



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 016

Wednesday, June 3, 2020

Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota



Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic

Wednesday, June 3, 2020

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to the 16th meeting of the House of Commons Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

[*English*]

This will be a hybrid meeting. Members will be participating via video conference or in person.

[*Translation*]

A reminder that, in order to avoid issues with sound, members participating in person should not also be connecting by video conference.

[*English*]

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name and please direct your remarks through the Chair.

[*Translation*]

For those joining by video conference, I would like to remind you to leave your microphone on mute when you are not speaking.

Also, please note that, if you want to speak in English, you need to choose the English channel, and if you want to speak in French, you need to choose the French channel. Should you wish to alternate between the two languages, please change the interpretation channel to the language that you are using.

[*English*]

Should members participating by video conference need to request the floor outside their designated speaking times, they should activate their mike and state that they have a point of order. Those in the chamber can rise in the usual way.

Please note that today's proceedings will be televised in the same way as a typical sitting of the House.

I understand that we do not have any ministerial statements this morning, so we'll go straight to presenting petitions.

The first petition goes to Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm honoured to rise to present a petition. The focus is on the appalling practice that petitioners draw to our attention of unethical

organ harvesting from Falun Gong prisoners held in the People's Republic of China. They ask this House to enact legislation that would require mandatory reporting of transplant tourism or of patients who need aftercare in Canada.

The Chair: The next petition goes to Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, it's an honour to bring this petition forward on behalf of people from Courtenay—Alberni. They're concerned about the 12,000 deaths of their brothers, sisters, daughters, fathers and other family members who have died due to preventable overdose from fentanyl-poisoned sources. This is timely, Mr. Chair, as the community action team in Port Alberni identified that we've had 10 times as many deaths from opioid poisoning since the COVID outbreak. In fact, in April, in British Columbia alone, we had 117 people die of overdose, Mr. Chair.

They're calling on the government to declare the current opioid overdose and fentanyl poisoning crisis a national public health emergency under the Emergencies Act in order to manage and resource it, with the aim to reduce and eliminate preventable deaths; to reform current drug policy to decriminalize personal possession, which is supported by the B.C. chief medical health officer Dr. Bonnie Henry; and, to create with urgency and immediacy a system to provide safe, unadulterated access to substances so that people who use substances experimentally, recreationally or chronically are not at imminent risk of overdose due to a contaminated source.

Mr. Chair, I would also like to give a shout-out to our chief medical health officer on central Vancouver Island, Dr. Hasselback, who is retiring and has done great work in standing up for people who are suffering from opioid addiction and for the most marginalized.

The Chair: I just want to remind the honourable members when presenting petitions to be as concise as possible. It would be appreciated and it is asked of you.

We'll now go on to Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I don't think this has ever happened before, but I'm going to agree with Ms. May and also present a petition on the issue of forced organ harvesting. I hope that we'll be able to see a broad consensus among all parties for making the 43rd Parliament the one that finally gets a bill passed to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking.

The Chair: We'll go on with presenting petitions.

Go ahead, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's with pleasure that I table a petition from the residents of Winnipeg North highlighting the very important issue of establishing a national pharmacare program. They are calling upon the Prime Minister, the government and in fact all members of Parliament to do what they can in working with other jurisdictions, particularly the provinces, to come up with a national pharmacare program.

• (1205)

The Chair: Very good. Seeing no further petitions to be presented, we'll continue to Statements by Members. The first one goes to Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, *bom dia*.

For the third year, Canada is celebrating June as Portuguese Heritage Month, when we highlight and appreciate the great contributions of Canadians to Canada.

Since Portuguese immigrants began arriving in Canada in the 1950s from all regions and islands in Portugal, Canadian society has been enriched by Portuguese culture, traditions, history and language. Canadians now listen to fado music, share the Portuguese great love of football and appreciate Portuguese port, wines and cuisine, whether it is churrasqueira, bacalhau or pastéis de nata.

Portuguese Canadians, a community that is now 500,000 strong, have also contributed greatly to building a better Canada, whether it be through world-renowned artists such as Shawn Mendes and Nelly Furtado, professionals such as Superior Court Justice Madam Linares de Sousa or athletes such as Toronto Maple Leaf John Tavares or Olympian Meaghan Benfeito.

I am so proud to represent Canada's largest Portuguese community as the member of Parliament for Davenport.

[*Witness spoke in Portuguese*]

[*English*]

Happy Portuguese Heritage Month.

Obrigado, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Today I rise to recognize people from all corners of Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River. From north to south, east to west and all points in between, people have selflessly stepped up to make life a little easier for others.

The young and the young at heart made masks for health care workers, delivered food and supplies to seniors and other vulnerable residents, and decorated for parades to encourage their communities. One lady even communicated in Dene to demonstrate how to make and wear masks, how to properly wash your hands and how COVID-19 might spread in your community.

Others cut out paper hearts to place in windows. They encouraged and thanked front-line workers with gift baskets, and many businesses changed the way they operate by instituting preventive measures to protect their staff and their customers. To all I say a great thank you.

Mr. Chair, my riding is the third-largest among the provinces, but at times like this it seems like one small town.

The Chair: We'll go on to Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as this is my first time speaking at this special parliamentary committee, I want to thank you and your team and the Clerk's team for your tremendous efforts in keeping the people's House open through this unprecedented time.

There have been extraordinary efforts across the country, including in the neighbourhoods of Don Valley West in midtown Toronto. To recognize them, I have launched a pandemic heroes award program, encouraging people to nominate exceptional residents of Don Valley West who are helping others to ensure they are healthy, safe and economically able to survive if not thrive through this time.

Many of those heroes are at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in the heart of our community. Sunnybrook admitted the first COVID-19 patient in Canada, and since then has continued to offer care to countless others. I salute the nurses, physicians, attendants, caretakers, cooks, administrators, funders and researchers who have set a standard of care that is second to none.

To all pandemic heroes across the country, thank you. May you be healthy and safe as we beat this virus.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Chair, one year ago today, the report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was tabled. It has been already one year since the conclusion of two years of work and more than 1,400 meetings with survivors of violence and the families of victims.

Indigenous communities had to take action for years to obtain this commission. One year after the report was tabled, we must commend them for their solidarity and tenacity, but above all, we must demand that the government not shelve this report. The violence, racism, discrimination, the disproportionate number of incarcerations and especially the murders of indigenous women must stop.

We have a duty to reconcile with the first peoples. For too long, we have all turned a deaf ear to the cries of distress from indigenous communities. We must not forget, so that it does not happen again.

The Chair: I will now give the floor to Mr. Schiefke.

• (1210)

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am honoured to rise in the House today to recognize the exceptional work of the members of my community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges.

As we go through the difficult period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, I wish to thank each and every front-line worker and volunteer who is helping to fight this crisis. I am thinking of the nurses, who are working overtime, the firefighters, who are showing their solidarity with the CHSLDs, the food banks, which are providing food to families in need, and the many community organizations and SMEs that are helping vulnerable people.

Their hard work is honourable. I speak on behalf of our entire community when I applaud their dedication to their neighbours.

[English]

You have represented and continue to represent the best of our community as the fight against COVID-19 goes on. Mr. Chair, I extend my sincere thanks to all those in my community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges who continue to go above and beyond every day. We are and continue to be stronger together.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We now go on to Ms. Findlay.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Chair, our world is in turmoil. We are told to stay home, and yet thousands crowd in the streets. Parliamentary oversight is gone, and our national debt is unknown. My B.C. constituents think that I should be in Ottawa, not on a laptop screen.

The UN says we must shift into a green new build-back-better world order, with redistribution of wealth in the trillions. This government seems fully on board, but hasn't told Canadians yet. We should forge a Canadian way, not take orders from the UN, Asia, the EU or U.S. consultants. We cannot live on our knees in deference to faraway third parties. We must care for the environment and seniors, help employers, workers and youth move forward and look to our foundational resources that the world needs and wants.

We are a free nation under God, with true patriot love. We are strong. Our land is glorious.

[Translation]

Notre histoire est une épopée.

[English]

Central planners, get out of our way.

The Chair: We're now going to Mr. Louis.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Chair, in Waterloo region, we are flying pride flags at all our public schools. To kick off Pride Month in Kitchener—Conestoga, the theme of my weekly virtual town hall was inclusivity and our LGBTQ+ community. I want to thank Washington Silk from KW Counselling's OK2BME program for joining in this discussion and I thank everyone who participated.

Conversations in support of equality and inclusion are essential, especially at a time when we are challenged by a global pandemic and heightened injustices. Pride events will be virtual this year. Though we're not walking together in parades, know that we are standing together in solidarity for everyone to be who they are and love whom they love.

I'm proud to support our friends in the LGBTQ+ community, and as we celebrate progress, we must also commit to the work that still needs to be done. Discrimination still exists, and as long as it does, we must always stand up and speak up for LGBTQ+ rights.

As pride flags are unfurled, let us stand together across our communities and throughout Canada.

The Chair: We'll now go to Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Chair, since the pandemic began, I've been working with urban indigenous organizations to ensure that they have the support they need to deliver their services. The majority of indigenous people in Canada live in urban areas or off reserve, and we know that they're facing unique challenges. Organizations like the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council have had to change their service delivery models to provide food, shelter and culturally appropriate services.

Recently the Prime Minister announced \$75 million to support indigenous peoples living in urban centres and off reserve. This funding is in addition to the \$15 million allocated in March to urban indigenous organizations.

June is National Indigenous History Month, and on June 18 I will be hosting author Jesse Thistle to talk about his memoir *From the Ashes*, which highlights many of the issues that indigenous peoples face in urban centres.

I'm proud of what our government is doing and I know there is still more work to do.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): I'm honoured to recognize the outstanding work that the Dashmesh Culture Centre, through the leadership of president Amanpreet Singh Gill and the entire executive committee, has displayed throughout this pandemic.

