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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 17, 2024

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

• (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

PARKINSON'S AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the month of April is dedicated to bringing awareness to Parkinson's disease.

Parkinson's is a lifelong, incurable brain disease, and no two journeys with Parkinson's are the same. In Canada, 30 individuals are diagnosed with the disease every day, and more than 100,000 people are living with it, including my wife, Barbara, and now my sister Paula. The reality for people who face a Parkinson's diagnosis is that many aspects of their lives will be disrupted. However, people living with Parkinson's can find new ambitions and joys, even many years after a diagnosis.

I am proud to support organizations such as Parkinson Canada, which are ensuring a better quality of life for those living with Parkinson's. This April, as we mark Parkinson's Awareness Month, I commit to advocating for more research, improved treatments and access to medicines and equitable care for people living with Parkinson's disease.

Together we can ensure that a full and vibrant life with Parkinson's is still possible.

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WELDON PLAYGROUND PROJECT

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on a respected example of indigenous reconciliation in the town of Weldon, Saskatchewan.

On Saturday, residents came together to participate in a pancake breakfast to raise money for a playground to commemorate the life of Wes Petterson. Wes was a former resident and victim of the mass stabbing on and around James Smith Cree Nation in September 2022.

The Weldon playground project was created in February to raise \$150,000 for a new playground in Wes's memory. On Saturday, James Smith Cree Nation's Chief Kirby Constant, Chief Calvin Sanderson and Councillor Adam Whitehead presented the fundraising committee with a cheque for \$116,000 to help build this playground.

During the breakfast, James Smith Cree Nation also gifted the town a painting by local indigenous artists. I must say that the room was filled with tears of joy.

May Wes's memory live on through the community playground built for the residents of Weldon and the surrounding area, as well as their families. To the James Smith Cree Nation, I thank them for their generosity and contribution to this project.

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EDDY NOLAN

Ms. Anna Gainey (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House to recognize a wonderful community leader and local hero, Eddy Nolan, who passed away on April 12. Eddy spread joy and inspired many of us.

His commitment to the Terry Fox Foundation annual run was contagious. Eddy ran his first marathon after watching Terry Fox cross Montreal's Jacques Cartier Bridge in 1980. He ran dozens over the years, raising more than a million dollars for cancer research.

Many students at Roslyn Elementary, where Eddy worked, knew him as a supportive and inspiring figure. He helped them learn how to talk about cancer.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank Eddy for his tremendous contribution. He will be missed.

*Statements by Members***COMPANY BASED IN MIRABEL**

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as members know, because I have often said it in the House, Mirabel's entrepreneurial community is teeming with talent. I have talked about our maple syrup before, so everyone knows about that, but now I want to talk about our baked goods, or more specifically, Farine et Chocolat, a thriving company. This proud Mirabel-based business, which was established by Mélissa Desjardins in 2012, specializes and excels in making peanut-free and nut-free artisanal baked goods, a wining and delicious formula.

I now want to draw members' attention to Miami. Yes, members heard me right, because that is where the prestigious American Cake Awards are being held on April 27 to honour the best bakers in North America.

Guess what? Farine et Chocolat is a finalist in the category of "rising star" in Canada. Imagine the sense of pride. On behalf of my constituents and, I trust, on behalf of the House, I want to wish the entire team at Farine et Chocolat the best of luck. I want to congratulate them and wish them well.

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• (1410)

NEXT GENERATION OF FARMERS

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's 2024 budget contained some very good news. We could never overstate the importance of giving young people every opportunity to achieve their potential and share their talents with the community, especially in agriculture, where the next generation is in short supply. That is why I want to highlight the effectiveness of the youth employment and skills program. This initiative, which has already been implemented, will provide the assistance that the agricultural sector needs to support about 1,200 jobs for young farmers across the country. In Châteauguay—Lacolle, soon to be Châteauguay—Les Jardins-de-Napierville, the program is a hit with farmers, including Delfland, Jardins A. Guérin et fils, Ferme Umami and Ferme Romuald. Thanks to this program, they can offer the next generation a helping hand.

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[English]

WORLD AUTISM MONTH

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, April is World Autism Month, and it is now 26 years since my son Jaden was diagnosed. Since then, I have embarked on an unanticipated lifetime of learning experiences.

For example, I have learned at home to always check for finger lines in the butter, cupcakes or just food generally. I have learned that an urgent "bababababa" in the car often means an iPhone left behind or a missed Google Maps turn. More importantly, I have learned that we tend to wrongly divide the world into people who give help and people who need help. In reality, as human beings, we are helpers or those helped at various times; sometimes, we are both at once.

Deciphering what Jaden needs or wants is often incredibly hard, but I learn much in the process of waiting on him, paying attention

to his non-verbal communication and assuming he has something to say. These lessons help me in every human interaction I have. Right now, finding ways to better understand one another is something our world needs more than anything else.

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INTERFAITH COMMUNITY GATHERING

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Vancouver Granville is a microcosm of Canada. We are diverse in faith and background, and we are united as Canadians.

Recently, I attended an interfaith dinner, hosted by the Foundation for a Path Forward and the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House. It left me with a full heart and full of hope for what we can do together.

With the theme of "breaking bread and building bonds", Vancouver's faith leaders, politicians and community leaders sat together, broke bread and found common cause. This is an example for all of us in that, despite the challenges we see in our world every day, such as war, uncertainty and hate, we must never waver in our commitment to foster pluralism, understanding and empathy across our differences.

It is incumbent upon all of us to heed the lessons of that evening and redouble our efforts to build bridges of co-operation and mutual respect, as well as to draw inspiration from and to reaffirm our shared values of courage, strength and compassion.

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COMMUNITY PROGRAM FOR SENIORS

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I want to share with members the inspiring program of Lucy and Lee's health and painting class in Humber River—Black Creek. Started by Lucy Catania and the late Lee Jackson, it is a program for seniors by seniors, where they can come together for a range of activities at the Carmine Stefano Community Centre.

One of their main activities is painting beautiful pieces of artwork. However, their program is not just about art; it is about social inclusion and mental well-being. Programs such as these are vital for our seniors, offering them more than just painting canvas; they offer a true sense of belonging.

Co-founder Lee Jackson passed away last year, but her legacy continues to inspire the seniors through a beautiful mural displayed in her memory. Let us continue supporting initiatives and programs that promote the mental well-being of our seniors.

I thank community leaders such as Lucy and Lee.

Statements by Members

• (1415)

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been confirmed that the government broke the rules by giving preferential treatment to their Liberal friends at McKinsey & Company.

The procurement ombudsman has found that the government did, in fact, favour McKinsey, a firm that has received over \$100 million of government contracts. The government even changed the eligibility requirements to make sure that McKinsey was selected.

The Prime Minister's friend, Dominic Barton, then CEO of McKinsey, recommended the creation of the \$35-billion Canada Infrastructure Bank. It then awarded \$1.5 million in contracts to McKinsey.

While the Prime Minister rewards his Liberal friends with cushy consulting jobs, Canadians are faced with out-of-control rents and mortgages; they are choosing between eating and heating their homes. This Liberal government is not worth the cost and not worth the corruption. Conservatives will end the corruption and fire high-priced consultants.

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HEALTH CARE

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was deeply disheartening earlier this month to witness the Premier of Ontario resorting to personal attacks instead of addressing the pressing need for a Whitby hospital.

My constituents have shared distressing tales of loved ones enduring agonizing waits for essential care. These stories paint a dark picture of the dire state of our health care system in Durham Region, and the promise of funding a Whitby hospital was made. However, we have been waiting well over two years for a planning grant to move forward. The failure of the province to allocate necessary resources for this vital health care project comes on the heels of our government investing over \$80 billion in Ontario's health care system.

The need for a fully equipped hospital in Whitby is not going away; in fact, it is getting more pressing and urgent every day. I will always advocate for families in my riding so our loved ones can get the health care they deserve.

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CARBON TAX

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, the NDP-Liberal government simply is not worth the cost. On April 1, it raised the carbon tax by 23%. This hits farmers and our food industry particularly hard. Canadians understand that when farmers, truckers and processors pay thousands of dollars in carbon tax, this makes the food we buy more expensive. Canadians are paying way too much at the grocery store for their food.

Another two million Canadians are visiting food banks each month just to feed their families because they can no longer afford

groceries. Conservatives are fighting against the NDP-Liberal government every day to lower the price of groceries and to bring tax relief for Canadians. That is why Conservatives brought in Bill C-234 to remove the carbon tax on Canadian farmers. However, the Prime Minister's hand-picked senators have gutted this bill, and NDP and Liberal MPs have worked very hard to keep the carbon tax on food.

It is time to axe the tax on farmers and food by immediately passing Bill C-234 in its original form. Let us axe the tax and bring it home.

* * *

FINANCE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's budget just offered more of the same after nine years of the NDP-Liberal government. It was the worst news possible for Canadians struggling to buy food, heat their homes and save for a down payment. The Prime Minister just will not listen to Canadians. He will not stop adding to his inflationary deficits that balloon interest rates. He will not stop putting social programs and jobs at risk. The \$54 billion to be spent on debt interest surpasses federal health care spending, and he will not axe the carbon tax on farmers and food.

The budget is about to make life a whole lot worse for Canadians, and their message to the Prime Minister is clear: Just stop. Stop the out-of-control spending, deficits, inflation and tax hikes that are forcing struggling people over the edge. The budget, the government and the Prime Minister are not worth the cost to any generation.

It is time for common-sense Conservatives to clean up the mess and to govern with common sense for Canadians.

* * *

INDIGENOUS TOURISM

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as international demand for indigenous tourism accelerates, our government is working with indigenous tourism operators to maximize the sector's potential. By investing \$20 million in the indigenous tourism fund, we are not just supporting an industry; we are fostering reconciliation, empowerment and prosperity for indigenous communities.

Statements by Members

The province of New Brunswick sits on the unceded territories of 15 first nations communities, and our indigenous tourism sector is growing rapidly. The wide network of operators offers rich and diverse experiences, ranging from art galleries to delicious traditional cuisine, from craft workshops to night kayaking.

A few weeks ago, when the hon. Minister of Tourism visited our riding, she and I had the opportunity to participate in a tree spirit tour led by Wolastoqey elder, Cecilia Brooks. This adventure is aimed at creating a more harmonious world by interacting with the land and by sharing a cultural experience together. Experiences like this are valuable, not only for our regional economy, but also for fostering shared understanding on our path toward meaningful reconciliation.

I invite all members to celebrate indigenous tourism and, better yet, to come to Fredericton to see the best of the best of indigenous tourism.

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● (1420)

G.R.O.W. FAMILY HEALTH CARE IN LONDON

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after years of Doug Ford gutting and privatizing our health care system, it is harder than ever to get support for young families, patients with complex needs and new Canadians, but a London family health care clinic has stepped up. Dr. Brenna Kaschor is the founder and a director of G.R.O.W., Grounded Roots, Open Wings, which is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to prevent and to treat adverse childhood experiences, and to prevent the inter-generational transmission of trauma.

Dr. Kaschor and her team strongly believe that the focus of our health system should be to foster wellness rather than treat disease, and they have supported more than 4,000 families and 1,800 kids in London. Most of their patients are low-income families and newcomers who do not have access to a family doctor and who cannot access services like breastfeeding support, postpartum counselling, systems navigation and so much more.

Dr. Kaschor and her incredible team are health care heroes, fighting for patients, unlike our current Conservative provincial government. We need to do more to deliver health care in a holistic way that puts people before profits.

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[*Translation*]

PAUL BRISSON

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to a great man from the north shore, Paul Brisson, who died on April 2 at the age of 79.

Originally from Les Bergeronnes, Mr. Brisson spent most of his life in Baie-Comeau, where he left his mark. He leaves a considerable legacy in the north shore media community. He began his journey in 1968 as co-founder of the Baie-Comeau newspaper *Plein Jour*. He went on to found or co-found some 15 north shore and Charlevoix weeklies. His tremendous contribution was recognized in 2010, when he received the *Ordre des hebdomas du Québec*.

Paul Brisson was a man who believed in free speech and freedom of expression. He worked his entire life to promote freedom of the press and expand regional media. He spent his life ensuring that our voice was heard throughout the north shore and all of Quebec.

To his loved ones and the Éditions Nordiques extended family, I offer my sincerest condolences.

Thank you, Mr. Brisson.

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[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after seeing budgets balance themselves, the incompetent Liberal-NDP Prime Minister delivered his eighth inflationary budget that raised taxes and deficits. He poured \$40 billion of new inflationary fuel on the fire he started. Canadians are on the hook to pay more for the Prime Minister's debt in interest charges than what goes to health care or to national defence.

This photo op budget gave no hope to the moms putting food back on grocery shelves or to those renewing their mortgages at double or triple the rate. He doubled mortgages, rents and the needed down payments on houses. He hiked the carbon tax scam 23%, after Canadians told him to spike the hike. He is not worth the cost.

It is time for a carbon tax election. The New Democrats need to stop protecting their leader's pension and propping up the corrupt Prime Minister. Let Canadians decide whether they want more Liberal-NDP corruption and more of the same or a common-sense Conservative government that will axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime.

Let us bring it home.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LAKAY NOU TELEVISION SHOW

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, *Lakay Nou* means our house or our home in Creole. It is also the name of a television series with a mostly African-Canadian cast. This is the first time a series about the Haitian community has been broadcast by Radio-Canada.

I am proud to welcome the stars of *Lakay Nou* to Parliament Hill in Ottawa. They are Frédéric Pierre, Catherine Souffront, Fayolle Jean and Mireille Métellus, along with co-author Angelo Cadet.

I cannot say enough about the impact of this series, because the television representation of ethnocultural groups is a reflection of our diversity.

I commend Radio-Canada's executives on this gesture. I congratulate everyone who helped produce *Lakay Nou* and wish them every success with their future shows.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1425)

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, who is paying for this \$50-billion orgy of new inflationary spending?

We know who will not pay. It will not be those with trust funds that protect their money, like the Prime Minister, nor the billionaires who invite him to their private islands. They will hide their money.

Who is going to pay? It will be the same people, as always. The ones who will pay are the ones who are losing their home because of rising interest rates, who are paying too many taxes, who cannot feed their own children.

Why are you paying for him?

The Speaker: I remind members to direct their questions through the Chair.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's economy cannot succeed if young Canadians cannot succeed.

Our economy must do more to ensure a bright future for young people, home ownership and the dream of the middle class that previous generations had. That is why we are putting forward a budget that offers all generations an equal opportunity to succeed. Yes, we are asking those who are better off to contribute a little more.

While the Leader of the Opposition continues to call for austerity and defend the rich, we will be there for the middle class and young people.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the ninth deficit in nine years under this Prime Minister. He is not worth the cost, just like always.

He admits that Canada is not a fair country for our young generations after nine years under his government, which doubled the cost of housing, doubled rents and doubled the national debt.

Why does he expect a different result when he is using the same failed approach?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, instead of choosing austerity, as the previous Conservative government did, and as the Conservative Party is advocating now, we chose—and still choose—to invest in young families so that they can purchase a home, in senior citizens, in young people, in students. We are investing in the jobs of the future and in new technologies.

Oral Questions

We choose to invest in Canadians because that is how we will build a stronger economy. The Conservatives can keep calling for cuts and austerity. We will continue to invest for the good of Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, who pays? Who pays for this latest \$50-billion orgy of spending by the costly Prime Minister?

We know who will not pay. It will not be those with trust funds that protect their millions of inheritance, like the Prime Minister, nor the billionaires who invite him to their private Caribbean islands. They will hide their money.

Who will pay? The ones who will pay will be the welder or the waitress who cannot pay their mortgage because he has inflated the mortgage rates. One will pay because he carbon taxed one's food, and now one cannot feed one's kids. Why should one pay for him?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see the lengths to which the Leader of the Opposition will go to avoid saying that he is choosing to stand with the ultrawealthy against the middle class, against young Canadians. When we first were elected and raised taxes on the wealthiest 1% to lower them for the middle class, the Conservative Party and that leader voted against it. We are asking for the wealthiest in this country, the wealthiest 0.1%, to pay more in taxes so that we can support the middle class and so that we can restore the dream, particularly for young people, of home ownership, of a brighter future that the world is taking away from people all over the world.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister likes to blame the world for the problems that he caused. He doubled the debt, doubled the rent, doubled mortgage payments, doubled the needed down payment, and now he is doubling down on the same costly mistakes that have made life unaffordable for Canadians.

When will the Prime Minister realize he is not worth the cost and that repeating the same thing nine times and expecting a different result is the definition of insanity?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Leader of the Opposition is saying is that he stands with the ultrawealthy 0.1% in this country and that everyone else is on their own, because that is what he would do, as he slashes programs, as he slashes investments, as he does not build the homes necessary, as he does not have a plan to fight climate change and create good jobs, as he has stood against affordability measures and as he stands against seniors getting dental care.

He is choosing to stand with the ultrawealthy, while we are investing in Canadians and building a stronger future that is fair for—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he is the ultrawealthy. He hid his family fortune in a tax-sheltered trust fund so that he would not have to pay the same taxes as everyone else. He vacations with the ultrawealthy on their private islands in tax-preferred locations where they can hide their money and avoid paying their fair share here in Canada.

Now, he is paying off the ultrawealthy by spending \$54 billion on debt interest, more than on health care.

Why give more money to the ultrawealthy bankers and bondholders instead of the nurses and doctors?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a budget that invests in fairness for every generation by asking the ultrawealthy to pay a little more.

The Conservative Party is choosing to stand with the status quo and to stand with the ultrawealthy, instead of saying, yes, we need to invest in young people, we need to build more houses, we need to support seniors with dental care, we need to create more spaces in child care and we need to deliver hundreds of dollars a month, tax free, in the disability benefit.

These are the things that we will be doing. Those are the things that they stand against.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, child care falls under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. Dental insurance, if applicable, would be a jurisdiction of Quebec or the provinces. The same goes for pharmacare, municipal infrastructure and housing.

The Prime Minister is obsessed with the areas of jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. I want to ask the Prime Minister if he has ever thought of running for premier of his favourite province, Ontario, to really get into something that interests him.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my friend from the Bloc Québécois that I am a proud Quebecker and I always will be. There is nothing he can say that will take anything away from this proud Quebec identity that has been a part of who I am for 13 generations.

Yes, I am concerned about Quebeckers, as I am about all Canadians. That is why we are working with provinces like Quebec on investing in more child care spaces. We have invested \$6 billion in early childhood education to help Quebec run its child care system. It is the result of an agreement with Premier Legault.

We will continue to be there and to be partners with Quebeckers.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not convinced that the Quebec government is saying the same thing as the Prime Minister. I myself am very proud to be a Quebecker. I am so proud, in fact, that I have confidence in Quebec. I believe it should be a country. I am not sure whether the Prime Minister has the same level of confidence.

Does the Prime Minister recognize that all of his meddling in areas under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces is funded exclusively through the never-ending fiscal imbalance?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am so proud to be a Quebecker that I know I have a place in Canada, as do all Quebeckers. We are proud to be Canadian and proud to be Quebeckers. Most of us do not feel we have to choose between the two. We can be very proud to be Quebeckers and Canadians at the same time.

We will continue to be there to invest hand in hand with the Province of Quebec in order to deliver results for Quebeckers, just as we do with partners across the country. In fact, Quebec is often ahead of the curve in investing in social issues and social programs. That is why much of what we do follows Quebec's model.

* * *

● (1435)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, young people see right through the Prime Minister. They know they are getting ripped off and they know the reason for it. Today, rent has doubled, grocery prices are sky-high and we are paying some of the highest cellphone bills in the world. The reason is corporate greed. The Prime Minister refuses to take it on and the Conservatives are afraid any time we mention corporate greed because they want to defend those corporations.

When will the Liberals finally take—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: There are some members in this place, who, like the Speaker, had difficulty hearing the member for Burnaby South ask his question.

I am going to ask the member for Burnaby South to start his question again. I am going to ask all members on all sides of the House to please hold themselves until they have the opportunity to be recognized by the Speaker to ask a question or to answer a question.

The hon. member for Burnaby South.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I know what happened. Any time I talk about corporate greed, the Conservatives get really upset. We are taking on their masters, so they get upset about it, but I will be careful not to say too much because I know the Conservatives get so angry when we mention corporate greed.

Young people are seeing that they are getting ripped off with rent. They are getting ripped off with groceries and getting ripped off with the high cost of cellphone fees, and they know it is because of corporate greed.

