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Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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• (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.)): I now call this meeting to order.

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

[*English*]

I remind all members that in order to avoid issues with sound, members participating in person should not also be connected to the video conference. For those of you who are joining via video conference, I would like to remind you that when speaking you should be on the same channel as the language you are speaking.

[*Translation*]

As usual, please address your remarks to the chair, and I will remind everyone that today's proceedings are televised.

We will now proceed to ministerial announcements.

[*English*]

I understand there are no ministerial announcements today, so we will go to presenting petitions.

Mr. Genuis, you are on.

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

I'm pleased to be presenting a petition in support of Bill S-204, currently before the Senate, or it will be once Parliament is able to sit. It would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad to receive an organ for which there has not been consent. It would also create a mechanism by which someone could be deemed inadmissible to Canada if they're involved in organ harvesting and trafficking. It seeks to respond to the horrific situation where organs have been taken from political prisoners without their consent. In some cases, people from other countries have received those organs via transplant.

I commend this petition for the consideration of the committee. I know the petitioners are hoping to see this Parliament finally pass legislation dealing with organ harvesting and trafficking.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Thank you.

We now go to the honourable member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, Mr. Manly.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's an honour to present a petition for the residents and constituents of Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Yesterday was World Oceans Day. This petition calls upon the House of Commons to establish a permanent ban on crude oil tankers on the west coast of Canada to protect B.C.'s fisheries, tourism, coastal communities and the natural ecosystems forever.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Thank you very much.

We now go to Mrs. Jansen.

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

I'm pleased to rise today to table a petition concerning conscience rights for palliative care providers, organizations and all health care professionals. The petitioners recognize that palliative care and euthanasia are entirely separate practices, distinct legally, clinically and philosophically.

They were compelled to call the government to action after the Delta Hospice Society faced sanctions from Fraser Health for refusing to offer on-site euthanasia to their patients. This is expressly against the conscience of the hospice.

Bill C-14, which legalized euthanasia, affirms that freedom of conscience and religion is still guaranteed in Canada. This petition calls on the government to do a better job ensuring this is the case. No person or organization should be compelled to act against its own conscience in this country.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Thank you.

I see no further petitions. I would like to remind members in the chamber that those who have not yet done so are asked to bring their petitions to the table.

[*Translation*]

We will now proceed to statements by members.

The honourable Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance has the floor.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): With temperatures going up and restrictions coming down, Nova Scotians are looking forward to the summer. Though our communities feel a little different this year, there's no shortage of local activities to enjoy across the entire region.

We are home to world-class beaches along Canada's warmest stretch of ocean on the Northumberland Strait. We also have access to the rugged terrain and white sand beaches of the Eastern Shore along the wild islands that dot the coast.

We have great places and events that allow us to socialize while practising physical distancing, like the new beer garden at the Sober Island brewery in Sheet Harbour, the community food forest in Middle Musquodoboit or the Antigonish art festival in Antigonish.

We have extraordinary trail systems to get outdoors along the East River and Musquodoboit River Valley, near the lighthouses at Cape George and along Trenton Park and Arisaig Provincial Park.

We're even going to be able to take in a movie at the soon-to-be-reopened Highland Drive-In in Westville, so get your popcorn ready.

If I'm going to be stuck anywhere this summer, I'm glad it's at home in Nova Scotia. Join me in supporting our local businesses and organizations so we can be tourists in our own backyard. Most of all, be safe out there and enjoy the summer.

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

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Madam Chair, every time we enter this House, I am reminded of my commitment to the constituents of Kootenay—Columbia and the magnitude of the role each of us plays in securing a future for our democratic institutions.

Collette Caron, a constituent in my riding, recently sent me a note that represents the overwhelming sentiment of our area. I will read it. It states:

Mr. Morrison, I would like to know why the Prime Minister participated in an event with thousands of people, where social distancing was not being practiced, and yet continues to postpone recalling parliament over COVID concerns. I would like to know if he understands that at his request and direction we have made enormous sacrifices to follow the rules. Canadians were not allowed to visit their dying loved ones, or hold funerals, and businesses have gone bankrupt. Many folks can't pay their bills or rent and grad ceremonies and weddings have been cancelled....

Madam Chair, Mrs. Caron is correct. If an event with thousands of Canadians is health-safe for the Prime Minister, then bring the voice of Canadians back to the House by reopening Parliament.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. Shanahan.

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Chair, ever since the tragic murder of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter protests have been multiplying, reminding us that police brutality and systemic racism against the black community exist. Now is the time to show our solidarity with our brothers and sisters of colour and to take a symbolic knee.

Even in a community like Châteauguay, which has always opened its arms to newcomers, we've seen regrettable acts of injustice. There is hope, however: four young girls in our community, with the help of their parents and local police, successfully organized a peaceful, responsible and inclusive demonstration. They were expecting 20 or so of their friends to show up this past Saturday, but more than 300 people of all colours came together in solidarity to support the global Black Lives Matter movement.

Each of us has a role to play in abolishing systemic racism.

I would like to thank Maribel, Marilou, Jessika and Audrey for giving us an opportunity to express our support.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. Gill.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Chair, so few workers have access to employment insurance that, in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, the government had to come up with the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB, to make up for its failings. That's why, today, I am speaking on behalf of the Mouvement Action-Chômage, the Mouvement d'éducation populaire et d'action communautaire du Québec, the councils of the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, chambers of commerce and first nations communities in my region, on the north shore, and elsewhere in Quebec. I am also speaking for dozens of entrepreneurs, elected officials, band councils and worker advocacy groups, from Montreal to Blanc-Sablon.

