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Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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• (1200)

[English]

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

Welcome to the 18th meeting of the House of Commons Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

As a reminder to all members, to avoid issues with sound, members participating in person should also not be connected to the video conference.

[Translation]

For those joining us via videoconference, I would like to remind you that, when speaking, you should be on the same channel as the language you are speaking.

In addition, please direct your remarks through the Chair.

Also, a reminder that today's proceedings will be televised.

[English]

Finally, on this note, I would like to remind members participating in video conference or in person that they should follow the usual dress code in place in the House.

[Translation]

We will now proceed to Ministerial Announcements.

[English]

I understand there are no ministerial announcements, so we'll move on to presenting petitions.

[Translation]

I would like to remind members that any petition presented during a meeting of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic must have already been certified by the clerk of petitions.

[English]

For members participating in person, we ask that you please drop off the signed certificates at the table once the petition is presented.

The first petition being presented goes to Ms. May.

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

In our special session of the COVID committee it's an honour to rise to present a petition from many people across Canada. It is e-petition number 535. While it deals in general with the urgent situa-

tion of the climate emergency, it focuses on the specific issue of climate finance. Canada's climate finance commitments fall due again this year. For Canada at the moment less than 35% of international climate finance investments support projects that help developing countries adapt to those levels of climate crisis that we can no longer avoid. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to commit at least 50% of Canada's public climate financing for developing countries to the category of actions generally described as adaptation, and at least 15% to projects that target gender equality as the primary objective.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to present a petition calling for the government to set more stringent targets and implement the policies needed to reduce emissions to levels that will address the climate emergency. The petitioners are noting that greater action is required to address the climate emergency caused by human production of greenhouse gases. They further note that Canada's current emissions reduction targets are insufficient to prevent warming of 1.5°C, which the international community has agreed upon as a safe upper limit. To that end, the petitioners are calling for the House of Commons to take action.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Chair, I apologize; it's a new format for me. I have a petition presented in the old-fashioned way as a paper petition by a number of constituents who presented it before the outbreak began while it was still safe to do so, and processing has taken some time for it to come through.

The petitioners ask the House of Commons to take into account the importance of saving seeds, and they ask that the House make sure that right is not taken away from farmers and others who have an interest in preserving the broad diversity of the seed stock in our society.

• (1205)

The Chair: Ms. Jansen.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Many Canadians are concerned about the government's proposal regarding euthanasia to remove or loosen certain safeguards currently in place, which protect vulnerable Canadians. They recognize that the government already has a challenge in enforcing the current safeguards and that loosening them further would endanger too many at-risk Canadians. That's why I'm pleased to rise here today to table this petition urging the government to discontinue the removal of safeguards for people requesting euthanasia.

The Chair: We'll now proceed to statements by members.

Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When I reserved this spot for a member's statement some time ago, I wanted to acknowledge that today is World Oceans Day and speak to the threats to our oceans. Instead, I will note that one week ago today, we lost one of our champions of oceans. We lost a giant in the world of literature who campaigned for a better world, someone who was loved by many.

Silver Donald Cameron, one of Canada's leading journalists and author of 20 books, died a week ago today after a very sudden, fierce diagnosis of lung cancer that killed him within the week. He was a member of the Order of Canada, a member of the Order of Nova Scotia. Born in Toronto, raised in British Columbia, he chose Cape Breton Island for his home in 1971 and lived in the little fishing village of D'Escousse. His last book, *Blood in the Water*, will come out in August.

His death has left an enormous hole in our hearts, in the work of the environmental movement and in the world of Canadian literature. Rest in peace, dear sailor Don Cameron.

The Chair: Mr. Easter.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Today I'd like to pay tribute to Mr. Gerald McCarville, the long-serving mayor of Kensington, P.E.I., who passed away in January at age 88.

Gerald was a pillar of the Kensington community, serving as mayor for over 25 years. His loyalty and devotion to his community were an inspiration to all. In fact, Gerald made a point of refusing to buy his groceries anywhere but Kensington. Now that's a true commitment to buying local.

As mayor, Gerald improved the governance of Kensington. He oversaw the modernization of the town's water system and the development of the first industrial park. To quote his daughter Catherine, Gerald was fiercely proud of his island and Irish heritage, and was a wonderful father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

Gerald's life's contributions to his community, often with wife Jennie by his side, were immense. We salute you, Gerald.

The Chair: Mr. Van Popta.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Chair, like everyone else in British Columbia, the people in my riding of Langley—Aldergrove are welcoming a new and better phase in the fight against COVID-19. We are starting to enjoy some of the small things in life, such as planting a tree.

The other day, I was able to distribute almost 1,000 tree seedlings as part of Canadian Environment Week. I want to thank the fine folks at Home Depot for allowing us to use their outside area again and NATS Nursery for supplying the seedlings. I'll give a special shout-out to Nichole Marples and her team of dedicated volunteers at Langley Environmental Partners Society for helping with the distribution and the set-up.

What is a better and clearer expression of hope than to plant a tree? I want to thank all the dedicated gardeners in my riding for taking a tree and planting it, making Langley greener and even more beautiful.

The Chair: Ms. Jones.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As we enter the fourth month of COVID-19, Canadians are looking to inspiring stories about communities coming together in a time of crisis to support each other. There are so many great stories out there, and today I will share one with you from Labrador.

Each day, more and more people are wearing non-medical masks across the country to protect themselves and others from the spread of COVID-19. A group of amazing Labradorians stepped up to help provide their friends, neighbours and strangers with non-medical masks designed and sewn right at their kitchen tables. From Wabush to L'Anse-au-Clair, Sheshatshiu to Nain and all communities in between, hundreds of volunteers worked hard to provide every Labradorian with a homemade mask to keep communities and residents safe.

I want to thank all of those who took part in this initiative, including the sponsors. I especially acknowledge the Iron Ore Company of Canada and Nunatukavut. I am so proud to represent the people of Labrador, and I highlight the kind and caring ways they support each other through difficult and challenging times.

• (1210)

[Translation]

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

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Chair, for the past three months, the main message from all governments of the world has been “stay home”, but to do that, you must have a home.

Whereas the UN has criticized Canada three times for the poor housing situation; whereas more than 300,000 Quebec households are living in inadequate housing; whereas, before the pandemic, 82,000 Quebec households spent more than 80% of their income on housing; whereas the government has committed to spending \$250 billion to manage the pandemic, but is unable to spend \$1.5 billion to provide homes for Quebec's most vulnerable; and whereas more than a dozen housing associations, chambers of commerce in Quebec, mayors representing more than 85% of Quebecers and the Quebec National Assembly are unanimously calling for investments in social housing; the Bloc Québécois therefore demands the immediate and unconditional signing of the housing agreement with Quebec.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Lattanzio.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): With great pride, as a daughter of Italian immigrants, I invite you during the month of Italian heritage to recognize the exceptional and valuable past and ongoing contributions made by Canadians of Italian origin to the culture, history and economic development of this great country, Canada. It is also an opportunity for us to remember their journeys, humble beginnings, hard work and dedication to family, and to celebrate their stellar accomplishments spanning numerous industries and professions.

I invite all Canadians to experience this month and throughout the year *la dolce vita*, and to learn more about rich Italian heritage and traditions. Treat yourselves to a gelato, cappuccino or cannoli, or enjoy playing a game of bocce. Better yet, come and visit Centre Leonardo de Vinci in Saint Léonard, my riding. It is an iconic community centre that encompasses all that is Italian and signals that you have arrived at a proud, strong and Italian community.

Auguri e lunga vita agli Italo canadesi.

The Chair: Mr. Mazier.

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

It is a pleasure for me to honour and recognize two promising young adults in my constituency today. Cole Stainer of Birtle and Sydney Strocen of Langruth are the only Manitoba recipients of the prestigious Loran scholarship award, worth \$100,000 each.

Cole is the captain of BCI's hockey and basketball teams, and coaches in youth sports programs. He is co-president of the student council. He hopes to combine his business acumen and passion for engineering to create a better world.

Sydney has served as treasurer in student government for the last two years. She is a member of WMC's environmental and social justice groups. She also volunteers at the Manitoba Museum and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Mr. Chair, on behalf of Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, I would like to extend my congratulations to Cole and Sydney on being selected for the largest undergraduate scholarship in Canada.

Good luck, and best wishes to both of you in future studies.

The Chair: Ms. Dhillon.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Chair, black lives matter. We are hearing these chants echo throughout the world. No one should ever have to assert their right to life, nor have to justify why they must be treated as equals. It is an inherent right within us all. No one should ever have to say again, "I can't breathe", or be the subject of gratuitous violence by those who have sworn to protect us.

The weaponization of laws and abuse of power have become all too common. For racialized people, the racial profiling, the terror of being followed for no reason, the fear for yourself and your loved ones, knowing that things can get bad within minutes, even seconds, leave us traumatized. These experiences remain imprinted upon us. We never forget or heal from these traumas. We are left with scars that we carry for the rest of our lives.

• (1215)

[Translation]

To those who deny the existence of systemic racism and institutional discrimination, it is not up to you to deny the existence of the inequalities and contempt that some communities experience on a daily basis.

[English]

Until all forms of systemic oppression are obliterated, there is little hope for equality or humanity.

The Chair: Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon and good morning, dear colleagues.

The uncertain and challenging times presented to Canadians by COVID-19 have also brought out the best in communities across the country. I would like to recognize some of the amazing groups working every day to support residents of Don Valley North during COVID-19: Bayview Village Association, Abu Huraira Center, Armenian Community Centre of Toronto, Afghan Women's Organization of Ontario, Oriole food space, Fairview Interagency Network, Immanuel Baptist Church, Adventure Place, Forest Grove United Church, Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations, the Council of Newcomer Organizations, Wenzhounese in Ontario, Scarborough-York Region Chinese Business Association, Buddhist Prajna Temple, Bethune medical association of Canada, and of course the fantastic team at North York General Hospital.

Thank you very much for your great work, your kind donations and awesome volunteerism.