The gurdwara has a food bank run by some amazing youth and, through kind donations of the community at large, is never low in supply. They see about 25 hampers given out daily. They have their hard-working volunteers make and serve 500 meals, hot meals that are given through their drive-through service or through delivery. They provide 100 hot free meals to our hard-working truck drivers daily. They deliver 400 meals with The Salvation Army, and brown bag lunches for those kids who don't have access to lunch. These services are helping the most vulnerable during this difficult time, including our seniors.

Sikhs believe in the concept of *seva*, or selfless service, and the Dashmesh Culture Centre, through the hard work of the executive committee and the volunteers, has fully displayed this by stepping up during the pandemic.

• (1215)

The Chair: We'll now go to Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Chair, at one point in our lives, my family and I used food banks. I understand the tremendous anxiety that people feel in front of an empty fridge, especially with young children.

Today, I would like to thank Benoist, from the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve community kitchen, and his team, who have provided more than 56,000 meals to 17,500 families in Hochelaga. I would also like to thank Tonia, from Bouffe Action, and all her volunteers who, every Friday, donate 200 baskets and over 600 bags of fruits and vegetables.

Those organizations would not have managed without the pedalling of the Cyclistes solidaires pour la santé alimentaire. I would like to thank Agathe for mobilizing dozens of volunteers to deliver food efficiently, quickly and, above all, in an environmentally responsible manner. Thanks to these dedicated and community-minded people, fewer residents of Hochelaga have empty stomachs.

The Chair: The floor goes to Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to acknowledge the work of all the constituents in my riding who, since the beginning of the pandemic, have put in countless hours. Whether they are workers in the health sector, the food sector, public services or volunteers, they make an essential contribution to the collective good of our communities. I would like to thank them on behalf of everyone who crosses their path.

I also commend the resilience of our entrepreneurs and businesses as they reopen, despite the difficulties they have encountered and the challenges still to come. My team and I remain vigilant and continue what we have been doing for the past three months to help people and provide solutions, just as we have been working to im-

prove the government's emergency plan so that our businesses are not left behind.

I am proud to represent the people of Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. I am extremely proud of them.

Let's keep going. We will get through this.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Kitchen.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Chair, as Canadian democracy crumbles and the government silences any kind of political opposition, it can be challenging to see the good in the world. Thankfully, the people in my riding of Souris—Moose Mountain are shining a light in the darkness by sharing stories of people coming together to help those in need.

One such story is of Fast Trucking, based in Carnduff, which was struggling to keep going during the Liberal attack on the oil industry. When they were hit with COVID-19 pandemic, company president Dennis Day was forced to lay off 250 of his employees. Realizing that this would leave many in limbo while waiting for government assistance, Dennis bought \$50,000 worth of Co-op grocery gift cards and distributed them to those he had laid off.

This kindness in the face of adversity truly exemplifies what the people of Saskatchewan are all about. Fast Trucking has shown that while they are a business, they are a family first.

Thank you to Dennis, his mother Vi and his family, and thank you to all my constituents for showing such bravery and unity in these uncertain times.

The Chair: We will go to Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Chair, many owners of small businesses in northwest B.C. are hurting as a result of the pandemic. It includes those in tourism, retail and the restaurant sector. I am talking about small local businesses, lots of them family-run, and many of them with only one or two employees. There is a real risk that some of these won't survive the pandemic. For some, it's already too late.

Despite the dire outlook, I've seen local business people respond with resilience, resourcefulness and optimism. With the help of local chambers of commerce and groups like Community Futures, they're finding ways to weather the storm. This government needs to have their back. That means fixing the commercial rent relief program, starting with a moratorium on business evictions. It means targeted support for tourism operators. It means keeping programs like the wage subsidy around long enough to help businesses get back on their feet.

Our small towns depend on local businesses, their owners and their employees. We must do more to help them survive.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: The floor now goes to Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Chair, Gilles Duceppe often said that Canada truly has two official languages: English and simultaneous translation.

During the COVID-19 crisis, even translation has often taken a back seat, whether for the labelling of hazardous goods or for daily press briefings.

As the crisis drags on, one-third of Franco-Ontarian organizations are afraid that they will be closing within six months, and half within a year. Francophone and Acadian communities are mobilizing for the survival of Campus Saint-Jean, the only francophone institution west of Manitoba.

While the Liberal Party is dipping into taxpayers' money with both hands by generously helping itself to the wage subsidy, I would like to remind them that French-language services in Canada were already largely underfunded before the crisis.

I am therefore asking the government to show the same spirit of generosity toward francophones in Canada as it has toward the employees of the Liberal Party.

• (1220)

[*English*]

The Chair: Now we go to Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Chair, it's a pleasure to be back in the House. This chamber is effectively the beating heart of our Canadian democracy. Unfortunately, the heartbeat of this place is suffering a prolonged arrhythmia, brought on by the disgraceful neutering of responsible government by a Liberal minority, aided and abetted by the NDP, who voted for closure not only of debate but of Parliament until late September.

Folks watching this temporary committee at home may think they're watching a parliamentary sitting. It is anything but. It will take more than the defibrillators scattered around this building to shock this place back to life and enable the holding of this hubristic Liberal government to account through the continuing COVID-19 health and economic crisis.

That's what Canadians expect. That's what Canadians deserve. Canada remains in crisis. The heart of our democracy should be beating on all cylinders, with appropriate health and safety protocols.

Please excuse the mixed metaphor.

The Chair: Mr. Arya is next.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm thankful to the many individuals and organizations in Ottawa that have worked very hard to combat this COVID-19 crisis.

In particular, I would like to thank the Chinese Community Association of Ottawa, its president Jin Sheng, and his team, who raised \$165,000 to purchase ventilators for The Ottawa Hospital and personal protective equipment for front-line health care workers.

I would also like to recognize the Indo-Canadian Community Centre, its president Kanwal Talwar, and his team, who donat-

ed \$77,000 to The Ottawa Hospital Foundation, the Shepherds of Good Hope, the Ottawa Food Bank and The Ottawa Mission.

In addition, the Indo-Canadian community also donated meals, masks and gowns to front-line medical staff of all Ottawa hospitals.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now go to questions to ministers.

[*English*]

Please note that we will suspend the proceedings every 45 minutes in order to allow employees who provide support for the setting to substitute for each other safely.

The first question goes to the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The government created the Canada Infrastructure Bank in June of 2017. It gave this bank \$35 billion. It appointed a CEO in May of 2018. The CEO left on April 20, 2020. The Prime Minister gave the departing CEO a massive bonus, a bonus so big he is afraid to tell Canadians what it was.

I have a simple question for the Prime Minister. How many projects did the Canada Infrastructure Bank complete since its inception?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Chair, we created the Canada Infrastructure Bank to leverage private capital along with public money to create more projects, because we knew that investing in infrastructure for communities, growth and Canadians was significantly important. It has invested in a number of large projects that are under way. We know infrastructure investments will make Canada better.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: How many projects have been completed through the Canada Infrastructure Bank?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, large infrastructure projects take many years to create, but they have a positive impact on communities. That's why we've invested in infrastructure—

The Chair: Now we'll go back to Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister said the Liberals came up with this scheme to build more infrastructure projects, so how many projects have been completed?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we know that building infrastructure is a way to build stronger futures for Canadians. That is exactly what we are doing.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, how many projects were completed?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, a number of projects are under way right now, and there are more to come.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, when people get a bonus for doing a job, it's usually because they exceeded expectations. How many projects have been completed by the Canada Infrastructure Bank?

• (1225)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, there are a number of large projects under way and more to come.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, the Canada Infrastructure Bank has an operating cost of approximately \$50 million a year. What has the Canadian taxpayer received for that \$50 million a year? In other words, how many projects have been completed? The Prime Minister can't answer a simple question. How many projects have been completed?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, for over 10 years under Stephen Harper, Conservatives underinvested in infrastructure. Therefore, over the past five years, we have made significant investments in infrastructure that have created jobs and growth for Canadians.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: The previous Conservative government invested in ports, bridges, roads and airports. This Canada Infrastructure Bank has taken \$35 billion from Canadian taxpayers. It has just paid the outgoing CEO a massive bonus. A bonus is usually given for a job well done, exceeding expectations. So far, it looks like the Canada Infrastructure Bank has completed zero projects. Has that exceeded the Prime Minister's expectations?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, investing in infrastructure is not only a way of creating jobs now but also of creating growth and prosperity into the future. That's why we moved forward with an innovative idea that is going to create more infrastructure that Canadians need across this country.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: It is an innovative idea that protects the investments of wealthy hedge funds and puts all the risks on the backs of taxpayers. He said this is an innovative idea, so how many projects have been built by this innovative idea?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, there are a number of projects under way and more to come. We know that investing in infrastructure and our communities is a better way of building the future than the cuts the Conservatives have done for years.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, what actually improves the quality of life in our communities is for projects to be completed. It's easy to make announcements about projects. This bank has been in operation for almost three years now. Once again—if the answer is zero, why doesn't he just say zero?—how many projects has the Infrastructure Bank completed?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, there are a number of projects under way across the country. These are things that take many years to do, but we know that investing in infrastructure, unlike what the Conservatives have always done, is the way to build a stronger future for this country.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: What exactly did the CEO accomplish that warranted a massive bonus on his way out?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, setting up the Canada Infrastructure Bank is an important part of making sure that Canadians have the infrastructures they need for their lives and for the growth of the economy.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Is the Prime Minister telling us that when he announced the Canada Infrastructure Bank in June 2017, he had zero expectations for any projects built and that he was going to pay a massive payout to a CEO just for setting up a new government agency?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, investing in infrastructure is a way to grow the economy, create jobs for Canadians and create a brighter future. That's what we've been focused on.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Blanchet, you have the floor.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Chair, over the past 24 hours, we have discovered that sometimes the Prime Minister's silence speaks louder than his words. He may be tempted to remain silent once again, but that is not the object of the exercise.