All of them have written to the federal government today demanding employment insurance reforms so that all workers have access to benefits. They are also calling for the five additional weeks for seasonal workers to be made permanent.

That is vital not just for industries such as fisheries and tourism, but also for the cultural sector. The government must extend the CERB for those workers who will not be going back to their old jobs anytime soon. They need assurance that they will have something coming in to help them through the year ahead, which must not turn into a long-drawn-out EI gap.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Sheehan.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Madam Chair, I have a point of order, please. I have been on the English channel, but unfortunately I was not able to listen to the translation of the honourable member's speech just now.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There seems to have been an issue with the translation.

[Translation]

Can we check whether the interpretation is coming through now?

It's fixed.

Mrs. Gill, you can repeat your statement.

• (1210)

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Chair, so few workers have access to employment insurance that, in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, the government had to come up with the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB, to make up for its failings. That's why, today, I speak on behalf of the Mouvement Action-Chômage, the Mouvement d'éducation populaire et d'action communautaire du Québec, the councils of the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, chambers of commerce and first nations communities in my region, on the north shore, and elsewhere in Quebec. I am also speaking for dozens of entrepreneurs, elected officials, band councils and worker advocacy groups, from Montreal to Blanc-Sablon.

All of them have written to the federal government today demanding an overhaul of the employment insurance program so that all workers have access to benefits. They are also calling for the five additional weeks for the industry to be renewed.

That is vital not just for industries such as fisheries and tourism, but also for the cultural sector, industries that have been hammered because of the pandemic. They receive little, poor or no support. That's why the government must extend the CERB for those workers who will not be going back to their old jobs. We must make sure that they have something coming in to help them through the year ahead, which must not turn into a long-drawn-out EI gap.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Sheehan.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Madam Chair, to mark Italian Heritage Month, I'm proud to tell you about the Italians in Sault Ste. Marie.

Over 16,000 people in the Soo trace their ancestry to Italy, and Italians own and operate countless beloved restaurants and businesses across our community.

I know that Italians in the Soo have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. I feel deeply for the *nonnas* and the *nonnos* across my community who are hoping they can gather with their families again soon.

I feel for the numerous Italian-owned businesses in the Soo, including the best Italian restaurants in Canada, that are suffering due to the pandemic, but I can tell you that the Soo Italians are resilient people who are making a difference each and every day, like Mayor Provenzano.

I also want to highlight another special Italian Canadian from northern Ontario, Mr. Anthony Rota, the first-ever Italian Speaker of the House of Commons. I know he makes Italians in the Soo and Canada proud.

Grazie e buona fortuna.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mrs. Jansen.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen: I recently got word that a long-term care facility in my riding was not going to receive Canada summer jobs funding this year, after eight previous years of being approved.

Considering the challenges they faced during COVID-19, that didn't make any sense to me, so I decided to do some digging. What I found out was absolutely appalling. It turns out that although I had prioritized senior care facilities as most in need of Canada summer jobs funding, the national priorities of the current government have changed from previous years, and senior care homes are no longer one of them.

For me, long-term care homes are a 10 out of 10 priority, but this government gives them only two out of 10 in their priority rankings. They're right at the bottom of the list during a pandemic that is having the most devastating impact in long-term care homes.

How are our seniors not a national priority?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Chair, municipalities provide the essential services we rely on every day, like police, fire, paramedics. They provide equality-seeking services like housing, transit, community centres and senior care.

As our country fights the spread of COVID-19, municipalities face major shortfalls in financing these essential services. By law, they aren't allowed to run deficits and have had to lay off thousands of staff, and they contemplate deep service cuts to make ends meet.

Municipalities are also excellent incubators of economic growth, and reopening economies post-COVID in partnership with them is an opportunity for us to build back better.

At the federal level, we have provided \$2.2 billion with the gas relief fund and continue to try to build consensus among provinces to partner with us on this path to recovery. I encourage our provincial leaders to take this opportunity to strengthen the vital building blocks of our country, our municipalities.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): On the northern tip of Halifax sat Africville, a village founded by Black Loyalists, slaves freed after the War of 1812 and the American Revolutionary War. In 1960, in an egregious act of racism, Africville was abruptly erased from the map in the name of urban renewal. African Nova Scotians were evicted, and their homes were demolished.

While my city carries the shame for what happened to Africville, it was not an isolated incident in Canada, where racist policies, both implicit and explicit, have shaped the cities we live in today.

This Sunday, I joined hundreds of Haligonians on the reclaimed grounds of Africville for a protest by prayer. It was a stark reminder that the injustices we fight today are built on generations of discriminatory policies.

Today, I call on every member of this House to stand shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, and together recommit ourselves to the work of naming and changing the ongoing trends of power and privilege that riddle our society and its institutions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1215)

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Kurek.

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

Today I send my congratulations and well wishes to each graduate from Battle River—Crowfoot. I am sure this is not the graduation you expected when you started your final year of school this past September. However, it does not downplay your achievements. If anything, it displays your strength and resilience, something you should be proud of.

These are tough times for all Canadians, and I commend the innovation and ingenuity of both students and faculty. Rural east central Alberta is an amazing place to grow up in, and I know you are ready for all that's to come.

For the dozens of public, Catholic and faith-based schools across Battle River—Crowfoot, the several Bible colleges, and the U of A Augustana Campus, you are all a shining example of how Canadians, when we work together, can overcome adversity.

On behalf of all the constituents of Battle River—Crowfoot, congratulations to the graduating class of 2020. May God bless you and all that's to come.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Bratina.