The Chair: Mr. Moore.

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role of technology to connect with family, friends and society. Unfortunately, many of my constituents in Fundy Royal have been unable to take advantage of the many forms of digital communication due to a lack of access to high-speed Internet. As many employers across Canada asked employees to work from home, those in rural communities with weak Internet connections are left at a disadvantage.

The federal government needs to act and ensure that investments are made in rural, high-speed Internet. Importantly, it needs to ensure transparency for those investments to residents so they know where and when to expect improvements. Rural Canadians across Canada have waited long enough. It's time for action.

The Chair: Mr. Finnigan.

[Translation]

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For over 20 years, the people of the greater Rogersville community have worked hard to create a community space and platform to express themselves and promote the development of our French Acadian heritage and culture. It has been a long road, but it finally became a reality with the official announcement by the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages in January 2019.

Today, with the imminent completion of the construction project, the time has come to name our cafeteria theatre. So, with the cooperation of our community partners, we have decided to name the building Lisa LeBlanc Hall.

Lisa is an internationally renowned artist from the region, and she will continue to inspire upcoming generations of our community to nurture their talent and pursue their dreams. She has certainly shown us that making a dream come true does not depend on where you come from, but rather where you want to go.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Kmiec.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Chair, this viral pandemic has brought two opposite responses: one from the people and one from the federal government. People across Canada have soldiered on, accepting limits on their freedoms to protect vulnerable neighbours; parents have home-schooled; strangers have brought groceries to seniors; and first responders were honoured for their efforts.

All the while, the federal government has been doing its very best to hide information and ignore Parliament.

The access to information system has ground to a halt. All my ATIPs have been delayed by months, and Global Affairs Canada refuses to answer. The federal government is starving the Auditor General's office of millions needed for performance audits on the \$300-billion deficit in spending. It sole-sourced a \$105-million contract for two new executive jets from Bombardier. It went ahead with a secret \$8.6-million renovation of Harrington Lake, the so-called "caretaker" house. The infrastructure minister claims privacy to hide from Parliament over 20,000 missing projects worth tens of billions of dollars.

This Liberal government believes that we only deserve the information that the Prime Minister deigns to give us.

• (1220)

The Chair: Mr. Soroka.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I believe we're at a pivotal point in our society, now more than ever. Many people have told me they are concerned and feeling hopeless about the future, their jobs, the economy and debt. I've had conversations about dictatorship, socialism, communism and whether we still have a democratic society, because they believe they have lost their freedoms and rights. I've been asked why, at a time when they can lose their freedoms that their father or grandfather had fought for. The conversations I had were not only about Canada's debt but that of other countries around the world. They want to know the plan and how society is going to exist when future generations will have to bear these huge financial burdens. People find themselves isolated and having financial, emotional and physical hardships.

Mr. Chair, we need true, strong leadership, not catchphrases. The words and actions we choose now will create the society we strive towards.

The Chair: Mr. Cannings.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Chair, today is World Oceans Day. My riding is landlocked, but beautiful rivers run through it: the Okanagan, Kettle, Slokan, Kootenay and the mighty Columbia. Each year, the ocean returns to my riding in the form of salmon; sockeye, chinook and n'titxw, as they are known in the Okanagan language. Salmon have nourished people in this region for millennia. Tragically, their numbers collapsed in the 20th century when dams were built throughout the Columbia system. Although a few managed to return each year to the Okanagan, the upper Columbia stocks were wiped out with the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam.

Thanks to the recovery efforts of the Okanagan Nation Alliance, salmon numbers in the Okanagan have increased dramatically in recent years, and I say *Lim'limpt* to them. The renegotiation of the Columbia River Treaty opens the possibility that once again salmon will return to the upper Columbia, bringing the ocean back to the Kootenays.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will continue with Mrs. Vignola.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Chair, in three days, Beauport—Limoilou lost three men who have worked their entire lives for the betterment of their fellow citizens.

On May 26, Raymond-Marie Juneau, a volunteer involved for more than four decades in Beauport, passed away. He was the recipient of several awards recognizing his involvement, including the Lieutenant Governor's Medal in 2014.

On May 27, Jacques Langlois, mayor of Beauport from 1984 to 2001, then municipal councillor, left us. Mr. Langlois helped Beauport get through the dark economic times of the 1980s and early 1990s. Until recently, people called him "Mr. Mayor", demonstrating their deep attachment to this larger-than-life man.

On May 28, Raymond Déry also left us. This man, who was constantly smiling, was so involved in organizing leisure activities in Limoilou that a room at the Jean-Guy-Drolet Community Centre bears his name.

To the families of these three men who gave so much to their community, I offer my deepest condolences.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Barbara Hillary was 75 years old when she became the first black woman to reach the North Pole.

Susan B. Anthony was 80 years old when she formed the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.

Alex Trebek, aged 79 years old, continues his philanthropic efforts despite battling cancer.

Benjamin Franklin was 70 years of age when he signed the Declaration of Independence.

Mother Teresa was 69 years of age when she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa at age 75.

Mr. Chair, seniors are not a burden. They are a blessing and a gift to our community. They provide wisdom, love and kindness to our community. We need to provide seniors with the life they deserve, a life of dignity; not just because of the fidelity or loyalty we owe them all for building this great country but also because we need their wisdom more than ever during these tumultuous times. Our children need their grandparents' reassurance, our young need their guidance and we could all benefit from their love.

Let's take a moment, Mr. Chair, and thank our seniors, not just for their sake but for ours.

• (1225)

The Chair: Ms. Duncan.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I have attended funeral after funeral of young black men and held grieving mothers in my arms while they cried for their sons and the safety of their children. I march time and again for change, but change hasn't happened.

Our families live the differences in our schools, streets and workplaces. Our Etobicoke North community is hurting because yet again another black man, George Floyd, has tragically been killed. People of all backgrounds are taking part in anti-black racism protests and vigils across Canada and around the world to show solidarity and to demand an end to systemic racism. Anti-black racism is real; systemic racism is real; unconscious bias is real, and they do happen in Canada.

Our community will always stand against racism, and I will always stand with our community. After hundreds of years of failed moments, this must be our watershed.

The Chair: We will now proceed to questioning of ministers.

[Translation]

Please note that we will suspend the proceedings every 45 minutes in order to allow the employees providing support for the sitting to spell each other off safely.

[English]

We'll now go on to the first question. It will be from the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Scheer.

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

Mr. Chair, the government has been telling Canadians for months now that they must not gather in large groups. The government, of course, has to set the right example. Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell the House whether the government's advice as to public large gatherings has changed?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Mr. Chair, thank you for that very important question from the leader of the official opposition. I have agonized over this myself, personally, quite a lot.

I think that the leader of the official opposition must be referring to the many—

The Chair: We now go back to the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, the Deputy Prime Minister herself said last week that she did not participate in mass gatherings in order to respect appropriate physical distancing. She said, "As a mother, I have been struggling very hard to say to my children that they can't see their friends, and they can't be in groups, so setting an example on that front is also an important one for me."

She clearly thinks it would have been wrong for her to attend large mass gatherings. Does she think it was okay for Justin Trudeau to do it?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The leader of the official opposition has inaccurately quoted the comments that I made last week, but those comments did sincerely reflect what I think is the debate or the struggle all of us have been having about two realities. One is the absolute imperative to honour peaceful protests and for Canadians—

The Chair: We go back to Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: It's a simple question, Mr. Chair. Canadians have been told that they cannot visit their loved ones, that they cannot attend funerals. Tragically, so many Canadians have had to say goodbye to relatives over Skype.

Is the Deputy Prime Minister now saying that all of those precautions no longer need to be followed and that people can visit relatives who are in care homes or who are facing illness?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Let me be clear about something the Leader of the Opposition said in his previous question. I strongly support the action that our Prime Minister took on Friday in joining the anti-black racism protest. The fact that our Prime Minister was there sent an essential message to Canadians and the world. He was also wearing a mask, which is very important.

In my own comments last week—

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

Hon. Andrew Scheer: It was sending a message, Mr. Chair. It was sending a double-standard message. The government has been telling small business owners that they have to watch their life savings disappear. It has been telling Canadians that they cannot visit their loved ones in hospital and have to say goodbye over Skype to relatives who are dying.

Are all of those precautions and public health advice now ended? In other words, is it okay for people to start gathering in large public gatherings, patronizing restaurants and visiting relatives?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I think it is essential for us to honour the right of Canadians and, indeed, of people around the world to make their political views known by peacefully protesting. That is an essential element of democracy and of people fighting for equality.

• (1230)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: No one is denying that Canadians have the right to protest, but what is at question is Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the one hand telling Canadians that they have to follow public health advice and on the other hand attending a large public gathering.

Is the Deputy Prime Minister now saying that Canadians should pick and choose when they listen to public health advice?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, in my comments last week and in the comments from our chief public health officer last week, clear advice was offered to Canadians who wanted to exercise their right to peaceful protest. The advice was to wear masks. The advice was to bring hand sanitizer. The advice was to be careful. That is very important, so is the—

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

Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, there have also been very clear messages to the public public regarding advice.

I think it's extremely important that Canadians continue to behave as we have largely in social distancing and staying home, in keeping ourselves, our loved ones, our families, our extended families, our seniors, our health care workers, and our essential workers safe from rapid spread of COVID-19.

Do you know who said that? Justin Trudeau said that, and yet on the weekend he attended a large public gathering, flying in the face of his own advice.

Also on the weekend, a local business here in Ottawa received an \$880 ticket for providing takeout food to customers who then were seated on a patio just near, blocks away, from where thousands of people were gathering in close quarters with each other.

Does the government think that the ticket to that business was fair?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I would like to be extremely clear about our government's position, and I would like to invite the official opposition to be equally clear about its position.

Now is a time in the world when all of us have to state our views. All of us have to be clear on whether we stand against anti-black racism or not. To be silent is to be complicit.

In attending that protest, in being visible for Canadians and the world, the Prime Minister sent an essential message to everyone in our country.