The Conservatives do not want me to talk about this, but will the Liberals take on corporate greed, which is driving up the cost of living?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recognize with this budget that Canada cannot be successful unless young people are successful, unless every generation sees a real and fair chance to succeed.

That is why we are stepping up to invest in new homes that young people are going to be able to afford, and making sure that their rent payments count towards a credit score to get them a mortgage eventually. We are investing in more supports for Canadians living with disabilities. We are investing in supports for seniors. We are investing in entrepreneurship for young people.

We are making the kinds of investments that are going to grow the economy, support young people and restore the dream of a stronger Canada for everyone.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not once mention corporate greed, which is driving up the cost of living.

[Translation]

Young people are getting ripped off at the grocery store, and they know it. They see Loblaws and Metro raking in record profits, and yesterday's Liberal budget does nothing to address that. It continues to line Loblaws' and Metro's pockets with the Conservatives' \$60-billion tax gifts.

Why does the Prime Minister keep siding with CEOs instead of with young people?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, this budget recognizes that our country's success depends on young people's success. That is why we are calling on the wealthy to pay a bit more tax so they can share more of the benefits with young people, to ensure that young families can pay their rent, buy a home and have better access to the care and services they need, particularly when it comes to day care and early childhood centres.

We will continue to be there to support families in need by asking the wealthy to do a bit more.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wants people to know that the status quo is unacceptable, that Canada has become an unfair country where young people, an entire generation, cannot afford a home and families cannot afford food. If he finds out who has been running this place for the last nine years, there will be hell to pay.

Will the Prime Minister complete his investigation and tell us who has been in charge for the last decade?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we got elected, the first thing we did was raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% and lower them for the middle class, a measure that the Conservative Party voted against. We have continued to invest in young people and to invest in a national housing strategy after the previous government completely ignored housing. The former housing minister, who is now Leader of the Opposition, was responsible for creating exactly six affordable homes in his time as minister.

We have continued to invest and we are going to continue to make sure that the economy is fair for every generation. That means asking the wealthiest to pay a little more so we can put more money in the pockets of the middle class.

* * *

● (1440)

HOUSING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has got to stop getting his facts from his incompetent housing minister's Twitter account. This is the same guy who, as immigration minister, lost track of a million people.

When I was housing minister, we built 92,782 new apartment units, with an average rent of \$973. How many apartments will the Prime Minister build at the price of \$972 a month this year?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our housing plan is the most ambitious and comprehensive in Canada's history. It will unlock close to four million homes by 2031. This will happen because we are working with municipalities and we are working with provinces to increase the levels of ambition. We have put out the most comprehensive and ambitious housing plan this country has ever seen because we know that making sure that young people can afford a home, making sure we change the way homes are built in this country, is about building a stronger future for everyone in this country.

That is what fairness for every generation looks like. That is what the government is focused on, while Conservatives are focused on cuts.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will cut the rent. When I was the minister of housing, we paid half as much for rent in Canada as we pay today.

On the question of the Prime Minister's ambitious housing plan, I decided to read all about it in the Liberals' 2015 platform. They said, "We will make it easier for Canadians to find an affordable place to call home." That was nine years ago. They have doubled the cost since that promise was made, and then they repeated the promise yesterday.

Why would we expect the same promise, with the same programs and the same Prime Minister to be kept this time?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was in Vancouver a few weeks ago to speak with young people about the fact that we are supporting renters with greater protections and by making sure that the money they spend every month on rent actually gets counted in their credit scores to help them get a mortgage in the future.

Oral Questions

Our housing plan will unlock 3.87 million new homes by cutting red tape, by reforming zoning, by lowering the costs of homebuilding and by using public lands and vacant government offices for housing. We are making it easier to save up for a tax-free down payment. We are helping end chronic homelessness and making homes more affordable.

We are going to continue doing the work—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is going to turn public buildings and land into housing. I wonder where he got that idea.

Let me quote, “We will conduct an inventory of all available federal lands and buildings that could be repurposed, and make some of these lands available at low cost for affordable housing”. That is from his 2015 platform.

Now, nine years later, he can only point to 13 homes on those public lands. Yesterday, he promised a “rapid review” of all the federal land portfolios. How rapid, another nine years?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we made a choice. We made a choice to invest in Canadians, and that started when we took office because the previous government had not invested in Canadians. It continued to choose cuts to services. It continued to choose austerity over the kinds of investments that a confident country should be making in its citizens.

That is where we have stepped up. That is where we are stepping up right now to make sure that young people have opportunities to build a strong future for themselves by asking the wealthiest 0.1% to pay more in taxes. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition continues to stand with the ultrawealthy while we stand with Canadians.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister blamed immigration for housing costs and the immigration minister who caused it all. Then he made that minister responsible for housing. Since that time, the minister has had a \$4-billion housing accelerator program that he admits will not build any specific homes. In fact, since it began, housing starts have gone down this year, and his housing agency says they will go down next year and the year after that.

How is it that the Prime Minister can spend \$4 billion on a housing accelerator program that decelerates homebuilding?

• (1445)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to talk about the housing accelerator program, because it stands in direct contrast to any plan that the Leader of the Opposition has put forward to pick fights with municipalities and provinces on housing. We are actually stepping up with investments and allowing for more densification, for four units as of right, to make sure there is better use of public lands, including by municipalities and provinces. We are making sure we are changing the math around building affordable homes to unlock millions of homes over the coming years.

This is the work that we are doing right across the country with people who are ambitious about solving the housing crisis. If the

Leader of the Opposition does not want to help solve it, he needs to keep getting out of the way.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was solved when rent was \$973 a month, until he came along, but this is more proof that he is not worth the cost after nine years. He is blaming the whole world. If the world were to blame for the housing problems in Canada, then why is it that housing here is 50% to 75% more expensive than in the United States?

Why is it that housing costs have risen faster than in any other G7 country relative to incomes? Why is it that we have the fewest homes per capita, despite having the most land and the most lumber? Why is that? Is it him?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite well knows that Canada's population is growing faster than our fellow countries around the world, and that is a good thing. It is a good thing that we continue to draw in people to be successful in this country.

It is also extremely important that we recognize that, even as the world is faced with challenges with inflation, disrupted supply chains, getting over the pandemic, conflicts and shifting geopolitics, Canada is on more of a solid footing fiscally than any of our other G7 partners, with a lower debt-to-GDP ratio, a lower deficit and a continued focus on creating the jobs of the future that Canadians need.

* * *

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with his budget, the Prime Minister is recognizing that the issues that are really important to Canadians fall under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces.

Therefore, he is shamelessly using the fiscal imbalance, thanks to which he has a lot more money than he should, while Quebec and the provinces have less.

Does he recognize that, to implement his budget at the expense of Quebec's jurisdictions, he is grossly abusing the spending power instituted by former Prime Minister Trudeau?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Bloc Québécois continues to look for a fight, we are working hand in hand with the Government of Quebec.

With our housing accelerator fund, we have invested across the country, including in Quebec. Since Quebec was prepared to work ambitiously with us, we were able to invest \$900 million directly in the province, and Quebec matched that amount to invest in housing.

That is the kind of partnership that will deliver results for Quebecers. It is a model for the other provinces as well, because we will be there to build houses and homes across the country.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Ottawa is working so hand in hand with the Quebec government that the Conservatives are recruiting from the CAQ.

Will the Prime Minister admit that, by failing to meet his obligations, he is responsible for a \$6-billion deficit in Quebec City, that he is responsible for making Quebecers shoulder \$8 billion out of his \$40-billion deficit, and that he has just put Quebecers \$14 billion in debt in one year?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, all the Bloc Québécois wants is to pick fights in Ottawa. We are here to work in partnership with the Quebec government. Of course, we will not always agree on everything. That would be a little too boring. We need creative tension, and we have it.

That is exactly what has produced results in terms of investments in housing and in Quebec's manufacturing future, investments that are creating solutions with long-term jobs for Quebecers. We are here to work in partnership, and we will continue to do so.

* * *

• (1450)

HOUSING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, because of his centralizing ideology, this Prime Minister has declared that housing is a federal responsibility. That means the results are his responsibility. Montreal has seen a 200% increase in rental costs over the nine years this Prime Minister has been in power. He is not worth the cost. All his interfering in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the other provinces has only succeeded in inflating the cost of housing.

Will he take personal responsibility and shoulder the blame for inflating the cost of housing?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we can see the Conservative leader's philosophy very clearly. He sides with those who are better off. He tells everyone else that they are on their own and that he will not be there to support them. That is what he stands for when he pushes austerity and budget cuts.

We have chosen to work in partnership with the mayor of Montreal, with the Premier of Quebec and with premiers across the country to build housing to address the pressures we are experiencing in Canada, much like elsewhere in the world.

We are here to create a stronger, fairer future for every generation. That is the job of this budget.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister says that this is all about fairness. I am

going to take him at his word and read the story of Emily, who told the Toronto Star that she could afford a home in 2015 with a mortgage of \$2,000, but after the Prime Minister's inflationary deficits ballooned mortgage rates, she lost her home and now she rents a small apartment for \$4,000. It is so small, she says that she can smell her own neighbours.

Has the Prime Minister been fair to Emily?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our economy cannot succeed unless young people are successful, and that is why the focus in the budget is on fairness for every generation, which is why we are asking the wealthiest 0.1% to pay more in taxes to be able to support families such as Emily's and others across the country who have lost the dream of home ownership because of the way the global economy is going and because of the pressures they are living. This is why we are continuing to step up, but what we do not see is why the Conservative leader continues to stand with the ultrawealthy, continues to block attempts to invest in dental care for people with low-incomes—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was exactly the promise he made nine years ago. He said that Emily would not have to pay any more, that some rich guy would pay, but since then, his trust fund has not paid any more taxes. The billionaires who host him on private islands do not pay any more taxes, as they hide their money abroad, but Emily is paying. She is paying \$4,000 a month for an apartment that is so small she says she smells her neighbours.

Is the Prime Minister treating Emily fairly?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' solution for Emily is for governments to do less to support her, to do less to invest in the child care she may or may not need for her kids, to do less for support for her parents or grandparents, who can go to the dentist because of a Canada dental program, which the Conservatives have blocked. Their solution is to do less for the investments that are going to support building more infrastructure in her community, whether it is public transit or, quite frankly, the investments that are going to ensure more apartment buildings, more affordable rentals and more affordable homes are being built. He wants to do less for Emily; we are doing more.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, Emily had a home with a mortgage payment of \$2,000. Now she has an apartment with a rental payment of \$4,000.

How can he possibly suggest she is better off paying twice as much to rent a place than she was, under Conservatives, owning one?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how can the leader of the Conservative Party actually believe that doing less to invest in Emily's future is of help to her? He is standing here continuing to push for austerity and cuts to programs and cuts to the kinds of supports that, yes, Canadians need more than ever before because the world is a much more challenging place. That is why we are continuing to step up. That is why we are asking the wealthiest 0.1% to pay a little more, which is something that he is standing against, and he will be voting against because he is still in the pockets of the ultrawealthy instead of focusing on Canadians who need it.

• (1455)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, young Canadians have heard the Prime Minister's broken promises for years. Seven years ago, he promised to fix the housing crisis, but what did he do? He built luxury apartments that no one can afford, and he let speculators drive up the cost of homes. We know he has never had to worry about making the rent.

Does he regret the bad decisions he has made that have put us in this mess?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2017, we created the national housing strategy, which put millions of families into homes across the country. We have continued to step up with investments, including last year with the housing accelerator, which has delivered increased densification and is going to be building thousands upon thousands of homes over the coming years. We are continuing to step up in this budget, which is focused on fairness for every generation to make sure young people can again see a pathway to home ownership and can be able to afford rents in the cities in which they work. These are things we are continuing to do because Canadians need it.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is something very wrong when a Prime Minister does not have a problem keeping the Conservatives' \$60-billion corporate handout but denies indigenous children the dignity of safe housing and decent schools, and denies communities the same access to good roads and clean water.

How can the Prime Minister look indigenous people in the eyes after putting the greed of CEOs in front of the needs of indigenous families?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have continued to step up over the past years for reconciliation and investing in indigenous communities. This budget has put aside a billion more dollars on top of all the investments we have made for indigenous housing. That is part of the \$9 billion of investments we are talking about for indigenous communities over the coming years. We know there is always more to do, but we will be there, hand in hand, with indigenous communities and leadership to make sure we are closing the gaps and building the strong future that is part of the journey of reconciliation.

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, too many children are going to school on empty stomachs, and that is not fair. It was our Liberal government who enhanced the Canada child benefit and brought home our \$10-a-day child care and many other supports Canadian families rely on.

Could the Prime Minister inform the House of the next steps of our plan to support middle-class families in getting ahead?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Brampton South for her hard work.

While the opposition leader is taking cues from his lobbyist entourage on how to make the rich richer, we are investing in programs to help middle-class Canadians. Yesterday's budget includes a national school food program. It is expected to provide meals for more than 400,000 kids a year and save the average family as much as \$800 per year in grocery costs. This is what the Conservative leader has already announced he will be voting against.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years and much spent, there has not been a single meal served.

What the Prime Minister has served up is a tax on the food of the very children he claims to want to help. It is a tax that will cost every single middle-class family more than they get back in rebates, according to a scientific study by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. It is a tax he increased by 23%.

If he really wants to stop the hunger for one in four kids in schools today, will he axe the tax?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just this past Monday, millions of Canadians received the Canada carbon rebate in their bank accounts, which puts more money in the pockets of eight out of 10 Canadian families across the jurisdictions in which it applies, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. That is eight out of 10 families, which are middle-class and lower-income families.

However, the Leader of the Opposition chooses to stand once again with the wealthiest families, the ones with big indoor swimming pools and nine big cars. Those are the things the Conservatives are choosing to stand with because we are putting more money back in the pockets of Canadians.

• (1500)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister thinks anyone who puts gas in their car is rich and needs to be made poor. He thinks any single mother who is not already pouring water in her children's milk is too rich, and he wants to make her poorer. He thinks that families who are heating their homes in big, cold Canada are too rich, and he wants to make them poor.

That is a bit rich coming from the guy who stuffed his family fortune in a tax-sheltered trust fund and helps his billionaire island friends avoid paying their bills. Why does he not stop taking from the have-nots and giving to the have-yachts?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in this budget, we are proposing to ask the ultrawealthy to pay more in taxes to support lower-income Canadians and middle-class Canadians, which is something that the Conservatives are standing against. They choose to stand with the ultrawealthy while we continue to invest in supports for families. We have cut the child poverty rate in half since 2016. We have continued to move forward on investing in supports for families right across the country. With this budget focused on fairness for every generation, we are continuing to do exactly that, despite the opposition of the Conservatives.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not the opposition from the Conservatives that he needs to worry about. It is the Liberal Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador. He said, "On the carbon tax in particular, the prime minister has tried to bait me at times with certain ad hominem and name-calling, almost. But look, we have a very different opinion on the carbon tax" and "I wish the prime minister would understand that. He's being very sclerotic in his approach on this ideologic marriage that he has to this [carbon tax]".

Will the Prime Minister end his ideological marriage with the carbon tax so that Canadians can eat, heat and house themselves?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am resolute that I will fight climate change and put more money back in the pockets of Canadians right across the country. Any premier is welcome to come forward with a plan to put a price on pollution that meets the levels required by the federal government instead of complaining, but that is what we will continue to do.

We will ensure that a price on pollution that puts more money back in the pockets of eight out of 10 Canadians, including in Newfoundland and Labrador, continues to be in place right across the country because that is what Canadians need for a stronger future and for affordability.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed, in fact, that six out of 10 Canadians pay more in carbon tax than they get back in rebates. One hundred per cent of middle-class or middle-quintile Canadians pay more in tax than they get back, with it being especially bad for rural and suburban Canadians.

Now, we have two-year highs in gas prices all across Ontario. Ontarians are being punished because of a 23% carbon tax. They can thank the Prime Minister every time they fill up the tank. Why will he not axe the tax so that Ontarians can afford to drive to work?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Ontario is an excellent example of a jurisdiction that chose to move forward with its own cap-and-trade system so that it would not be subject to the federal carbon-pricing backstop. It was the choice of a Conservative premier to scrap the carbon-pricing system that they had and to take on the federal carbon-pricing backstop, but that is not all bad because that actually puts more money in the pockets of eight out of 10 Ontarian families, which is something that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has confirmed repeatedly.

We are fighting climate change and putting more money back in people's pockets.

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[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I refuse to believe that the Prime Minister is working hand in hand with Quebec. On the contrary, I believe he has his hand in Quebecers' pockets. He is blatantly abusing the fiscal imbalance. He is blatantly abusing his spending power. Furthermore, he is racking up an appalling deficit that Quebecers will be paying off for a long time to come simply to save his government's skin, and his own skin, in the next election.

Does he understand that I am condemning this government and this budget as it concerns Quebecers?

• (1505)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am shocked, shocked I say, to hear the Bloc Québécois complain about a government in Ottawa. That is its job, after all, and it has been for many decades.

We will continue to invest everywhere in Canada, including Quebec, in partnership with the Government of Quebec, to ensure that more housing is built, to invest in health care systems, and to support Quebec's efforts to provide a health care system. We will continue to be there to fund the creation of child care spaces. We are there to be partners in the well-being of Quebecers and of all Canadians.

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if you have 10 minutes, I would ask you to explain to the Prime Minister what purpose the opposition serves in Parliament, especially since it comes so naturally to a Quebecer.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister is interfering in all of Quebec's jurisdictions, and yet the Liberals think it is outrageous for Quebec to want to use a tiny piece of the Constitution, the notwithstanding clause, to protect its own jurisdictions. The Prime Minister is abusing his power at Quebec's expense, and I will continue to speak out against that.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will continue to fulfill my responsibility, both as a member from Quebec and as the Prime Minister of Canada, to invest in helping Canadians across the country. That includes investing to create housing for Quebecers, jointly investing in health care, and investing to create more opportunities for Quebecers in the coming years in good careers and good jobs in a green economy. We are there to invest across the country. The Bloc Québécois is the only one that does not like that.

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THE BUDGET

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even a former NDP leader has more common sense than the current Prime Minister and the current leader of the NDP. Thomas Mulcair said yesterday that this government is going to spend \$54.1 billion on interest on the debt, in other words on bankers. That is exactly how much is collected with the GST. Every penny that Canadians spend on GST is going not toward services, but toward bankers.

Does the Prime Minister think that is acceptable?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note that, like the Conservative Party, Thomas Mulcair was against increasing taxes on the 1% in order to lower them for the middle class. That is what we did in 2015. We have continued to invest in helping the middle class and young people, while the Conservative Party continues to advocate for austerity and cuts. The Conservatives are siding with the wealthy once again.

We will be there to deliver fairness for every generation, including young people, especially young people.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, austerity is what people are living every day when they cannot afford to eat, heat or house themselves after nine years of the current Prime Minister, but when people pay the GST they assume they are getting something in return. It turns out that they pay \$54.1 billion in GST and it costs them \$54.1 billion in interest on the national debt.

Does the Prime Minister realize that not one penny from the money Canadians pay in GST goes to valuable services? It all goes to pay wealthy bankers.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again in the face of the challenges Canadians are struggling with every single day, the solution by the Conservatives is for the government to do less, to invest less in supporting Canadians, less for seniors and dental care, less for child care spaces, less for medical supports for health care and less in building more homes. The solution proposed by the Conservatives is for the government to do less for Canadians. We are continuing to invest in people responsi-

bly with the best and lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. We will continue to do that.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we propose less for bankers and bondholders, and more for doctors and nurses. This year, for the first time in over a generation, the federal government will spend more on interest for the national debt than we do on health care.

After the Prime Minister doubled the size of the debt and grew health spending slower than the previous Conservative government, why is it that he wants to give 54 billion hard-earned Canadian tax dollars to wealthy bankers and bondholders, and not doctors and nurses?

● (1510)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that would perhaps be a more credible partisan argument if it was not for the fact that the Conservative Party consistently stood against investments to support Canadians. The dental care program we are putting forward is already helping the 1.7 million seniors who have signed up. The Conservatives have not only voted against it, but they are busy spreading misinformation around the country to try to scare people out of that program for partisan gains. The fact is that we are going to continue to invest in child care spaces, because that helps families. We are going to continue to invest in supporting students, so they have less debt. We are going to build more homes. They want to do less.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's skilled workers and entrepreneurs are our greatest resource. Capitalizing on their ideas, innovations and hard work is an essential way to keep our place at the forefront of the world's advanced economies.