I was wondering whether he has seen the Léger poll showing that 48% of Quebecers do not think the Liberal Party should be eligible for the wage subsidy, compared to 27% who think it should. To be more specific, 40% of voters who identify as Liberals think that the Liberal Party should not be eligible for the wage subsidy.

Should he not consider, like our esteemed Conservative colleagues, giving up the wage subsidy for his party?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we put in place the wage subsidy to help businesses and organizations across the country to support the people who work for them. They are accountants, translators, office workers. They work and have families who depend on their paycheques.

During the COVID-19 crisis, we are here to support workers across the country.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, as the days go by, how many times can they repeat the same “non-answer” that says nothing? At a certain point, it gets a little tiresome.

Has the Prime Minister seen that 57% of Quebecers think he should pay back the wage subsidy, whereas only 21% of Quebecers think he should keep it? A majority of Liberal voters, 51% of them, think he should pay back the money. The phones must be ringing in Liberal MPs' offices. People must be saying that it does not look good.

Is the Prime Minister starting to think about the ethical issue?

• (1230)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, this crisis is unprecedented. That is why we are investing to help workers across the country, whether they work for large companies, small companies, not-for-profit organizations or charities.

We are here to help workers who depend on a paycheque to support their families.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, it is increasingly clear that silence speaks louder than words.

How much money has the Liberal Party received through the wage subsidy?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, the wage subsidy is there to help workers. It is money that goes to workers across the country, not to companies and organizations. It is the workers—

The Chair: It is now Mr. Blanchet's turn.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister is confusing “why” and “how much”. It is not the same thing. I asked how much.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he is putting the Liberal Party in a financially irregular situation? This is not a donation from an individual or direct funding under the election rules. The Liberal Party may even find that the funding is illegal.

I know they do not mind, but we do.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, workers in organizations and businesses across the country are at risk of losing their jobs because of COVID-19. As a government, as a country, we have made a choice to support these workers in all kinds of organizations and institutions to ensure that the country can recover and that families can help their loved ones.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, is the Prime Minister aware that he and the Minister of Finance are putting themselves into a conflict of interest, because they will have had money given to an institution, the Liberal Party of Canada, in order to get themselves re-elected?

Is the Prime Minister shopping around for a third conviction for his ethically questionable behaviour?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, the wage subsidy funds go to organizations of all kinds, including several political parties.

We are here to help workers who are at risk of losing their jobs and their incomes. We need to help families, and that is exactly what we are doing across the country.

The Chair: Mr. Blanchet, you have 22 seconds left.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: I have asked him whether Liberal Party jobs are in danger and whether the Liberal Party is in trouble. He did not want to tell me and he is still sticking to that today.

Mr. Chair, can you ask the Prime Minister if he is going to extend the wage subsidy program to get even more money for the Liberal Party?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, people across the country are worried about their future and their jobs. As a government, we are here to help them and we will continue to do so.

The Chair: We will now go to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It has been a year since we were promised a response to the report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, but we still have none.

What is taking so long?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, on this first anniversary of the final report of the inquiry, we pay tribute to the women, girls, LGBTQ and two-spirited people in indigenous communities whose lives have been stolen in tragic circumstances or changed forever because of violence.

We will continue to be here for them.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The Prime Minister could be here for indigenous communities by responding to their calls for justice.

Will the Prime Minister put in place a national plan to address violence, as asked for by the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry's calls for justice?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we were the government that after decades of non-action by governments, moved forward with a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. We didn't wait for that inquiry to get going or even end before taking action. We acted right away on countering violence against women—

• (1235)

The Chair: We will now go back to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Will the Prime Minister immediately dramatically change policing in Canada, as asked for by indigenous women and girls?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we have made changes to our justice system. We have worked with partners across the country and we will continue to do so to make sure that our justice system and our policing are safer for and more respectful of indigenous people.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Why the delay? It's been one year.

Will the government respond without delay to the indigenous communities' calls for justice?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we have been responding for five years and taking action for five years. We did not wait for the end of this inquiry to act. We passed legislation on child and family services to protect indigenous language and culture, to eliminate gender discrimination under the—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Will the government, will the Prime Minister, immediately ensure there is core funding for health services for the indigenous community, as requested in one of the calls for justice?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we have increased funding to indigenous communities by billions of dollars over the past years. We've invested directly around this COVID crisis.

We will continue to invest in indigenous communities and health services because we know we need to do more.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I have a simple question. It has been one year since the calls for justice were put forward. Why is the government delaying response?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we have been acting on those calls for justice over the past year, and we will continue.

The COVID-19 crisis has delayed the work by our partners and us on the response—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Singh.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: For five weeks, we have been pushing the government to provide assistance to people living with disabilities in Canada and it has still done nothing along those lines. What is the government waiting for?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: We have helped a lot of Canadians, but we recognize that there is more to be done.

We are looking at how we can help people living with disabilities. We recognize that they have additional costs because of COVID-19, and we will be here for them.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Throughout this pandemic, Canadians living with a disability have received no extra help, and they need extra help.

Why is the Liberal government, why is the Prime Minister, delaying the provision of that essential help to Canadians living with disabilities?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we have been giving extra help to Canadians who need it, but we recognize there is more to do. That's why we will be coming forward with a package of supports for Canadians living with disabilities.

We recognize they are facing extra costs because of COVID-19. We will be there for them.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, it has been five weeks, five weeks since we pushed the government to commit to helping Canadians who are living with disability.

Why is it taking so long to help out those who are among the most vulnerable? Why is the Prime Minister delaying help to those in need?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, from the beginning of this pandemic, we have moved to help vulnerable Canadians, moved to help Canadians who have lost their paycheques. The CERB is delivering help to over eight million Canadians. Millions more are receiving the wage subsidy. We're investing in helping

small businesses. We're investing in helping our seniors, our youth, and we are doing more for—

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, the government has certainly moved, after the New Democrats pushed them again and again to help out those in need, to help out those who are struggling. Again we have to push the government. We have to push the Prime Minister to deliver on that promise made in a unanimous consent motion passed in this House. We need again this government to follow through, and not with the pretty words. We need the action.

Canadians living with disabilities need help. When will they get the help?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, the action has been from this government. The rhetoric and words have always been from the NDP. We've taken concrete action to help Canadians, to invest in their families, to support small businesses, to get Canadians through this pandemic and we will continue to do so. For Canadians with disabilities, young people, seniors and hard-working Canadians, we will continue to be there with action, not words.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Prime Minister says, "action, not words." For months we've been asking what the government plans to do for expectant parents who, due to COVID-19, will not be able to obtain the hours necessary to access full parental benefits.

The Minister of Employment has said she's looking into this. Would the minister tell these parents and the parliamentarians who are assembled today how she plans to fix this problem?

• (1240)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Delta, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can assure everyone in the House that we know that there are many groups of people who, because of COVID and for COVID reasons, will not have accumulated sufficient hours or time to access EI benefits. As I committed to the member, we are working on it. It is a tough system to navigate, but I can assure everybody that we will figure this out and be there for all Canadians.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, we have been asking about this for months, and still the government has no solution. This isn't a problem for the future. Canadians who are having children right now are 40 or 50 hours short of the benefits because of COVID-19. The minister has had ample time, and Canadians are falling through the cracks.

When will the government ensure that these parents are not left behind?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, yes, I appreciate the difficult situation, particularly of expectant parents who are wondering if they're going to have the EI support they need. I can assure them that we're working through this. As I've told the member, it is complicated. That's not an excuse. We will deliver for Canadians.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, we've been told that CERB claims for EI-eligible people are being paid from the employment insurance account. Is that accurate?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, I can confirm that is accurate.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, can the minister please tell us the current balance of the EI account?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, I don't have that information at my fingertips, but I can provide it to the member.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, it would seem to me that the minister should know at least a ballpark figure. Can the minister please let us know if there is a modest surplus?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, out of respect for this House, I would prefer to give him an accurate answer, which I promise to provide as soon as possible.

Mr. Dan Albas: Well, Mr. Chair, this is a pretty easy question. At least give us a ballpark figure.

Am I getting warmer when I say a modest deficit, or a large deficit? Could the minister please just tell us in general where the EI account is? Is it in a positive surplus, or negative?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Once again, Mr. Chair, I commit to getting that information to the member, but I would prefer not to provide this House in any way with an inaccurate number.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, this minister has told me she would respond to letters. We've sent over six letters and we have not received a reply to them. We need to have more transparency from this government.

The minister has said she will get a number. Can she give me an idea of when? Would the end of the week be too soon?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, I assume that the end of the week is possible. I will commit to let the member know by the end of the day exactly when he'll get that information and I will follow up on all of his correspondence.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, for weeks we've been asking why the government was turning a blind eye to fraud in the CERB. The government said they had no choice if they wanted to get the money out fast. Now we know they'll be looking into fraud through a CRA snitch line.

Therefore, the government did have a choice for the past two months, and they chose to ignore fraud until now. Why is that?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, with respect, we are by no means ignoring fraud. When we committed to delivering this benefit to Canadians as quickly as possible, we moved some of our integrity measures—and I emphasize some—to the back end of this process. However, I can assure everyone in the House and Canadians that we will absolutely follow up, and people who received inappropriate payments will be paying those back.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Chair, when public servants raised red flags that some people were not eligible for the benefit, the government directed that they be paid out anyway. Now the Liberals have a snitch line, encouraging Canadians to phone in if they believe their neighbours are misusing the benefit.