The Chair: Before we go on to the next question, I just want to point out that there's a five-minute period to ask questions, so keep your questions within that five-minute period.

One thing we talked about the last time was about the last question, cutting the question off when I see that half of the time has been consumed before the end. I'm afraid I'm going to have to go to that, because it seems that sometimes some members ask their question in a lot longer time than what is allotted. Hopefully we won't have to enforce it, and it'll happen very well.

The other thing that was brought up was normally, if there are only 15 seconds left, we won't go to another question because there is not enough time.

[Translation]

I just wanted to clarify how things work so that everyone respects the parameters set by the House.

I now give the floor to Ms. Normandin.

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

At the beginning of April, the Bloc Québécois more or less predicted the situation. Unfortunately, and we take no pleasure in saying this, we predicted what is happening now.

While the Bloc Québécois was advocating prevention and a sense of accountability, the government shunned its responsibility to protect seasonal migrant workers by putting the burden of protection on the backs of farmers. It has also abandoned the farmers by telling them to deal with their problems themselves.

Unfortunately, today, we are seeing the consequences. A damning report has revealed racism, overwork, wage theft and inadequate housing conditions due to the quarantine requirements.

Can the Minister of Agriculture look both seasonal workers and farmers in the eye today and tell them that she has done an impeccable job handling the situation?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I would like to thank my colleague for her very important question.

I think this crisis has highlighted for all Canadians and all Quebecers the importance of the people doing essential work in our country. That absolutely includes seasonal farm workers.

I absolutely agree that we need to do better to protect them and ensure healthy and clean working conditions. This is obviously the obligation of employers, but it is also the obligation of all Canadians.

I want to thank the seasonal farm workers for their important and hard work.

• (1235)

Ms. Christine Normandin: The work of seasonal workers and farmers is actually so important that they should not have been responsible for implementing quarantine and monitoring measures.

A private group, the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, is currently telling us that some workers are in absolutely deplorable situations.

Why isn't the government giving us a status report rather than a private organization?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I have a few answers for that. First, organizations and civil society have a role to play in raising key issues. It is an essential part of our democracy. I also want to thank those who work in civil society.

When it comes to seasonal farm workers, our government is very aware of the importance of the issue. We are working in close cooperation with the provinces and public health authorities across the country—

The Chair: Ms. Normandin has the floor.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Unfortunately, the government's close cooperation has obviously been limited to sending \$1,500 to farmers, who have to fill out a phenomenal amount of paperwork to qualify.

Other than that, the government has done absolutely nothing to ensure compliance with the health regulations among seasonal workers and farmers.

Can the government tell me how many inspectors were sent out in the field to perform proper checks?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I must say there are some inconsistencies in the member's question. On the one hand, she says that the poor employers have too much paperwork, and on the other, she says that we need more inspectors to make sure that everything is fine with seasonal workers.

I share her view that it is very—

The Chair: Ms. Normandin, you have 36 seconds left.

Ms. Christine Normandin: I maintain that the government has completely abandoned its role in protecting seasonal workers and supporting farmers. It was not their responsibility to put those procedures in place.

The government did nothing. It did not issue directives and it did not do any checks after the fact.

Once again, can the government say to both seasonal and agricultural workers that it has managed the crisis responsibly?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Absolutely. This is a very important issue for us. We are working hard to ensure that the working conditions are healthy and clean. We are working with the workers themselves, with the provinces, with—

The Chair: I must give the floor to Mr. Singh.

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

I often say that the time for talk is over, and the time for symbolic gestures is also over, especially when the Prime Minister has the power to take meaningful action.

What meaningful action is the Prime Minister going to take to fight systemic racism against black people?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for his important question.

In response to the questions we have heard today in the House, I must say that symbols are also very important. Symbols are very important to our Prime Minister—

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

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's absolutely not enough for the Prime Minister to take a knee. He needs to take a stand. The Prime Minister has the power to actually change things for the better. Now, will the Prime Minister commit to concrete changes, like for example, with the RCMP, which is fully under federal jurisdiction? Will the Prime Minister commit to ensuring there's legislation that ends racial profiling by the RCMP?

• (1240)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'd like to personally thank the member opposite for the very specific role that he plays in our country today on this issue. It is important. Actions are important. So is standing on the right side and I'm very proud that's what the Prime Minister did on Friday.

The member opposite points to questions we all must have today about policing, including the RCMP.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: People across the country—people across the world—are calling for the defunding of the police. They're saying that there has to be a better way to prioritize the spending of our limited resources. They're saying that instead of spending money on policing, in many cases we should be spending that money on mental health.

Will the government commit to shifting resources to mental health workers and mental health services over the police?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: The member opposite has asked some important questions about the RCMP and about policing in Canada. Let me be clear about a few things. There can be no tolerance for racism or bias of any kind within police forces in Canada. We absolutely are aware that systemic discrimination, systemic racism, is real in Canada and that unconscious bias—

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: D'Andre Campbell in Brampton, Regis Korchinski-Paquet in Toronto, Chantel Moore in Edmundston, were all black or indigenous. They had mental health concerns. Police responded and they were killed.

Clearly something is wrong. Will the government accept, and just admit right now, that we need to be spending more money on mental health workers instead of police, that mental health workers should be responding to requests for wellness checks, not the police?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I absolutely agree with the member opposite that these are tragedies and I agree that we must act and do everything we can to ensure they are not repeated.

Acting includes anti-bias training in all of our police forces, including the RCMP. Acting includes, as the Prime Minister said, body cameras for police, and acting absolutely includes focusing even more on mental health. That has been a focus for our government and I agree so strongly with the member opposite that we must redouble our efforts. These deaths—

The Chair: Back to Mr. Singh. We have 45 seconds left.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Liberal government has spent and continues to spend nearly \$10 million a day on the RCMP. That's more in a day than the Liberal government has spent in an entire year on mental health services and funding for the black community.

Will the government fix this massive imbalance and start backing up the symbolic gestures with real concrete action?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, as the member opposite knows, mental health has been a focus of our government from the outset. It was something that we campaigned on in the election in

the fall. As all Canadians have been suffering through coronavirus, we have redoubled our efforts there.

But I agree with the member opposite. We have to do more. We have to do better. We are committed to doing that, and I hope we can work with the member opposite, with the NDP—

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, the Deputy Prime Minister just invited the opposition to clearly state its position, so allow me to do that.

Conservatives are clearly and unequivocally opposed to racism in all its forms and support calls to eliminate it. We are also clear on calling out hypocrisy, the hypocrisy of a government led by someone who wore blackface so many times that he lost count; a Prime Minister who fired the first indigenous Canadian to hold the position of Minister of Justice because she refused to go along with his interference in a criminal court case; a public servant who was disciplined because they dared to speak out against the government's handling of the blackface controversy; and, of course, the Minister of Public Safety, the chief of police who introduced card-checking in the city of Toronto.

We will absolutely and unequivocally call out the hypocrisy of this government when it comes to these kinds of issues. So, one more time, I will point out that Canadians have been told that they have to endure great hardship watching loved ones die alone, missing graduations and watching their life's work and small businesses evaporate. Is the government now telling Canadians that they can pick and choose which health advice they follow?

• (1245)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, let me start by saying that I welcome the clear and unequivocal statement against anti-black racism by the leader of the official opposition.

I think we in Canada need to understand that we are at a watershed moment for our country and the world. We are at a moment when we all have to take a stand. We have to take a stand either against racism, against anti-black racism...we have to say something that is painful for many of us to admit—

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yeah, you guys. Your boss—

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: —which is that systemic discrimination exists in our country.

I do have to say to the member opposite and to members of all parties here, this is such a monumental challenge. It is a challenge that calls on us to transform our society and our country, and I think we need to work together on that challenge and not fall victim, fall prey, not minimize it and belittle it with partisan bickering.

The Chair: Before we go to the next person, we're just going to take a short pause to allow our technicians, our technical backup, to rotate.

I noticed a few people shouting "time". I do want to remind them that I do have an Apple phone here that I keep time on, and I think it's very accurate. I appreciate the help.

As a disclosure, I do not have any shares in Apple.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: In case any of you are wondering about what's happening and what everyone sees in the bird's nest, the crow's nest, up there, there's a quick changeover, but there's also a changeover where all the background stuff gets done, and there is some sanitization that takes place.

[Translation]

It is very important to give them the time they need to do the work in order to protect the health of our employees.

Now we will go to Mr. Paul-Hus.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Chair, last Friday the Prime Minister attended a huge gathering of 7,000 people on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. The Prime Minister did not observe physical distancing rules, none of the rules that Canadians are being asked to observe to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Did the Prime Minister receive approval from Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Theresa Tam, to attend the gathering?

[English]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth): Mr. Chair, our government has been clear that we do not condone racism or discrimination in our country. We will speak out against anti-black racism, anti-indigenous racism and anti-Asian racism. Racism and discrimination exist in our country. It's important that we stand in solidarity, and that's exactly what our government is doing.

● (1250)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Chair, I agree with the minister. The government is trying to play games with us.

One thing is clear right now: we are in the middle of a COVID-19 pandemic and the government has spent hundreds of billions of dollars trying to deal with it. Entrepreneurs from all over Quebec and Canada are going to go bankrupt because of COVID-19, including some of my friends.

They are now trying to deflect the debate, but we are talking about the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Prime Minister showed up

at a demonstration and did not follow physical distancing guidelines, when he has been standing in front of Rideau Cottage for 70 days trying to make Canadians believe he is protecting himself.

Can you tell us whether the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, Theresa Tam, gave him permission to attend the demonstration? It is a simple question.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health): Mr. Chair, it's very important for all people who have exercised their democratic right to protest the extreme experience of racism that many Canadians, and in fact, international citizens, have faced, to remember that when they're doing so they can do so safely. As the member opposite knows, we've provided advice through the chief public health officer that if people are taking part in protests, they do so while respecting physical distancing when possible, while wearing a mask to protect others, and ensuring that they use signs and not shouting so that we can reduce the amount of droplets that spread from person to person.