Can the Prime Minister tell the House about the new measures announced in the budget that will support not only our workers, but the Canadian economy as well?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges for his question and for his hard work.

Yesterday's budget is a clear commitment to investing in our future and in the talents of Canadian workers.

However, the Conservative leader has said that he will vote against supporting Canadian clean-tech companies, against our investments in artificial intelligence and against people working on the electric vehicle supply chain.

While we are investing to ensure that every Canadian succeeds in the 21st century, the Leader of the Opposition wants to take us back to the Stone Age.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, David Dodge, proud Liberal and former Liberal appointee as governor of the central bank, said that this would be the worst budget in over 40 years.

It turned out that he was right. We have had John Manley, a former Liberal finance minister, who said that the Prime Minister is pushing on the inflationary gas pedal.

We now even have Bill Morneau condemning the government of which he is a former finance minister.

Why is it that so many Liberals have come to the conclusion that this Prime Minister is not worth the cost?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are people, like the Conservative Party of Canada, who are going to choose to stand with the ultrawealthy and not stand with young people, who need better supports, as we ensure more housing, more investments and more opportunities for them to succeed in an economy that is increasingly tilted toward the ultrawealthy and away from young people and the middle class.

That is why we are going to continue to step up and put money in the pockets of Canadians who need it, by asking the wealthiest to pay a little bit more, something that the Conservatives will continue to stand against, because they stand with the ultrawealthy.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the adults in the Liberal and NDP parties are saying that this budget is irresponsible. We have John Manley, former Liberal finance minister, saying that this Prime Minister is pushing on the inflationary gas pedal. David Dodge, renowned Liberal, is saying that it could be the worst budget in four decades.

Bill Morneau, if members remember him from before he became “Bill no more”, said that this is a troubling budget.

Even Tom Mulcair says that there is too much going to debt interest.

Is this not like the NDP-Liberal marriage? The parents went away, and the rambunctious, reckless kids went and trashed the place.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Leader of the Opposition continues to focus on partisan attacks, we are going to stay focused on building a better future for Canadians.

Speaking of inflation, this is the third month in a row in which inflation has been within the Bank of Canada's target range. That is because we continue to govern responsibly, in a fiscally sound way that is at the forefront of the G7, even as we step up to invest in Canadians and in their future.

Confident countries invest in themselves and their people. That is what we are doing, while the Conservatives propose to do less and to invest less to support Canadians.

• (1515)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not the one who is doing personal or partisan attacks

Oral Questions

against this Prime Minister's agenda. It is his fellow Liberals and New Democrats. It is his coalition partner, who simultaneously attacks everything he does and then enthusiastically stands up to support it.

It is the Prime Minister, who attacks his immigration minister for letting the system get completely out of control and then attacks himself for doubling housing costs, making life so unfair.

If they are so busy attacking themselves and their own record, why do they not just call a carbon tax election, so that Canadians can vote them out?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is making the choice to invest in a fairer future for all Canadians, for every generation. That is the choice we are making.

The Conservatives are continuing to choose to stand with the wealthiest in this country and to do less to invest in child care, less to invest in solving the housing crisis and less to support young people across the country, who need to feel the opportunities they can build in the future again.

We will continue to be there to put money in the pockets of Canadians, to put homes in their communities and to build a stronger future for them and their families, while the Conservatives continue to promote cuts and austerity.

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HOUSING

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been hearing from young people in my riding that home ownership is just out of reach—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I would ask hon. members to please listen to their whips, so that we can listen to the question.

Mr. George Chahal: Mr. Speaker, I have been hearing from young people in my riding that home ownership is just out of reach. The 2024 budget puts forward the government's housing plan to build more affordable homes faster and to make it more affordable to buy or rent.

Can the Prime Minister please share with the House how the government plans to support young people?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Calgary Skyview for his continued advocacy and hard work.

House of Commons

We have put forward the most ambitious housing plan in generations. Our plan will help build more student housing on or by campus, link infrastructure dollars to housing conditions to ensure new apartments are built near public transit, make it easier to save up for a down payment and qualify for a mortgage.

While the leader opposite has no real plan, we are delivering for Canadians.

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PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, \$200 a month is what the Liberal government thinks Canadians with disabilities are worth. The Liberals said that their long-overdue Canada disability benefit would end poverty for persons with disabilities, but what they have offered is not even enough for groceries for a month, yet the Liberals did manage to keep giving \$60 billion to rich corporations, just like the Conservatives before them. It is unacceptable.

Will the Prime Minister use his power and increase the Canada disability benefit immediately?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada disability benefit is a major milestone in our strong and unwavering commitment to creating a more inclusive and fairer Canada. There is always more to do, but \$6.1 billion over the coming years is going to make a measurable difference in the lives of some of Canada's most vulnerable people. Hundreds of dollars a month, tax-free, will help with the cost of living.

We recognize there is more to do. We will be working with provinces and territories to make sure, first of all, that this disability money is not clawed back and, secondly, that we can do even more in partnership with provinces and territories for Canadians with disabilities.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, in line with the question just asked, we were also shocked to see \$200 a month, as if that could lift people living with disabilities out of poverty. In what world is \$200 a month enough? At the same time, the red dress alert initiative will be given \$1.3 million over three years. When we have stolen sisters versus stolen cars, the cars get \$47 million right away.

Can the Prime Minister explain: Is this fair? Is this just?

• (1520)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has recognized for many years that Canadians living with disabilities are facing extreme challenges and disadvantages in our economy and in our communities. That is why we have stepped up regularly over the past years with initiatives to reduce barriers in Canada and to create a Canada disability benefit. We are now moving forward with that at the cost of over \$6 billion over the coming years to put hundreds of dollars a month, tax-free, in the pockets of individuals with disabilities.

The reality is that there always more to do, but this will help.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES—MR. KRISTIAN FIRTH AT BAR OF HOUSE

The Speaker: It being 3:20 p.m., pursuant to order made on Monday, April 8, the House will now proceed to the appearance of Kristian Firth at the bar of the House.

Colleagues, the Chair would like to make a brief statement in regard to the historic moment that is about to take place. Indeed, the last time an individual was summoned to the bar of the House to answer questions dates back to 1913, well over a century ago.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to order made on April 8, 2024, once Mr. Firth is escorted to the bar of the House by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Chair shall read the admonishment. Following this, the House shall proceed to a question-and-answer session with Mr. Firth.

[*English*]

The process for questioning, specified in the House order, is as follows.

First, questions and answers shall be addressed through the Speaker.

Second, 10 minutes will be allocated to each recognized party for the first and second rounds in the following order: Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Bloc Québécois and New Democratic Party.

[*Translation*]

Third, during the third round, five minutes will be allocated to each of the recognized parties with an additional five minutes for the Green Party. Fourth, within each 10- or five-minute period of questioning, each party may allocate time to one or more of its members.

[*English*]

Fifth, in each question and answer period, answers shall approximately reflect the time taken by the question. In addition, should Mr. Firth require a moment to consult with his counsel prior to responding to a question, or for other delays of a similar nature, the Chair will stop the clock.

As well, as discussed with House leaders, provisions are in place for brief suspensions between the rounds of questioning to allow Mr. Firth a pause, if he chooses to avail himself of them.

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[*Translation*]

Furthermore, as with any proceedings of the House, the Chair will decide procedural matters as they may arise.

Upon completion of the questioning, the Chair shall excuse Mr. Firth from further attendance at the bar, after which he will withdraw, and the House shall resume its usual business for the remainder of the sitting.

[*English*]

Finally, colleagues, I wish to remind members that it is incumbent upon all of us to conduct ourselves in a manner befitting of this occasion and to uphold the dignity of the House. I therefore ask for everyone's co-operation in respecting our rules of decorum.

● (1525)

I now ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to admit Mr. Firth at the bar of the House.

Mr. Kristian Firth, please remain standing until I invite you to be seated.

You are attending the bar of the House for being found in contempt for your refusal to answer certain questions and for prevaricating in your answers to other questions before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

You are here today, by order of the House, for the following purposes: First, to receive an admonishment for your refusal to respond to questions posed to you by the committee; second, to provide responses to the questions referred to in the committee's 17th report; and third, to respond to supplemental questions.

The privileges of the House of Commons are enshrined in The Constitution Act, 1867, and in the Parliament of Canada Act. This includes the right to institute inquiries and to require the attendance of witnesses. Under the Standing Orders of the House, they are also exercised by its committees within their respective mandates.

These privileges, enjoyed by the House collectively and by members individually, are essential in the discharge of our duties. The House has the power, and indeed the obligation, to reaffirm them when obstruction or interference impedes the House's proceedings and the ability of members to carry out their parliamentary duties.

That is precisely what the House has ordered the Speaker, as the guardian of these rights and privileges, to do today: to reprimand you, to reprimand your contempt for refusing to answer questions put to you by the committee and for prevaricating other questions.

For all these reasons, on behalf of the House of Commons, I admonish you.

In addition, the House orders you to respond to the questions you refused to answer in committee, in whole or in part, and to respond to any supplementary questions.

● (1530)

Mr. Firth, I would like to remind you that you must answer all questions that are posed to you. I would also like to remind you, and everyone listening, that everything you say as part of these pro-

ceedings is protected by parliamentary privilege and cannot be used against you in any other forums.

The Chair is aware that you have been briefed on this process.

You may now be seated.

The House will now proceed with its questions.

The House will now proceed to the first round of questions. Each recognized party will have 10 minutes.

I wish to remind hon. members again that all questions are to be addressed through the Chair.

The hon. Leader of the Government.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could Mr. Firth inform the House as to whether he consulted with a medical professional, prior to his appearance today, regarding answering questions from the House?

Mr. Kristian Firth (Partner): Mr. Speaker, yes, I did. I consulted yesterday.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, is Mr. Firth comfortable sharing what the doctor told him?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, yes, I am.

I am not supposed to participate in any activity that would call any undue stress to myself, being diagnosed with having acute mental health flare-ups, being actively under therapy and being on medication.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, was the information about Mr. Firth's medical condition shared with the House of Commons administration?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, could the member ask the question again, please?

● (1535)

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, certainly, by all means.

Was the information about Mr. Firth's medical condition shared with the House of Commons administration?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, we shared it with the Clerk.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, this information is consistent with what was shared with all recognized parties yesterday individually by the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel: Mr. Firth's health is fragile, and a doctor has provided a note recommending that Mr. Firth does not participate in activities such as the questioning today for mental and physical health reasons.

We were also told that Mr. Firth understands he will have to answer questions and that he is prepared to do so once his health allows it.

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I want to be crystal clear: We believe that what happened with the ArriveCAN app is unacceptable. We want to ensure that all unanswered questions receive answers. That is an important principle of the House.

It is why we supported the motion that brings Mr. Firth here today. We want to get to the bottom of this issue, and we want to ensure that committees are respected.

We understand all recognized parties were individually informed of options to delay the questioning component of today's proceedings until Mr. Firth has been medically cleared to participate. Only the Conservatives refused.

On this side of the House, we do not believe it is appropriate to question Mr. Firth if he is not medically able to participate. We want this to be done in a way that respects the dignity of Parliament, and forcing someone against medical advice to do something a doctor believes could harm their treatment and recovery is indeed beneath the dignity of this place.

The Leader of the Opposition is giving us a demonstration of his character, and Canadians should pay careful attention—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader has the floor.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, I will repeat the last sentence. The Leader of the Opposition is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The government House leader is purposely causing disorder in this House. Mr. Speaker, you just asked every person here to keep their conduct calm and within the dignity of the House for these extraordinary proceedings. The member is saying that things were in a medical certificate that were not there. We had a House leaders' discussion on this. Now he is using the opportunity to attack the official opposition. This is inappropriate, and it causes discord in the House; it will cause disruption on a continuing basis.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to please ask the government House leader to conduct himself within the dignity and within the four squares of this extraordinary situation and not continue down this path.

• (1540)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock for raising this issue.

I see that the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle is also rising on his feet for a point of order.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, it is very important for you, Mr. Speaker, to understand how we got here. It is important to know that the witness was offered accommodations that have been granted; should there be further accommodations requested, in terms of breaks or any type of need to consult with any professional, we have signalled our absolute co-operation with that. These are very similar to the accommodations the witness requested when it took months for him to respond to a committee invitation and further summons. These were the same accommodations that were provided when he finally testified just recently, and that is how we arrived at where we are today.

The dignity of the House and the ability for parliamentarians to do their jobs on behalf of taxpayers, many of whom lost every single cent they had during the lockdown, and on behalf of the thousands of Canadians who were ordered into quarantine because of this app, essentially—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I thank the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle and I thank the member for South Surrey—White Rock for raising these points.

I would like to emphasize to all members the importance of how we conduct ourselves. Canadians are clearly watching this historic event, and they would expect us to conduct ourselves in a way that befits the occasion.

With that in mind, I invite the hon. government House leader to finish his remarks.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, indeed you pointed out in your remarks earlier just how unprecedented this is. We supported this initiative, but we regret that it has come to this. When we received the information that all parties were privy to, we made the responsible decision. What you, Mr. Speaker, have just seen across the aisle is the very confirmation of what I have been saying.

The Speaker: I will take it then that we can move on to the next series of questions.

The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, ArriveCAN was supposed to cost taxpayers \$80,000, but the NDP-Liberal government rewarded consultants and insiders, who got rich on taxpayer dollars for an app that nobody wanted. The app erroneously forced more than 10,000 people into house arrest. It did not work, and the Auditor General said it cost at least \$60 million. ArriveCAN is now under 13 federal investigations. Two middlemen who do no IT work got rich in a corrupt system under the NDP-Liberal government. Some, including the witness today, became multi-millionaires.

GC Strategies is a two-person company, and it claims to find people who actually do the work by using LinkedIn. Nearly \$20 million for ArriveCan is what the company was paid, roughly \$2,500 per hour. The people have been paid \$100 million since forming GC Strategies just after the Liberal Prime Minister was elected. This is eight years under the Liberal Prime Minister.

The Liberal government has been ordered to collect and recoup all funds paid to ArriveCAN contractors and subcontractors who did no work on the ArriveCAN app. Has the government asked Mr. Firth to repay the money paid to GC Strategies on ArriveCAN?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, no, they have not.

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Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, the procurement watchdog found “numerous examples where [GC Strategies] had simply copied and pasted” information to prove the people GC Strategies found to do work on ArriveCAN actually did it.

Has the government asked GC Strategies to repay the money paid to GC Strategies for ArriveCAN?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, when we did our assessments, we found that the numbers provided by the ombudsman from public works were inaccurate. We have not been asked to pay any money back.

• (1545)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, for how many contracts did GC Strategies copy and paste the exact same information?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, we have never copied and pasted to win any contract.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, we know from committee testimony that Mr. Firth has admitted to doing exactly that. Today, media reports that Mr. Firth's property was raided by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

What crime are they investigating?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, that is correct. There was a search warrant, not an arrest warrant, for my property to obtain electronic goods surrounding the Botler allegations.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have also confirmed that GC Strategies and ArriveCAN are under police investigation.

Has the RCMP contacted Mr. Firth about allegations related specifically to the Prime Minister's \$60-million arrive scam?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, the RCMP has only reached out to us regarding Botler.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, in the search of Mr. Firth's home, did the RCMP take only electronic devices, or were there documents, cellphones or any other information?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I was not at my premises when the search was being done, so I cannot comment on that. I do not have that information.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, does Mr. Firth know if the property of his partner, Darren Anthony, has been searched by the RCMP?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, as of this morning, it had not.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, GC Strategies is two guys in a basement taking 30% commissions on multi-million dollar contracts that they add no value to, but they have endorsements from senior NDP-Liberal government officials.

On the endorsements, who was the Government of Canada chief information officer who offered a quote?

The Speaker: Mr. Firth, do you need time to consult with your counsel?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, yes, please.

The Speaker: The clock is stopped.

Could the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes please repeat the question?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, GC Strategies is two guys in a basement taking 30% commissions on multi-million dollar contracts that they add no value to, but they have endorsements from senior NDP-Liberal government officials. On—

The Speaker: The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate the official opposition approaching this with some dignity. There is no NDP-Liberal government, so I expect he would ask his questions in the appropriate form, please.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby. Indeed, that is the case. I will ask the hon. member if he could reframe his question. It is a pertinent question as it is.

The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes has the floor.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, this company has done no work on the multi-million dollar contracts it has been given by the Liberal government, supported by the NDP. On the endorsements on the company's website, who was the Government of Canada chief information officer who provided an endorsement?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, we gave that information over, and the name was Paul Girard.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, are all of the subcontractors that GC Strategies uses Canadian companies?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, can I get clarification? Is that period, or during the ArriveCAN application?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, it is the subcontractors used on Government of Canada contracts.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, every company that we represent and we work with for government contracts have valid Canadian security clearances.

• (1550)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, that is not an answer to the question I asked.

Does Mr. Firth have any knowledge of or involvement in the reviews for the ArriveCAN app on either the Apple store or the Google Play store being artificially amplified or paid for, any knowledge at all?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I know those services exist, but I have no knowledge of whether or not they were executed.

House of Commons

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I will give the remainder of my time to the member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, please.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the procurement ombudsman found that 76% of resources named in bids on the ArriveCAN contracts did no work and were switched out for other companies. He termed this “bait and switch”, which is often used to sub out expensive subcontractors for cheaper ones, allowing the middlemen to take home more profit.

Did Mr. Firth switch out any of his proposed resources on the ArriveCAN application contracts?

Mr. Kristian Firth (Partner): Mr. Speaker, we were part of the 24% that did not. Every resource we proposed that were called out for task authorizations were given to the Government of Canada.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, through you, has Mr. Firth ever engaged in bait and switch in any of his contracts with the Government of Canada?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, we were asked to replace resources all the time depending on whether there were discrepancies with their experience, whether they were not working very well, or whether or not they needed to move on to another project. They are contractors, so we replace resources frequently under the guidance of the client.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General found in her ArriveCAN report that Mr. Firth sat at the table with public servants to draft the requirements for a contract worth \$25 million that he was later awarded and, thereby, was setting the price. Through you, what are the names of those public servants?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, that name was provided in the questions, and the government official's name was Diane Daly.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, that is in direct contradiction to the name that was submitted by Mr. Firth as a direct answer to this question to me at a committee last month. Why is the answer changing today?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, the question posed to me was who did I speak with in May of 2022, prior to the contract award, and that was the procurement lady, which was the name I gave.

Subsequently, there was a question by the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan that was posed very similar to the hon. member's, which was who was I engaged with at CBSA when discussing suggestions, and that was Diane Daly.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General also found that the CBSA advised KPMG, a multinational consulting firm, that it would be a subcontractor under Mr. Firth's two-person middleman company. At committee, the deputy auditor general confirmed this would allow Mr. Firth and GC Strategies to take an additional 20% cut of the contract, despite not even doing the work to get KPMG as a subcontractor. How many times have public servants provided him with subcontractors?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I do not know the answer to that question. It is common, once one has an existing contract in place, for a client to engage those services to help bring on a subject matter expert they would not otherwise have access to, or typically, because contracting takes quite a long time, to actually bring them in if it is a time-sensitive deliverable.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I will take that to mean that public servants have provided him with subcontractors many times.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, again, I am not being elusive. I do not know the answer to that question.

• (1555)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will begin this question period by reminding members of some of the things I said in my speech last week.

Sadly, we are dealing with an historic situation caused by various issues. One of those issues is the inconsistencies in some of the information we received from the witness, as well as the inconsistencies between that information and the information we received from other sources.

Then, there is the time it took to receive written responses and requested documents, which was unusual and, in some cases, took as long as 18 months. Having said that, I must point out that the responses were received, although they were delayed, and it took some time and urging.

As I was saying, the purpose of my questions today will be to understand the processes, and to identify flaws in the public service, how it operates and its procedures. I am not a court, and have no intention of being one.

I urge members not to become a people's court or be taken in, and focus on our role: find flaws in the system, organization and processes in order to correct those flaws.

It is important to specify that these flaws have been around for a while. Several processes were put in place years ago, including by Ms. Ambrose, the Conservative minister at the time.

Here is my first question: I would like to know what skills and training are needed to become a talent recruiter.

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I believe I understood the question.

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There is a series of things. There is building a network, which can be, just through years of experience, working with clients, working with resources, understanding their skill sets, understanding their availability and understanding what their per diems are. There are a lot of things that have to be put into place to understand if somebody is perfect for a role. Again, do they have the right experience? Do they have the right skill set? On top of that, as well, is understanding how they respond to RFPs. We are a small shop. I mean, I do not think that is a surprise to anybody here.