Why did they not put more onus on the front-end measures to make sure those red-flagged accounts were dealt with in a timely way? We're not talking about cutting off benefits to everyone. Canadians want to know why the government has done things this way.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, I assume the member agrees that when we asked employees to process claims differently, moving from EI to the CERB, we had to give them operational direction to do so. I will again emphasize that we were first focused on getting an efficient and quick benefit to as many people as possible, and we have not in any way compromised the integrity of this program.

• (1245)

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. d'Entremont.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the Minister of Agriculture.

In the Annapolis Valley, berry producers are facing significant losses due to COVID-19. With a one-month delay for bringing in foreign workers and the 14-day quarantine, Millen Farms is facing a 25% to 40% loss of its planned strawberry harvest. In addition to being fewer in number than last year, missing 50 foreign workers means less work is being done. Since the rules of social distancing are also creating a lot of problems when it comes to “you pick”, it's very difficult for farmers to recoup in that manner.

How are government programs helping berry producers like Millen Farms?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Mr. Chair, in Canada, business risk management is there to help. We all remember that in 2013 these programs were gutted in a significant way by the previous government. I am working very hard with my provincial counterparts to improve these programs.

These programs offer, in an average year, \$1.6 billion. In the AgriInvest account alone there is \$2.3 billion. For the temporary foreign worker program, we have put forward \$50 million, which means \$1,500 per worker to support our producers. We are—

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: How about this? Last year, Louise Endres, a blueberry producer in my riding, was affected by Hurricane Dorian. It damaged a large portion of her fields and caused substantial loss. This year, her annual foreign workers arrived. Of course, there were fewer of them, so hectares of blueberry bushes aren't being pruned for optimum growth.

In order to meet the criteria for financial assistance from the government, producers must provide financial statements from last year to show losses. In this case, last year was also a year of losses due to Hurricane Dorian.

What kind of support can this producer expect?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, there are three programs in business risk management, but let's talk about two of them. The AgriInsurance program is specifically for natural disasters. The other one is AgriStability, for when farmers are facing significant losses in their revenues. There's still the AgriInvest program, which they have access to as well.

We understand that there are still gaps to be filled, and we are working on these different options right now.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: In this morning's news, we learned that an Annapolis Valley tomato producer had to abandon production of 26,000 tomato plants because he was only able to hire four of his normal 18 Mexican labourers, since they've been blocked by delays due to COVID-19. No locals are responding to the ads to help since the government has basically paid them to stay at home for another month or so.

Producers do not believe that the government has their backs. What should I tell producers when they're desperately asking for support?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I can assure you that I understand the challenges that our farmers are facing right now. I'm in constant conversation with them, with their representatives and with my provincial counterparts.

We have worked really hard, and it's impressive what the immigration department has done in facilitating the venue of these workers. It is the same thing with our other colleagues, in particular the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is supporting us and facilitating these workers to come to Canada.

In addition, we have put in place the—

The Chair: We will now go back to Mr. d'Entremont.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont: Thank you very much.

My next question is a follow-up from last week's question to the Minister of Public Safety about the mass shooting in Nova Scotia. I asked about the secrecy surrounding the file, the investigation that was ongoing and the move to push for an inquiry.

Today the justice minister in Nova Scotia, one of the minister's partners, confirmed that Nova Scotia is interested in some kind of review, like an inquiry. When will the government be clear on what such a review will be?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): We know that Nova Scotians and all Canadians need clear answers to what transpired, all the circumstances leading up to the mass shooting, the actions that were taken in response and the restorative actions that need to be in place to support Nova Scotians, the victims of these terrible crimes and their families.

We've been working very closely with the Province of Nova Scotia. As the attorney general of Nova Scotia indicated in his press conference yesterday, we are very close to the actual implementation of this review.

I appreciate that the member is anxious. We are also anxious. We're working diligently towards putting that in place.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now continue with Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On March 20, 2020, the Prime Minister said that immigration cases involving family reunification would be a priority.

Is that still the case?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, I'd like to assure the member opposite that keeping families together and family reunification remain strong priorities for this government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, on March 17, 2020, three days earlier, the office of the Canadian embassy in Haiti, located in Port-au-Prince, stopped issuing approved permanent resident documents for family reunification.

Does this directive contradict the Prime Minister's statement?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, it's quite the contrary.

We remain absolutely committed to a robust immigration process, including family reunification. Of course, we have had to take some very significant, unprecedented steps in order to ensure the health and safety of all Canadians. As we work through those important and necessary steps to protect Canadians—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, does the government intend to abolish the moratorium on issuing approved permanent resident documents?

[*English*]

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Mr. Chair, there is no moratorium. In fact, we have continued to process applications for permanent residence in the belief that those who have the skills and experience necessary to contribute to the economy will continue to add to it in our recovery post-COVID-19.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Since the minister has just stated here that there is no moratorium, when will these approved permanent resident documents be issued?

[*English*]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chair, as I said, of course we continue to process applications.

There is an exemption under the current orders in council, such that anybody who is coming into Canada must abide by the mandatory 14-day isolation period.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: The new horizons for seniors program is much appreciated.

When will the calls for proposals for 2020 open?

[*English*]

Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors): Mr. Chair, I want to assure the member that we are working right now diligently to assess what funding is already being utilized through past new horizons funding. We're looking at the groups that did not get funding last year and will be—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, my question is about the revised new horizons for seniors program.

As part of the program, what COVID-19-related objectives have been established to keep supporting our seniors?

[*English*]

Hon. Deb Schulte: I would like to make sure that the member knows that we have adjusted the program for this year so that groups can address the best way to help seniors during COVID-19. There are new parameters—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Gourde has the floor.

• (1255)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chair, last year, I objected to how complex the government made the application form for the new horizons program. It was very complicated for organizations that wanted to fill in the application form to register for the program.

Has this problem been solved so that the forms can be completed more easily?

[*English*]

Hon. Deb Schulte: I want to assure the member that we're taking all the information that was provided by members and stakeholders to see how we can best improve the program for this coming year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: This government has been talking for years, but it has taken no concrete measures to ensure high-quality digital connectivity for all our regions. As we have seen in the context of this pandemic and of telework, several thousand Canadians are simply disadvantaged by the fact that, in 2020, they only have access to a low-speed Internet connection.

The question is simple: when will this problem become a real priority for this government and what will it do about it?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development): Mr. Chair, our government's plan is to ensure that all Canadians have access to reliable, affordable high-speed Internet service.

This plan is working. To date, we have approved projects that will connect more than one million households across Canada. COVID-19 has underscored the urgency of this work. I want to assure my colleague that all Canadians—

The Chair: We will now continue with Mr. Kent.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Government of Canada speaks generally of 300,000 Canadian citizens in Hong Kong.

Can the Minister of Immigration tell us more exactly how many Canadian citizens are currently resident in Hong Kong?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The first thing that I would like to clarify, Mr. Chair, is that those Canadians who are in Hong Kong and elsewhere have a right to return home. With regard to those who wish to seek asylum, we have a robust system in place that ensures that everyone making a claim will receive a fair hearing. That will continue.

Hon. Peter Kent: Minister, how many of the Canadian citizens currently resident in Hong Kong—I would like, at least, an estimate from you—currently hold valid Canadian passports? How many have recently made passport applications?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As my honourable colleague knows, those individuals who do hold citizenship do have a right to return home. We will continue to monitor the situation very closely to ensure that those who wish to exercise their right do so in accordance with the health and safety measures in place at the border.

Hon. Peter Kent: These answers underline the deficiencies of this temporary committee. With respect to the minister, the PMO doesn't like straight answers. At least if the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration were sitting, we would get straight answers from the deputy minister, department officials and the occasional witness allowed by the government.

Again, does the minister have any estimate of the number of Canadian citizens currently resident in Hong Kong?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chair, as my honourable colleague said, there is an estimate of approximately 300,000 who hold Canadian citizenship. Those individuals do have the right to return home. When they exercise that right, they must do so in accordance with the travel restrictions in place to reduce the likelihood of the spread of COVID-19.

Hon. Peter Kent: Here's something for the minister: Has the department updated its emergency contingency plans in the event of worst possible outcomes in Hong Kong?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chair, I know that my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, is working very closely with our representatives in that region. In the meantime, our officials are also providing—

The Chair: We'll now go back to Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent: Minister, last year, Canada assigned members of Global Affairs' standing rapid deployment team to our consulate general in Hong Kong to assist the mission and Canadian citizens in that territory. Is that team in place today?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Chair, we have the current number of staff that we need in Hong Kong. As needed, we would be prepared, like we've been in Wuhan and like we were when we repatriated Canadians from more than 110 countries. We can deploy these teams. They are rapid response teams. As the case may be, we—

• (1300)

The Chair: We will go back to Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Chair.

Again to the Minister of Immigration, the supplementary estimates reveal a \$200-million line item in the Department of Citizen-

ship and Immigration for the housing of illegal border-crossing asylum claimants. This would seem to be a minor down payment on much larger costs borne by Ontario and Quebec and a number of cities. The City of Toronto alone is asking for \$77 million this year and years going forward to cover asylum claimant shelter costs, given that the backlog of asylum claimant cases is now more than 90,000 and will stretch for years.

Can the minister answer on supplementary funds beyond this very small initial payment?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, Mr. Chair, I will have more to say about those estimates going forward.

I'm very proud of this government's record when it has come to partnering with cities like Toronto and the support we're providing with regard to interim housing for refugees and asylum-seekers. We will continue to build on that record going forward.

The Chair: Mr. Kent, a very short question.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you very much, Chair.

I have a final question for the Minister of Digital Government.

Can the minister tell us whether she read the House of Commons cybersecurity email, titled "IT Security Alert", on risks with the WeChat application?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The minister in question has already made it clear that this is not part of her own work. This is something else in her network, which is now out of the network. She has clearly said that the views expressed by that person are not her views.