Finally—

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Paul-Hus, you have 20 seconds left.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: In conclusion, if I understood correctly what the Minister of Health has just told us, the Quebec City Summer Festival can go ahead if people wear masks and keep quiet at the shows. Did I understand correctly? If 7,000 people can demonstrate while keeping quiet, then live shows in Quebec can resume.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, it's clear that in fact Canada is joining citizens around the world in fighting the pandemic of racism, which as you know also equally has terrible effects on people's health. As I've said—

The Chair: We'll now continue with a question from Ms. Bergen.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

On May 25, the Prime Minister, together with the help of the NDP, shut down Parliament, replaced it with this committee. Next week, parliamentarians are going to be asked to approve \$87 billion worth of spending with only four hours' worth of debate and oversight. That's \$87 billion of spending.

Now, it's clear from the Prime Minister's actions that he believes it's okay to gather in a public setting if the cause is worthy. I believe, and I think most Canadians would believe, that Parliament is a worthy setting.

Why won't this government recall Parliament? We can wear masks, we can be responsible, so that we can provide proper oversight, so committees can reconvene and we can do the really important work of democracy in overseeing this spending.

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Regarding the estimates, as she knows, there will be those four hours on the 17th, but since the estimates are public, they can ask questions about them today, tomorrow, the day afterwards, on Thursday, on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday, whenever they want. We're allowed to ask questions on anything, including the estimates, because they're public. On top of that, committees are meeting, so they can also ask questions during those committee sittings.

Hon. Candice Bergen: I'd just like to inform the minister that they do not have a majority government, and Parliament is still part of our democracy. This COVID committee does not replace Parliament, and it's sad to see the arrogance and the hypocrisy of Justin Trudeau, as well as this Liberal government.

Here we've seen an area where the government has been really unaccountable, and that's in infrastructure spending. Infrastructure Minister McKenna said they have funded 52,000 projects, but the Parliamentary Budget Officer said there are 20,000 that are unaccounted for. Therefore, we've asked the minister, will she table, will she make public, the 20,000 projects they're trying to hide from Canadians?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities): Mr. Chair, the simple answer to the honourable member's question is to look at the 10-year agreement that the Conservatives signed on the gas tax fund in 2014. It does not require provinces to provide detailed reporting on each project or its outcomes. In fact, Quebec isn't required to do project-by-project reporting at all.

We'll be looking for more accountability when we renegotiate the gas tax funds, for example, by requiring provinces and municipalities to publicly publish project details on their website.

In the meantime, it's quite something for the Conservatives to attack the accountability of a program they negotiated.

• (1255)

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Chair, it's the Parliamentary Budget Officer who has stated that there have been projects that money has been spent on but they don't know where it's gone. The government says they've spent \$10 billion on infrastructure; the Parliamentary Budget Officer says only \$5 billion. The government has an opportunity to be transparent and they need to table those projects.

Another area where they've been holding back is on the Auditor General's ability to provide oversight of this massive amount of spending. When the Conservatives put money into infrastructure, when we stimulated the economy during one of the great recessions, we put it into legislation that the Auditor General would provide oversight, and we provided funding for that.

Will the Liberals provide funding for the Auditor General and let the Auditor General audit all the spending that has happened over the last number of months?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Chair, first I would like to offer my congratulations to the new Auditor General for her appointment. I'd also like, on behalf of the government, to offer her our full support and collaboration. Her role is essential to our democracy, and we are all eager to work with her.

The Auditor General is more than welcome to share her concerns directly with the government, and I can assure her that my colleague the Minister of Finance, the President of the Treasury Board and all of us will take these concerns into account.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Hon. Candice Bergen: There is an ongoing pattern here, Mr. Chair. The Liberals don't want to be held accountable. They've shut down Parliament, even though it's clear the Prime Minister will show up for gatherings that he thinks are important. They're not funding the Auditor General, and they're not being transparent on money that they've spent on infrastructure. Usually this ends up being some sort of a Liberal scandal.

Why don't the Liberals just be transparent, recall Parliament and give the Auditor General the funding she needs?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Mr. Chair, the government actually worked with the Auditor General to increase funding levels in 2018-19, after they were cut by the previous Conservative government. Thanks to this funding, their office was able to add the equivalent of 38 new full-time staff to the team.

We're totally committed to working with the Auditor General and her staff on the important—

The Chair: We'll now move on to Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since April, there has been a notable increase in the number of political executions in Iran, while the world's attention was focused on COVID-19. What interventions has the Liberal government made with the Iranian regime to strongly condemn these increasing atrocities?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade): Mr. Chair, our government will always stand up for human rights across the world, and we will continue to do that work for Canada, and for Canadians.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, in June 2018, my honourable colleague Garnett Genuis tabled a motion, which was passed by this House, to immediately list the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist entity.

It's been two years now. What's the holdup?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, I want to assure the honourable member that human rights are absolutely a top priority for this government, and we will always stand up for it.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, as with all the questions I've posed in the last couple of sittings, there are all kinds of platitudes, but absolutely no action taken.

I'll give it another chance. What about the Magnitsky act? When will we use the Magnitsky act to sanction the leaders in the Iranian regime?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, we condemn the Iranian regime for its abuse of human rights, and I want to assure the honourable member that standing up for human rights is what we will do, what we will always continue to do.

• (1300)

Mr. David Sweet: My real concern, Mr. Chair, is that we have lost our way entirely, as far as human rights on the international stage are concerned.

What exactly is this UN security seat costing us?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, I want to assure the member that the work Canada does around the world, in global trade and in our relationships on the international stage, is—

Mr. David Sweet: What concrete steps has the government taken in the last two weeks to help Hong Kongers?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, our government has been clear. Our government stands with our allies, making a strong statement expressing our deep concern—

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, the Burmese government told the world that they were heading towards democracy, and gladly took millions of dollars from Canadian taxpayers. They continue to persecute the Rohingya and other minorities. What actions will this government take to increase the Magnitsky Law on the leaders of that regime?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, I want to assure my honourable colleague that our government will always stand up for human rights. It will continue to do that, and it will always do that.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, for 14 years, Huseyin Celil has been in prison in China, and now the two Michaels.

What exactly is the government doing to get their release?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, the two Michaels are Canadians and are our absolute top priority. We will continue to work tirelessly to secure their immediate release and to stand up for them as a Canadian government and as—

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, the IOC promotes the role of the Olympic Games in advancing human rights. Given the human rights record of the Chinese Communist regime, many are calling for a boycott of the 2022 Olympics. What is the government's position on this?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, our government will always stand up for human rights. We have a record of doing this, and we will continue to do this.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair, what promises has the Prime Minister made to other nations to have his long shot Security Council seat confirmed?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, I think everyone here will agree that Canada's leadership on the international stage and having an important voice standing up for human rights, standing for predictable global supply chains—

The Chair: Mr. Sweet, you have 30 seconds.

Mr. David Sweet: I'll try one more time.

Two years ago, the House passed a motion to immediately list the IRGC as a terrorist entity. When will that happen? Why is it taking two full years?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, our government has strong sanctions against Iran. We stand against the human rights abuses. We will always stand up against human rights abuses, today and always.

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

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Chair, the Canada-U.S. border is still closed for non-essential travel, which is splitting up spouses and splitting families apart. Families cannot be reunified due to the government's restrictions.

Even if someone can comply with all of the health regulations, why do the current travel restrictions not allow immediate family members of Canadian citizens to be reunited in Canada?

The Chair: The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I'd like thank the member opposite for that important question.

As the Prime Minister announced today, we are expanding the understanding of what counts as essential travel into Canada. As the member opposite points out, immediate family members of Canadians and of permanent residents will be allowed to come into Canada provided it is a journey of lasting duration and—

Ms. Lianne Rood: Mr. Chair, the Liberal list of banned weapons is getting longer and longer, with no rhyme or reason to it. The firearms reference table has changed weekly, with the RCMP interpreting it behind closed doors, leaving firearms owners and vendors guessing. Firearm purchases are now being made and even being deemed illegal retroactively.

When will the minister clarify the text of their order in council so that firearms owners and vendors don't have to operate in the dark?

• (1305)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, if I may, I just want to first finish my answer to the first question, because it is very important that all Canadians, all permanent residents and now their immediate family members coming into Canada will be subject to a mandatory quarantine order. I just want to make very clear to them and to all Canadians that it must be followed. It will be enforced. I do want to thank the premiers on their collaboration around these border rules—

Ms. Lianne Rood: Mr. Chair, she didn't answer my previous question. Will the minister answer the question, please?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Yes, for sure. The border regulations are important. I wanted to be sure there was clarity on that.

When it comes to the ban on military—

Ms. Lianne Rood: She still doesn't want to answer the question, but I'll move along. Maybe she can't answer it.

Mr. Chair, farmers are having a tough year with increased expenses and production challenges. With COVID-19 and its restrictions on the economy ongoing, farmers are still facing market disruptions. We've heard from countless farmers that AgriStability just doesn't help them.

Will the minister announce meaningful BRM changes before the July 3 deadline?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to assure my colleague that we are working hard to improve the business risk management programs, but since these programs have been changed by the previous government, with significant cuts, it's very hard now to get the agreement of all the provinces to increase the financing.

The Chair: Ms. Rood.

Ms. Lianne Rood: It was your government that negotiated the last deal.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, Liberal mistakes have already cost our soy and canola farmers export markets. When Australia spoke out against China, they were slapped with 80% tariffs on their barley. Now, Canadian ginseng farmers are unable to sell their crop to China. Has the minister spoken with her Chinese counterpart to rectify the situation? What concrete actions will this Liberal government take to help these farmers?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, restoring full market access for canola seed exports to China is a top priority for us. The issues faced by the canola sector in the last year underscore the critical importance of diversification to reduce risk of market closures or overreliance on a single export market.