Myself and my business partner, we had to understand how to look for RFPs on Buyandsell.gc.ca, how to respond to them, how to recruit for them and how to fulfill our obligations once the contracts have been awarded. Then there is invoicing and time sheets, everything that goes from a 360° desk.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, it is hard to make a name for oneself, to become known in the huge government machinery.

I would like to know how the witness' company has managed to establish itself as a key player in recruiting talent for the Government of Canada.

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I understand the question. I am not sure we are recognized as a benchmark. We were in a good position to respond and help with the ArriveCAN application, with having resources already on the ground and already having them CBSA security-cleared, which, in itself, takes a long time. However, that is not typical. At that point, I believe we beat out competition from two to three other firms. Members heard in testimony recently from AWS, Microsoft and BDO that they did not have the capacity to build the app.

Although I understand it may look like we are the benchmark, we are not recognized as the benchmark with the federal government.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, I was talking about what happened long before ArriveCAN. I was talking about what happened at the very beginning, when GC Strategies first became a company recognized by the Government of Canada. How did that happen? How did the company make its mark?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, for the first two years GC Strategies was in business, we actually were building corporate requirements. We were trying to get onto supply arrangements like TBIPS, SBIPS and ProServices, and all the mechanisms to go after business. Granted they were bluebirds, which basically means we had no idea these things were hitting the street. Then, shortly after winning the first two or three, one then starts getting corporate requirements, people start identifying the company as being good at one thing or good at the other, and then, at that point, one starts building credibility and so forth.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, so, if I understand correctly, the first contracts he received, he received them before he even knew exactly how it all worked. If I remember correctly, these first contracts were awarded back in 2015, when GC Strategies was founded. Despite not knowing exactly how it all worked, he managed to get contracts.

I would like to understand that.

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I understood what the process was for responding to RFPs, but, for the first two years, we were working in building our credibility through other companies, like other subs who were working with the private sector. At that point, we had built the confidence in our network and our understanding of how many resources we had access to with specific skill sets, so that we felt comfortable going after the RFPs that were being put out by the federal government.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, does the witness believe that civil servants in general, and those working on ArriveCAN in particular, followed the rules, procedures and policies related to their strategic and privileged position within the government apparatus when negotiating the contracts his company won?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, can I please have that question repeated?

The Speaker: I will stop the clock.

The hon. member for Beauport—Limoulou.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, does the witness believe that public servants complied with the rules, procedures and policies related to their strategic and privileged position within the government apparatus in negotiating contracts for GC Strategies?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, again, without sounding elusive, and that is not why I am here at all, I do not have the answer and cannot comment on that. I am not privy to every meeting that happens and every conversation that happens.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the witness is not familiar with the rules of the public service.

However, did any public servant with whom he had contact tell him, at any time, that they could not do certain things that did not abide by the rules that apply to public servants?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, no, they did not.

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[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, it has been noted, particularly by the Auditor General, that people from GC Strategies helped develop the criteria for a contract that they ultimately won.

Does the witness believe that any company that participates in developing criteria should withdraw from a call for tenders?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, from previous testimony that came from Amazon and Microsoft last week, I believe it is common practice to offer suggestions, because typically clients are not always best informed when it comes to writing RFPs or putting requirements together, whether it is cloud computing for Amazon or Microsoft. It is common for government officials or technical resources to ask for specific suggestions, understanding what skill sets and what technologies they would have to be privy with to be working on an application or working on projects.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Speaker, based on what I understand from the answers to my last questions, the public service is currently forced, or feels obliged, to seek out the expertise of certain consultants because it cannot even identify or formulate criteria related to its own needs. That indicates a lack of expertise, and a lack of training.

In particular, I would add that it makes no sense for a company that worked on selecting the criteria for a bidding process to be allowed to submit a bid. It creates the appearance of collusion, something that public servants, and companies, must absolutely avoid. That should be avoided. I recommend that the process be reviewed.

• (1605)

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too am struck by the historic nature of this moment, and I am keenly aware of our responsibility, which is a sacred responsibility, to not only seek answers on behalf of Canadians but also ensure we are not doing undue harm to the individual who is here before us. We must also ensure that we are conducting ourselves in a way that upholds the integrity, dignity and credibility of this place, which lies at the heart of our democracy. I will certainly try to uphold those values in my questioning.

We are here because of the serious allegations and revelations surrounding the procurement and execution of the ArriveCAN app, a piece of technology that incorrectly required thousands of Canadians to quarantine, that cost some \$60 million and that was procured in a way that both the Auditor General and the procurement ombudsman have found was highly irregular and likely connected to misconduct on the part of the government officials who were responsible.

There are two main questions of substance that I believe we are seeking answers to today. The first dealt with Mr. Firth's misleading of the committee when it came to the question of whether he had met with government officials outside of work. The first time that question was raised at committee, Mr. Firth replied in the negative, saying that he had not met with officials outside of work. He then

later provided documentation that showed he had met with three officials at some half a dozen Ottawa restaurants and breweries.

Why did he choose to mislead the committee in the first instance?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, again, I am fully endorsing the embellishment and the understanding that there were questions that may have not been answered correctly and the understanding that some of them may have been obtuse. That is why I am here today. I will be answering all questions, just as I have been over the last 45 minutes, honestly and to the best of my knowledge.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, the question, as originally asked at committee, was a simple yes or no question: Had the individual met with government officials outside of work? Mr. Firth replied that no, he had not.

My question, which was not provided with an answer, was why he chose, in that moment, to mislead the committee.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, at that time, I did not know how many. Rather than giving a fake answer, I did not know exactly how many people I had met with. I have been doing this for 16 years.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, the question was not how many government officials or how many times. The question was a yes or no question. Had Mr. Firth met with government officials outside of work? Why did he mislead the committee by answering that question in the negative?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, at that time, I thought I did answer it correctly.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, I have a very difficult time accepting that answer and believing that answer to be the truth.

The other question of substance that I believe we are here to seek an answer to is with regard to which government official Mr. Firth discussed the criteria for a contract that was eventually awarded to him. I believe he has provided that name as being Diane Daly.

Can Mr. Firth confirm that this is indeed the government official with whom he discussed the contract criteria?

• (1610)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, I think, for Canadians watching, this is really the most troubling of the allegations, that Mr. Firth, on behalf of his company, was involved in setting the rules and the criteria for a multi-million-dollar contract that, strangely enough, his firm was eventually awarded with.

To most Canadians, this would look like, and I will not exaggerate, a rigged system that is designed to benefit Ottawa insiders and make it more difficult for entrepreneurs and small businesses in this country to do work for the government.

Does Mr. Firth not agree?

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Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, the RFP for the contract in question had over 220 requirements involved. We offered up three suggestions, with which PSPC still deemed 40 qualified vendors could respond to, and of which 10 showed interest. I do not see that as overly restrictive.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, both the Auditor General and the procurement ombudsman found that the criteria for that contract were set in such a restrictive way that only GC Strategies could have been selected as the successful bidder.

Does Mr. Firth not agree that this process is profoundly unfair?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I find the ombudsman's comments to be somewhat subjective after the fact. I cannot comment as to why the other 39 people did not respond. People are busy. They sometimes do not have the bandwidth.

Also, for the Auditor General to understand that we would be the only people that could respond to this, there are 635 other vendors out there with the corporate requirements and there are wholly 10,000 or 12,000 resources out there with the technical requirements. Unless they are familiar with all of those, it is hard, again, to assume that we were the only people qualified to win this.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, Canadians are deeply troubled by the allegations and revelations surrounding the ArriveCAN app.

Could Mr. Firth, in his own words, describe what those concerns are, precisely?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I can, to be honest.

I do not know the allegations and accusations around the ArriveCAN app. We used the first three national security exemption contracts. Actually, only two of them, the first and the third, were used to build the ArriveCAN application.

I am not being disrespectful. I may not understand the question, but I think I am answering it honestly.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, at committee, when Mr. Firth was asked about which government official he discussed the contract criteria with, he refused to answer, citing the fact that the RCMP was now involved at some level in looking into the circumstances surrounding the ArriveCAN app, yet the rules of Parliament and the laws of Canada do not accept that as a valid reason to refuse to answer a question of Parliament.

Does Mr. Firth accept the fact that the rules required him, at the time, to provide a full answer to our questions at committee?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, as a result of my admonishment and my understanding of that, I do now.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, in an internal investigation report by the company Botler AI, there is a characterization of a communication with Mr. Firth in which he is discussing the exorbitant commissions charged by his company for the work done by subcontractors.

In those communications, he is alleged to have said that it sucks for Canada. Does Mr. Firth recall making those comments?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I have not seen any of that content. I cannot recall saying that at all.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, given that Mr. Firth has now been brought before the bar of Parliament, and this is only the second time in our country's history that this has happened, and given the grave concerns of Canadians, I wonder if there is anything he would have done differently in his initial committee appearances to avoid the situation he now finds himself in.

• (1615)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely would. I would have answered the questions more concisely, taken more time in giving the answers and provided all written information back to the committee faster.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, earlier, Mr. Firth said that no one has asked him to pay back the commission that he earned.

Given that the Auditor General found the government overpaid for the ArriveCAN app, that the app itself did not work and sent thousands to quarantine incorrectly, that the Auditor General has called the record-keeping around those contracts some of the worst that she has ever seen, that 76% of the subcontractors did zero or little work, that GC Strategies bills itself as a recruitment firm but does not recruit, and that Mr. Firth took \$2.5 million in commission for very little work, will he give that money back?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, we were the 24%; we were not the 76%. We did recruit over 50 people to work on the ArriveCAN application and over 100 people in totality at CBSA.

The answer is that we did as we were told. We invoiced monthly. At any time, we could have been stopped. This was not that we were given \$20 million and then walked away to build an app. This was not our app. We were paid to recruit and find the resources who built the app within 20 days and did subsequent new releases for 18 months on time and on budget.

The Speaker: This concludes the first round of questioning.

Would Mr. Firth like a pause before the House proceeds to the next round?

Mr. Kristian Firth (Partner): Mr. Speaker, yes, I would, please.

[*Translation*]

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Speaker: The sitting is suspended to the call of the Chair.

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(The sitting of the House was suspended at 4:17 p.m.)

• (1625)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 4:28 p.m.)

The Speaker: Order.

The House will resume now.

[*English*]

Before we continue with our business, there is some other business I have to get done.

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, Carbon Pricing; the hon. member for Kitchener Centre, Persons with Disabilities; and the hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Carbon Pricing.

The House will now proceed to the second round of questions.

[*Translation*]

Each recognized party will have 10 minutes.

[*English*]

I wish to remind hon. members that all questions are to be addressed through the Chair.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the witness what allegations were made by Botler AI that resulted in an RCMP search of his home this week.

• (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the allegations. There were six points on the search warrant and they were not very specific to any specific allegations, but from previous testimony, I am understanding that it was fraudulent billing and résumé fraud.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, the witness, Mr. Firth, is here in the wake of the Liberal scandal involving the Prime Minister's ArriveCAN application. It is an app that was supposed to cost \$80,000, but ended up costing \$60 million.

Did the Liberal government, who paid tens of millions of dollars for work that was not done, contact Mr. Firth?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, there was no English translation for the member's question.

The Speaker: It seems there was English translation for the first question, but not the second question.

[*Translation*]

I will ask the member for Mégantic—L'Érable to ask his second question again.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, the witness, Mr. Firth, is here in the wake of the Liberal scandal involving the Prime Minister's ArriveCAN application. It is an app that was supposed to cost \$80,000, but ended up costing \$60 million.

Did the Liberal government, who paid tens of millions of dollars for work that was not done, ask Mr. Firth to reimburse the money or contact him to find a way to do so?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, no, I was not contacted.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, the witness, Mr. Firth, either refused to answer questions or lied to the parliamentary committee after we learned that the Prime Minister's government had made him a multimillionaire on the backs of taxpayers.

Can the witness affirm today in the House that he did not lie before the parliamentary committee?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, again, acknowledging the fact that I am being admonished and am making history right now, I think I have acknowledged the fact that I made mistakes in the previous committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, can Mr. Firth tell us exactly when he lied?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the exact information. Again, I am not being elusive. I just cannot allude to which questions, what time and which month.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the witness lied repeatedly in committee and that is why we are here today to try to find out the truth.

Can Mr. Firth confirm that he purposely avoided naming his sources within the Liberal government to protect his lucrative business model, which resulted from the Liberal government's lax procurement processes?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, no, I did not.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, can Mr. Firth confirm that the three quotations on the GC Strategies website were anonymous at the request of the authors of those quotations?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that was requested.

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[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, did these individuals receive any benefit for allowing GC Strategies to use their comments anonymously?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, no, they did not.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Midnapore.

[English]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth just admitted that the RCMP raided his house, relative to Botler AI. When Mr. Firth introduced Botler AI to his consultant colleague Mr. Vaughn Brennan, he had them email Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst, the former chief of staff for the Minister of Finance and the current Liberal campaign chair.

Did Mr. Brennan regularly set up Mr. Firth's contacts with elected officials, ministers and their chiefs of staff?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, that is news to me. I have never engaged Vaughn Brennan to get any meetings with senior government officials.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, is Mr. Firth aware that Mr. Brennan's wife works for Procurement Canada?

• (1635)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I was as of the third testimony when that was brought to light, but until then, I was not aware of it.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, what benefits did Mr. Vaughn Brennan provide Mr. Firth that furthered their professional relationship?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, Vaughn Brennan never provided anything outside of the work that we would give him on a per diem time and material basis for a government department.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth submitted that he was meeting with government officials outside of government offices. Where did Mr. Firth meet Paul Girard, the former CIO of TBS?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I have met Paul Girard at the Starbucks on 99 Metcalfe.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, what did Mr. Firth discuss at this meeting?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, with Mr. Girard's position, and I had two contracts within his directorate, it was just understanding how the contracts were going, thanking me, thinking the resources were performing well, understanding if there were any issues and just general chief information officer duties.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Where did Mr. Firth meet Monsieur Philippe Johnston, former CIO at NRC?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, it could have been Bâton Rouge, which was underneath where his department was, or it could have been a coffee shop.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, what did Mr. Firth discuss at this meeting?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, at that time, it was very similar to Mr. Girard. We had contracts within Mr. Johnston's department. I think it was just a health check on the contracts, making sure that my resources were performing. If they were not, then they would let me know this and we would replace them.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth has made connections and met with public servants for over a decade, wining and dining them for contracts. Officials became comfortable with this system. Officials allowed Mr. Firth to charge millions because they were not willing to follow the rules and used Mr. Firth as their easy way out of accountability.

Who is Mr. Firth protecting in this corrupt system?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I am not protecting anybody. I am just going about my business, like an IT staffing firm does.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, did Mr. Firth review the content of the search warrant executed on his house yesterday?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I skimmed through the six pages, yes.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, did the search warrant specify forgery pursuant to section 366 of the Criminal Code and fraud pursuant to section 380 of the Criminal Code of Canada?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Again, Mr. Speaker, I skimmed through it. To answer honestly, I cannot give that answer accurately.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth admitted that he altered two résumés, replacing a two-month internship with 51 months of professional experience. On another occasion, he inflated seven years of experience to 12. He claimed that this was a mistake.

He did not have consent to manipulate the résumés. Is that not correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, we have mentioned this previously in previous testimonies, but we encouraged the RCMP investigation into the Botler allegations, whether it is fraud over \$5,000, because we believe it is going to exonerate us.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, he clearly did not answer the question. I will move on.

How many other times has Mr. Firth altered materials and résumés to the government since 2015?

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Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, it is a common practice to engage with a resource to understand, because not everybody's CV or résumé completely aligns with requirements that are coming out. They may have the experience, but we just have to speak with them to qualify that.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, I am asking for the number.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I do not have a number.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth's actions amounted to forgery under the Criminal Code. He altered résumés to secure government contracts, thereby fleecing the Canadian taxpayer. Is that not correct?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, the allegations regarding the Botler résumés were on a contract that had already been awarded, so these were task authorizations. No contracts would have been decided either way by these résumés. It was one business.

• (1640)

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth's actions further constituted a fraud on the Government of Canada. Section 380 of the Criminal Code stipulates fraud is "Every one who, by deceit, falsehood or other fraudulent means" defrauds the public "of any property, money or valuable security".

Both offences are punishable by indictment and, upon conviction, he could face a maximum prison sentence of 10 to 14 years. Is he aware of that?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Again, Mr. Speaker, we are looking forward to the investigation by the RCMP because we believe it will exonerate us.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth's actions were not accidental but intentional. This was not a mistake. He knew his resources would not qualify for taxpayer monies without manipulating their experience.

Does Mr. Firth think that the Prime Minister or the Liberal cabinet ministers should be at the bar answering questions today, instead of him, or is he willing to go to jail for them?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, can I speak to my counsel, please?

The Speaker: Go ahead, Mr. Firth.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I am not even sure what the question is there.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the hon. member that his time has elapsed.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I would like to inform the hon. member for Brantford—Brant, and we will be able to show him this on the record, that actually by the time he finished his question the time he had had already elapsed.

Mr. Larry Brock: I respect that, Mr. Speaker, but he clearly indicated that he did not understand the question. In terms of fairness to Mr. Firth, he should be afforded an opportunity for me to rephrase the question so he can understand it and respond accordingly.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, you started off today talking about the importance of decorum. I do not think it is appropriate for the member opposite to be challenging the Speaker when the rules, as you expressed them, were very clear.

The time has expired. That means we move on to the next person, and he should not be challenging the Chair.

The Speaker: I appreciate the intervention from the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader. I am going to take a moment to consult on this matter.

The Chair is going to permit the hon. member for Brantford—Brant to please put a question within 10 seconds so that the witness, Mr. Firth, can answer the question.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, does Mr. Firth think that he should be solely responsible for this scam, or should the Prime Minister, the Liberal cabinet ministers and certain members of the Liberal back bench be at this bar facing legal consequences?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I do not want to be elusive. I cannot comment on this; it is kind of speculative. I am not sure what I can do here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to defend Canada's Parliament, an institution to which I hope one day Quebec will no longer have to answer. Nevertheless, I must defend the principles behind this Parliament, in particular respect for democratic institutions, and therefore of the parliamentary democracy in which Quebec participates.

A few weeks ago, the Office of the Auditor General submitted a report on the management of the ArriveCAN app. To quote the Auditor General, management of the app was the worst she had seen in her career. The ArriveCAN app was supposed to cost \$80,000 and ended up costing \$60 million. In the same report, we learned that one company composed of two people, the owner of which is here today, pocketed more than \$19 million. That company is GC Strategies.

We also learned that the ArriveCAN affair is only the tip of the iceberg. The comptroller general recently revealed that GC Strategies, and its ancestor Coredal Systems Consulting, have obtained contracts totalling \$108 million since 2011. Manual searches could reveal other contracts, so it might be even more than \$108 million.

We learned in the Auditor General's report and from several witnesses that the witness here today, Mr. Kristian Firth, and public servants participated in whisky tastings, dinners, golf tournaments and dozens of other events. It is normal and healthy in a self-respecting democracy that the parliamentarians responsible for ensuring the proper functioning of the government take a closer look at what may have happened to prevent it from happening again.

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That is the reason why the owners of GC Strategies were invited to testify several times in committee. Mr. Kristian Firth refused to answer several questions. He compromised parliamentarians' work by not submitting the requested documents on time. He lied to the committee. In particular, he refused to submit the list of public servants with whom he did business, a list he has just now submitted but that is incomplete based on the testimony we heard in committee.

It is clear that, if that is where we are, there are huge problems with the government's procurement processes. For almost 15 years now, it has been so difficult for companies to pass the preselection stage to do business with the government that small companies that provide no services at all are being paid a commission so that the government can enter into a contract with the company that will actually be doing the work. It is completely absurd.

Here we have a person who took advantage of our broken system and pushed it to the extreme. I will give members an example. When the Canada Border Services Agency identified KPMG as a company with which it could do business and as a company already on the list of pre-approved companies, it contacted KPMG. The contract would be pre-established. That is when a public servant at the CBSA called KPMG to tell them that there would be an intermediary in their contract. The intermediary was GC Strategies. We learned that Mr. Kristian Firth met with KPMG with respect to the contract. That is precisely the problem. Mr. Kristian Firth and his two-person company did not even provide the head-hunting service they claimed to provide. They did absolutely nothing and pocketed \$84,000.

My question for Mr. Firth is as follows: Does he think that taxpayers got their money's worth for the \$84,000 in this affair?