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): In the coming days, I want to address the tragic death of George Floyd and its aftermath.

Today, Madam Chair, I have prepared comments about my city, Hamilton, which, along with every other community in Canada, is benefiting from the historic and unprecedented investments our government is making during the pandemic.

Our response has put money into the pockets of Canadians. Over \$42 billion was paid out to eight million workers through the CERB program, \$9 billion in relief to students through the student benefit and grant payments, \$2 billion of targeted relief through the

GST top-up for the poorest, as well as the OAS, GIS and disability tax credit to help the most vulnerable.

In these difficult times, perfection is elusive, but we are listening and responding to needs the best we can. These programs are the ones that invest directly in individuals who, in a city like Hamilton, number in the tens and hundreds of thousands. Their money goes directly into the local economy.

Businesses struggling through this crisis rely on customers—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The government wants us to debate and vote on \$87 billion in new spending next week in just a few hours. Most Canadians would spend longer deciding on a new TV.

Even the Alberta opposition New Democrats have introduced bills in the Alberta legislature, but the federal NDP just wants to get out of here.

I've heard from many constituents who think this is just plain wrong. Many have lost jobs. Others have worked through the pandemic as essential workers. Far too many have fallen through the cracks and could not qualify for government supports. They want their representatives working in Parliament. They want their challenges raised in Parliament and addressed. They don't want government run through order in council like the recent gun law. They want this government to be held accountable as hundreds of billions of dollars of their taxpayer money flows out of the door.

If the government truly wants to do a better job for Canadians, Parliament just needs to work.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. Rood.

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Chair, I rise today to acknowledge the life and tragic passing of a truly inspiring and kind-natured woman, Joyce Thomas Rood.

Joyce was born and raised on the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, where she was fostered and adopted by her mother, Flossie Sinopole.

Joyce was proud to be an indigenous Canadian, proud of her people, her culture, and she was proud to be a lawyer who fought for access to justice. She always stood tall and spoke for what she believed was right. Joyce's crowning achievement was opening her law practice in 2018, specializing in human rights, labour, employment and indigenous law.

Joyce attained many achievements during her short life, mentored law students at Western University and volunteered with Community Legal Services and Neighbourhood Legal Services. Joyce was a council member on the OBA and co-chair of the South West Region Women's Law Association, among many other organizations.

A memorial scholarship has been established in Joyce's name at Western University to help an indigenous student who positively contributes to their community. She will be deeply missed by all who knew her, especially her high school sweetheart, husband and best friend, Ryan Rood.

The world is a less enriched place without her.

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

[Translation]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Chair, the Faculté Saint-Jean is at the heart of Edmonton Strathcona's vibrant French-speaking community.

[English]

Established in 1908, the Faculté Saint-Jean became a campus of the University of Alberta in 1977. It is the only francophone campus in all of Alberta and serves a vital role in attracting people to our province and in protecting and preserving the French language and the Francophonie.

• (1220)

[Translation]

The faculty's existence is in jeopardy because of the province's numerous cuts to post-secondary education. The federal government made official languages commitments to French-speaking communities.

[English]

We need to do more to support the Faculté Saint-Jean and to preserve Alberta's only French-speaking post-secondary institution.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mrs. Desbiens, you may go ahead.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Chair, I am very concerned.

Even during the pandemic, when every cultural sector is at a virtual standstill, the Canada Council for the Arts is refusing to provide financial support to renowned theatres like the Théâtre du Rideau Vert—Canada's oldest French-language professional theatre, headed by none other than the equally renowned director Denise Filiatrault. The theatre's applications for long-term financial assistance have been turned down for the past 10 years.

I will paraphrase Ms. Filiatrault, who put it best: the Théâtre du Rideau Vert has always enjoyed enviable fame, having proven its ability to fulfill its mandate by putting on open-minded theatre productions for everyone.

Madam Chair, I would like the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Canada Council for the Arts to recognize the Théâtre du Rideau Vert's rightful status as a cultural institution, thereby allowing it to receive the financial assistance it deserves.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is now Mr. Généreux's turn.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Chair, it is with sadness that we mark the passing, this past week, of an extraordinary woman who left an indelible imprint on Canada's cultural and political landscape. I am, of course, referring to the honourable Andrée Champagne.

Well-known to Quebeckers and the entire francophone world for her portrayal as the lovely Donalda in the television series *Les belles histoires des pays d'en haut*, she was a woman of countless talents and remarkable skill. She was part of our great Tory family, first as a member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot from 1984 to 1993 and, then, as a senator from 2005 to 2014. She will also be remembered for her community involvement as the general secretary of the Union des artistes and her contribution to the Francophonie, where she sought to build relationships and celebrate the richness of francophone cultural heritage throughout the world. I want to extend my deepest sympathies to her son, Patrick, her daughter, Liliane, and her spouse, André Sébastien.

Ms. Champagne, it was a privilege and an honour to have known you. You will be missed. Thank you very much.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. van Koeverden.

[Translation]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

It's with great sadness that I rise in the House today to honour the life of Robert Walter Elliot. Walt passed away at his Milton home last Thursday, in his 87th year. Walt was a pillar of Milton. He served as the Liberal member of provincial parliament for Halton North from 1987 to 1990 and played a prominent role in every Liberal candidate's campaign, both provincially and federally, since the 1970s.

Walt was actively involved in fundraising and organization for groups including the United Way, Children's Aid Society, the Ontario Agricultural Museum, and our mutual alma mater, McMaster University. Mr. Elliot was also a high school math teacher and principal.