Ms. Lianne Rood: Mr. Chair, last week in the industry committee, my colleague Michelle Rempel put forward a motion to study the problems of foreign buyouts of Canadian-owned companies that are being hit hard by the pandemic. The non-partisan motion passed despite all the Liberals voting against it.

Keeping national security in mind, why is the government so reluctant to safeguard all Canadian interests and protect Canadian companies?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry): Mr. Chair, we have clear provisions to protect Canadians under the Investment Canada Act. The net benefit analysis is there to make sure that vulnerable Canadian companies are given the benefit through this process, and we make sure when it comes to national security as well that all such transactions are subject to assessments.

The Chair: Now we'll go on to Ms. Rood, for a 10-second question if possible.

Ms. Lianne Rood: Mr. Chair, last week the member for Kingston was reportedly calling on the government to make information on the Internet surrounding COVID-19 accurate. This isn't the first time that the government has been toying with the idea of truth arbitration. I'd like to give the government a chance to set the record straight: Will the government be regulating content on the Internet, yes or no?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Chair, we have very clear provisions in place to make sure that when it comes to online content it's consistent with Canadian laws.

The Chair: I'll go on to Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Chair, can the minister inform the House what the average livestock price insurance premium for a cow-calf operator was a year ago?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, we are supporting our farmers in different ways. Recently, for the meat sector, we have opened the AgriRecovery program to support—

Mr. Martin Shields: Can the minister inform the House what the insurance rate is now?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I understand that the price of insurance on livestock has increased considerably under COVID-19. We have put in place various programs that—

• (1310)

[English]

Mr. Martin Shields: Can the minister inform the House by what percentage the insurance rate has increased since the pandemic?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, we have put in place the AgriRecovery program to support the beef sector, as well as the \$77.5 million—

Mr. Martin Shields: Can the minister inform the House how many head of cattle the JBS and Cargill meat-packing plants process per day at full capacity?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, as I said, we are supporting the meat sector in a significant way. We have put in place the AgriRecovery fund. With the collaboration of the provinces, it means \$50 million in addition to the processing fund.

Mr. Martin Shields: Can the minister inform the House at what capacity these plans are currently operating?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, once again, we have put in place a fund of \$77.5 million to support the food-processing—

Mr. Martin Shields: Can the minister tell what percentage of cattle in feedlots is currently being sold to processing plants?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, I know the meat sector is having a hard time because of COVID, because its employees have to work in—

Mr. Martin Shields: The feedlots are full. How much longer will the money the federal government committed to the set-aside program sustain feedlot operators?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: We are supporting the processing plants with a \$77.5 million fund.

Mr. Martin Shields: How is the amount of money determined to be enough to support our beef supply chain?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Once again, there is more than one program under the business risk management program. There is also the AgriStability, the AgriInvest—

Mr. Martin Shields: Seed potato growers don't qualify for the surplus food purchase program under the federal criteria: no seeds, no potatoes. Will the government correct this oversight in Alberta?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I'm very well aware of the situation. Actually, I've spoken to the industry once again this morning. We have all the business risk management programs in place and we are working hard to fill some gaps.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you for that one. I appreciate that.

Now we'll go back to the insurance on the AgriStability. When we talk about the insurance rate, if your insurance rate increased by 400%, do you think that's a program you'd buy into?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: We are supporting our farmers through different programs. The provincial governments also do support through different programs. You can see some of this support through buying insurance in other provinces.

The Chair: Mr. Shields, we have 34 seconds left.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, I appreciate it.

We've talked about AgriStability a number of times. We've talked about the shortcomings in it. There are very few people who buy into it. The agricultural sector's just over 30%. Why are just 30% plus buying into this program?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I have to remind my colleague that when they were in the government, they cut \$400 million from these programs, and these programs are cost-shared with the provinces, so it's not always easy to get the provinces back and to find an agreement, but we're working hard on that.

[Translation]

The Chair: We'll now continue with Mr. Therrien.

Mr. Therrien.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Chair, I'd like to inform you that I'll be sharing my time with the hon. member for Joliette.

Last week, the government offered the provinces transfers worth \$14 billion to help them overcome the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to prepare for recovery.

The provinces immediately responded that it was nowhere near enough, but also that the money was being paid for areas under provincial jurisdiction. The federal government did not deny that the areas were indeed under provincial jurisdiction. However, it played armchair quarterback by imposing conditions on these transfers.

It's the provinces and Quebec that are on the front lines. It's the provinces and Quebec that know their needs. It's the provinces and Quebec that set their priorities. Why would the federal government not simply give this money to the provinces and trust them?

• (1315)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his important question.

We agree that the \$14 billion—I'd like to stress that amount—that the Prime Minister talked about last Friday is money. This money that the Prime Minister offered to the provinces is very important because the federal government understands the importance of economic recovery. We understand the importance of having a healthy and successful economic recovery. We also understand, of course, the importance of close co-operation with all the provinces, including Quebec.

Mr. Alain Therrien: This is fair proof of predatory federalism. The \$14 billion is the money of Quebec and Canadian taxpayers.

In the federal government, you think you're being nice because you're giving \$14 billion with strings attached to be sure it's going to be well spent. Yet, we're talking about areas under the jurisdiction of the provinces and Quebec, which you know nothing about.

Don't try to start thinking about what the provinces should do with the money, since you don't know anything about it and these aren't areas within your expertise. Instead, trust the provinces and Quebec, instead of acting like predators with the money of Quebec taxpayers.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.)): There isn't really time for a response, unless it's very brief.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I don't think offering \$14 billion is being predatory. I think offering \$14 billion is co-operation, and we're proud of that.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Chair, it's the way it's being done that's the problem.

We'll stop sitting in two weeks. Will the government provide an economic update by then?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance): Madam Chair, being transparent with Canadians is very important.

When the situation is more stable, we'll have an opportunity to explain our economic situation.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I have to say that if the minister had said yes, it would have started the week off really well.

The economy is starting to recover. We're slowly moving towards a recovery. At the very least, we need to know the state of the situation, which includes a picture of the economic situation and all the government's emergency measures, and whether or not it intends to extend them over the summer. It also needs to tell us how it plans to do it. As the minister said, the government needs to be transparent.

Why isn't the government giving us an update?

I don't understand it. Is the government scared? Is it hiding something from us?

I'd like him to explain this to me.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, I'd like to thank the hon. member for his very important question.

We want to have a transparent approach and more information for Canadians.

Soon, when the situation is more stable, we will have an opportunity to explain our economic situation.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Does “soon” mean “within the next two weeks”?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, as I said, we're in the process of looking at the stability of the economy. Of course, it's important to be transparent about our situation.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Ste-Marie, you have 30 seconds left, 15 if you want an answer.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We've been making this request for more than a month. It's been a month since the Parliamentary Budget Officer urged the government to quickly submit an economic update. It would be good if it were to happen within the next two weeks.

• (1320)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Madam Chair, I understand the question.

Of course, we're transparent every day about our investments. I fully agree, it is always necessary to be transparent about our economic situation. We are waiting until the situation is stable enough to give precise explanations.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard, Mr. Zuberi, has the floor.

[English]

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Over the last two weeks, from Halifax to Vancouver, Calgary to Whitehorse, Canadians have been seized with the Black Lives Matter movement. Yesterday evening, in my own riding of Pierrefonds—Dollard, Kemba Mitchell and the West Island Black Community Association organized a virtual town hall attended by 500 people. Earlier in the day, I took a knee at a Montreal vigil organized by Denburk Reid for the Montreal Community Cares Foundation. On social media, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, parents and young people are all saying that we must do much more to confront anti-black racism and systemic discrimination. Films like *13th* that explain the link between racial inequality and over-incarceration are trending online. Everyone is asking how we can move beyond allyship to concrete action. Studies show that black Canadians and indigenous peoples aren't any more likely to commit a crime than the general population. However, over-policing and over-incarceration of these communities is well documented.

Deputy Prime Minister, in the spirit of moving us forward, can the government inform the House what measures are being taken by the government to address over-incarceration of indigenous and black Canadians while working to collect and publicly report on race-based data?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me start by thanking the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard for his tireless advocacy on these important issues.

We know that indigenous peoples and black Canadians are over-represented in our criminal justice system, and that needs to change. We are making important investments to support the reintegration of indigenous offenders into their communities and advancing restorative justice approaches while strengthening agreements for healing lodges, which incorporate indigenous values, traditions and beliefs. We are also providing black Canadian offenders with services aimed at supporting their reintegration, including support for career building and mentorship, engaging community members to provide training and funding community organizations.

Furthermore, we will invest an additional \$11 million to ensure that all enforcement and security agencies have access to bias-free training we will and implement mandatory training on unconscious bias for all judges in Canada. We know that better, more precise and more consistent tracking, collection and measurement of data are needed and that we have a lot more work to do.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Next is the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I know at the outset of this pandemic a big concern of our government was the possibility that we could in places run out of ventilators, as tragically occurred in northern Italy.

Now that hasn't happened and hopefully it won't happen, but the pandemic is far from being over and certainly a lot of people are predicting further waves to come. I don't think we are going to run out of ventilators because we've started to mass-produce them here in Canada. I want to give a big shout-out of congratulations to the Bombardier plant here in Thunder Bay, which as of last week started mass-producing portable ventilators. They're doing a fantastic job. Keep up the good work.

I also want to congratulate O-Two in Brampton, which is part of the same endeavour.

Another big concern of mine as a long-time emergency room doctor, and I know this is a shared concern of our government, is PPE. I want to ask a question specifically about N95 masks. Last week in *The Lancet*, there was a big meta-analysis, which pretty clearly seemed to indicate that for most health care workers, N95 masks are superior to surgical masks in preventing transmission of disease.

I know this is an area of primarily provincial jurisdiction, but can our relevant ministries please tell us what we are doing to ensure our health care workers will get those N95 masks?