The Chair: We'll now go on to Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Canadian families who don't normally qualify for the Canada child benefit received a payment of approximately \$300 per child as part of the COVID-19 CCB top-up. When Canadians call Service Canada to report the error and return the benefit, they are being told to donate it to a children's charity if they don't need it. This in fact happened to our colleague Rosemarie Falk, member of Parliament for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

Is the minister aware of this issue?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, we were very proud to be able to deliver to Canadian families an extra CCB payment. I don't know the particulars of this circumstance, but I assure the House that I will look into it after this meeting.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Well, neither do Canadians, Mr. Chair.

Can the government clarify the criteria that need to be met at this time for Canadian families to receive the CCB?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, the CCB is based on the income of the family. There is a pro-rated amount per child. If you have a child with a disability, it is increased.

Again, I can provide details of CCB eligibility to the member after this meeting.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: There has been no additional tax filing since these new increases were instituted. Will Canadians who received the CCB top-up in error be asked to repay it come tax time?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, we are working on a number of different ways to ensure that any repayments by any people or any families are done as respectfully as possible. Service Canada will be reaching out to individuals.

I would suggest—

The Chair: Back to Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Will this government direct Service Canada to ensure that the benefit money is recouped from families who received the payments in error?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, Service Canada is working to ensure that every payment made either in error or in duplicate will indeed be recouped. Although I can't give the member specific details on specific payments, know that Service Canada is working very hard on this file.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Will the government deliver the July CCB increases to families who qualify for the CCB, and which families would this be?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, the CCB is helping hundreds of thousands of families, especially in this time of need. Families will be getting their CCB payment in July. I can assure the member that we will ensure that they get the right amount.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Chair, the debates commission came out Monday with their report on the 2019 election debates. They recommended against many of the unilateral rules the Liberal government imposed because they delegitimized the commission.

They recommended that the commission be established through legislation so that there would be parliamentary accountability. They recommended that next time, all political parties in the House of Commons should be consulted on the appointment of the commissioner. Finally, they recommended that the participation criteria should be set by the commission and not the Liberal government.

Will this Liberal government admit that their dictatorial approach to this debates commission was an affront to Canadian democracy?

• (1305)

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada): No, Mr. Chair, it won't surprise my honourable colleague that we won't admit to that because she knows it's not accurate.

We have always believed that debates play an essential role in the electoral process. They should be fair. They should be put together in a transparent way. We've taken note of the Right Honourable David Johnston's report. We're obviously looking at it carefully, and I look forward to receiving suggestions from all members on how we can implement the recommendations of this very worthy report.

Unlike the Conservative government, under former prime minister Harper, we don't seek to—

The Chair: We'll now go back to Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much for the “mansplation”.

As the former shadow minister for democratic institutions, I think I know very clearly how the debates commission was set up.

Will the Liberal government start respecting democracy and apply these crucial recommendations for the next election debates?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Again, Mr. Chair, we take no lessons from the Conservatives on respecting democracy.

We're proud of the report. We look forward to working with all members to implement those recommendations in the appropriate way.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now continue with Mr. Blanchet.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, in Quebec, the issue of long-term care homes raises health and safety concerns and the need to save lives. Everything else can only be secondary.

The few military members I know say about themselves and their colleagues that they are particularly proud to be able to contribute to protecting and helping people, some of whom are their grandparents or parents. We know that in this period of crisis, time is of the essence. Every day stretched out or every day lost jeopardizes the continuation of operations.

In this context, can the government again agree, as it wisely did at the beginning of the crisis, to depoliticize the issue, to put an end to its narrow-minded stubbornness and accept Quebec's nuanced request—which is prepared to discuss terms—to ensure that military personnel remain in the long-term care homes for as long as necessary, given the urgency of the situation?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question.

At no time has this issue been politicized, on the contrary. From the beginning, the Canadian Armed Forces were ready and happy to lend a hand. I have spoken to several members of the military, and they know that they are helping to improve the situation.

We will continue to talk with Quebec to help our seniors, the most vulnerable people in our society.

The Chair: I would simply like to clarify something, Mr. Blanchet. You have 43 seconds left: do you want to give your time to Mr. Ste-Marie?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Ste-Marie, go ahead.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Chair, I thank my leader for his generosity and his 43 seconds.

I'm going to continue on the same subject. Quebec is asking for the army's help in its long-term care homes until September. What is the government's response to that request?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, we're aware of the fundamental role played by our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces. We recognize the contribution they are making in the long-term care homes.

It's obvious that we are continuing to talk with Quebec. There are many ways to help our seniors. We will continue to be present.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, I fully agree with the Government House Leader about the fact that there are many ways to help our seniors in our long-term care homes and in our health care system.

The permanent solution isn't complicated: fund health care. We know that in the mid-1990s, the Liberals chose to slash health care funding. Nothing has changed since then. This has led to the health care system under pressure that we know today, which is especially striking with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Does the government acknowledge that our health care services are in a pitiful state because Ottawa has chosen to manage its finances on the backs of seniors and the sick for the past 25 years?

• (1310)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health): Mr. Chair, all parts of our government are working together to protect Canadians against COVID-19. We have increased funding to the provinces and territories by \$500 million to help them prepare for COVID-19 outbreaks. This is in addition to the \$40 billion that we already provide to the provinces and territories each year.

We will continue to work with the provinces and territories to fight COVID-19 together.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, that's all well and good, but we see the spending is increasing faster than the federal portion, which ultimately gives us a net decrease. If you take the \$500 million announced for COVID-19, Quebec's share is \$115 million. The Government of Quebec says that it will cost \$3 billion. So we realize that the federal government isn't even paying 4%. The federal government is paying only 4%, but it's taking the liberty of lecturing and saying how the provinces and Quebec should manage the health care system.

Does the government acknowledge that it must provide more funds to the health care system and our long-term care homes?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, we have worked with the provinces and territories to respond to the crisis from the beginning. We've increased health transfers, provided medical protective equipment and responded to all requests for assistance. It is because

of this co-operation that we've been able to make so much progress in the fight against COVID-19.

Creating a fake squabble between the federal government and Quebec during a pandemic isn't a good way to score points.

[English]

The Chair: We'll now pause for a moment to allow the console operators to switch out in safety.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Thank you.

We're now going to Ms. Sidhu from Brampton South.

Ms. Sidhu, go ahead.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to be sharing my time with the member from Kingston and the Islands.

My question is to the Minister of Seniors.

No Canadian should have to choose between putting food on the table, filling their prescriptions or paying their bills. During COVID-19, seniors in my riding of Brampton South have faced many challenges, especially those in long-term care homes.

One long-term care home in my riding has 86 COVID-19 cases and 12 deaths. Furthermore, in Brampton, the median age of those hospitalized from this virus is 73. Regardless of where they live, seniors are facing health, economic and social challenges. It is very clear that seniors, particularly, are feeling the impact of COVID-19. It is essential that we take care of the most vulnerable members of our communities and ensure they're able to get through these challenging times.

Canada's seniors built this country and it is our responsibility to work with the provinces and territories to ensure seniors get the care they deserve from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Chair, can the Minister of Seniors please update the House on how the federal government is helping seniors directly address the increased financial pressure and how the minister is collaborating with provincial and territorial counterparts on seniors' issues?

Hon. Deb Schulte: Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the honourable member from Brampton South for her question and her advocacy for seniors in her community. The stories we are hearing are tragic and our thoughts are with those who have lost loved ones in the long-term care system.

The Government of Canada is doing our part to help by providing guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19, by buying personal protective equipment, helping top up the wages of low-income workers, and sending in the Canadian Forces to help.

We will continue to work together with provinces and territories to address the pressing needs in the long-term care system.

We also recognize seniors' financial challenges. Seniors in Brampton South and all across Canada are staying safe at home because of their increased risk of the virus, but that has made life more difficult and more expensive for seniors. Groceries are more costly and deliveries are coming at a premium. Prescription dispensing fees have increased because of the new 30-day limits in some provinces. We're helping millions of seniors during the pandemic with a tax-free payment to those on OAS and GIS, which is coming soon. Together with the GST credit payment that came in April, a low-income senior couple on GIS will be receiving over \$1,500 in direct financial support.

Our government is working hard to help seniors during this difficult time.

• (1315)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The surge of online misinformation regarding COVID-19 has been termed an "infodemic" by the WHO. While we know that physical distancing is important to keep Canadians safe, we must also be mindful of the importance of sharing reliable, trustworthy information. Not only is it integral to the health of one another but also the health of our democracy.

While the Internet can support democracy, bad actors can use the Internet to undermine and interfere with it. Malicious actors are, right now, attempting to erode democratic institutions through the spread of malicious falsehoods that create confusion, sow division and cause harm.

My question is for the President of the Queen's Privy Council. Could he please tell us how the government is working to protect our democratic institutions?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Chair, as colleagues will know, ahead of the 2019 election, our government took decisive action to protect and uphold democratic institutions from interference. Now, with the increasing presence of the Internet in our lives, we recognize that we must be proactive in the fight against cyber-threats and the need to build an Internet of trust in the face of an issue that ignores borders.

We're adopting an approach that works with states, businesses and communities, allowing us to remain at the global forefront of new developments in emerging threats and best practices. That's why our government has decided to take a leading role on principle three of the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace to address the threats endangering citizens and our infrastructure and keep our democracy resilient.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go to Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be sharing my time with the member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Today, we heard from the Prime Minister again. There have been questions asking the Prime Minister when he will make good on his promises to Canadians, and Canadians have, once again, been told that it is their lot to wait.

Millions of people impacted by COVID-19 have been forgotten by this government, and people with disabilities are now facing new challenges in increased costs just to survive. It's been 12 weeks since this pandemic began, five weeks since this House unanimously passed our motion to act "without delay".