• (1645)

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that this is common practice for people with existing contracts. They get subcontractors to come through their company, because typically the time to procure directly, even if one is one of the 635 vendors who could do work with the government, takes too long. Again, I was not aware of the file and what the urgency was and the deliverables, but I did know timelines were very tight. My assumption, and again this is being speculative, was that they were leveraging the contract I had, because it needed to be done quickly.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, what we heard in committee is that the public servants did everything they could to make sure the contracts were awarded quickly. That is why many contracts were awarded non-competitively. Once again, we are hearing contradictory testimony.

According to Mr. Firth, why did the public servant agree to simply pick up the phone and call KPMG to tell them that there would be an intermediary and that that intermediary would be paid \$84,000 to do absolutely nothing? Why does he think the public servant did that?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, again, not being elusive, I cannot comment on why somebody picked up the phone in a government organization and made a call.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, does Mr. Firth have a number in mind for the many gifts in money and in kind that he offered the federal public servants?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, that number is zero.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, to summarize, Mr. Firth never paid for a coffee, never paid for a restaurant meal, never paid for a golf tournament and never paid for a whisky tasting, despite all the testimony we heard?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I have admitted I would go out and I would invite government employees to lunches or to coffee, understanding that if they were to show up, they had already gone through their regular chain of command and already asked permission to accept that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, here is a good example of a contradiction. We went from zero to yes, there were coffees, restaurant meals, golf tournaments, whisky tastings and on and on, with dozens of federal public servants.

I will repeat the same question. How much, in money or in kind, was given to the federal public servants?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, the first question was specific to what was given to receive contracts by government employees. That is why I said it was zero.

Once the contracts had been awarded through regular procurement practices, they became a client, and we would have frequent meetings to check on the health of the project, whether that was over lunch or whether that was during coffee.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, why do that if not to obtain federal government contracts?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I am looking for a health check on how my resources are performing and whether, also, I need to replace any if they are not.

*House of Commons**[Translation]*

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, had he previously identified those with whom he was having coffee and tasting whiskey as people who could grant him contracts, or were they simply people he met on the street?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, they were clients who we engaged with once we had won the contracts.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, that is clearly providing a service paid in kind to obtain a contract. It is the very definition of it.

Let us go on to the next question.

Mr. Firth justified his rate of \$2,600 per hour by saying that he did not just work 9 to 5.

Does he think that Canadians and Quebecers got their money's worth with the \$2,600 per hour they paid for Mr. Firth's so-called huge number of hours?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, the hours that we were quoting were specific to ArriveCAN. We had 22 other departments and other contracts we were working on at that time.

I would like to also remind everyone that we were picked. We did not solicit. We provided services; over 50 resources were in there and delivered on 170 releases on the application.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth and Mr. Anthony met at Veritaaq, which was accused of colluding on contracts in 2009 while Mr. Firth was working there.

The judge who looked into the matter had ordered that all employees receive anti-collusion training.

Did Mr. Firth learn anything from that training?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, in 2009, at Veritaaq, I was a recruiter. I was not involved in the sales cycle whatsoever, so I do not think I had training in 2009.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, that is too bad, because even a recruiter is considered a company employee.

I think that what we are seeing today is that there is a big problem when it comes to procurement and that there is a certain loss of control when it comes to the gifts that are being accepted by public servants. We saw proof of that today.

I think that the CBSA, which was one of the main government bodies that awarded contracts to GC Strategies, must be put under third-party management because Quebecers and Canadians need to recover the money that was wasted on this company and others.

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I know that the clock can be stopped.

Can I have the question again, please? It was not coming through on my headphones very well.

[Translation]

The Speaker: I would ask the hon. member for Terrebonne to repeat her comments.

● (1655)

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Mr. Speaker, does he agree that any public servants that did not follow internal procedures should lose their jobs and that if this is a widespread problem within the CBSA, then that agency should be put under third-party management?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I believe that if any wrongdoing is found, there should be repercussions.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians across the country and members of Parliament are disappointed, not just in the dramatic failure of the procurement system in our country to address the real issues of value for money, but in that this sheds light on what has been a terrible instance of reporting missing information and lost invoicing. We do not even know the total amount to date.

This is a serious and grave matter facing our country, one that stems back decades now. We heard testimony at the public accounts committee, of which I am a member, several times. Other contractors spoke to us about the tremendous vulnerability that exists in Canada's procurement system and also exists in the lack of investment in our public sector.

According to The Globe and Mail, for instance, since 2017, GC Strategies has received \$46 million in federal funding. The flow of tax dollars to GC Strategies has increased steadily each year, growing from \$32.6 million in the 2016-17 fiscal year to \$80.3 million in the 2021-22 fiscal year.

According to the Auditor General, GC Strategies' ArriveCAN app cost Canadians almost \$60 million. The total is still undetermined due to the lack of documentation and of a paper trail, a serious and grave error in and of itself.

On top of that, we have noticed that this vulnerability of our public service and procurement process has created a system in which insiders are able to profit in extreme amounts because of a system that does not have the proper accountability and does not have the proper follow through, albeit, in this particular instance, that there is a lack of proper procurement.

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Canadians are rightly disappointed. Not only that, but they are angry at the very real fact that they wake up every single day, go to work, pay their taxes and do everything right, and then are told that the tax dollars they have worked so hard for have not gone to close in the gaps in social or economic outcomes, or for material benefits for Canadians, but have been going towards a dramatic outsourcing of jobs that Canadians in our public service could do.

I recognize that not all IT services, of course, can be dealt with here at the House of Commons or in our public service, but a great deal of them could.

When did Mr. Firth first start doing contracts and business with the Government of Canada?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, my first contract would have been in 2011.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, what are the names of Mr. Firth's various companies that have contracted or subcontracted with the Government of Canada since that time?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I probably cannot remember them all, but I will do the best I can.

Sorry, can I get a qualification for that question, please?

The Speaker: I am not certain what you are asking me, Mr. Firth.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask for a qualification. Should I be speaking about my companies or the companies that we have subcontracted work through?

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, I am inquiring as to the names of the companies that he has been the owner or co-owner of since 2011, while he has been doing business with the Government of Canada.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, the only IT staffing firm I have had is GC Strategies, as an owner. We were not part of Coredal.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, does Mr. Firth believe that the work his company, GC Strategies, has done in relation to ArriveCAN was good money for Canadians' dollars?

• (1700)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the team we put forward, again, as attested to by AWS, Microsoft and BDO, were the only ones at that point that had the capacity to build this application, so I would say yes.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth, in the past, has spoken about his worries or concerns, or even at times perceived rejection, of the Auditor General's report, in particular to this fact as well in regard to value for money. What does Mr. Firth have to say in relation to the Auditor General's report on value for money?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I am not questioning the report. Again, it is the inputs that were given to the report. There is a big delta between the \$19.1 million the AG's report claimed that we used to build the application versus the \$11 million, but because of the financial system and the tagging for other projects associated, because these contracts were pandemic response contracts and were not specific to the ArriveCAN app, I can understand why there is the discrepancy.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that when our public service does the job, they are doing it knowing the most important piece to that is the outcome for Canadians and making sure that the service is truly up to the standard that Canadians expect. When we outsource that work, when we take that job away from the public sector and when we take it away from those who work for the good of our country, it comes with a price. It comes with commission, and it comes with profit by the private sector in this particular instance. How much money did Mr. Firth take home from these contracts?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, again, I am not being elusive, but I do not have that exact number in front of me. I'm sorry.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, it would be difficult to not be able to supply such a number when, as a matter of fact, the company would be responsible for issuing invoices or issuing the amount owed to them. It would also be up to an owner of a company to administer and to have paperwork for their employees, including themselves, if they are paid.

Does Mr. Firth suggest that he has not paid himself or that he has not kept track of payments to himself? If not, how can we, in this chamber, get this information, and would he supply it in writing later?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I can answer that question, but I just do not have the answer in front of me right now. I was not given a set of questions that would be coming at me in the next hour and 20 minutes. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: Mr. Firth, there was a second part to that question.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, can I ask the hon. member to repeat it please?

The Speaker: The clock is stopped.

The hon. member for Edmonton Griesbach.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, would Mr. Firth supply the amount he took home from government contracts?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I think that information has been provided to the committee.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth and his partner, Mr. Anthony, have both made accusations that the Auditor General's report is false and that she is lying. He gave clarity to my question in relation to some of the numbers supplied. In addition to those numbers that were supplied, what other areas of that report would Mr. Firth contest?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, off the top of my head, the numbers one is the one that has caused the most media attention, so that would be the one I would be more focused on to make sure it was corrected.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, the Office of the Procurement Ombud said that "overly restrictive", "mandatory [solicitation] criteria...favoured [GC Strategies] for "a \$25-million contract". GC Strategies had been involved in the development of their requirements, which were included by the CBSA in a request for proposal for a contract ultimately won by Mr. Firth.

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To be clear, Mr. Firth's company, GC Strategies, by evidence of the ombudsman, participated in the recommendations set out in a request for proposal to which Mr. Firth's company applied and was awarded a contract.

Does Mr. Firth understand that the Auditor General concluded in that investigation that there was no evidence to the effect that GC Strategies supplied a proposal even to get this contract?

Can Mr. Firth please explain how the information was requested, who from the CBSA requested the information related to a contract like the one they were a recipient of, and what aspects of that proposal did Mr. Firth supply for requirement?

• (1705)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I would like a quick clarification on the question. The Auditor General identified no proposal for the national security exemption ones, not the one we are discussing right now.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, in what capacity was Mr. Firth involved in developing and contributing to the CBSA requirements for the ArriveCAN contract?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I have previously mentioned there were 220 requirements in that RFP. There were three suggestions we put forward, understanding that they would need to know the technology stack and the types of resources they would need. From that point onward, that was everything. The 220 other requirements were all public information that could be obtained through Buyandsell.gc.ca or through any other RFP that has hit the street. On top of that as well, it was PSPC that still deemed 40 qualified vendors who were responding to this RFP.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, can Mr. Firth please explain the process, in particular the timeline of events, that enabled Mr. Firth's contribution to that RFP?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I was approached in May 2021, I believe, for suggestions and understanding of what kind of requirements they would need for a team to continue the work, and I believe the contract was awarded a year later. There was no conversation between those.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Mr. Speaker, does Mr. Firth believe that to be a conflict of interest?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I do not. Again, these were three suggestions of 220 that went through multiple levels and went through multiple departments before being awarded and evaluated.

The Speaker: This concludes the second round of questioning.

Mr. Firth, would you like a pause before the House proceeds to the next round of questions?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, yes, please.

[Translation]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Speaker: The sitting is suspended to the call of the Chair.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 5:07 p.m.)

• (1715)

[English]

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 5:17 p.m.)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth said today that he was completely unaware of connections between Vaughn Brennan and senior Liberal staffer Jeremy Broadhurst and was completely unaware of connections to senior Liberals, but Mr. Firth received a text on February 1, 2021, that was subsequently reported in *The Globe and Mail*, which specifically described the involvement of the Deputy Prime Minister's office, where Broadhurst was chief of staff.

Does Mr. Firth want to correct his earlier response?

Mr. Kristian Firth (Partner): Mr. Speaker, I have no knowledge, and I cannot remember sending that text message.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth received a text message on February 1, 2021. It was reported in *The Globe and Mail*. That report in *The Globe and Mail*, along with other information, sparked subsequent hearings at the government operations committee.

Is Mr. Firth claiming he did not read that article or the text?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I cannot remember that text message, and I cannot remember that article.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, this is a final chance to tell the truth.

Will the witness tell the House about any connections and relationships between him and Jeremy Broadhurst or, that he is aware of, between Vaughn Brennan and Jeremy Broadhurst?

He received texts. It is in *The Globe and Mail*. Will he tell the truth?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, again, I do not know of any communications. I do not remember that text message. I have not seen the article.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth claimed today that it is common practice for clients to request and to receive suggestions about the content of RFPs from those who bid on them.

How many times, since 2015, has GC Strategies provided these kinds of suggestions to government clients regarding RFPs that it then bid on?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, again, without being elusive here, I do not have that number. I do not know.

• (1720)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, will the witness undertake to provide a response to that question in writing to the Speaker and to the government operations committee within 14 days?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, we were spoken to previously. Do we have to provide information to the House?

The Speaker: I will consult the Chair.

House of Commons

To all hon. members, the process, which was set forth by the House, was that subsequent to the calling to the bar, the admonishment and the responding to questions and supplementary questions, the answers being provided by Mr. Firth would be referred to the House committee for it to evaluate and to make recommendations.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the witness has asked if he has to provide responses. I would submit to you that the whole reason he is here is that he has refused to provide responses. This is why the House is taking this matter so seriously.

The Speaker: What I understood Mr. Firth to say to the hon. member was whether he had to provide a response to the Speaker of the House.

The point that I was making before, in terms of the order that the House had set out, the order that the House had passed, was that the testimony brought here will be referred to the committee.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, will the witness provide the response, in writing, to the question I have asked, which he claims to be unable to answer?

Will he provide it in writing, within 14 days, to the Speaker and to the committee, yes or no?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, yes, I will.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, why did the government go to GC Strategies for this sort of advice?

How did GC Strategies become a favoured contractor and advisor regarding RFPs to the Government of Canada?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I got my first contract in 2011 and have done that subsequently by just responding to RFPs. It is flattering to be a recognized person who can provide requirements and help for the federal government.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, it is very flattering indeed. According to committee testimony, Mr. Firth received \$2,600 per hour spent working on ArriveCAN. That is substantially more than the earnings of an average NHL player. It is very flattering that they came to him for advice. It is very flattering that he was paid so much.

Does he see this as a reasonable rate of compensation for what he did?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, again, in the testimony, they were quoting hours towards ArriveCAN. We had 22 other departments and 20 other contracts we were working on at the same time. It is impossible for me to spend 250 hours on one contract when I have to service and maintain other projects with other clients.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, is the witness involved with any other companies?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, just my holdco, which is the 50% owner of GC Strategies.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, what is that holdco, and does it do business with the Government of Canada?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, my holdco is a numbered company that was used to register the name GC Strategies.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, does it do business with the Government of Canada directly?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, it does not.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the witness discussed the health of contracts outside the office with Paul Girard, Treasury Board CIO.

Did he discuss replacing resources or increasing resources at that time?

• (1725)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I have had many conversations with Paul Girard. I cannot remember every single one of them.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, did he discuss new contracts? Since he claims to be unable to answer that question, will he respond to it in writing as well?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, sorry, I thought I did answer the question.

The Speaker: I am going to ask the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan to rephrase the question.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, in meetings outside the office with Paul Girard, did they discuss replacing resources or increasing resources? Did they discuss new contracts? If the witness is unable to answer that question, will he provide a response in writing?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I will respond in writing. I do not have every conversation with Mr. Girard catalogued.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the witness said earlier that he had altered two resumé, but only after contracts were awarded. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I said that earlier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, I am sure he said that. I was there, I heard him. I do not understand why he is claiming that he did not say it.

Earlier, a Conservative asked him if he had altered two resumé and he said yes, but after he was awarded contracts. Did I mishear that?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I did not say I doctored two resumé. I said that the business was already won. I did not amend any resumé to win any contracts, and the resumé were for a task authorization that was already won business.

*House of Commons**[Translation]*

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, so he did not say that he altered the resumés after the contracts were awarded?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I have never amended a contract.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, the witness told us earlier that public servants received all kinds of compensation, but only after contracts were awarded. That is what he told us.

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, sorry, I do not understand the question.

[Translation]

The Speaker: We will stop the clock.

I will invite the member for La Prairie to ask his question again.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, earlier, the member for Terrebonne asked whether Mr. Firth has ever given any money, benefits in kind, gifts to public servants. The witness said that he had, but only after the contracts were awarded.

Is that accurate?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, we do not give gifts and do bribes to win contracts.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, the witness mentioned earlier that he had picked up the tab at restaurants or things like that for public servants, but he did that after the contracts were awarded.

Is that true?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, that is correct. Once the contract has been awarded, one wants to have a relationship with the client to understand if one's resources are doing a good job, or, if they are not, to try to pivot and move as fast as possible to replace them. The fact that the invitation went out and the officials showed up suggested that they followed the code of conduct and that they had already asked permission from their superiors.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, to the witness, the public servant is the client.

Is that it?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, if we are doing government business, that is correct.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, is it possible that when emoluments are given after a contract, they are given before another contract?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I believe it would be before another contract, but that does not mean it is for me.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, there was mutual support between several people like the witness. Is that it?

[English]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, it was inaudible for the translator.

[Translation]

The Speaker: I will stop the clock and ask the member to ask the question again.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Mr. Speaker, if I may, I will draw a conclusion based on what we have heard today.

There is nothing unusual in having the Canada Border Services Agency do business with GC Strategies and give it \$19 million, without ascertaining that GC Strategies' employees have any exceptional skills or the skills needed to obtain or disclose a contract.

We also have to consider it acceptable for public servants to receive gifts, although it is unclear whether this occurs before or after the contracts are awarded. We also have to accept that GC Strategies helps draft calls for tenders because the Canada Border Services Agency lacks the skill to identify its own needs and criteria when it comes to developing calls for tenders. That is very disturbing. We are being asked to believe that paying someone \$84,000 for nothing is normal. The witness actually said that he had not done anything to earn this \$84,000, but that it was normal.

Now people are wondering whose fault it is. Perhaps the Canada Border Services Agency is to blame. This may be the tip of the iceberg, but it is not normal. The Auditor General noted that it was the worst record-keeping she had ever seen. That is not normal. Now the Canada Border Services Agency is working on an import registration system, known as CARM. The House of Commons committee has found a number of irregularities. It is worrisome that this agency is continuing its work after what we have heard today.

Let us focus more on the Canada Border Services Agency and the government's responsibility to ensure that that agency is put under third-party management and that steps are taken to recover the taxpayer money that was spent for reasons we do not understand.

● (1730)

[English]

The Speaker: Although there might not have been a question, if you would like to make a comment I will allow you to do so at this time.

House of Commons

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I am good.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now that Mr. Firth is aware of the powers of Parliament, I wanted to ask whether he regrets not answering the questions that were asked of him, not once, not twice, but three times at the government operations committee.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. I sent that in writing to, I believe, all members of Parliament prior to coming here, with apologies for that.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know this: Did Mr. Firth meet with any members of Parliament during the process for the RFP for the contract for ArriveCAN or during the contract process?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, no, I did not.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know this: Has Mr. Firth, outside the committees where he has been brought formally, ever met or spoken with any members of Parliament, regardless of which party?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, can I speak to my counsel for a few seconds, please?

The Speaker: The clock is stopped.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, no, I have not.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, Mr. Firth has not had any private conversations, at any point, with any member of Parliament over the period of the committee hearings. I am not talking about at the committees themselves; I am talking about private conversations, hallway conversations, phone calls or anything of that nature.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I have not.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, we have not seen a scandal like this since the ETS scandal under the Harper government. The ETS scandal cost Canadian taxpayers \$400 million. The Conservatives had a majority government at the time. The Conservatives did everything they could to keep Canadians from getting the answers they were looking for. This Conservative scandal was never resolved and we never got the information.

However, this time, since we have a minority Parliament, we are getting answers about the ArriveCAN scandal. That is extremely important. It is because of the parliamentary powers we have. As we saw under the Harper regime, with a majority government, it was not possible to get answers about the \$400 million the Conservatives had spent without any transparency at all, but today, we have the opportunity to get more answers, and I think that is important.

If I understood correctly, Mr. Firth stated earlier that he only influenced three things in the 220 requirements of the contracts.

Is he saying that he did not influence the contract, or is he saying that he did not influence the contract as much as is being claimed?

• (1735)

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, the answer is correct to both of those. I had no influence at all on the contract award, and I had no influence on the ArriveCAN scandal.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Firth mentioned earlier that he did in fact falsify or alter the résumés.

According to what we heard in committee, one person was said to have 13 years of experience, when that was not true. Other information about these people was also falsified.

I want to ask two questions.

First, does Mr. Firth regret the fact that those résumés were falsified?

Second, to date, the federal government has not asked for the questionable amounts to be repaid. Is Mr. Firth prepared to reimburse Canadian taxpayers for the questionable amounts of these contracts?

[*English*]

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, the Botler contract was in no way related to the ArriveCAN application.

Furthermore, I made a margin of zero dollars on the Botler opportunity.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this historic, unprecedented occasion.

I would like to put this question to Mr. Firth. I know he will not have them with him at the moment, but will he provide to Parliament and the operations committee the full list of all website domains that he has registered or requested to be registered in pursuit of his business as an IT staffing firm?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, yes, I can do that.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would like to review some of the answers that Mr. Firth gave earlier today.