• (1325)

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement): Madam Chair, Canadian businesses of all sizes, right across the country, have truly stepped up to protect Canadians. Since the outset of the pandemic and the launch of Canada's plan to mobilize industry, domestic manufacturing has ramped up significantly with deliveries under way of gowns, masks, respirators and ventilators. We've been working collaboratively with the provinces and territories to ensure that we can fulfill all requests of PPE needed by our front-line health care workers. We've so far distributed over 2.7

million N95 masks and hundreds of ventilators, along with millions of units of other critically important supplies.

Our absolute priority is to make sure that our front-line health care workers have the supplies they need to protect themselves and their patients. We are buying to meet Canada's needs in the short and the long term, in order to be ready for any eventuality.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Next is the honourable member for Cloverdale—Langley City.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Madam Chair, four weeks ago, I received a message that my niece's wedding was no longer going ahead as planned this summer due to COVID-19.

Does Minister Hajdu believe that wedding celebrations continue to pose a serious health risk to the community—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Just a moment, please.

We skipped Mr. Harris because he is having technical difficulties. That's why we went to Ms. Jansen. I'm sorry. I should have explained that before.

We are going to restart. You have the floor, Ms. Jansen.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Shall I start over? Maybe that would be easier.

Four weeks ago I received a message that my niece's wedding was no longer going ahead as planned this summer due to COVID-19.

Does Minister Hajdu believe that wedding celebrations continue to pose a serious health risk to the community?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I would just like to remind the member that it is very important to follow the local public health advice. As we know, it is different across the country, depending on the epidemic in any particular region.

I have great faith and also a great respect for the hard-working local public health officers and public health nurses, and I want to thank them for being so thoughtful in the advice they are giving to the people in their own communities in terms of how to protect themselves.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Recently I attended an outdoor Eid ceremony and the first outdoor call to prayer in Canada. Only a handful of people were given permission to attend due to COVID-19.

Does the minister believe that outdoor religious gatherings continue to pose a serious health risk to the community?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, what is clear is that crowded situations where people are very close to each other, where they are in prolonged contact and have no ability to physically distance, do pose an elevated risk for COVID-19. That's why we reminded all people who took part in the many protests across the country this weekend to monitor themselves very closely for symptoms. I would remind all people who have attended any gathering to make sure that at the first sign of any symptom, they should contact their local public health—

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): I have a point of order, just to clarify that time will not be deducted from but added to Mrs. Jansen's time.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will give her that 10 seconds, yes.

Mrs. Jansen, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Three weeks ago, a local high school made plans to hold a drive-by graduation in a large parking lot, with arrangements for all attendees to remain in their cars. Unfortunately, the restrictions did not permit this due to COVID-19. Does the minister believe that drive-by graduations actually pose a serious health risk to the community?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What the minister believes is that our local public health officers and health officials are working incredibly hard to make sure they protect the health of the Canadians they serve. I also believe it's important that we follow the local public health advice and that if we are in a gathering, we make sure that we monitor ourselves for symptoms and report to public health should we suspect that we are at all ill.

• (1330)

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Last week my niece gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. No visitors were allowed in the hospital due to COVID-19. Does the minister believe that visiting new mothers in the hospital continues to pose a serious health risk to the community?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It appears that the member opposite is not understanding my response. My response is that we have incredibly hard-working public health officers and medical officers of health who are balancing the need for Canadians to continue their lives with some sense of normality, and the need to protect them from the risk of contracting COVID-19.

I stand with those public health officers as they make those incredibly difficult decisions every single day. I also thank Canadians for the sacrifices they're making to protect their neighbours, their friends and their loved ones.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: This summer, the annual Cloverdale Rodeo Parade in my riding has been cancelled due to COVID-19. Does the minister believe that outdoor parades continue to pose a serious health risk to the community?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, the measures in place in communities—

A Child's Voice: Walker, we have no Mountain Dew.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have a little technical problem

Could everybody mute their microphones, please.

[*Translation*]

That will allow us to hear the minister's response.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: How much time do I have left?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): You have one minute and 22 seconds.

Is the minister back?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We know that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] be in place based on the biggest activities and risks in their communities. We know that people are heeding public health advice to protect their loved ones, and I want to thank all Canadians for continuing to do so.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: Dr. Tam recently stated that attending a protest with hundreds of masked and unmasked people walking through town is safe, as long as they don't yell too loudly. Does the minister concur with Dr. Tam that large crowds of protesters gathered in downtown streets do not pose a serious threat to the health of our community, as long as they don't yell too loudly?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I think it's inappropriate for the member opposite to put words in Dr. Tam's mouth. She did not say that attending a large gathering was safe. She said that when people were exercising their democratic right to protest racist conditions that exist across the world, there were in fact ways to do so more safely. She advised people not to yell loudly and to carry signs instead to reduce the risk of spreading droplets among one another.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: If Canadians are allowed to take a knee in a large protest, they should be allowed to take a knee in prayer. If we do not see a COVID-19 outbreak in seven to 10 days following these protests, will the minister commit to allowing Canadians from all faith communities to go back to their places of worship for open air services, as long as they don't sing too loudly?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The member opposite is very confused about who actually places restrictions on local activities. In fact, the federal government does not have any jurisdiction, nor has it put any restrictions on people's activities in terms of what is and isn't allowed in a particular jurisdiction.

I would refer her back to her local public health unit, and she can ask those questions of her local public health unit. It is very important to follow local public health advice to members of communities on how to—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are now going to Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Chair, like most Canadians, I'm shocked, horrified and angry after seeing the video of an RCMP officer using his truck door to attack and knock down a 22-year-old Inuk man in Nunavut. The officer is then joined by several other members as they jump on him and pin him to the ground, an outrageous act of brutality.

Sadly, this is not news to the people in the north. Nunavut's legal aid agency says that Inuit, especially women, suffer systemic police abuse, including excessive violence and persistent racism.

What is the Minister of Public Safety doing to eliminate indigenous racism and police misconduct within the RCMP?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Regardless of where they live, all Canadians deserve to feel safe in their communities. That very much includes our Inuit community, and it includes all indigenous Canadians.

I am aware of the graphic video that is circulating online. It's shocking and deeply disturbing. Immediately upon review, the officer was removed from the community and an independent investigation was launched.

We all must and will do better.

• (1335)

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, the Inuit in Nunavut live with mistrust and fear of the RCMP. They exist to serve and protect all Canadians, including this man, yet this officer appears to act, in front of other officers, without any fear of repercussions.

The legal aid allegations include repeated and systemic instances of unnecessary violence in the 25 communities policed by the RCMP in Nunavut. A systemic problem requires a systemic solution. What is the minister's systemic plan to address this clear evidence of over-policing and abuse?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me truly thank the member opposite for raising this essential issue in this House. He is absolutely right that systemic racism does exist in our country, and that does require a systemic solution.

In order to resolve this, we need to acknowledge the problem. We need to talk about it in this House, which is what we are doing. We are absolutely committed to doing whatever it takes to ensure that these behaviours do not happen in the future.

The Prime Minister today spoke about his own commitment to work with the premiers on body cameras. That is one step—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go back to Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: It's certainly good to acknowledge that indigenous racism exists in our police force, and particularly our national police force, which has been policing indigenous people for nearly 150 years with its predecessor.

We've had, since 2018-19, nearly 3,000 complaints about the conduct of RCMP officers to the review and complaints commission. That is a 13% increase over the previous year, and excessive use of force is one of the most common complaints.

What do the government and the minister plan to do to address this rise in complaints and solve the problem we currently have in the RCMP, the national police force?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member opposite for drawing attention to this very important issue. The member said in one of his questions that this is a long-standing issue that indigenous communities, Inuit communities and legal aid lawyers have been pointing to for a very long time.

I am very aware of that, because throughout my childhood my mother was a legal aid lawyer in northern Alberta. I can still remember some of the horrific stories she told us about the abuse of her clients.

It is long past time for us to ensure that all indigenous people in Canada and all Inuit people in Canada do not fear the police, do not fear the RCMP, but see Canada's police as serving them and working for them, which is their job.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Harris, you have about 10 seconds.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Chair, I don't know what kind of question I can ask in 10 seconds, but I can say that we've had 150 years of the RCMP imposing race-based laws on indigenous people, and something very, very significant has to be done to change that. I think we have to treat it as a crisis and try to find a crisis-based solution for this systemic racism.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are now going to pause to allow our technical experts to do the necessary changes. We are suspended for a few minutes.

• (1335)

(Pause)

• (1340)

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will recognize the honourable member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I have a simple question. Do the Liberals believe that access to information is an essential service in Canada?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I'd like the member to repeat the question, please.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Sure. I would ask that my time also be restarted.

Again, I have a simple question. Do the Liberals believe that access to information is an essential service in Canada?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Chair, I failed to hear the question the first time around.

Of course the answer is yes. Access to information is absolutely key in all normal circumstances, and absolutely essential in the emergency circumstances in which we are living currently.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Actions speak much louder than words. In fact, we heard in committee last week that the infrastructure minister, Catherine McKenna, refused to reveal whether or not 20,000 projects even exist, and the Information Commissioner has launched an investigation into the government's processing of access to information requests, also known as ATIPs.

Why doesn't the government back up its words with action when it comes to ATIPs?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, again I would like to assure all members of this House that access to information is absolutely key to the working of our institutions. It's also absolutely key for Canadians to understand the impact of this important investment we're making to help them go through the crisis.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Chair, this is stunning hypocrisy. The Liberals claim to care about transparency, but, as in almost every aspect of the way they govern, their words simply do not represent reality, and no number of deliverology consultants seem to be able to fix that. It's always "do as I say, not as I do", and that is nowhere more true than in the case of transparency and improving access to information processes.

Over the last five years, outcomes for transparency have not improved, and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have gone from bad to worse. According to the government's own ATIP website, only 12 departments or agencies out of more than 250 that are subject to the Access to Information Act are currently accepting ATIPs.