Why is this government still making people with disabilities wait for the help they so desperately need?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: From the beginning, people with disabilities have absolutely been at the heart of our decisions, and we've put a disability inclusion lens on our government measures in response to COVID-19. That's, in great part, due to the passing of our historic Accessible Canada Act, and I will take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy National AccessAbility Week.

As both the Prime Minister and I have said, I can assure every Canadian that, before this week is done, they will have news they will take very positively.

Take care.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Chair, last week and just now, the minister said that, "We are three days away from National AccessAbility Week, the first week after we legislated it in the Accessible Canada Act. I would expect something from our government during that week."

Has the government been holding back supports for people living with disabilities so they could time an announcement to make a splash?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, absolutely not. In fact, we've been working very hard with our disability advisory group to ensure that what we do announce and the support we do provide to Canadians with disabilities is exactly what is needed and targeted at the people who need it most.

I'll remind everyone that we put in force an extra \$750 per month for students with disabilities, and Canadians with disabilities have access to the CERB. We are investing in a number of ways, of course, through the GST increase that disproportionately benefits—

• (1320)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): You have time for a short question, Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Chair, people living with disabilities are not publicity tools. If the minister denies that this is what they are doing, then what is the excuse for their long delay on their promise?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Mr. Chair, as someone with a disability, I take great offence that we would do that. We certainly haven't. We are working very hard to provide for everyone, including people with disabilities. I regret, of course, that it's taken as long as it has, but we are not leaving anybody behind.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll go to Mr. Julian, New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Julian, go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Chair, people with disabilities are the poorest of the poor in this country, and making them wait is simply despicable; but there's one group that doesn't have to wait for COVID relief, and that's Canada's major banks.

The Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions has revealed that the sum total of supports for the big banks is now at an astounding \$750 billion, and yet banks continue to gouge Canadians and small businesses as they impose massive fees and penalties. Why does this government allow them to act with impunity?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance): Mr. Chair, we continue to support Canadians. One of the ways we're working to support Canadians is to make sure that they have access to loans. Of course, that means we need to work with banks, push banks to do the right thing in using the liquidity available to them to get credit out into the markets to Canadians, to Canadian businesses.

We will continue to work with them. We will continue to make sure that they help their customers, their clients, so we can all get through this crisis and get to a better economy afterwards.

Mr. Peter Julian: A few weeks ago the finance minister promised to keep the banks' feet to the fire. Instead, it turns out this government just wants to give bankers a warm foot massage. These banks have recorded \$5 billion in profits during this crisis so far while small businesses close forever. While Canadians struggle to put food on the table, this government is letting the banks make a fortune from the misfortune of Canadians.

Why hasn't the government used its powers to stop banks from profiting from this crisis? Why isn't it stopping the penalties, the fees, and high interest charges on mortgages, credit cards and lines of credit as Canadians struggle to survive this pandemic?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we know that one of the things we can do in order to ensure Canadians get through this time is to help them in working with their banks. That's one of the reasons we've worked hard to make sure that banks will actually have deferrals on mortgages. There are a very large number of Canadians who have deferred their mortgage during this time.

We have also worked with the banks to make sure they reduce their credit card fees for Canadians who are struggling to pay those credit card rates, and they have reduced them by half in most cases.

We will continue to push banks, keep their feet to the fire as the member mentioned, and we will continue to support Canadians not

only through direct payments to individuals and to businesses, but also to ensure they can get access to credit through their bank or through their financial institution so they can get through a challenging time.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We will now go to Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Canadians need some good news. Hockey is our national pastime and something that unites Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

The NHL is considering three Canadian cities to host the playoff games. The Quarantine Act might prevent these games from happening.

What is the Prime Minister doing to ensure that at least one Canadian city gets to host the NHL?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would agree with the member opposite that we're all looking forward to resuming our favourite pastime, which is watching the NHL. I will tell you right now that the Public Health Agency of Canada has been working very closely with the NHL to understand what their plan is, to make sure they protect the players, to make sure they protect the staff that support the players, and to understand how we can work as a country to protect the communities in which they may locate.

I look forward to having more to say about that in the near future.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: It was revealed that the Liberal minister, Joyce Murray, allowed her WeChat social media platform to be used to advance the interest of an arm of the Chinese Communist Party.

Does the minister accept responsibility for this attack on Canadian journalists?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

• (1325)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The minister made clear two things. First, that person was not part of her network. Second, she does not share the views that were shared.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Is the minister aware of the espionage activities that the United Front carries out on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party, yes or no?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, I'll repeat in French what I said in English.

La ministre a dit deux choses très clairement: premièrement, la personne ne fait pas partie de son réseau; deuxièmement, les avis et les opinions exprimés par cette personne ne sont pas partagés par la ministre.

[*English*]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: [*Inaudible—Editor*] incompetent or an active participant in the efforts by the communists to muzzle Canadian journalists?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, I think the honourable member, whom I respect very strongly, is going a bit beyond the customs of rationality and reason. I would encourage him to come back to reason and rationality.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Chair, someone should take responsibility for this.

Does the minister or the government take that responsibility, yes or no?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, as I said earlier, the minister involved made two things very clear. First, that person was not part of her network. Second, the views that the person expressed are not shared by the minister.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: The minister admitted on the record that her own political staff managed this WeChat. This is someone who is being paid by the Canadian taxpayers.

Why is the minister helping China to attack Global News?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, I would repeat once more to make sure that the honourable member understands very clearly that the minister concerned made two things clear. First, that person was not part of her network. Second, the views expressed are not shared by the minister.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Chair, that was Joyce Murray's own Liberal-branded WeChat group that was advancing the lawsuit against Global News. Either the minister is fully accountable, or she has been duped by the communists in China. Which one is it?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, I think that this is again going beyond reason and rationality. I have made very clear the views and the context in which this happened, and I believe that should be satisfactory to the member of the House.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Sam Cooper is an investigative Canadian journalist who has uncovered many different criminal rackets that can be linked back to Beijing. Has the minister apologized to Sam Cooper for attempting to shut down his work?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, I'll repeat it in French, because what I said may not have been entirely clear.

Premièrement, la ministre a dit clairement que la personne ne faisait pas partie de son réseau. Deuxièmement, les points de vue exprimés par cette personne n'étaient pas partagés par la ministre.

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Mr. Aboultaif, you have about 40 seconds remaining.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: When will the minister apologize to Sam Cooper and Global News?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Chair, I'll repeat it again to make sure everything is understood because, yes, clarity is important in the House.

First, this person wasn't part of the minister's network. Second, the points of view this person expressed are not shared by the minister.

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): You have time for a last one, Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I will pass on the 21 seconds, Mr. Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Next we have Mr. Zimmer from Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question today is for Minister Bill Blair. I wrote him a letter seeking clarification on the CBSA definition of what a bore is and the conflict that it has with the RCMP's definition. We sent that letter on May 12.

I was a little bit surprised to see that Minister Blair had actually responded to my letter on Twitter. This is his exact tweet:

There is misinformation circulating online surrounding the types of guns that were prohibited in Canada on May 1st. To be clear, 10 and 12 gauge shotguns are not prohibited in Canada - Canadians who use these guns lawfully, including hunters and farmers, can continue to do so.

Mr. Chair, let's take just a quick look at the reference table. I will just cite six 12-gauge shotguns that are actually now on the prohibited list: the Adler B210 bolt-action shotgun, the AlphaArms 15SA semi-automatic shotgun, the Axor MF-1 semi-automatic shotgun, the Canuck Havoc pump-action shotgun, the Derya Arms VR90 semi-automatic shotgun, and the Eternal FX12 semi-automatic shotgun.

Frankly, Mr. Chair, it wasn't me who was misinforming Canadians; it was this minister. Will he stand up and apologize to Canadians for misleading the public?

● (1330)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, I'm delighted to have this opportunity to stand before the House and provide some clarity. Quite frankly, we listen to Canadians, and we listen to the concerns of Canadians who have expressed fear within their own communities from the rising proliferation of certain types of weapons that were never designed for the purposes for which firearms were intended in this country. In our culture, in our traditions and in our law, firearms are exclusively for use for hunting and sports purposes, and weapons that were designed for soldiers to use in combat to shoot other soldiers have no place in Canada.

Mr. Chair, that's why we took action. We took decisive action, keeping our promise to Canadians to strengthen gun control laws. Mr. Chair, we continue to work with the RCMP to ensure that the public firearms reference table is updated as quickly and thoroughly as possible. However, let me be very clear, Mr. Chair. Despite the claims made by the opposition members, standard shotguns used for hunting, such as the 10- and 12-gauge shotguns, are still not prohibited. I will also say that firearms that include designs, receivers, or other variances of rifles such as the AR-10 and the AR-15 are prohibited. The RCMP is doing its important work to update the public firearms reference table as quickly as possible to keep Canadians informed and safe.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: For everybody out there watching, that was a non-answer.

There are 12-gauge shotguns that are on that ban list, Mr. Minister, and you need to apologize to Canadians for misleading them.

I have another question about our sport shooting community. We have a bunch of retailers who are left out in the cold by this decision. Cassandra Premack, co-owner of K.K.S. Tactical Supplies in Prince George, projects that her business will lose up to 45% of its annual revenue thanks to this ban. With no buyback program coming anytime soon, what is this government doing for the thousands of sporting-goods store owners who have been left out in the cold?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, I would like to acknowledge the member's strong advocacy on behalf of the firearms industry, manufacturers and retailers.

I want to assure the House and all Canadians that our focus is on public safety and keeping Canadians safe.

We have implemented an amnesty period that will allow us time to bring forward legislation that will deal effectively with the compensation of people who have lawfully acquired these weapons. Until then, we have put in place a non-permissive grandfathering amnesty that will protect those individual Canadians from any criminal liability.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We have time for one short question.