To the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, when asked if he would have liked to have answered differently when he thinks back and reflects on his answers to committee, his answer was that he wished he could have answered more concisely. I would like to put it to the witness that no one has accused him of answers that were verbose. He has been accused of answering, and found to have answered, in ways ways that were evasive and dishonest.

Would he like to amend his answer to say he wishes he had answered honestly in the first instance?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, again, as a result of the admonishment, I see there are a lot of mistakes I have made. That is why I am here, so the answer would be yes.

Private Members' Business

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, in response to questions from the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable, Mr. Firth similarly had said earlier today, “I made mistakes”. Is it correct to say that, when the witness says “I made mistakes”, he is acknowledging that he behaved in ways that amounted to a contempt of Parliament by being deliberately misleading, evasive and dishonest? I would suggest that most Canadians would not consider these to be mistakes, but deliberate efforts to mislead Parliament.

• (1740)

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, they were mistakes. I have a lot of respect for this, and this was not to be deliberately misleading.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would like, in the last few moments we have here with the witness, to put myself in the position of a Canadian watching this on television, and wondering how this could happen. I think it is clear on a factual basis, and respecting this place and everyone in it, that there has been here, in this example, as the Auditor General has found and as the ombudsman has found, an appalling failure of our procurement process. It is completely unacceptable, and the individuals involved at GC Strategies, particularly Mr. Firth and his partner, have benefited personally from what can best be described as extremely dodgy business practices.

I would like to ask, on behalf of the people of Canada, an obvious question. I am not suggesting there is an answer, but I would like to ask Mr. Firth if he is a member of any political party. Does he donate to any particular party? Has he been involved in currying favour with any party or political parties in this country?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, no, I have not.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I am pursuing evidence that the witness gave to the government operations committee on October 20. It is a very interesting skill set that the witness has, to obtain these various contracts. Mr. Firth said, “between my business partner Darren and me, we have 30 years of experience dealing with IT companies, whether we are dealing with independent consultants or we have had the luxury of dealing with true subject matter firms... [We] build a network in which we know the people”.

Is it the case that the business experience that gained him millions of dollars, to his personal benefit, amounts to him having an extensive Rolodex of people in the Ottawa area whom he entertains?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, it has afforded us the luxury of having a large Rolodex of resources we can use and get them contracts from the federal government.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, given the experience here, and knowing that the witness has health challenges, all I can ask is this: Is he not ashamed?

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, do I have to answer that?

The Speaker: Yes, you do.

Mr. Kristian Firth: Mr. Speaker, I am not ashamed.

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that Mr. Firth's presence at the bar is no longer required and that the order is discharged.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Firth, you are now excused from the bar and will be escorted out by the Sergeant-at-Arms.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

PANDEMIC DAY ACT

The House resumed from April 15 consideration of the motion that Bill S-209, An Act respecting Pandemic Observance Day, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: It being 5:44 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill S-209 under Private Members' Business.

Call in the members.

• (1810)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 740*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Ali	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arseneault	Arya
Ashton	Atwin
Bachrach	Badaway
Bains	Baker
Barron	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Bérubé
Bibeau	Bittle
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney
Blois	Boissonnault
Boulerice	Bradford
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe
Cannings	Carr
Casey	Chabot
Chagger	Chahal
Champagne	Champoux
Chatel	Chen
Chiang	Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)
Collins (Victoria)	Cormier
Coteau	Dabrusin
Damoff	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Desbiens
Desjarlais	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Diab
Dong	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Dzerowicz
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith	Fillmore
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fortin
Fragiskatos	Fraser
Freeland	Fry
Gaheer	Gainey
Garon	Garrison
Gaudreau	Gazan
Gerretsen	Gill

Private Members' Business

Gould
 Guilbeault
 Hanley
 Hepfner
 Housefather
 Hussen
 Iacono
 Jaczek
 Jones
 Julian
 Kelloway
 Koutrakis
 Kwan
 Lambropoulos
 Lapointe
 Lattanzio
 Lemire
 Long
 Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
 MacDonald (Malpeque)
 MacKinnon (Gatineau)
 Martinez Ferrada
 Mathysen
 May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
 McGuinty
 McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
 McPherson
 Mendicino
 Michaud
 Morrice
 Murray
 Ng
 Normandin
 O'Regan
 Perron
 Plamondon
 Qualtrough
 Rodriguez
 Romanado
 Sahota
 Saks
 Savard-Tremblay
 Serré
 Shanahan
 Sidhu (Brampton East)
 Simard
 Singh
 Ste-Marie
 Suds
 Taylor Roy
 Therrien
 Trudeau
 Turnbull
 Van Bynen
 Vandal
 Vignola
 Virani
 Yip
 Zarrillo

Green
 Hajdu
 Hardie
 Holland
 Hughes
 Hutchings
 Idlout
 Johns
 Jowhari
 Kayabaga
 Khalid
 Kusmierczyk
 Lalonde
 Lamoureux
 Larouche
 Leboutillier
 Lightbound
 Longfield
 MacAulay (Cardigan)
 MacGregor
 Maloney
 Masse
 May (Cambridge)
 McDonald (Avalon)
 McKay
 McLeod
 Mendès
 Miao
 Miller
 Morrissey
 Naqvi
 Noormohamed
 O'Connell
 Pauzé
 Petitpas Taylor
 Powlowski
 Robillard
 Rogers
 Rota
 Sajjan
 Samson
 Scarpaleggia
 Sgro
 Sheehan
 Sidhu (Brampton South)
 Sinclair-Desgagné
 Sousa
 St-Onge
 Tassi
 Thériault
 Thompson
 Trudel
 Valdez
 van Koeverden
 Vandenbeld
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 Wilkinson
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Dancho
 Deltell
 Dowdall
 Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
 Epp
 Falk (Provencher)
 Ferreri
 Gallant
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 Hallan
 Jeneroux
 Kelly
 Kitchen
 Kram
 Kurek
 Lake
 Lawrence
 Leslie
 Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
 Lloyd
 Maguire
 Martel
 McCauley (Edmonton West)
 Melillo
 Morantz
 Motz
 Nater
 Paul-Hus
 Poilievre
 Redekopp
 Rempel Garner
 Roberts
 Ruff
 Schmale
 Shields
 Small
 Steinley
 Strahl
 Thomas
 Uppal
 Vecchio
 Vien
 Vis
 Warkentin
 Webber
 Williamson

Davidson
 Doherty
 Dreeshen
 Ellis
 Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
 Fast
 Findlay
 Gagnéux
 Gladu
 Goodridge
 Gray
 Hoback
 Jivani
 Khanna
 Kmiec
 Kramp-Neuman
 Kusie
 Lantsman
 Lehoux
 Lewis (Essex)
 Liepert
 Lobb
 Majumdar
 Mazier
 McLean
 Moore
 Morrison
 Muys
 Patzer
 Perkins
 Rayes
 Reid
 Richards
 Rood
 Scheer
 Seeback
 Shipley
 Soroka
 Stewart
 Stubbs
 Tolmie
 Van Popta
 Vidal
 Viersen
 Wagantall
 Waugh
 Williams
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PAIRED

Members

Bergeron

Sorbara — 2

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to submit a membership report for some membership changes that all parties have agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif
 Albas
 Arnold
 Barlow
 Berthold
 Block
 Brassard
 Caputo
 Chambers
 Cooper

Aitchison
 Allison
 Baldinelli
 Barrett
 Bezan
 Bragdon
 Calkins
 Carrie
 Chong
 Dalton

*Private Members' Business***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

● (1815)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 64th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House.

I ask that the House give its consent so that I may move concurrently in the 64th report now.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay. It is agreed.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would hope we would have unanimous consent for a motion to have a brief period for the presentation of petitions before going to Private Members' Business.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

PROTECTION AGAINST EXTORTION ACT

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC) moved that Bill C-381, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (extortion), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, crime is wreaking havoc in our neighbourhoods and communities right across this country. We see extraordinary crime statistics in almost every single category. We continue hearing about incidents that are committed by the same repeat offenders. They get arrested, get released and commit more crimes, and the cycle repeats.

This is a result of the last nine years of the Liberals' soft-on-crime policies. After nine years under the Prime Minister, our nation faces a full-blown crisis that demands urgent action. Each day, Canadians wake up to the news of more gun violence, gang shootings, extortion, auto thefts, robberies and arson. That was not the case nine years ago.

What happened nine years ago? Canadians got a new Prime Minister, a Prime Minister whose soft-on-crime policies unleashed chaos in our once peaceful towns and suburbs, a Prime Minister who made Canada a safe haven for organized crime and gangs, a Prime Minister who makes life easier for criminals, not Canadians, with his broken catch-and-release bail system.

According to the Liberal government's own news release, auto theft in Toronto has skyrocketed by an alarming 300% since 2015. In just nine years, there has been a terrifying increase in extortion across the country. In fact, the rate of extortion was five times higher in 2022 than a decade prior. In 2022, the rate of police-reported extortion increased for the third consecutive year. Extortion has skyrocketed in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, where it has risen 263%, 284% and 386%, respectively, since 2015. These numbers are extremely alarming. In the GTA alone, extortion has increased by 155% since 2015 and, in Vancouver, by 228%.

I would like to remind my colleagues in the House that, behind every number and every statistic, there is a real family, a business owner who fears for their safety and their family's well-being. Canadian's lives and their livelihoods are at stake. There are examples of terrified families right across the country. I met one such family in the GTA, who ran a very successful business. They worked hard to get where they are today, but earlier this year they started receiving extortion threats. Soon after that, their house was shot at. The family had to stay separately in different hotels. They wore bullet-proof vests to go outside, and they had to purchase a bullet-proof vehicle as part of a long list of security measures. That was all because they ran a successful business.

I also want to tell colleagues about Mr. Buta Singh Gill. He moved to Edmonton from Punjab, where he was a trained lawyer. Like many new Canadians, he worked in a meat processing plant when he got to Edmonton, and then he went on to drive a bus for the Edmonton transit system. Then he followed up on his dream to become an entrepreneur. He started building homes, first with single-family homes and then multi-family homes. Eventually, he started building apartments for Canadians to live in. He also gave back to the community. In fact, he and his family were heavily involved in revitalizing one of the gurdwaras in Edmonton.

His family also received extortion threats. His family home was shot at. Houses that he had under construction were burned down. He and his family also had to take extraordinary security measures, which would obviously be extremely expensive for any family or business to undertake, but Buta would not let thugs slow him down.

Last week, Mr. Buta Singh Gill, a prominent Edmonton businessman, a family man who had just welcomed his first grandkids, twins, and a community leader, was murdered in broad daylight at one of his construction sites. It seems the murder had nothing to do with the extortion letters. Regardless, he is another tragic victim of violent crime in our country.

● (1820)

I went to his home and met with his family. His sister-in-law and brother said they cannot believe that this is happening in Canada and that they moved to Canada for a better life for their family, a safer life for their family. They are right that this is not the Canada they moved to. Things have been very different in the last nine years.

Private Members' Business

Mayors in British Columbia and Ontario have written to the Prime Minister's top government officials asking them to take concrete action to combat extortion in their once-peaceful communities. Despite this, we continue to see the government's complete inaction.

Extortion is a federal problem. The Criminal Code that allows these criminals to openly operate freely is federal. The RCMP, which is responsible for catching these criminals, is also federal, yet our neighbourhoods are grappling with the reality of the Prime Minister's indifference to their suffering. Law enforcement continues to catch and release the same individuals, who terrorize our communities and continue to commit crimes, because of soft-on-crime Liberal policies.

Of course, it is not just extortion. Auto theft continues to rise across Canada. Statistics Canada paints a grim picture, with auto theft up by 190% in Moncton, 122% in the Ottawa-Gatineau area, over 100% in Montreal and 62% in Winnipeg. These staggering statistics underscore the urgent need for action to address this growing threat to our communities.

In 2022, the insurance industry spent over \$1 billion on car theft. Where does that extra \$1 billion come from? It comes from the pockets of hard-working Canadians. They pay the cost of auto theft crime. With insurance premiums skyrocketing, some Canadian drivers are facing a staggering 25% increase in premiums this year alone. Again, the responsibility to combat auto theft lies squarely with the federal government. In fact, all primary prevention tools, such as the Criminal Code, the RCMP, the CBSA and our port systems, are at the Prime Minister's disposal.

Liberal catch-and-release, soft-on-crime policies, Bill C-75 and Bill C-5, have allowed crime to thrive in our country. Liberal Bill C-5 eliminated mandatory prison time for drug traffickers and those who commit acts of violence. It allows criminals who commit violent acts to serve their sentences at home, in the same communities they have terrorized.

According to a recent report published by the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, violent crime is only getting worse and Canada's violent crime severity index is at its highest level since 2007. This means that the overall severity of crime has risen significantly in Canada.

To put things in perspective, under the previous Conservative government, the violent crime severity index decreased by almost 25%. Under the Liberal government, it has increased by 30%. According to Statistics Canada, the rate of firearms-related violent crime in 2022 was at the highest level ever recorded. This is a 9% increase from 2021 alone. Because of Liberal catch-and-release policies, criminals who get caught are able to walk away and are back on our streets terrorizing our neighbourhoods, sometimes within hours. Just talk to local police officers and they will say that. In addition, an increasing number of criminal cases are being stayed or withdrawn thanks to the Liberal justice minister, who has simply failed to appoint enough judges.

What does the government have to say to the victims of these crimes or to our hard-working police officers, who are sick and tired of catching the same criminals over and over again? Not surprisingly, Canadians are losing faith in our justice system. After

eight years of Liberal catch-and-release policies letting crime and chaos run rampant on our streets, only 46% of Canadians still have confidence in our justice system.

● (1825)

For Conservatives, combatting crime is a top priority. What we want to tell Canadians today is that they do not have to live like this. Conservatives have a common-sense plan to protect our businesses and neighbourhoods, with common-sense legislation that would prioritize the safety of Canadians.

My private member's bill, the protection against extortion act, Bill C-381, is a common-sense bill that addresses extortion and those who terrorize our communities with demands for protection. First and foremost, this bill would undo the serious damage caused by the government's reckless crime policies, such as Bill C-5. Bill C-5 eliminated mandatory jail time for committing extortion with a firearm. On top of this, the government also brought in catch-and-release bail policies in Bill C-75, which make it easier for extortionists to get back onto our streets.

Bill C-381 would establish a mandatory prison sentence of three years for a criminal conviction of extortion. In addition, we would bring in a mandatory five-year prison sentence for any criminal convicted of extortion who is acting on behalf of a gang or organized crime. This means that not only would the criminals who carry out these crimes go to prison, but also that prosecutors and police would have another tool to go after the ringleaders of these organized crimes.

We would restore mandatory four-year prison sentences for the offence of extortion with a firearm. We would make arson an aggravating factor. Finally, we would reverse the damage done by Bill C-75 and restore jail, not bail, for repeat offenders. Conservative Bill C-381 would ensure that extortion crime means mandatory jail time. It would go after the criminals, their gang leaders and anyone who participates in threatening our community members with arson or violence.

With Bill C-381, common-sense Conservatives would send a clear message to criminals and their organized criminal bosses that, if they do the crime, they will do the time. My colleagues and I will not tolerate the exploitation of our citizens for financial gain, and we will not allow organized crime rings to terrorize our communities.

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Canadians deserve safe streets and secure communities. They deserve a government that will listen to them and take their safety concerns seriously. It is our duty to deliver on this fundamental promise. Common-sense Conservatives would fix the damage and the chaos that the government's nine years in power has created. We would ensure that the extortionists who scare and intimidate our neighbours will stay longer in jail. We would go after the leaders of these organized crime rings to make sure they get shut down once and for all.

Extortion has no place in Canada. Conservatives would bring home safe streets for all Canadians. Let us bring it home.

• (1830)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member for Edmonton Mill Woods for bringing this bill forward.

When it comes to extortion, B.C. is one of the provinces he mentioned. In fact, all orders of government, irrespective of their political stripe, and all police forces in Canada have to come together to find a smart and tough solution to deal with these situations.

I wonder if the hon. member would agree that we, as one party irrespective of political stripe, all orders of government and all police forces have to come together to find a smart and tough solution to deal with this situation.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Speaker, it is nice to say that we all need to come together to find a solution, but the fact is that the member is part of the government that brought in Bill C-75 and Bill C-5, which make it easier for violent criminals to get back out onto the streets and terrorize the same communities they come from. If we talked to police officers right across the country, they would tell us they are arresting criminals in the morning who are being released later that day.

The member and the government had the power to keep criminals in jail. They chose their ideological ways and soft-on-crime policies and are allowing these criminals back onto the streets. Only Conservatives would put criminals behind bars with jail, not bail.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again we have Conservatives bringing forward a bill that calls for imposing mandatory minimum penalties. I am wondering what evidence they have, in describing this as a tool, that mandatory minimums actually works as a deterrent because, as a former criminal justice instructor, I can cite stacks of information that show that mandatory minimums have absolutely no deterrent effect.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that, since the government has been in power, over the last nine years, and the NDP member and the NDP-Liberal government have brought in these soft-on-crime policies, crime has gone up. Every statistic across the country on violent crime has gone up.

We have made a commitment to Canadians that we would put these criminals behind bars. A repeat, violent offender who is behind bars cannot commit crimes again because they are in jail.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank and commend my colleague, a

deputy leader of the Conservative Party, for his leadership on prioritizing victims, not offenders, but victims.

I am wondering if the member can share how the scales need to be tipped back to ensure that it is victims and their rights that are protected at a time when we see crime running rampant on the streets of this country.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right, we have to take the side of victims right across the country.

I continue to meet with so many victims who are just lost for words. What can they do to protect their families? Many of them are new Canadians who came to this country expecting a better future, and they feel that they cannot do anything. Many are having their vehicles stolen, and there is nothing they can do. There are those who have been involved in violence, and there is nothing they can do. They actually see the same person who committed those crimes back out on the streets.

Canadians feel helpless. Canadians need help. Canadians need a government that will stand up for them and protect them, and Conservatives would do that.

• (1835)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today to Bill C-381, the protection against extortion act.

As we all know, extortion is increasingly impacting Canadian communities. We recognize and acknowledge that extortion is a very serious crime that can impact multiple facets of a person's life. Bill C-381 proposes amendments to the Criminal Code that the sponsor believes will combat extortion by reinstating a mandatory minimum penalty. I will focus my remarks today on the proposed amendments related to the penalty regime and sentencing.

As it currently stands, we have a robust criminal law framework to address the crime of extortion. The offence of extortion is covered under section 346 of the Criminal Code, and it is a straight indictable offence that carries significant penalties. These penalties are intended to reflect the seriousness of the offence and the responsibility of the offender. If an individual is convicted of extortion, they will be subject to the maximum penalty of imprisonment for life. I want to emphasize this: The maximum penalty for extortion is life imprisonment.

Bill C-381 also proposes to direct courts to consider, as an aggravating factor, if that offender, in committing the offence of extortion, also committed arson. We recognize that arson is a serious crime that poses a danger to a community and the public, and there is unquestionable intent to cause damage to property. While there is no doubt that the combination of extortion and arson is damaging and dangerous, I question whether this change would have any meaningful effect.

It seems to me that, if there is evidence that someone committed arson and extortion, then a prosecutor would seek convictions for both. If they do, then the proposed aggravating factor becomes meaningless. Moreover, treating an element of an offence for which an offender was convicted as aggravating at sentencing was found to be an error in principle in the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *R. v. Lacasse* in 2015.

Arson can have devastating impacts to individuals and businesses. As with cases of extortion, the seriousness of the offence of arson is reflected in the current criminal framework to address crimes of this nature. Individuals convicted of arson are subject to maximum terms of imprisonment ranging from five years to life, depending on the circumstances.

Along with the offences contained in the Criminal Code, the sentencing regime addresses the seriousness of extortion and arson as it relates to organized crime. Section 718.2 of the Criminal Code sets out aggravating factors that a sentencing judge must take into consideration when crafting an appropriate sentence. One of the codified aggravating factors is evidence that the offence was committed for the benefit of, at the direction of or in association with a criminal organization. Given that extortion crimes often imply a level of sophistication that suggest the workings of criminal enterprise, this factor gives sentencing judges the ability to impose penalties that fall on the higher end of the spectrum in cases where organized crime is involved.

A court must also consider the victim's extortion when crafting an appropriate sentence. The sentencing regime sets out that it would be particularly aggravating if an offence has a significant impact on the victim, considering their age and other personal circumstances, such as their financial situation.