The question is simple. Was Minister Duclos aware that about 95% of government agencies and departments are not accepting ATIPs during a time when they have nearly doubled government spending and shut down Parliament?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, I would first like to thank the public servants who are working extremely hard in the context of emergency circumstances that have big impacts on both their personal and their professional lives. All the public servants that I know of understand as well that their work is important, not only in terms of the emergency but also in terms of the transparency of their actions. I would like to congratulate them and thank them, and I would like to encourage them to keep doing the essential work that they do, including the work they do in providing essential information to Canadians.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Chair, we thank the public servants. It's the Liberals who have a problem with accountability.

There are reports that ministerial staff have indicated that submitted ATIPs will simply not be followed up on. This is not only a stunning lack of transparency but also a contravention of the act. It's illegal and goes against a government bill, Bill C-58.

Has the minister issued a directive, or has the TBS issued direction to its department, regarding how essential it is to ensure that ATIP requests are fulfilled?

• (1345)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you for the opportunity to also thank someone else, the Information Commissioner, who I've had the chance of working with and talking to in the last few weeks. We both agreed very quickly on the importance of public information and of making it easier for all Canadians, including members of Parliament, to have access to the important information they need in the current crisis.

I will keep working with all members of the House and other colleagues across the government to make sure this information is easily and freely accessible.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Again, the words simply do not represent the reality, even as to what the Access to Information Commissioner has said, so I encourage the minister to listen more carefully.

Is the minister aware that provinces don't seem to have the same issue when it comes to ATIPs that the federal government does?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable minister has 25 seconds.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, I'll use my 25 seconds to again thank all public servants for the work that they do and to remind everyone that we are in a situation of urgency and a situation in which the transparency of our actions is important. I look forward to working with all members of the House to make sure that this work continues.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Again, we're learning that the Liberals are abandoning Quebec's regions. The regional relief and recovery fund is a fund for the regions, yet they are taking \$30 million out of that fund and sending it to Montreal.

How is it that the Liberals are putting our regions second?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages): Madam Chair, our regions are very important, which is why we've doubled the budget of all the economic development agencies in the country to support our regions.

At the same time, since the pandemic is currently hitting Montreal, we have to be where the need is.

Hon. Steven Blaney: It isn't necessary to steal from Peter to pay Paul.

I have a question for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The show *Oh Canada Eh?* is a key event that takes place in Niagara Falls. How is it that, despite the minister's announcement of millions of dollars, the venue for this show has to shut down?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his question.

As you know, we've announced a \$500 million emergency fund that is starting to be deployed. The second phase of this fund, a portal, will be online in the next few days. Organizations across the country will be able to register and apply.

We are in a historic situation, a crisis that we certainly haven't experienced in a hundred years. It may take some time before we can roll out our programs, but we are working hard to do so.

Hon. Steven Blaney: For over two months now, artists, our cultural producers, have lacked resources. The minister announces funding, but the money doesn't materialize.

When will this money be available to support our artists, specifically in the context of the temporary aid measures coming to an end?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Madam Chair, I deeply disagree with my colleague. Our government has invested \$2.5 billion to help the arts and culture sector and our artists. We've done a lot.

I'm aware that we need to do more, and we're working on that.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, on May 26, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced that he wanted to create just 700 new positions to support our young people in agriculture, when it's 10,000 jobs we need in Quebec.

When will these positions be available for our farmers?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, the positions are available. Interested producers can make their request. They simply need to go to the Agriculture Canada website at agr.gc.ca.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Madam Chair, apparently it can take close to 50 working days to make a decision. The summer will be over.

What is the minister waiting for to fill these positions, which are on a first come, first served basis, as is the case? Producers have been applying for several weeks now already. They need people.

What is the minister waiting for to send these young people where they're needed?

• (1350)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Madam Chair, I assure you: when it comes to the program, the maximum administrative time limit is 50 days. The files will be processed as quickly as possible.

Hon. Steven Blaney: These jobs are needed now. These people are needed now.

My next question is for the Minister of Public Safety.

Does he acknowledge that his political and partisan classification of firearms is based on subjective and aesthetic criteria, without regard for public safety?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for his question. I have to say, I absolutely disagree with the question.

I know the Conservatives disagree with us that it's important to control firearms. It's a real political difference.

As a woman, especially, I feel that we have taken the right position.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Actually, we agree with having an effective system. The Liberals are implementing ineffective measures that go after honest people.

Why aren't they following the advice of experts and police chiefs who say that we must fight criminal street gangs and illegal weapons, rather than attacking honest citizens?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I'm delighted the hon. member is quoting police chiefs because I also have some quotes from police chiefs.

[English]

Mark Saunders, the Toronto police chief, said on Friday, May 1, taking military assault-style rifles off the street contributes to public safety. He said, "I support any step that helps prevent the circulation of these weapons that endanger families and communities."

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are now going to Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Madam Chair, thank you.

In my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, there are several gunsmiths who are in possession of specialized guns worth in excess of \$20,000. According to the minister, these collector guns are now illegal.

Does the minister plan to buy back these collectibles at a low price, or will the minister be buying them back at their full value with taxpayer dollars?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me be very clear. What is illegal and was illegal from the date of the OIC was the sale of these assault-style weapons. I am proud of our government for taking that essential and indeed long-overdue step.

It is also the case that we have not made illegal previously legal conduct, and owners may continue to have these guns provided they are safely stored and are not being used.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Chair, when the minister invoked the order in council gun ban, what was the budget the government approved for the buyback?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me point to what is essential about that action our government took. What is essential about that action is that as of the date of the OIC, we stopped additional weapons whose only purpose is to kill other people from coming into Canada.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Chair, as the list of prohibited guns is expanding daily, can the minister answer how many guns the government will potentially be buying back?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Let me be extremely clear with the member opposite and the party opposite. We have a clear political difference of opinion here, and I do not shy away from underscoring that.

Our government believes military-style assault weapons have no place in—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go back to Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Could it be 200,000?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me be very clear. We disagree about something very directly—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Go ahead, Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Chair, is the minister looking at a possible \$1 billion or more for the buyback and the huge administration costs?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I believe the member opposite is trying to muddy the waters and trying to distract Canadians from the clear question of whether Canadians want military-style assault weapons in our—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go back to Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Chair, the safety of Canadians is the number one priority.

How does the minister explain buying back legal guns from legal gun owners is a strategic priority when the safety of Canadians is at risk from gangs and organized crime, whose members are using illegal guns and are illegally possessing them?

• (1355)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I'm very grateful for that question, because it allows me to say what is absolutely essential to our government and to me personally in this historic action, which is that it is long past time to protect Canadians, and may I say particularly to protect Canadian women and girls from these weapons. After the Polytechnique, we all owe—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go back to Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Chair, will the minister please advise us as to the percentage of gun crimes that were committed using legally registered guns?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Again, I in no way shy away from the clear difference between our government and the official opposi-

tion. We think that Canada is a safer, healthier place without these military-style assault weapons, and I'm—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go back to Mr. Morrison.

Mr. Rob Morrison: Madam Chair, if the minister plans to spend \$1 billion on buying legal guns from legal gun owners, what's the government's budget to provide for the RCMP and the CBSA to once and for all stop the flow of illegal guns across the border?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, of course illegal weapons have no place in Canada, and illegal weapons should not be moved from the United States to Canada.

You know what else, Madam Chair? We as a government have an obligation to every single Canadian, particularly vulnerable—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go now to Ms. Atwin.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

On June 5, the indigenous services minister said that he was outraged in response to the act of police violence against indigenous people and the recent death of Chantel Moore. I too am outraged. Families want answers. We should all want answers.

I want to know if the Minister of Public Safety is outraged. Does he condemn the systemic discrimination among police forces in Canada?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for that very important question.

Yes, I am outraged. I think all of us are and need to be outraged. Absolutely, systemic discrimination and systemic racism exist everywhere in Canada. I am sad to say it exists in our hearts and in our minds, and we need to now take these tragedies and use them to change.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Go ahead, Ms. Atwin.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for that very thoughtful response.

On May 1, while introducing new firearms regulations, the Minister of Public Safety said, "And if now is not the time, when is?" If now is not the time to put an end to racial profiling, when is? If now is not the time to rethink how the police intervene during a wellness check, when is? If now is not the time to end the patterns of dehumanization and violence that keep repeating themselves, when is?

Madam Chair, I am asking the Minister of Public Safety if now is not the time to work to end systemic discrimination in the police forces and our justice system, when is?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, let me again thank the member for her question, and let me start by saying that now is the time. Now is the time for all of us to commit to the incredibly hard work of ending systemic discrimination and systemic racism in all Canadian institutions. That is something we all need to be committed to. It is something our government is committed to.

On the issue of racial profiling specifically, let me be clear that it is entirely unacceptable. It's wrong. Police forces mustn't do it.

Let me also thank the member for connecting in her question the ban on military-style assault weapons and the need for us together to work against systemic—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go to Ms. Atwin.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Across the country we see that police service is, in the vast majority of cases, the biggest single line item of an operating budget. Police are responding to tens of thousands of mental health calls each year. Studies show that the percentage of police work police that involves social issues is evergrowing, while coincidentally, we are seeing the defunding of multiple critical social services. Something is wrong here, and it is costing people their lives.

Can the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development advise on the vision of the government regarding this reality and share with this committee if there is any plan on the table toward ensuring that communities have access to the funds required to reinvest in the social services that the population critically needs?

• (1400)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development): Madam Chair, I'm very happy that the member asked this really important question.

We are there for families, for children and for our most vulnerable. We've introduced the emergency community support fund to make sure that we not only support organizations that are delivering essential services to the most vulnerable in our communities but also that we expand their capacity to do that.

We will be there for Canadian families. We will continue to be there for Canadian children and our seniors.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Madam Chair, charities are a key component of our communities, and they contribute immensely to strengthening the social fabric of this country, but because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are now facing billions in lost revenue, drastic service disruptions to essential community services and massive layoffs that disproportionately impact women. This sector is projected to lose \$15.6 billion in revenue and about 194,000 employees.