Dear father of Paul and his wife Evelyn, as well as Tina and her husband Joe, he is lovingly remembered by his granddaughters Emily Violet and Katie, and of course his wonderful wife, Anne, with whom he recently celebrated an incredible 60 years of marriage.

Thanks for everything you did for Milton, Walt. You are and will be dearly missed.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will now proceed to questions to ministers.

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

[English]

The honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Chair, last week we learned that Liberal member of Parliament Marwan Tabbara had been arrested on April 9 of this year on a series of charges, including two counts of assault, and we know that one of the victims is a woman.

The Prime Minister said he learned Friday about the charges. Can he tell the House when he first learned about the arrest of Mr. Tabbara, not the charges but the arrest of Mr. Tabbara?

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

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Chair, we learned about this issue—the arrest, the charges, everything that happened—on Friday. We take this issue very seriously. These are serious allegations, and the member has stepped away from the Liberal caucus.

[Translation]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: On Friday, the Prime Minister took part in a gathering of nearly 7,000 people. He wore a mask, because he could not maintain his physical distance from everyone else. Today, we are here, in the House, keeping a good distance from one another and not wearing masks. Parliament can work that way.

Will the Prime Minister recall Parliament immediately so that it can do its job?

• (1225)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, I am very pleased to be here, today, to answer questions from the opposition. We are very pleased to be able to ensure that Parliament and the democratic process work.

That is not in spite of the pandemic, but because of the pandemic. It is important that we maintain our efforts to be transparent and open, and those measures will remain in place.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Except, Madam Chair, this is not actually a parliamentary meeting of the House of Commons. This is a committee. This is not the normal workings of Parliament. We know that the Prime Minister wants to abridge and sideline the role of

parliamentary accountability. He met with thousands of people outside on Parliament Hill just a few days ago. Why can we not meet with a fraction of that number inside Parliament Hill to do the work on Canadians' behalf?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, I am pleased to be here in Parliament today answering questions from the opposition. We've been sitting four days a week over the past number of weeks to continue to engage in the kind of back-and-forth that is essential in our democracy.

At the same time, I do want to highlight that peaceful protest is a fundamental right in Canada. Thousands of Canadians spoke out over the past week, and it was important for me to be part of them, to hear them and to demonstrate my support.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Again, Madam Chair, the Prime Minister knows that this is not the normal functioning of Parliament.

In fact, in a little over a week, Parliament will debate what's called the estimates, over 80 billion dollars' worth of new government spending. Because of the Prime Minister's rules that he's imposed on this chamber, members of Parliament will only have four hours to debate over 80 billion dollars' worth of new spending. Imagine the CEO of a major corporation telling its board of directors that they are only going to let the auditors in for four hours and they are going to rubber-stamp everything else. That CEO would be fired.

Again, if the Prime Minister can meet outside this chamber with thousands of people, why can members of Parliament not gather inside to do the work that Canadians elected us to do?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, nothing prevents the Leader of the Opposition from asking questions right now on the estimates. We have hours of questions every single day when they are more than open to ask questions. We will respond to the questions on the important measures we've put forward for Canadians.

Yes, we have invested unprecedented amounts in supporting families and households and small businesses and seniors and people right across the country who needed help.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Chair, the Prime Minister brought up some of the government's spending. Well, we know that they like to waste money, giving \$50 million to Mastercard and \$12 million to Loblaws, but when the Auditor General asks for enough funding to do the work this House has asked her to do, the government refuses. The Auditor General is a key tool for members of Parliament to do our job, to provide that kind of oversight.

In a few moments, the Prime Minister is going to blame the previous government, but let me point out to him the quotes that we have from the previous auditor general with regard to the previous Conservative government's time. At no time did the previous auditor general ever tell Parliament, under the Conservative government, that he didn't have the funds to do his work. That has changed under the current government.

Without trying to reach into the past, will the Prime Minister live in the now and acknowledge the fact that it is his refusal to give the Auditor General the money she needs to do her job that is preventing the oversight that Canadians expect from their government?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, I can understand that the member opposite is asking us not to talk about what happened during the Harper years, but the reality is that the Conservative government cut nearly \$6.5 million from the Auditor General's budget and fired 60 employees from the Auditor General's office.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Blanchet has the floor.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The government is trying to pass a bill that contains quite a few measures, some of which may be helpful. However, it doesn't contain a necessary measure, one that would prevent political parties from accessing wage subsidies and require them to repay subsidies they should have never been entitled to receive.

Does the Prime Minister think immorally funding the Liberal Party of Canada is more important than passing the bill he will be introducing tomorrow?

• (1230)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: We are introducing a bill that will make it possible to provide financial support to Canadians with disabilities. We are going to expand access to the wage subsidy and ease restrictions around the Canada emergency response benefit. These measures will help Canadians, and that is our focus.

We encourage the other parties to work with us to help Canadians.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: The Liberal Party's proposal to expand access to the wage subsidy is, in and of itself, concerning, because the party is also benefiting from the measure. Nevertheless, some of the measures to expand access are probably worthwhile.

On another topic, does the government care so little about the bill it's introducing that it's willing to undermine the legislation just to hold its ground on not delivering an economic update?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, we remain open and transparent about the investments we are making to help Canadians, about the funding we are providing to small businesses, about the assistance we are giving to workers across the country, and about the supports for seniors, students and, soon, Canadians with disabilities.