Mr. Zimmer, go ahead.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I have a question from a constituent, Malcolm Dutchak, who wants to know why the government didn't review and update the emergency stockpile to ensure that we would have the necessary supplies when the pandemic hit.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: As we've covered a number of times, the national emergency stockpile is under review. As I mentioned in the House, we know that we have a system that works very closely with provinces and territories to ensure that we have the equipment and the antiretrovirals in place.

This is a global pandemic, the size of which we have not seen in 100 years, and we have a lot of work to do to prepare for the next one.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now move on to Ms. Wong in Richmond Centre.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, June 15 is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. It is a sad reality that the levels of financial, physical and mental abuse against our seniors are increasing, especially in the wake of COVID-19.

In the last Parliament, the House and the government agreed that action was needed to address financial fraud targeting our seniors, by unanimously passing my motion, M-203.

When will the government take the steps necessary to protect Canada's increasingly vulnerable seniors?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Deb Schulte: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to address a very significant concern for our country and our seniors, which is rising abuse and ageism.

I want to assure the member that we have taken significant steps in a variety of ways. One of them is to enhance the money we have provided for the new horizons for seniors program, so that we can enhance programs throughout the country in all communities that can support seniors, not only to get through this pandemic but also to address the important issues that are occurring with abuse.

I also want to make sure that—

● (1335)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll have to leave it there.

We will go back to Ms. Wong, for the next question.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, on 12 May, after a delay of nearly two months, the government announced a one-time payment for seniors collecting OAS and GIS. Last week was the OAS payday, and the promised top-up was nowhere to be seen.

How many more months must Canada's seniors wait before the government honours its commitment?

Hon. Deb Schulte: Many Canadian seniors are facing significant health, economic and social challenges due to COVID-19. Our government recognizes this, and that is why we did take significant action to provide an additional payment.

We will be delivering these payments automatically as soon as possible, within weeks, and beneficiaries do not need to apply. We will continue to find ways to support our seniors during this difficult time.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, during my last opportunity to ask questions in this place, I inquired if seniors who chose to defer the OAS payment to a later date would receive the top-up or not. We then received correspondence from the minister's office indicating that those seniors would not be receiving the top-up.

Can the minister confirm this?

Hon. Deb Schulte: I can confirm that those who have deferred their payments, because typically they are in a better financial situation, may be continuing to work. As a result of that, they have access to other opportunities through CERB if they should lose that employment. We will not be providing payments to those who have deferred their benefits.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, can the minister confirm that the eligibility cut-off for the OAS/GIS top-up was June 1, 2020?

Hon. Deb Schulte: That is correct.

Hon. Alice Wong: Mr. Chair, formal and especially informal caregivers are an important part of health care in this nation. Their contribution is crucial as governments are trying to ease the strain on our health care system that COVID-19 presents.

Could the minister please let us know what measures, if any, they will be rolling out to help take care of the caregivers?

Hon. Deb Schulte: Mr. Chair, our government recognizes how important caregivers are in the lives of sick and injured family members. We've introduced the new Canada caregiver credit, which provides a tax reduction of up to \$1,071 for the expenses of the care of dependant relatives with infirmities and \$335 for the expenses of the care of spouses and children.

We introduced a new family caregiver benefit that provides up to 15 weeks of EI for adults caring for critically ill or injured adult family members.

We will continue to assess the needs of Canadians and—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Ms. Wong, we're going to try to get one last short question in here. You have about 30 seconds left, so ask a very short question, and then we'll have time for a response.

Hon. Alice Wong: Could the minister provide an estimated dollar figure for the amount of money delivered so far under the new horizons program?

Hon. Deb Schulte: Mr. Chair, we have undertaken the process necessary to determine the best distribution of these additional funds, and we'll have more to say on that soon.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I now invite the hon. member, Mr. Godin, to take the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Chair, on May 19, the Prime Minister announced during his daily press conference that his government would take additional measures to help businesses that still needed assistance. The Prime Minister said that he would expand the Canada emergency business account, or CEBA, to include family-owned SMEs that prefer dividend income over salary income.

More than two weeks after his announcement, SMEs are still waiting for this promise to be fulfilled. I'd like to remind the government that this isn't an election campaign. We're in a crisis, and urgent action is needed.

When will the program be fixed?

• (1340)

[English]

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade): Mr. Chair, I thank the honourable member for that really important question. Indeed, those small businesses he has described are very important to our country.

As of now, over 650,000 small businesses have accessed the Canada emergency business account. The member is absolutely right that we need to make sure that additional support is provided to those additional businesses that now qualify. We're working very hard to make sure that support is there for businesses, and very soon they will be able to get that support through their financial institutions.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I'll continue on the same subject.

In the announcement made in his daily TV drama in front of Rideau Cottage, the Prime Minister added that SMEs that employ contract workers, such as hair salons, could soon have access to it. Even though hair salons in Quebec have just reopened, they are in financial danger.

When will they get this indispensable financial assistance to pay what they owe? When? The question is simple.

[English]

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, the member is absolutely right that hair salons and all of the businesses in Quebec and, indeed, across Canada absolutely need support, which is why we introduced the Canada emergency business account. Those criteria have been expanded. Those businesses will get access to that support, and very shortly they will be able to get it through their financial institutions. We're working very hard to make sure that is there for them at this very difficult time.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, the minister just said "now". It isn't available now. I agree with her that they're working hard, but it isn't available now.

In the same daily TV drama in front of Rideau Cottage, the Prime Minister informed us that his government is preparing solutions so that business owners and entrepreneurs who use their personal bank accounts rather than a business account can have access to the CEBA. These business people are still waiting.

When will our honest entrepreneurs, who have gone all in, get some help?

[English]

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the honourable member for his incredible advocacy and for raising that very question on behalf of all of our small businesses.

I want to assure the honourable member and, indeed, all small businesses across this country that we are working hard to make sure that they are going to get this support in addition to the various measures that are already helping many of our small businesses across the country.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: I'll move on to another sector.

The tourism industry isn't seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. When will this government put in place a plan to save this industry, which generates over \$100 million a year in Canada?

Many countries have a plan to save this sector of economic activity.

When will tourist attraction operators, restaurateurs and hoteliers have the tools to rebuild Canada's tourism industry?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages): I thank my colleague Mr. Godin for this important question.

I share his concerns about the tourism sector, because we know it's been very affected by the pandemic and economic crisis. That's why we have introduced various measures, including the wage subsidy, commercial rent assistance and the \$40,000 loan, about which he asked my colleague questions. We have also provided money through the RRRF program, which is administered by Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, or CED.

We also have money for tourist attraction operators. So, if my colleague would like to share with me some cases in his riding, I would be pleased to work with him on these issues.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): That completes this round.

We'll now go to Ms. Wilson-Raybould.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.): Thank you, Chair.

Today is our 16th COVID committee meeting, and while this committee has certainly been and remains important, so too are all aspects of our democracy and our institutions. I believe, as I have heard from many constituents, that we need to ensure that the House of Commons resumes on September 21. There is no question that there are critical issues that we need to discuss, both domestically and globally.

Will the government commit to taking all necessary steps to ensure that we will meet in Parliament on September 21, whether virtually, in person or in a similar manner as we are today?

• (1345)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her important question.

[Translation]

All legislatures in Canada have had to adapt to the pandemic. We have done so quickly and collectively while allowing as many questions and exchanges as possible to promote democracy and allow the opposition to play its role.

We want to move as quickly as possible towards what would be called a more comprehensive Parliament, but to do so, we need to be able to vote remotely, and I want to make sure that everyone is prepared to do so.

[English]

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: While all Canadians can look with shock and horror at the events unfolding south of the border, we cannot be complacent in our own country when it comes to issues of racism against black Canadians, indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups.

With respect to indigenous peoples, we have made strides forward, yet we are only now beginning to come of age as a country. There is still systemic racism. We still have the Indian Act. We still have significant levels of over-incarceration of marginalized people. I know for certain that significant work has been done at the Department of Justice on necessary sentencing reforms and restorative justice measures to address the overrepresentation of indigenous peoples in the justice system, and there is a clear plan for getting rid of the Indian Act through rights recognition.

We know what needs to be done. Will the Prime Minister please tell this country why the government has failed to support these comprehensive and transformative plans? Nice words need to be translated into action. If not now, when? If not us, who?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth): Mr. Chair, I agree entirely with the member that black communities in Canada, the United States and around the world continue to experience anti-black racism and far too often have to grieve the loss of a life in their communities. I also agree there is anti-indigenous racism. With COVID-19 we have seen anti-Asian racism as well.

Racism exists, and that's exactly why my focus remains in Canada, on Canadians. We have a lot of work to do. The anti-racism secretariat was set up in October 2019, and I look forward to working with the member, because I will be focused on outcomes.

We need to do better, and it's time for outcomes and action now. I'm committed to doing that work.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Thank you. I definitely agree that we need action and we need it now.

Relatedly, today, as we know, is the one-year anniversary of the murdered and missing indigenous women and girls report and its calls to action. Many ministers of the government have stood in this committee in the last few days and emphasized the importance of hearing the calls for justice from across the country and around the world.

The murdered and missing indigenous women and girls report has 231 calls for justice. Can the government commit today, on the one-year anniversary of the report, to releasing the action plan on MMIWG? More consultation should not be an excuse for inaction.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): I thank the member for the question and her ongoing work on this.

Today, our hearts are with the families and survivors of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and the two-spirit and gender diverse people whom we've lost. It is, as the member said, this week that we also need to deal with the issue of racism, which actually is a colonial legacy that we need to undo. What is going on is heartbreaking.

We have put in concrete actions to stop this national tragedy, and we are working with our provincial and territorial partners and indigenous partners to put in place a national action plan that will allow indigenous women and girls and two-spirit, gender diverse people to walk safely anywhere in this country.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): With that, we'll move on now to Ms. Gazan in Winnipeg Centre.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In February 2016, advocates working for the Walk4Justice initiative stopped counting the names of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA people when they got to 4,232. Does this government understand that this is a crisis?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Absolutely, and I thank the member for her ongoing advocacy.