Can the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion share what the government's plan is to support charities and the essential work they do?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, once again I want to thank the honourable member for raising a really important issue. Charities provide key and essential services to Canadians. When Canadians need help, charities step up. We have to be there for them. The emergency community support fund is meant to do exactly that, with \$350 million to support charities and non-profits in Canada that are delivering really important and essential services to more Canadians than ever before.

There is a larger request from this sector for stabilization money. We have received those proposals, and we're studying them very carefully.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. McPherson is next.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be sharing my time with the member for Courtenay—Alberni today.

I rise again on behalf of people in my riding and across Canada who are living with disabilities. I am shocked by this government's announcement last week. They cynically waited until Friday of AccessAbility Week to announce supports for people living with disabilities. That was 12 weeks after the start of the pandemic and five weeks after they promised to deliver without delay, even though their corporate friends and big banks got funding within days of the pandemic being declared, and as usual, it was way too little and way too late.

Does the minister realize that over half the people living with disabilities in Canada—over 60%—will not be able to access these funds?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion): I thank you, Madam Chair, and the member opposite for her important question.

Last Friday was indeed a really important day for our citizens with disabilities. We announced an investment of \$550 million to over 1.25 million Canadians with disabilities.

Madam Chair, we've been working with the disability community from the beginning of this pandemic. We've been careful to make sure that we are supporting initiatives on the ground in local communities, working with provinces to make sure our efforts were complementary and ensuring as we rolled out initiatives such as the student benefit that students with disabilities were explicitly considered in our measures, and I will not apologize for what we delivered on Friday.

Ms. Heather McPherson: By tying this help to the disability tax credit, the government is intentionally leaving out the poorest people living on disability. Can the minister tell us what percentage of people eligible for the CPP disability tax credit will receive this support?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, Canadians who get the DTC are by far the largest cohort of citizens that we provide service to at the federal level for people with disabilities.

I can advise the member that a significant portion of CPP and QPP disability recipients are indeed covered by the DTC, but approximately 40% of those eligible CPPD recipients are not currently claiming the DTC.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): You have 10 seconds, so make it very short, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Why is this government so focused on excluding people instead of helping as many as possible? Will this government finally put supports in place so all Canadians with disabilities are protected?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable minister may give a very short answer, please.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, I can assure you that we're working very hard to do just that.

• (1405)

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go now to the honourable member for Courtenay—Alberni, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, on the one-year anniversary of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report, Chantel Moore, a wonderful young Nuu-chah-nulth mom, a member of the Tla-o-qui-aht nation, was shot dead by a police officer.

The minister expressed outrage and wondered aloud how this could have happened, but no amount of outrage will bring Chantel back. Implementing the 231 calls for justice of the national inquiry will save the lives of others like her. When will the government table and implement the promised national action plan, with dedicated funding and timetables?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): I thank the member for the question. Our hearts go out to the family of Chantel as well.

All of the survivors and all of the families of the missing and murdered girls deserve our support, and we will not let them down. We will go forward with the kinds of commitments that have to be there to deal with the systemic racism that is at the root of all of this, with the misogyny that means that indigenous women and girls have been—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Chair, indigenous people and all Canadians are waiting for action. They have been sitting on this for a year. Why is the government dragging its feet on such an important issue?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It is really important to recognize that this is a national public inquiry, not a federal one, and it is has been really important as we work with all of the provinces and territories and the national organizations, the local organizations and the families and survivors to build a national action plan from the bottom up that will be the concrete action to stop this national tragedy.

Mr. Gord Johns: The family and loved ones of Chantel Moore want answers about why and how she was shot dead by a police officer, but they will have to wait for an investigation and rely on what those involved in her death say happened.

What will the government do to change how calls like this are responded to? Does the minister really think that police are the right answer for wellness checks?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: We absolutely agree that this very tragic death should have been avoided, and we absolutely agree that it behooves all of us to have root-and-branch reform of how these cases are handled.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Savard-Tremblay has the floor.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The aerospace industry in Quebec, a strategic and extremely important sector, is going through troubled times. I think everyone will agree on that. Bombardier has almost reached a dangerous threshold where it can be bought out unconditionally and without compliance, under the inadequate Investment Canada Act.

Obviously, the industry is much more than just Bombardier. It represents about 40,000 jobs in Quebec and 200 businesses. It's safe to say that the industry and the various actors in civil society are concerned.

Why isn't the government acting now, with the same willingness and speed as it did for the automobile sector in 2008, or as it does for the oil and gas sector almost all the time?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Madam Chair, unfortunately, I disagree with my colleague.

Our government understands the importance of the aerospace industry. That's why we've invested in this sector since 2015. Our government understands the importance of investing in research and development, and these investments are going to improve the situation for aerospace industry workers.

We're going to continue to work each and every day to improve the situation of this sector.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: What I understand from what the minister is telling us is that we will continue in the same direction, which isn't encouraging. As for the good work that the government is boasting about, if I listen to the Government of Quebec, which is concerned, the verdict is not at all the same.

It's the same story for the industry itself, which sent a letter to the Prime Minister last week to question him about this issue.

The same goes for the Institut du Québec, which was co-founded by the Conference Board of Canada. So it isn't exactly a bastion of independence. We will agree that it isn't prejudiced against Ottawa.

Furthermore, the study in question, which specifically mentioned Ottawa's inaction in the area, is signed by a man named Alain Dubuc, who isn't exactly from our gang, either.

So what concrete steps are coming up?

• (1410)

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Madam Chair, once again, unfortunately, I don't agree with my colleague.

In fact, we've invested a lot of money in the aerospace industry since 2015. Our position is very clear. We must continue working with the Government of Quebec and the sector. Our position is also very simple: we are going to continue investing in the aerospace industry because it's very important for workers.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Let's talk about that. Canada is pretty much the only country with a real aerospace sector that doesn't have a policy to match the sector. If I understand correctly, there will be some money. With a bit of imagination, that's what I can detect in the minister's response.

If we've learned one thing from the Bombardier situation in Quebec, it's that money must not be given unconditionally to companies. That money must be invested in innovation and must go to workers, not just senior executives. A few weeks ago, I myself asked, with regard to the assistance provided, whether there could be a cap on executive compensation.

In addition, could there be conditions related to the ecological transition, for instance, or a guarantee that activities and jobs remain here? In other words, are there any conditions that will accompany this?

A few weeks ago, when I asked about a completely different kind of assistance, I was told that the conditions were important.

So I'm asking, again, what conditions will accompany the concrete measures that we don't yet know about?

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Madam Chair, our position is very clear. We are going to continue to invest in the aerospace sector, which is very important for our economy, for the future and for our workers. That's why we will continue to work with the Government of Quebec and with the industries.

I'm sure our strategy will improve the situation. Unfortunately, in the short term, we'll continue to have problems, but I'm sure that, in the long term, we'll have a very robust sector, which is essential for our economy and, in particular, for workers.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We'll now go to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): The tourism industry in Canada supports one out of every 11 jobs. It's actually Canada's fifth-largest sector, and it's responsible for 2% of our GDP. Without government action to support the industry, 61,000 tourism businesses, which is over 50% of all tourism businesses, will fail, and over a million and a half Canadians will lose their jobs as a result. Despite this and despite the Prime Minister's saying well over a month ago that there was going to be a specific package for tourism, the tourism minister has been simply pointing towards existing measures that haven't been sufficient to help the industry.

Will the government commit today to sufficient measures that will actually help the tourism sector?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I agree with my colleague that the tourism sector is an important sector and that it has been very impacted by the pandemic and the economic crisis.

That's why we extended the wage subsidy until the end of August. That's why we came up with commercial rent relief across the country and, with its \$40,000 loans, the CEBA. Since the member last asked a question regarding the tourism sector, we also announced \$70 million to make sure that we are supporting destination marketing associations. He even applauded this new investment.

I'm happy to continue to work with him because we need to make these investments for the tourism sector.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's far from enough to ensure the industry's survival. It's far from enough to ensure that these businesses, which are looking at going out of business, will survive.

It's really disheartening to hear the minister spout these talking points, because she knows it's not enough. One of the biggest groups that will be affected by the job losses and business closures in this sector is women. The job losses will also affect youth, visible minorities, new Canadians and, certainly, indigenous people.

What is the government doing specifically to assist indigenous tourism businesses in Canada?

• (1415)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, we believe in the importance of indigenous tourism across the country. That's why I had good conversations with Keith Henry, the president of ITAC, the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada. We will be supporting ITAC through new funding, which will be allocated by Destination Canada, to make sure that we can help indigenous tourism businesses across the country.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, conversations don't get the job done. I certainly look forward to hearing more detail when they announce it, if they ever do, because we've been promised things before that they haven't delivered.

I want to hear about the wage subsidy. Will the government do anything to make changes to the wage subsidy so that seasonal businesses can qualify?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague's question is important because we just finished a consultation regarding the wage subsidy. The Minister of Finance is very seized with the situation. I understand the tourism sector has also made some good recommendations. We will take stock of these recommendations.

Mr. Blake Richards: Again, we hear promises and talk about conversations, but we see no action. It's time for action.

What about the support for meetings, conventions and special events in those sectors? They've been completely decimated. What is the government doing for those sectors in that regard?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That's exactly why we're helping them through the different measures, including the wage subsidy, which the tourism sector wanted until the end of the summer. We've done that, so that's good news. There are also the \$40,000 loans, through what we call the CEBA account, and if these operators fall through the cracks, they can come and see the regional development agencies. We will be there to support them and to make sure they can survive and really bounce back when tourism is much more in a recovery phase in the coming months.

Mr. Blake Richards: The industry can't get to a recovery phase if the government doesn't give them the opportunity to be able to survive this phase. What about agri-tourism? That's typically in small communities that don't have DMOs. What about agri-tourism?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Agri-tourism businesses can have access to community futures programs, or in Quebec they're called SADCs, and definitely they will be supported. We've done the biggest investment in decades in our community futures organizations and we hope this investment will really help them survive this economic crisis.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The committee is now adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, June 9, 2020, at noon.

The meeting is adjourned.

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