We are here to help Canadians, and we are being fully transparent about what we are doing.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: The government hung a sign on the doors of Parliament indicating that it's closed because of COVID-19, but the government still has to answer to the people of Quebec and Canada, in accordance with the rules of Parliament, not to mention the Constitution, which do not belong to the government.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether he thinks his bill is more important than the Canadian Constitution?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Everything we are doing, as a government and as a party, respects the Canadian Constitution, which is of the utmost importance to us and to all Canadians.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Is the Prime Minister's bill more important than the exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces over health?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: We have always worked with the provinces on important issues such as health care. That's why our government sends tens of billions of dollars every year to the provinces for their health care systems, and we will continue to provide health transfers.

A few months ago, we transferred half a billion dollars to the provinces because of the pandemic. We will keep working with them, while respecting their areas of jurisdiction.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Chair, it's almost as though we are watching two plays simultaneously, but the scripts don't match up. Fans of *Astérix* will remember the arsenic cake scene. In our case, the script reads "insipid cake". We are left without an answer or any substance.

Does the Prime Minister want his bill to pass?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would remind Mr. Blanchet to respect the decorum that should be kept in the House and to avoid insults.

The right honourable Prime Minister has the floor.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, I'm sure that all members of the House want to see more assistance for Canadians living with disabilities. They also want to see an expansion of the wage subsidy and more flexibility in the Canada emergency response benefit. That's why I'm confident we'll be able to work together tomorrow to help Canadians through this bill.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Chair, [inaudible].

Does the Prime Minister want the co-operation of the opposition parties?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, I think all Canadians expect the opposition parties and the government to work together to take real action for citizens. That's exactly what we are going to do.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Blanchet, please be brief.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Consequently, does the Prime Minister logically agree to invite the premiers of the provinces and Quebec to a first ministers' conference on health transfers?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The right hon. Prime Minister has 10 seconds to respond.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: I've been meeting with the provincial premiers every week for several weeks now. We've discussed health care funding many times, and we will continue to do so.

Our 12th meeting took place last week, and we're going to continue holding these meetings.

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Singh.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Madam Chair, for a family that started receiving the CERB in March, the benefit will end in July, even though many people can't return to work.

Will the Prime Minister commit to extending the 16-week CERB period?

• (1235)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, from the beginning, we've been there to help families in need who had lost their paycheques because of COVID-19 by providing the Canada emergency response benefit.

We'll continue to be there for families in need in the months to come. We're looking at how best to help them while the economy begins to recover. We'll be there for Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I received an email from Kirsten from Hamilton. She is an EA. She works as an educational assistant with special needs students. Her school is closed, understandably, and that school will not open until maybe September. That school also doesn't qualify for the wage subsidy. For her, the CERB is going to end in July, and without the CERB, she will have no way to get any funds for her family.

What does the Prime Minister have to say to Kirsten? How will she get help?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, to Kirsten and to the millions of Canadians who receive the Canada emergency wage response, we know that it needed to be there, and it needs to continue to be there. We will continue to work to ensure that we're supporting Canadians. As we look at reopening the economy, we recognize that millions of Canadians will continue to need extra supports, and we will be there for her. We will be there for Canadians.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: What will the Prime Minister say today to Kirsten, who's saying that she needs the CERB to be extended beyond the 16 weeks? Will he say, yes, we will extend the CERB so that families such as hers will still get help while they can't go back to work?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, every step of the way we have been there for Canadians, with the Canada emergency response benefit, with support for our seniors, with support for students, and soon, hopefully with the support of the other parties, with support for people living with disabilities.

We know there is more to do. We will continue to be there for Canadians to get through this pandemic all together.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I want the Prime Minister to understand that Kirsten is just making a simple request. There are a whole bunch of programs out there; we understand that. Kirsten is saying that the CERB is going to run out in July. She is the only income earner, and she does not qualify for the wage subsidy.

Will the Prime Minister extend the CERB for families such as Kirsten's, who need help?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, throughout this pandemic, we have been working to respond to the needs of Canadians on the ground. Obviously, the situation is changing. We are continually updating our measures, extending our measures and looking at how to change our measures so that we can give Canadians the support they need.

I can tell Kirsten directly that we will be there for her and her family, as we are for millions of Canadians, as best we can in the coming months, because we know that supporting each other is what Canadians need to do and will do.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Chair, we know that a lot of Canadians were in desperate need and applied for the CERB. People who were just on the cusp were encouraged by the government itself to apply for the CERB: people who were earning \$4,900 instead of the \$5,000 cut-off and people who didn't lose their job, but the job they were supposed to work at was no longer there. They applied for the CERB. They're not criminals. They're people who were desperate and in need of help.

While the Prime Minister took a knee one day, on the same day his government was putting in place a law that would criminalize people who were desperate. How does the Prime Minister think that makes any sense at all to do?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Madam Chair, this government has been there for Canadians from the very beginning, and we made the CERB so that it could flow immediately to everyone who needed it, with minimal upfront paperwork or verification.

Of course, if people made mistakes in good faith, there are not going to be punitive consequences for them, but we need to make sure that we have the responsible measures in place to go after fraudsters and criminals.

Our focus has been on helping Canadians, and that is what we have done throughout. We will continue to be there for Canadians and to support all Canadians who need the help.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

For months now, the Prime Minister has been demanding that Canadians stay home. He has followed the advice of the Public Health Agency of Canada. He even set an example by staying at Rideau Cottage and going out only to speak to the media.

However, given that the Prime Minister joined a crowd of 7,000 people, is there any chance of resuming celebrations and festivals in Canada?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health): Thank you very much for the question, Madam Chair.

I would remind the member opposite that it is important for people to follow the advice of public health. As the member opposite knows, different jurisdictions have different rules and advice in place to make sure that we have the best protections possible to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Yesterday, the minister answered my question by saying that if people wore masks, there was no problem. That's why the Prime Minister joined a crowd of 7,000 people.