I would also note that Bill C-381 proposes enacting more mandatory minimum penalties. We have had ample evidence over the years that MMPs do not work. I do not want members to take my word for it, either. They can listen to Ben Perrin, legal adviser to former Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper. He has stated that “[mandatory minimum penalties] are a grave policy failure and cheap politics.”

Mr. Perrin goes on to say, “If history is any judge, [the Leader of the Opposition's mandatory minimum penalties] may not be worth the paper they're printed on. What's worse, even if they do pass constitutional muster, they will only exacerbate the existential challenges facing the criminal justice system.” Mr. Perrin also said that the Leader of the Opposition's “idea may actually backfire, leading to more crime in the long term.”

Again, these are not my words. Those are the words of the former legal adviser to Stephen Harper. This is the man who advised Stephen Harper on justice policy, who has now seen the problems caused by reckless Conservative Party criminal justice policy.

● (1840)

Our government believes in evidence-based policy, and we know this is simply not that. The Leader of the Opposition likes to throw around such phrases as “stop the crime”, but he has no real plan to do that. As we often see from him, it is just a series of slogans.

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On this side, we actually believe in policies that will reduce crime. We also know that mandatory minimum penalties have a disproportionate effect on Black and indigenous people in the justice system.

Data from Correctional Service of Canada shows that the disproportionate impact of MMPs on indigenous peoples and Black Canadians has also been reported in admissions to federal correctional institutions. Specifically, of all admissions to federal custody between 2007-08 and 2016-17, 39% of Black offenders and 20% of indigenous offenders were admitted for an offence punishable by a mandatory minimum penalty. Here, the proportion for indigenous offenders increased from 14% in the same year, 2007-08, to 26% in 2016-17.

The proposal brought forward by the hon. member is unlikely to result in higher sentences being imposed, given the serious penalties already associated with arson and extortion and the corresponding aggravating factors I referenced earlier.

Our existing legal framework provides judges with the tools and discretion needed to tailor sentences that reflect the gravity of the offence by the offender. While there is no doubt that extortion is a serious crime, our current legal framework is such that extortion is being addressed in a way that reflects its severity and harmful effects.

We need to focus on serious policies rather than empty slogans and policies we know will not work. I encourage all hon. members to work together on policy that will combat crime rather than failed policies and slogans.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this feels a bit like Groundhog Day. I have sat in the House since 2015, and there is a recurring debate between the Liberal and NDP vision of opposing mandatory minimum sentences and the Conservative vision of applying this policy to as many offences as possible. I think we need to reflect on the issue, which is no small matter, but we also need to find ways to be effective, to adopt legal rules, legislation and regulations that are in line with the values of the society in which we live.

The Bloc Québécois is opposed, in principle, to systematically adding minimum sentences to the Criminal Code. Prison time is often essential, and our courts do not hesitate to use it to punish numerous offences. However, there are other penalties, other solutions besides prison, that exist and that deserve to be considered.

It is certainly not a question of being more tolerant when an offence is committed. On the contrary, we believe that the values we hold must be reflected in the laws we adopt and that these laws must be enforced and complied with by all. When our rules are broken, a fair and consistent consequence must follow. However, we must never forget to be imaginative when we think about how our justice system should be structured. Might I suggest that we be daring? We are here to legislate.

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The Bloc Québécois believes that our justice system must help build a functional society that effectively brings together a safe, equitable and fair system for everyone. It is our responsibility as legislators to put in place laws and regulations that ensure that all people can walk the streets freely and safely.

What a great success it will be if we manage to stamp out crime one day. I am too old to believe in unicorns, flying horses and other magical creatures, but I will never stop working to make our society better. That is why we believe that when people break our laws and must be sentenced, we must always strive to rehabilitate them wherever possible. Rehabilitation is not a magic pill; it is an objective.

Our job as members of this legislature is to find ways to punish those who should be punished, prevent them from doing harm and, if possible, get them back on the right track. Last year on January 13, the 13 provincial and territorial premiers wrote a letter to the Prime Minister to remind him of his duties in this regard. They called for a reverse onus on bail for the offence of possession of a loaded prohibited or restricted firearm. Obviously, we need to take that into account and be vigilant.

The question remains: How do we take effective action? The Supreme Court of Canada struck down many of the mandatory minimum sentences passed by a previous Parliament. The situation had to be fixed. Many minimum sentences were abolished. However, our Conservative Party colleagues keep demanding at every opportunity that we reinstate these minimum sentences in the Criminal Code. I could let this behaviour bother me, given that, as I said at the outset, the Bloc Québécois is not a big fan of mandatory minimum sentences. Instead, I choose to take it as a call to work, an invitation to examine the issue of how to enforce our laws and impose the most appropriate penalties on offenders.

• (1845)

In committee, I proposed an alternative to minimum sentences, something that would reconcile the neo-liberal or “liberal-democrat” vision, that is, the vision of the Liberal Party and the NDP, with the position at the other extreme, in other words, the position of our colleagues in the Conservative Party.

Why not include a provision that would allow courts to depart from the mandatory minimum sentences when exceptional circumstances allow? We would then have the minimum sentences some people want so badly, but we would also have a safety measure, a safety valve, that would allow a judge hearing a case to determine, in certain circumstances, that the mandatory minimum sentence is inappropriate. By justifying the exceptional circumstances, courts could waive the mandatory minimum sentences. Is this the best solution? Probably not. There could be others. However, it is one solution, and I think it deserves to be considered.

There is another possibility. Why not consider adjusting the sentences to include a transitional period during which the inmate could be released, but required to wear an electronic tracking device? For example, for a one-year sentence, the person could spend a year, a year and a half or two years behind bars. The period could be discussed. Then the inmate could be released, go to work, carry on with their social and family activities, resume a “normal” life, or as normal a life as possible, but under constant surveillance.

How could this individual get away with resuming their criminal activities under that sort of surveillance? What criminal organization would want to use the services of such a compromised individual? According to the statistics, when a member of any criminal organization is sentenced to three, four, five or 10 years of prison, that person is almost automatically taken back as soon as they are released. They are told that they have served their time and can come back to work. For example, they may be asked to go get three Mercedes from Westmount and two Ladas from another neighbourhood.

However, if the individual were wearing an electronic monitoring device when they were released, I am not convinced that the most powerful criminal organizations would want to use that individual's services. That is another option, a second alternative. Once again, is it the best option? Maybe it is or maybe it is not, but it is worth considering.

As I was saying, I am going to consider our Conservative colleagues' invitation to address the issue of minimum sentencing as an invitation and opportunity to think about and work on improving the Criminal Code.

The Bloc Québécois is therefore willing to send Bill C-381 to committee and work on bringing it into line with the values of safety and security, justice and appropriate consequences for wrongdoing, while seeking to create a better society in the short or medium term, in other words, a society made up of law-abiding people and, when necessary, people who have been rehabilitated.

• (1850)

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start tonight by stating something that is particularly obvious to most people, which is that “tough on crime” is a slogan and not a policy that contributes to keeping communities safe. Dealing effectively with crime requires a laser focus on the reality before us. Exaggerating crime statistics to promote fear brings us no closer to solutions; in fact, it often leads us to counterproductive measures.

As such, I would ask everyone to beware of those who cite percentages when we are talking about crimes. It is an easy way to distort the situation we are facing, and the most basic example of that is that two is, of course, 100% greater than one. I am not in any way saying we do not have a problem with extortion. We clearly do, but to combat it, we must understand what is actually going on with extortion in this country.

Last month, media reports identified 74 active investigations of extortion in three provinces. What do all these investigations have in common? All the extortion cases targeted South Asian businesses. Whether they were restaurants, laundries, bakeries or convenience stores, they were all owned by members of the South Asian community. All these cases used the same methods: letters, phone calls and social media messages threatening arson, drive-by shootings and even kidnapping if protection money is not paid. All the included messages threatened bullets, rather than future messages, if the police were contacted.

Clearly, there is no coincidence here. This is organized crime at work, targeting the South Asian community.

There were incidents last November in White Rock and Abbotsford of threatening letters that gave a month to pay up. In December, shots were fired into at least one home in White Rock, while there were two shootings at homes in Abbotsford and one case of arson.

In Ontario, Peel Regional Police opened 29 investigations in November and, as in B.C., Peel Regional Police reported several shootings in which multiple shots were fired at homes and businesses. There were 34 identical incidents in Edmonton.

Some arrests have been made, including two in Surrey, seven in Edmonton and five in the Peel region. The RCMP has created a task force, which it calls the RCMP national coordination and support team, to share information and coordinate efforts to combat what is clearly a targeting of the South Asian community by organized crime.

Delivering resources to those local police forces and the RCMP, so they can share information and coordinate their efforts, is key to combatting extortion.

In February, in the midst of these instances in Surrey, the Conservative leader delivered a speech where he laid out the three things proposed in the bill before us: imposing a mandatory minimum of three years for extortion and four years if using a firearm, as well as adding arson as an aggravating circumstance. He called these additional tools for police to use.

Here is the problem with this proposal and the reason the NDP will be voting against Bill C-381: The evidence is clear that mandatory minimums are not effective as a deterrent. As a tool, mandatory minimums do not deter people from committing crime. No criminals sit around at home thumbing through the Criminal Code to see what possible penalty they face, before deciding whether to commit a crime. What they do evaluate is how certain they are to be caught and prosecuted, so devoting resources to enforcement and prosecution are the keys to deterring offences such as extortion, which are clearly premeditated and planned.

There is another problem with this, of course, and that is the unintended consequences. The member for Kingston and the Islands clearly identified that mandatory minimums disproportionately impact those most marginalized in society: the poorest in our society, indigenous people and racialized people. However, there is a second unintended consequence that is often missed, and I know about this from my experience as a police board member and from teaching criminal justice.

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If we have a mandatory minimum, then the prosecutor cannot really plea bargain.

That is important in extortion, because the people who most often get arrested in extortion investigations are the ones who do the drive-by or throw the firebomb. These are most often young men who have been pressed into service by gangs. If we want to get at the organizers, the people who hired them, in effect, to carry out these crimes, we have to be able to use plea bargaining. However, with a mandatory minimum, where they know they are sure to go to prison, we have no way of getting at the people who actually organize these crimes.

As such, it is an unintended consequence of mandatory minimums that obstructs the investigation and prosecution of crimes such as extortion.

• (1855)

I will not go on at great length here, because we have had to make these arguments many times. It is clear that mandatory minimum sentences do not work to deter crime. It is clear what works, and that is the devotion of resources to enforcement and to prosecution. We have to understand that although the Conservatives like to situate us in some great, huge crime wave that is sweeping the country, extortion is a particularly focused campaign by organized crime to target the South Asian community in this country, and we have to respond appropriately.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today before this House to address a grave concern that has escalated into a crisis under the watch of the NDP-Liberal government. Extortion, a severe crime threatening the safety and security of Canadians, has surged alarmingly, particularly in Alberta. We have seen a staggering 283% increase in reported cases after eight years of the current government. This epidemic of crime has sown fear across our communities, demanding a robust response that the current policies fail to provide.

In recent years, our nation has witnessed a troubling escalation in extortion rates, driven by inadequate responses and lenient policies from the government. Its approach to crime, especially to serious offences like extortion, has been characterized by a disturbing leniency that has allowed criminals to thrive. Notably, the repeal of mandatory minimum sentences for extortion-related offences under Liberal Bill C-5 has directly contributed to this increase, emboldening offenders with the knowledge that consequences will be minimal.

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The impact in Alberta has been particularly severe. Families and business owners face daily threats, and entire communities live in heightened anxiety. A glaring example of the government's failure to protect its citizens occurred recently in Edmonton, where a criminal network targeted the South Asian community. Home builders and construction business owners were extorted for large ransoms via threats communicated through digital platforms like WhatsApp. When their demands were not met, the criminals resorted to arson, destroying properties and livelihoods. This case is not isolated but is indicative of a broader pattern enabled by the Liberals' soft-on-crime policies.

This surge in extortion is mirrored nationally, with Canada's overall extortion incidents having increased fivefold over the past decade. These numbers are damning evidence of the failure of the NDP-Liberal coalition's approach. Its soft-on-crime stance has not only undermined the effectiveness of our police forces but also eroded the trust between the Canadian public and the justice system. The promise of safety and security, a fundamental responsibility of any government, has been forsaken, leaving Canadians to bear the consequences. The consequences of the government's policies extend beyond the immediate victims of extortion. They ripple across the economy, deter investment and stifle the growth of communities, particularly those most vulnerable to such crimes.

In Alberta, where the extortion rate has skyrocketed, we see a clear correlation between rising crime and a faltering community confidence. This erosion of security is the direct result of policies that prioritize criminal leniency over effective public safety. In the face of rising extortion threats and the palpable failure of the current government, the Conservative deputy leader and hon. member for Edmonton Mill Woods has taken decisive action by introducing a common-sense bill, Bill C-381, the protection against extortion act. This legislation marks a critical shift towards restoring the rule of law and providing substantial deterrence against the crime of extortion.

Bill C-381 is carefully crafted to address the complexities of extortion crimes, ensuring that penalties are both appropriate and effective. The legislation proposes to re-establish mandatory minimum sentences, which were unwisely removed by the Liberals, weakening our justice system's ability to deter serious criminal activity. Under this new law, anyone found guilty of extortion would face a minimum of three years in prison. This firm stance is essential to communicate that extortion will not be tolerated and the justice system stands ready to impose significant consequences.

• (1900)

The bill specifically addresses the escalated risks involved when firearms are used in extortion. By restoring a mandatory four-year penalty for extortion involving firearms, this bill aims to counteract the increased danger to victims and to send a strong message to criminals about the seriousness of using deadly weapons in the commission of crimes. Additionally, the legislation targets the organized crime networks that often orchestrate these extortion schemes.

Recognizing the sophisticated nature of these criminal enterprises, the bill sets a mandatory five-year sentence for any act of extortion carried out for the benefit of, or in association with, a criminal

organization. This provision is particularly crucial as it strikes at the heart of organized crime, aiming to dismantle the groups that profit from extortion activities.

This bill also introduces arson as a recognized aggravating factor in extortion cases. This is a significant addition, reflecting the severe impact that arson has on victims and communities. It is often used as a tool for intimidation or retaliation. Enhancing penalties for extortion cases involving arson acknowledges the profound trauma and the destruction associated with such acts and bolsters the law's response to them.

The introduction of Bill C-381 comes at a critical time, when the need to fortify our legal framework against extortion has never been more urgent. The recent rise in extortion cases, especially those involving severe tactics like arson and the use of firearms, underscores the need for legislation that can effectively respond to and curb these crimes.

By implementing these targeted measures, this legislation not only aims to deter individuals and groups involved in extortion, but also to restore public confidence in the justice system's ability to protect them and to ensure their safety.

The differences between Conservative and Liberal approaches to addressing crime are stark. While the current NDP-Liberal coalition has favoured a soft approach that has seen penalties reduced and serious offenders quickly returned to the streets, Conservatives advocate for robust measures that prioritize the safety of all Canadians. Our approach is to enforce laws that deter criminals effectively and that provide real protection to our communities.

As we stand here today, faced with a significant rise in violent crimes and extortion, we must choose action over inaction. The protection against extortion act is not just another piece of legislation; it is a real solution for those who have been living in fear of criminals. This bill would restore necessary and effective penalties for extortion, particularly addressing the use of firearms, the involvement of organized crime and the destructive act of arson. We can no longer stand by as our communities suffer.

I urge all members of the House to support Bill C-381. It is time to send a clear message that we are committed to the safety and the security of our citizens. By passing this bill, we would demonstrate that we stand for justice and for security, and we stand for the peace of mind that every Canadian deserves.

Let us take decisive action today. Let us pass this bill and ensure that our streets are safe again. It is not just our duty; it is our responsibility to bring home safe streets for every Canadian, restoring trust in the justice system that protects, that deters and that delivers real justice.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on this crucial issue. Let us work together to make Canada a place where safety and security are not just ideals, but also realities.

● (1905)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be able to add a few comments to this discussion tonight, which is a very important discussion. When we talk about community safety, safety for all Canadians, it is critically important that we all participate and that we ensure that we have given it our full attention.

On Bill C-381, I am going to read out what it is, so that anybody who is watching will get a better feeling and understanding.

Bill C-381 would amend the offence of extortion to create a mandatory minimum penalty of four years where a firearm other than a restricted or prohibited firearm is used in the commission of the offence, and a minimum sentencing of three years in any other case of extortion. There is already a mandatory minimum for when a restricted or prohibited firearm is used and the offence is committed in association with organized crime.

This bill, from my hon. colleague from Edmonton Mill Woods, would repeal the requirement that extortion committed for the benefit of, at the direction of or in association with a criminal organization be committed with a firearm, meaning that MMPs of five and seven years would apply to any case involving organized crime. This bill would add an aggravating factor at sentencing when the person convicted of extortion also committed arson.

It is an important bill and one that I am very confident my colleague from Edmonton Mill Woods thought about very carefully before presenting it as his private member's bill. Clearly his community, in particular, is the subject of a lot of extortion, according to what we read in the newspapers and so on. I think that the bill reflects his frustration and concern with our justice system overall, which many of us feel. It does not always play out the way we would like it to on a variety of different cases.

I do not think it deters anyone, but I know that it certainly makes the member who put this forward as his private member's bill very interested in trying to find the solution to an ongoing problem.

Extortion is illegal in Canada today. Perpetrators need to be apprehended and punished, without question. There is a mandatory minimum penalty of seven years for a repeat extortion with a firearm. These penalties show just how seriously the Criminal Code takes this behaviour of extortion. We do not want to see extortion happening in Canada and we do not intend to tolerate it.

Serious crimes will always deserve very serious punishments. That said, it has been proven time and time again that overly harsh mandatory minimum penalties on first-time offenders do not deter crimes. I wish it did, but clearly the evidence is that it does not. I have been here quite a few years and was here when the previous

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Conservative government introduced mandatory minimums. I remember when we had that discussion and debate at committee and in the House. I was always a bit on another platform because I thought that if that is going to work, then way to go; that is what we need to have.

Over the years, we have seen, unfortunately, that it does not work. It does not work the way the Conservative Party, when it introduced it, thought it would. It has played out very differently. The previous legal adviser to former prime minister Stephen Harper has recently admitted that the harsh approach to criminal justice is ineffective. To quote him, he has said that the mandatory minimums "are a grave policy failure and cheap politics."

Again, I go back to the fact that when it was introduced, I was very supportive. I thought it was going to be an answer to try to deter some of the crime, but it did not work that way. We ended up having people without the flexibility to be able to look for alternative sentencing opportunities to truly prevent recidivism from happening. We have seen that it is ineffective at reducing crime, and that it actually increases recidivism.

We have often been told that, once someone goes to jail, it does not matter what amount of time they spend there, repeat offenders are what follows so many times. It does not necessarily help.

I think people know my history. I have pretty strong feelings when it comes to guns. I had a first cousin who was a police officer who was shot to death. I signed petitions for the death penalty in those days. That was then and I have learned a lot since then.

● (1910)

On the fact that I was able to get I do not know how many thousands of signatures calling for the death penalty, a lot of that was because I was hurting and in pain as a result of having that terrible thing happen to my cousin and the killing of this young, 32-year-old police officer with three young children.

I have always taken a very strong stance when it comes to the justice issue, and I want to see our justice system stronger and better and more effective. Is this particular bill that has been put forward going to help with that? I do not think so, but that is what committees are for, which is to have further discussions and talk about the pros and cons of all of it. Any time we look at ways in which we can reduce recidivism and crime in our country, it is a good thing to do.

I will go back to Mr. Perrin, the previous legal adviser to Prime Minister Harper, who said, "If history is any judge, [the current Conservative leader's] MMPs may not be worth the paper they're printed on. What's worse, even if they do pass constitutional muster, they will only exacerbate the existential challenges facing the criminal justice system."

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As my colleague from the Bloc mentioned previously, there needs to be meaningful innovation, ideas for different ways of handling things. We have not been awfully successful so far in finding ways to deter serious crime. We know we have organized crime happening in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal when it comes to the stealing of vehicles, which are being shipped out through Montreal primarily. They arrested, I think, 19 people involved in that particular part of it. Thank God we have police officers who spend the hours they do out there on the streets, trying to ensure our cities can stay safe.