I was very pleased, with Minister Vandal, to speak with the Manitoba coalition this morning. I too have been with Gladys Radek and Bernie Williams and the people on that walk for justice. We've been fighting for a national inquiry for a very long time and are very grateful now that this first-ever national inquiry has meant that the provinces and territories will work with us to respond—

• (1350)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We'll now go back to Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Chair, the former commissioners of the national inquiry have noted in a letter today that this government has had “one year of inaction... [with] lack of transparency”. If this government agrees this is a crisis, why did they choose inaction to address it?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I have to say to the member that the concrete actions we have put in place as a government are changing the lives of indigenous women and girls, and two-spirit and gender diverse people. Even in the family liaison units in each of the victim services, the customized services offered are making the families feel supported as they seek justice, as they have healing and advise us to put in place the concrete actions that will have no other family—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Back to you, Ms. Gazan. Go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Chair, those weren't my words; those were the commissioners' words.

This government had eight months to act before COVID-19. We have the technology to meet in groups. We are using it right now. They called Manitoba “ground zero” for this crisis, and yet it took the government a full year to meet with the Manitoba coalition of families for murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. This government is using the same excuse to continue to discriminate against first nation children living on reserve. When will the lives of indigenous peoples matter to this government?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I was saying to the member that I think that the changes to child and family services, the legislation that allows nations to take jurisdiction over their own children and youth, is one of the most important things and a true legacy of the concrete actions we are dealing with. It is so important that we listen to the engagement that Pauktuutit has done, that Michif women have done, and the tremendous advice that we have had from that as they were able to get together to advise us on what should be in a national action plan. We will not let the families and survivors down. We will get this done.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Chair, that program has no funding. The Native Women's Association of Canada reported that one in five indigenous women has experienced some sort of violence during COVID—that's one in five. Given the increase in violence due to the pandemic, will this government stop making excuses, properly consult and immediately put in place an action plan, yes or no?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I'm very proud to tell the member of the work that we are seeing by all of our partners as a result of the first-ever national inquiry, which requires a response from all of the provinces and territories. They are all working on their plan that will be lifted up into a national action plan. I think the member understands that the absolutely amazing collaboration in the Yukon government with its chiefs and with the women's circle is an example—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Ms. Gazan, we have about 30 seconds left for a short question and response.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Broken promises are all we're getting from this government. They promised legislation on UNDRIP and broke that promise. They promised to release a national action plan one year after the release of the national inquiry's final report and they failed to do so. They refuse to comply with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and continue to turn a wilful blind eye towards violence against indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA people, despite legal obligations to do so.

When and will this government stop breaking the law? When will they act?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I hope that the member will take a look at the website where we have listed all the concrete actions that we've done, all the engagements we've done, and I hope she will join us on the calls with all of the provinces and territories as they walk us through their plans that will stop the tragedy and allow indigenous women and girls to walk safely on the streets wherever they live.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

• (1355)

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

There has been a lot of talk in the last few days about guardian angels, those refugee protection claimants from Haiti, but also from other places, including the Congo, who are on the firing line to take care of Canadians.

The Bloc Québécois has made a statement to thank them for their dedication. More than that, we have moved a motion twice, rather than once, to ensure that their cases were given priority and processed quickly.

Does the minister agree with our vision that these cases should be given priority and fast-tracked as a thank you?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Health care workers play a critical role in maintaining the health of Canadians. We are deeply grateful to them.

All eligible refugee protection claimants are entitled to a full and fair hearing before the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

We are continuing review the situation, but I hope we'll have more to say soon.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Chair, where there's a will, there's a way, as the saying goes.

I'm glad to know that the minister agrees with me that we have to thank these people. That's a good thing. If we're looking for the means, the minister has many, particularly under section 87.3 of the act.

Humanitarian and compassionate considerations applications, for instance, are dealt with on a paper basis by Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada officers. During the crisis, this can be done through telework. The minister has the authority to grant priority to these files.

My question is simple: will he?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chair, my colleague and I feel the same way.

We know there are extraordinary people doing heroic work in our long-term health care centres. We need to look for ways to help them. We are working on proposals with the provinces.

We will have more to say on this soon.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Chair, I'm very glad to hear that we are on the same wavelength, but again, they need to walk the talk. I'll continue making suggestions.

In addition to having the power to give priority to humanitarian and compassionate considerations, the minister has many other powers. He can, among other things, add criteria to humanitarian and compassionate considerations to give a little boost to our refugee protection claimants who have worked on the firing line in long-term care facilities. It's a nice way to thank them.

Will the minister do that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chair, we have the best asylum system in the world. Our reputation is respected everywhere. We will continue to look for ways to recognize the excellent contributions that have been made in Quebec and in the rest of Canada.

We will work with our colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and the provinces to find solutions.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Chair, I can only return the serve. Since my colleague is interested in working together, I'll continue to offer ideas.

Our guardian angels are often separated from their families because the family reunification process is dragging on and on and on. I'll say again that the minister has the power to put these files on top of the pile.

I'll ask him again: is he prepared to do that as a thank you?

[English]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chair, first of all, the work we are doing at the border with regard to family reunification is very important, and there are some compassionate cases that we are working through.

This government has done more to reunite families than any other in the history of the country and we will continue to work with all of our colleagues in government to ensure that we're keeping families together while not in any way compromising the health and safety of Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I'll continue with my list of suggestions.

It isn't just the files of family members of refugee protection claimants that often drag on. Their own permanent residence files also drag on. They have to constantly renew their work permits. Employers don't always recognize the implied status. Claimants can't upgrade their education because they don't have access to the tuition fees that permanent residents have.

One last time, Mr. Minister, could you tell me if you are prepared, as a thank you, to take the files from the bottom of the pile and put them on the top?

[English]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We have a three-year plan that is going to ensure that we continue to attract hard-working individuals who will contribute to the economy. We have a plan that will continue to unite families and we have a plan that will continue to protect the world's most vulnerable.

This is a plan that is there and is transparent, and I look forward to debating with my colleagues and all our provincial partners to continue to see that immigration is an economic driver that will continue to drive the values of this country.

• (1400)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The last question for today's grouping of questions to ministers goes to Mr. Mazier, member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Canadian farmers across my constituency and across this country are frustrated at the Liberal government, which continues to make

their lives and careers more difficult. Farm families aren't asking for more debt. They need relief now, not months from now.

When will meaningful reform to business risk management programs be announced?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The honourable minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me point out once more that, in Canada, we are fortunate to have risk management programs available for producers. We have four main programs: AgriStability, AgriRecovery, AgriInvest and AgriInsurance.

I am well aware that our producers would like those programs to be more generous. I can assure you that I am working in collaboration with the provinces and territories to improve them.

[English]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Mr. Chair, despite the COVID-19 challenges, farmers have stepped up now more than ever. They continue to work hard to ensure that the food supply chain is functioning and continue to ensure that Canadians are fed. Nothing stops Canadian farmers.

However, the Liberal government is letting Canadian farmers down by failing to reform business risk management programs.

Will the agriculture minister commit to announcing reforms to the business risk management programs before July 3 so farmers can make an informed decision before the new AgriStability deadline, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I agree with my colleague on one thing: our agricultural producers work extremely hard and in difficult situations. Being a farmer is always difficult. You have to work with Mother Nature and with the unpredictability of our trading partners. It is difficult. In addition, this year, the pandemic is adding to those difficulties.

That is why we have added programs to the risk management programs, including ones for beef producers, pork producers and food processors. We are putting a lot of effort into facilitating the arrival of foreign workers and we are giving more resources to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

[English]

Mr. Dan Mazier: The agriculture minister claims to stand shoulder to shoulder with Canadian farmers. However, Canadian farmers know talking points and mixed messages do not mean action, and an online calculator is not a replacement for meaningful support.

Can the minister explain what the specific next steps are in guaranteeing a positive reform to business risk management programs so Canadian farm families can be confident there is stability in growing and selling crops?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I am sorry, but I have to remind my colleague that the situation might well be easier in a real crisis if, in 2013, his party had not cut the risk management programs by \$400 million.

As it is, we now have to work with the 10 provinces and three territories again to come to an agreement with all our partners in order to improve matters for our producers.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Go ahead, Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Mr. Chair, the minister has pushed the next federal-provincial-territorial meeting back to October, but will she keep her promise to make public the results of her business risk management review in July?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, the official meeting with my partners, by which I mean all the country's ministers of agriculture, has been postponed. However, we speak to each other each week. We can even see each other using the Zoom platform, for example.

We discuss the best ways to provide immediate support to our producers in the current situation.

[English]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Mr. Chair, does the minister believe the government's actions are sufficient for our farm families to succeed, yes or no?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question.

[English]

Better is always possible.

[Translation]

That is why, our risk management programs aside, we are working very hard with representatives in the sector and with our provincial partners to bring in new improvements and establish new programs.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Mr. Mazier, we have about 40 seconds left for a short question.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you. The unprecedented nature of this pandemic calls for unprecedented action, not recycled programs by a government that does not take agriculture seriously.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture asked for \$2.6 billion in support and said that the government has fallen woefully short in addressing the needs of agri-food's mounting losses. Why has this minister failed to listen to the organizations that represent Canadian agriculture?

● (1405)

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, listening to representatives from agriculture is what I do full-time.

Let me remind you that, in a normal year, our risk management programs come to \$1.6 billion. It could be much more this year. The AgriInvest program has \$2.3 billion. To date, we have moved the AgriRecovery program from an average of \$15 million to \$125 million. We have increased the funding for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and done a lot more.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton): That will conclude the committee proceedings for today.

Accordingly, this committee stands adjourned until tomorrow at noon.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>