How can we justify the cancellation of the Fêtes de la Famille in Saint-Émile, for instance, or the Huron-Wendat nation pow wow, namely, the Wendake International Pow Wow? People could very well wear a mask during these events.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, we will always stand up for the right of people to—

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There are translation problems.

[English]

Would you like to try in English? Is it working, Madame Larouche?

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): The minister's last two responses weren't translated.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): She's only responded once so far.

We'll try again.

[English]

The honourable minister.

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

I will just reiterate that we will always stand up for the right of people to—

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Madam Chair, there's no interpretation.

[English]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès: There is still no interpretation. Can we try to see if there is interpretation?

[Translation]

Is it working now?

[English]

Do you get interpretation now?

[Translation]

Are you on the French channel?

[English]

Was it the minister who was not on the right channel?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm on the English channel, Madam Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Okay.

Is interpretation working now? Madame Larouche, can you see if the interpretation is working now, please?

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: There's no interpretation.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Do we know what the problem is?

[Translation]

We're going to take a few minutes to make sure everything is working correctly with the technology.

[English]

Interpretation is not working here either. Is it working from English to French?

[Translation]

Is the interpretation from French to English working?

[English]

Okay, that's working. Is it working now for French? Okay.

We will resume.

• (1245)

[Translation]

Mr. Paul-Hus, could you please repeat your question?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Yesterday, the minister told me that people could take part in the events if they wore masks.

Is there any reason why the Fêtes de la famille in Saint-Émile or the Wendake International Pow Wow couldn't be held?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I thank the member for his important question.

Listen, millions of global citizens gathered to protest the second pandemic of racism. We know, of course, that it's better if people don't gather in large groups during the time of a pandemic, but we also stand up for people's right to have democratic freedom of speech in times that are so distressing.

As such, we provided advice at the federal level—I know it was provided at many other levels—on how people could gather in a way that would better protect their safety and reduce their risk of contracting COVID, including the need to wear masks and the need to remain physically distant from one another.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, it's very unfortunate to hear that kind of response. They're just trying to divert the debate. All we want to know is why hundreds of parties and festivals that were supposed to take place in Canada this year have been cancelled.

If people can go to an event with 7,000 people wearing masks, why can't they have an event where 400 or 500 people are watching shows? Cultural groups, music groups and citizens are able to protect themselves just as the Prime Minister did to go to the gathering of 7,000 people.

Another problem that currently exists is CERB fraud. Yes, the CERB is very important for honest citizens, but there are criminal groups that are taking advantage of the situation. The line of credit is wide open, and they're dipping their hands in to amass millions of dollars. The problem is identity theft.

Does the Prime Minister have any solutions to protect the identities of Canadians who are being taken advantage of by criminals?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion): Madam Chair, we know that there are individuals and organizations taking advantage of Canadians in this time of crisis, and we deplore it. We are working very hard behind the scenes to put in place integrity measures that allow us to go after fraudsters and criminals, but at the same time, Madam Chair, we cannot in any way send any message that honest, hard-working and concerned Canadians will be penalized in any way for mistaken belief or error on their part or on our part, and that's the balance we're trying to strike.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, here's what's troubling. Last year, at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, we did a study on cybersecurity in finance and banking. The president of Desjardins also appeared following the internal fraud that occurred at Desjardins and led to the identity theft of four million citizens.

Nothing happened. The government knows about it, and now it's putting in place a multi-billion dollar program. It's opening the bank account and letting criminals in, when we know there are problems.

Have measures been or will they be taken quickly to protect the identity of Canadians? This is important.

Giving money to honest citizens is one thing, but protecting the identity of those who have it stolen is another.

[English]

Hon. Joyce Murray (Minister of Digital Government): Madam Chair, we recognize that the use of digital tools has increased as a result of COVID-19, and so has our vigilance towards malicious cyber-activity. We have provided specific guidance to federal employees on secure telework, including best practices on when and how to use digital tools safely. Ensuring and securing digital delivery of services while protecting Canadians' information is more important than ever. We continue working with the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security and all our partners to prevent, protect against and respond to potential cyber-threats.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Since we're talking about cybersecurity and “dilly-dallying”, I remind you that the government has been waiting to make a decision on Huawei. BCE and Telus finally had to make the decision to protect themselves.

What's the government waiting for to tell Huawei we don't want their 5G technology in Canada?

Currently, our agreements with the Five Eyes countries are in jeopardy.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Unfortunately, we have only a few seconds for the answer.

The hon. minister has the floor.

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development): Madam Chair, our government works hard to ensure that Canadian networks are kept safe and secure. While we cannot comment on specific companies, an examination of 5G technologies and a review of security and economic considerations are ongoing.

● (1250)

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

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I believe that it's important to call out discrimination when it occurs within our own power structures. My party is no exception. For example, I call out the barbaric cultural practices tip line policy as discriminatory.