We are all looking for answers, but we need to be able to provide judges with the flexibility to make a decision on what they want to do. There are serious offenders out there who need to be dealt with appropriately. Plea bargains are not the way to go with most of these cases. With any of these things, especially if we are talking about extortion, we want to make sure offenders are dealt with. Right now, the Criminal Code calls for very serious penalties on that aspect, so we want to do whatever we can.

If the bill goes to committee, it will give us an opportunity to talk more about how MMPs do not appear to work, but are there other opportunities? What else can be done? Maybe this is a way we can really send a very strong message that Canada is not going to tolerate extortion happening to any community. In this case, as was referred to earlier, it was the South Asian community being subjected to extortion.

We have an obligation to stand up and push against that and to protect communities that are being intimidated, belittled and threatened. Members of those communities come to Canada to start a new life and to be able to have a successful business, and they should not have to worry about being extorted.

This has happened in other communities, not just the South Asian community. There are a variety of communities that are being extorted, and I have heard of it happening within the Italian community some time ago.

We need to have strong penalties. Extortion needs to have, and it does have, a very strong policy right now in the Criminal Code. We want to see that continue. This will be discussed at the committee if it gets to the committee level, and in further discussions it would be very interesting to hear whether there are any new ideas and ways in which we can make our Criminal Code even stronger than it currently is today.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to this bill.

● (1915)

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I also appreciate the member who brought this forward. I know there is concern in his community with respect to the rise in certain types of crime.

If we look to the United States and the extensive use of mandatory minimum penalties there, I was wondering if the Conservative members could show me which state in the United States is actually succeeding with these types of criminal justice policies.

It is not something that works. It is something committees have studied time and time again, and they have shown it does not work. Even though it is well intentioned, policy-wise it will not work.

I see my time is up for today.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have plenty of time when the opportunity comes back up.

The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House of Commons passed Bill C-234. Normally, that is not a remarkable statement, but it bears repeating for comprehension. The House of Commons, made up of 338 elected members of Parliament to democratically legislate the laws of Canada, passed Bill C-234. That bill was a private member's bill to remove the carbon tax from farmers so that the thousands of dollars in unrebated carbon taxes that every farmer pays will no longer have to be built into the price of food.

During a crisis of food affordability and food inflation, this is a common-sense way to do something immediate and concrete to help farmers produce affordable food for Canadians. The elected members of Parliament passed this bill over the objection of the governing Liberals. It was sent to the Senate where the same legislative process takes place, but during this process and at the clear and obvious behest of the Prime Minister and his government, the Senate gutted the bill by removing heating fuels for barns from the bill. They wanted to kill the bill altogether, but the government's extraordinary lobbying efforts succeeded in gutting the bill by ensuring that the carbon tax still applies to heating buildings like barns. This adds an enormous cost to the production of food, particularly the cost of eggs, chicken, pork and dairy.

Axing the tax on food production would be a simple way to address inflation on food, which continues to rise even faster than the general rate of inflation, and along with the staggering cost of rent and mortgage payments, it puts the greatest pressure on the most vulnerable Canadians, people whose entire family budgets cannot cover the cost of food and shelter.

I asked the government, after a desperate weekend of panic-stricken phone calls, which resulted in the Senate gutting the bill, if the Prime Minister would listen to Canadians and take the carbon tax off farmers, first nations and families who want to heat their homes. I mentioned first nations in my question because first nations are challenging the federal government's authority to impose the carbon tax on them. I mentioned farmers, who are price takers and who only have so much room to pass on higher costs without simply having to shut down production, and consumers who have to pay more for food. The response was an insipid mix of unrelated nonsense talking points.

Since that time, the government House leader has pathetically and falsely tried to blame the Conservatives for the failure of Bill C-234 passing in the House again, ignoring the entire reason, or pretending not to know why, the bill is back here in this place. It is here because the government's senators are doing the bidding of the Prime Minister who appointed them and are gutting the bill.

The Conservative deputy whip offered a motion to pass the bill by unanimous consent in its original form, but the Liberals refused to do that, so I will ask them again: Will they respect the will of this elected House? Will they recognize the roles that the Prime Minister and his ministers played in begging and bullying senators into rejecting a bill passed by the elected members of this chamber? Will they realize, as an overwhelming number of Canadians, including most provincial and territorial premiers have, that the carbon tax is punishing people who just want to eat, to heat and to transport themselves? Do they not see that when a basic input like energy is made more expensive, the output is reduced, which leads to higher prices? If they will not axe the carbon tax altogether, will they at least agree to axe the tax on farmers so that they can bring down the price of groceries?

• (1920)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to explain to the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge that putting a price on pollution is at the centre of our government's plan to fight climate change and to curb its devastating effects on our communities and our economy.

[Translation]

The negative impacts of climate change are very real. The public will not soon forget the destructive force of last year's forest fires that scorched much of Canada and choked our communities, which were cloaked in thick smoke.

It would be irresponsible of us to stand idly by instead of proposing solutions to deal with our rapidly changing climate. Standing still is unacceptable. We must act. Our efforts are not just to benefit our generation, they are to protect future generations of Canadians, our children and their children.

[English]

Our government is taking necessary steps that will have effective, concrete impacts, and a vital part of this plan is Canada's price on pollution. Pollution has a cost. It has a cost for Canadians, for

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communities, for our health and for our economy. Applying a price on carbon pollution is widely recognized as one of the most efficient ways to reduce emissions and to fight the devastating effects of climate change.

[Translation]

Our mechanism also ensures that the price on pollution stays affordable for Canadians. We sometimes hear, especially in the House, that putting a price on pollution costs Canadians too much. I can assure the House that this statement is completely false. In fact, in provinces where the federal pollution pricing system applies, people get back the lion's share of the revenues, and low-income earners benefit the most.

[English]

This means that our system is helping with the cost of living for a majority of Canadian families while encouraging choices that will help Canada lower its emissions. Our price on pollution ensures that eight out of 10 households in these provinces are receiving more money back through quarterly Canada carbon rebate payments than they pay. Thanks to our government's pollution price mechanism, a family of four living in one of these provinces can receive up to \$1,800. As people can see, with our plan, we are not only fighting climate change, but we are also returning money to Canadians.

[Translation]

The government does not keep any direct proceeds from federal pollution pricing. Instead, the government returns the money collected to households, small and medium-sized businesses, farmers and indigenous governments. International experts agree that our pollution pricing mechanism is an effective way to fight climate change.

[English]

With this approach, we are sending a clear message: Pollution has a price. Putting a price on carbon pollution encourages reduction across the economy while giving households and businesses the flexibility to decide when and how to make changes. To achieve this, we need to maintain the price signal that, over the long term, is necessary for carbon pricing to work and bring emissions down. Removing pollution pricing, as the opposition has called for, would eliminate its powerful incentive to encourage people and businesses to change their behaviours and pollute less.

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● (1925)

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, the response is that the Liberals will continue to tax farmers, to apply an input tax on farmers to increase their costs, which inflates and increases the cost of food. They will give some rebates to some households, which the Parliamentary Budget Officer has clearly stated do not cover the cost of the carbon tax to those households, particularly when we include all the higher costs people incur. It is not just the carbon tax they see on their heating bill and at the pump but also the general inflation of all the goods that it is applied to.

The farmer does not get the rebate to cover these costs. They are either going to cut production, which will raise the price of food, or pass the cost on and make the food more expensive. The Liberals should just axe the tax. If they cannot do it for everything, they can at least do it for farmers.

[Translation]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: Mr. Speaker, our government knows that ensuring sustainability for future generations is paramount, and that is why we are taking action. We are protecting people from the dangers and costs of climate change and ensuring that Canada continues to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions.

[English]

Not only does our price on pollution help combat climate change, but it also directly gives more money back to many Canadian families at a time when so many need it most.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party platform in 2021 promised that the re-elected Liberal government would implement the Canada disability benefit and that “this new benefit will reduce poverty among persons with disabilities in the same manner as the Guaranteed Income Supplement and the Canada Child Benefit.” The Liberals were, of course, elected that year.

In the time since, thanks to consistent pressure from the disability community to keep that promise, the government slowly put forward a bill that needed significant improvements every step of the way, including ones that my team and I secured, such as requiring an application process that is without barriers and indexing the benefit to inflation. The government then told those in the disability community that it was consulting with them, including inviting people from across the country to spend significant time completing a lengthy survey.

Finally, yesterday, we got the government's proposal for the Canada disability benefit in budget 2024, and it was nothing that folks with disabilities were calling for. The maximum amount of \$200 a month is far too little to actually reduce poverty levels among folks with disabilities. They have limited eligibility to those already receiving the incredibly burdensome application process for the disability tax credit, in contravention of the amendment I mentioned earlier that called for it to be barrier-free, and it will not even start until July 2025.

The total cost is just over \$1 billion a year. The Liberals promised the Canada disability benefit would reduce poverty in the same way that two other programs did. The guaranteed income sup-

plement is about 15 times as much and pays out a maximum of just over \$1,000 a month, and the Canada child benefit is 24 times as much annually and pays out a maximum of just over \$600 a month. The Canada disability benefit, as proposed, does little to help the disability community and seems to be much more about convincing non-disabled Canadians that the government is helping people with disabilities than about doing what it said it intended to do.

As a result, folks with disabilities are deeply disappointed, and that is putting it kindly. Here is a sampling of reactions from the past 24 hours that I would like to read into the record. Some of the language is quite raw, but it reflects the pain that some folks are feeling.

Laura says, “I have never been so disappointed in something in my entire life.” Mitchell said, “This is the ultimate failure. What an atrocity. No fairness here”. Cody said, “\$2400/year? That's not just a joke, but an outright slap in the face to the disability community. You should be ashamed of yourself.” Kate said, “This budget announcement of adding a max of 200 more a month to a select few disabled people is The Most Liberal Party thing I've ever seen”. Il-landria said, “So much for 'Lifting Disabled People Out Of Poverty In Canada'...They REALLY put the 'NOTHING' in NOTHING WITHOUT US”.

There are leading organizations that have been advocating for the benefit. Krista Carr from Inclusion Canada said, “Our disappointment cannot be overstated.... This benefit was supposed to lift persons with disabilities out of poverty, not merely make them marginally less poor than they already are.”

Samuel Ragot from La Société québécoise de la déficience intellectuelle said, “this is worse than my worst case scenario. Not only is it not enough, using the DTC will gatekeep the benefit from SOOOO many people. My heart goes to the people living in poverty who will have to keep fighting everyday to survive.”

Lastly, Michelle Hewitt from Disability Without Poverty said, “To say we are disappointed is an understatement. Yesterday's announcement on the CDB is woefully inadequate.” Again, it looks to me like the government is not even trying to do right by people with disabilities.

Will the parliamentary secretary admit that the Canada disability benefit, as proposed yesterday, is a performative measure intended to make non-disabled Canadians think the government is doing something of substance for the disability community when it is clearly not?

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• (1930)

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his brilliant advocacy and for his question on behalf of persons with disabilities. The member knows, as does everyone in this place, that protecting and helping the most vulnerable in our society is a fundamental Canadian principle, and it is a fundamental principle of our government.

When it comes to people with disabilities, we have invested more money in the last eight years than ever before. I take the point: Is it enough? Absolutely not. Do we need to do more? Absolutely we do, but we have made progress. In comparison, the previous Conservative government promised and failed to deliver a national disability act. Our Liberal government made the Accessible Canada Act a reality, but there is still a lot more to do. That said, we are moving as quickly as possible on the Canada disability benefit.

Of course, we understand that the disability community is anxious to see extra dollars in their bank accounts, but we must get it right to make the delivery of the benefit as smooth, as targeted and as effective as possible. Budget 2024 proposes funding of \$6.1 billion over six years, beginning in this fiscal year, 2024-25, and \$1.4 billion per year ongoing, for the first-ever federal Canada disability benefit. This represents an important next step in the journey for this.

I cannot talk about the journey of the Canada disability benefit without talking about the years of relentless advocacy from the community. I want to thank all of those who have been relentless in their advocacy as they championed the needs and priorities of persons with disabilities. I encourage them to continue to engage with our government as we move forward in the next chapter.

The lived experiences of persons with disabilities has been a key part of the consultation process. In the true spirit of “nothing without us”, we engaged with persons with disabilities, stakeholders and all Canadians on key issues. In the coming months, once we have published the draft regulations in part I of the Canada Gazette, Canadians will again be invited to provide feedback. As the hon. member knows, the act requires that regulations be in place by June 2025, with money flowing into bank accounts by July 2025. Let me assure all members in the House and all Canadians that we are on track to meet this timeline.

This is the first federal government step-up in support of persons with disabilities by creating a new and specific benefit just for them. The budget 2024 announcement unlocks the ability to proceed with the extensive and intense behind-the-scenes work needed to deliver the CDB. We need the time not just to be focused on the developing regulations, but to build the internal infrastructure and support systems necessary to deliver the program and to allow the provinces and territories to adjust their policies to ensure that there are no unintended clawbacks.

This is a crucial time as we carefully balance the need to strengthen our social security net while making sure government spending is able to help with the everyday costs of living. We are committed to creating a better, fairer country for generations to

come, but, as I said, there is more work to do. It is the next step in the journey of building a barrier-free Canada.

I thank the member for Kitchener Centre for his ongoing excellent advocacy on this.

• (1935)

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, we have had this conversation dozens of times in the House over the last three years. I have heard, time and again, about a need for time for the regulations, negotiations with provinces and territories, “nothing without us” and that they need to do more. The difference now is that, with this budget, their cards are on the table. There was a dollar amount in that budget, and that dollar amount was \$200 a month.

The government set the expectation that this benefit was meant to lift people out of poverty. The Liberals find money for the Trans Mountain pipeline; they find \$35 billion for that. They send \$18 billion to oil and gas companies that are already making tens of billions of dollars in record-breaking profits. However, when it came time to step up and demonstrate that there was well-placed trust from the disability community, the community was let down.

Are the parliamentary secretary and others going to put pressure on the government to expand what was in the budget and do better?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the member's advocacy. I have a nephew who has severe disabilities. Right now, in his first five years of life, is when he needs the most support to be able to grow and live a functioning life. I completely understand the need to ensure that the disability community has the support it needs so it can continue to flourish and thrive in a community that is barrier-free.

During the past eight years, we have invested unprecedented amounts of money to further the inclusion and the financial stability of persons with disabilities. The Canada disability benefit represents the largest single item in budget 2024, of over \$6 billion. This is not insignificant. This is the first time in Canada that there will be a federal benefit designed specifically to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Like all progressive programs that we have delivered, it is built to be enhanced and expanded.

I look forward to working with the member and the disability community to ensure that we are continuing to advocate for a barrier-free community for them.

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I really dive into the substance of my question here today, I want to give a quick shout-out to the U13 boys' hockey league champions from the Southwest Saskatchewan Hockey League.

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I was fortunate enough to coach my son's hockey team this year. The story starts like this: I was in a classroom in Mossbank back in September, talking to the students there. It turned out that half of the kids I talked to were on the hockey team that won our league, so I congratulate the Wood River Flyers on winning the Southwest Saskatchewan Hockey League. I give a big shout-out to Devin Smith, Jesse Packet, Kipton Tremblay, Grayson Eisen, Ashton Clermont, Lawson Layman, Ryder Tallon, Alex Jolly, Griffin DeWulf, Jon Jennett, Cole Masse, Austin Pritchard, Carson Crooks, Kyle Batty, Turner Tallon, Grady Crooks and, of course, their head coach, Dustin DeWulf. A big congratulations to them on a great year and a job well done.

Back in December, I had the opportunity to ask the government about the carbon tax. This is a topic that is not going away anytime soon. When I talk to people back home, particularly at this time of year, April, the farmers are itching to get going in the fields. They see the costs and the effects of the carbon tax right up front, because farmers back home are price-takers. They do not get to pass costs on to anybody, at least not back home. There are other farmers in greenhouses who grow produce and are able to pass on some of those costs; that is a whole other issue.

I am going to focus more on the grain farmers that I have back home today. They have to pay the carbon tax on their trucking, as they are still waiting for the grain drying bill to pass. There are a lot of things they still have to pay it on. If they want to get fertilizer shipped out to their farm, they have to pay the carbon tax on that. They have to absorb that price. They cannot pass that cost on to anybody else, so they are paying for it.

They also do not get to sell their crop to anybody. There is a global price that is set on their crop. They have to buy their machinery, their crops and their inputs, then grow the crops and harvest them. Therefore, they are price-takers. There are some exemptions for on-farm usage, but that does not cover the cost associated with many other activities. That is what we are trying to get the attention of the government for.

However, there is another element to the carbon tax that the government continues not to address. That is the issue of municipalities and towns. I gave the example previously of the Town of Shaunavon, for instance, which is going to have an 8% or 9% property tax increase for it to cover the costs of the carbon tax alone. The City of Swift Current will have an increase of multiple percentage points on property taxes to cover the carbon tax.

The Town of Kindersley has a fairly new hockey rink, built in the last 10 years. It just recently built a brand new aquatic centre. To run just those two facilities, it is paying \$12,000 a month in carbon tax. The costs are exorbitant. That cost goes directly back to the ratepayers, so the same ratepayers who are paying the carbon tax on their gas, groceries and home heating are also paying it on the increases in their property tax; they have to pay the costs that the Town of Kindersley has to pay on these buildings.

There is no rebate that covers that. This is yet another layer to the carbon tax that people are getting gouged on, and the government continues to refuse to do anything about it.

• (1940)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have been through a lot in the past five years, and many are struggling with the cost of living. We have heard numerous calls to scale back the carbon pricing system in response, but carbon pricing is not the problem. It is designed to help families through the Canada carbon rebate, which will help lower- and middle-income households most of all. That is why a pause on carbon pricing simply will not help families keep life affordable.

[Translation]

As the Governor of the Bank of Canada explained, the price on carbon contributes only 0.15 percentage points to inflation per year, a tiny portion of the high inflation we have been experiencing. Economists estimate that carbon pricing increased the cost of food by 0.33%. Once again, that is a small portion of what we have all been dealing with in recent months.

The main reason for that is that farmers are already exempt from the carbon tax for most of their activities. Bill C-234 is simply not going to change things for households that are dealing with higher grocery prices, and it is false to suggest that it would.

It stands to reason that carbon pricing is not causing inflation. Inflation is something that is happening all over the world, including in many countries that do not have a carbon tax.

[English]

The real causes are events like the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 crisis and Russia's war in Ukraine driving energy prices up. Canada's price on pollution is designed to protect Canadians from any price increases it does cause. All direct proceeds from pricing carbon pollution under the federal system are returned to the jurisdiction in which they were collected.

More than 90% of fuel charge proceeds are returned directly to individuals and households through the Canada carbon rebate. They are distributed via cheque or direct bank deposit every three months, and eight out of 10 families in provinces where the federal system applies receive more money back than they pay.

[Translation]

We cannot deny the devastating effects of climate change. Doing nothing is not an option. We would just be wasting time in the global race to find carbon-neutral solutions. The effects of climate change cost Canadian households \$720 a year, and this figure will rise to \$2,000 a year by 2050. Climate change also costs lives and impacts the physical and mental health of millions.

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[English]

We need to listen to youth, our communities and our businesses. Choosing the easy path now will force us all to take a harder path later, and that is not an option.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, just because someone cannot see the cost of the carbon tax on their grocery bill does not mean it is not driving up that cost. We know that it is driving up that cost. Anyone who has gone to the grocery store knows that the prices of groceries are going up, because when we tax the trucker who brings the food from the farm to the terminal, when we tax the truck that takes it from production to the grocery store, and when we tax the grocery store, we are taxing the food and we are driving up the cost for the consumer who buys the food.

We know that through the Canada Gazette and through the government's regulations, it is expressly stated on carbon pricing and many other government initiatives that the people most likely to experience the dramatic effects are single mothers and seniors living on a fixed income.

We have seen that first-hand. We have experienced that first-hand. That is why we are seeing issues with people being able to pay their mortgages, people being able to pay their bills and people being able to buy food and feed their families.

• (1945)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: Mr. Speaker, carbon pricing is one of the simplest and most effective ways to reduce pollution, since it sends a signal across the economy. It gives every household and business an incentive to find ways to reduce pollution, but it leaves them the flexibility to decide when and how to take action.

[Translation]

That is why pollution pricing alone helps achieve one-third of the greenhouse gas emissions reductions that we need in order to do our part and mitigate the worst effects of climate change. It is a key pillar of any serious climate plan.

Modelling by Environment and Climate Change Canada shows that Canada's emissions in 2021 would have been 18 metric tonnes higher without carbon pricing, which had already been implemented for two years.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted, and accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:47 p.m.)

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