Would the Prime Minister characterize giving a statement last week about anti-black discrimination without explicitly acknowledging his history as a blackface practitioner an example of systemic discrimination within his power structure?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth): Madam Chair, let's be clear that our government does not condone any form of racism or discrimination. We condemn racism and discrimination. We've seen with COVID-19 the return and the rise of anti-Asian racism. We see people marching and protesting coast to coast and throughout the world in opposition to anti-black racism. Our government is committed to doing the important work necessary to make sure that our institutions, communities, school systems and workplaces are more inclusive.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: When the Prime Minister said, "We see you", was he referring to his government's treatment of a federal government employee who felt that she had to quit her job with the federal anti-racism program after she criticized the Prime Minister for wearing blackface, or was he referring to his saying "Thank you for your donation" to a first nations woman who came to protest at a Liberal fundraiser because she wanted to draw his attention to mercury contamination in her community?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, Canadians from coast to coast and people around the world are speaking out right now. What they need is for people to come together. I see allies in all parties. I see an opportunity for us to work together. This is something that's ingrained in our institutions. We can do better. This is not the time for partisan politics. This is the time to build a more inclusive Canada—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go back to Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: When the Prime Minister said last week that the intention has been to fight systemic discrimination in this country, was he referring to giving millions to the rich white owners of Loblaws and to the Irving family while simultaneously failing to provide many first nations with access to clean drinking water?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, let's be clear. When it comes to our history with indigenous people, it's one that our government has brought to the forefront because we should not be proud of that history. We have work to do. We have committed to ensuring that all communities will have clean drinking water by 2021, and we are well on our way to having that happen.

When it comes to the anti-racism strategy that our government brought forward, it was a strategy created by Canadians for Canadians, including racialized Canadians and black Canadians—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go back to Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: When the Prime Minister said about systemic discrimination this week, "It's about the fact that people are all too often treated like criminals instead of receiving the support that they need", was he referring to his treatment of Jody Wilson-Raybould?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. Rempel Garner, we can't hear.

Order. Can we please not speak to one another?

Ms. Rempel Garner, can you repeat the question, please?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: When the Prime Minister said about systemic discrimination this week, "It's about the fact that

people are all too often treated like criminals instead of receiving the support that they need", was he referring to his treatment of Jody Wilson-Raybould?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, we have an opportunity in our country right now not only to acknowledge that racism and discrimination exist within our country but also to do something about it. We have a government today that's saying, "Let's all work together, and let's find a better way forward." That's the approach I will take. Obviously, that's not the approach of the Conservatives. That's very unfortunate right now.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Does the Prime Minister believe that making someone else answer questions about discriminatory practices that he has had a hand in perpetuating is an example of systemic discrimination based on his own privilege?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, it is clear that there are people with privilege within our country. I will remind this House and all Canadians why I ran for office. I ran for office because the policies of the previous government under Stephen Harper did not include people like me. I was not represented, and that's why I put my name on a ballot: to ensure those voices were heard. They will be heard.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: When the Prime Minister said yesterday, in speaking about changes to police forces, "I think there are many different paths toward making a better country. We need to explore the range of them", was he referring to his decision to make the person who oversaw carding in the Toronto police the minister responsible for the RCMP?

• (1255)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, we will make no apologies for the progress we have made in combatting systemic racism under the leadership of the Prime Minister.

It is appalling that the member opposite fails to remember the record of the Harper government, which systematically discriminated against a variety of people who are still paying the price today.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, the question here is that we have a government that won't apologize and won't move forward.

When the Prime Minister said that systemic racism is "the result of systems which far too often condone, normalize, perpetrate, and perpetuate inequality and injustice against people of colour", was he referring to his leadership of the country?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, our government has taken the approach to invest in an anti-racism strategy. We have set up the anti-racism secretariat and we did that by working with Canadians from coast to coast to coast, including racialized Canadians and black Canadians.

Our approach is very different from the previous government's approach. We acknowledge that there is a—

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

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madame Chair, all of my questions are for the health minister.

Testing for the presence of antibodies would be a great help for businesses and citizens in our country in making wise judgements about their lives, about their businesses and about their livelihoods. Antibody testing can tell us the percentage of Canadians who have been infected with the virus and the percentage of Canadians who remain susceptible to future infections.

Why is it taking so long for Health Canada to approve new tests?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I am thrilled to talk about the work of the national immunity task force, which our government has been supporting in its development and start-up. These are national scientists who are coming together to ensure that we have a robust scientific approach to understanding immunity and the prevalence of COVID-19 in Canadian society.

Of course we're working very closely with the task force to understand what their needs are and to make sure they have the equipment and the resources necessary—

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

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, Health Canada has only approved two serology tests, according to my count, and the U.S. FDA has approved 15. Why is there a difference between the two countries?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, it's extremely important that any testing devices, equipment and approaches that are approved by Health Canada be verified to the utmost accuracy. We have seen other jurisdictions loosen approval processes and then backtrack because the tests flooding the market were providing inaccurate responses.

It is extremely difficult and dangerous to have—

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

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, there are 22 serological testing devices—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Falk has a point of order.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Chair, I have noticed in the last several questions that you have allotted three times more time for the answer than you have for the question.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am trying to get answers to the questions being asked, and sometimes an answer is a little longer than the question being asked. I am trying to get answers for the members. I will let Mr. Kmiec determine if I have been lacking in fairness.

Go ahead, Mr. Kmiec.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I thank Mr. Falk, my colleague, for standing up for my rights as a member.

There are 21 serological devices that are still awaiting approval from Health Canada. What is the estimated timeline for their approval?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, each test has a different length of time for approval, depending on the manufacturer's compliance with the information that's requested from them to ensure that we can run the appropriate tests.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Under the interim order with respect to the importation and sale of medical devices for use in relation to COVID-19, a post-market authorization condition is placed on every serological test approved for use in Canada. There are two approved tests for use in Canada. The requirement of the order that the minister signed is that two weeks after approval, companies have to start providing information—data and evidence—on their use in Canada.

Does the minister have that information and can she share it with this committee?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I am happy to report that there are 22 test kits now and two serological tests, as the member notes, available for use in Canada.

I will get the information to him. I do not have it in hand.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Will the minister table that evidence with the committee?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I will follow up with the minister's office for the information that the member is requesting.

● (1300)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Chair, I will table it with the committee the moment I receive the email, and I will send it to the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and to you, Madam Chair, as the chair of the committee of the whole.

I have one more series of questions on antibody testing, because it's so important for my province of Alberta.

How many tests does the government expect to administer over the next three months?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I think the immunity task force has set its sights on 10,000 across the country in its initial approach. Those studies are being conducted in a very precise approach to try to understand the prevalence of infection, not just among Canadians in each province but among different kinds—

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

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That number of 10,000 comes from a test that will begin with an online questionnaire that will be sent out to 10,000 Canadians through the Angus Reid Forum. It's not actually antibody testing at this point, so I'm going to repeat my question: How many tests does the government expect to administer over the next three months?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I'll correct the member. The government is not administering the tests. The tests will be administered through the immunity task force in partnership with provinces and territories that have the capacity to analyze the tests.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Will the federal government be doing antibody testing on any of the members of the public service, including the RCMP and military personnel?

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

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

I'm not sure if those population groups are included in the plans of the immunity task force, but we'll certainly get back to the member on that.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Patzer is next.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Canadian farmers and manufacturers are being penalized under the current Canadian copyright law. Digital locks are providing a barrier to manufacturers, and they're unable to innovate because of the excessive fees they have to pay to get the key for the digital lock.

Is the Minister of Innovation aware of this problem?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): I thank my honourable colleague for bringing this matter to our attention. I'm happy to work with him to see if we can resolve it.

Thank you.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: What is going to be done to ensure open interoperability among manufacturers?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: These are all very good initiatives, and we look forward to collaborating with my honourable colleague when it comes to the interoperability issue he's just raised.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: The U.S. came across the same problem and with bipartisan support made a clear exemption for farmers. Without any equivalent exemption, Canadians are at a disadvantage. In the same nonpartisan spirit, can Canadian manufacturers rely on the minister to make sure Canada is on an equal footing?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, I can assure my honourable colleague that we will continue to work with business leaders in Canada, particularly in the manufacturing sector, which has stepped up and is saving lives every day with their innovations.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: From the beginning, Canadian manufacturers outside Quebec and Ontario were ready to produce medical equipment, but their help has often been turned away. Why is the minister's procurement playing favourites with different regions of the country?

Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs): Madam Chair, the whole-of-government approach is focusing on responding to the COVID outbreak and working with partners at all levels of government and with industry to secure life-saving medical supplies. We have established complementary supply chains from a range of suppliers, and we are partnering with Canadian industry to rapidly scale up and retool production capacity, ensuring a reliable domestic supply to serve our needs for the short and long term.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: How does the minister justify waiting for Medicom to set up operations in Montreal when another company like Novo Textiles was already producing N95 masks in B.C.?

Hon. Dan Vandal: Madam Chair, we are ensuring that we have procured a steady supply of goods for front-line health care workers in the short and long term from domestic and international sources. We are continuing to place bulk orders for PPE and medical supplies on a regular basis in anticipation of short-term and long-term needs.

This has been our approach from the onset, and we will continue to see deliveries arriving from manufacturers internationally and—

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

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Well over a month ago, in committee, we were told that you'd received information from Innovation Canada about their engagement with Canadian companies. When will this report and a full, detailed list of the government's COVID contracts be made available to the public?

● (1305)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, Canadian companies are answering the call to provide critical supports to our workers. They are on the front lines of this COVID pandemic with us, and we thank them.

We're exploring various ways to provide secure domestic supplies of personal protective equipment to Canadian workers. We'll continue to work with industry partners to develop and manufacture the much-needed personal protective equipment.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: [*Inaudible—Editor*]for use in Canada, while the same devices have begun to be used in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Does the minister not trust the medical standards of these other countries?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, our government is working hard to protect Canada and Canadians from COVID-19, and we are working very hard to ensure that every opportunity that can lead to a vaccine is explored. We owe that to Canadians.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Does the minister agree petroleum products are an essential part of producing PPE and medical equipment, yes or no?

Hon. Dan Vandal: Madam Chair, the size of our orders reflects the fluidity of highly competitive global supply chains. The reality is that some contracts will need to be modified in order to deliver the goods we need. These shifts are built into our flexible approach to procurement.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: I will say that was maybe a “maybe”, then.

Why does the government keep ignoring our domestic energy industry?

Hon. Dan Vandal: Madam Chair, that is absolutely not true. I would cite that our government purchased a pipeline in order to get our oil to tidewater, something the previous government could not do in 10 years.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will now go to Mr. Van Popta.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Chair, a couple of weeks ago Canada's Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Therrien, told the industry committee that Canada's privacy laws are not keeping pace with Canada's digital economy.

Is the minister confident Canadians' privacy will be adequately protected in the digital economy with the current legislation?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, our government continues to work hard to protect Canadians' health and also their privacy. We have well-developed national security frameworks to protect Canadians and to protect research. We're also working with universities and research institutions, which have strong protocols in place to address issues around cybersecurity and safety.

We owe it to Canadians to protect their well-being and safety as well as their security and privacy.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Can the minister confirm whether the government is planning on adding digital contact tracing to its tool box to fight COVID-19? If that is the case, will Canada's privacy laws protect Canadians' privacy?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, we're exploring innovative solutions from all sectors of the economy to fight COVID-19, including data and digital technology experts.

Let me be clear that Canadians' safety, well-being and privacy are top of mind

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll move on.

My riding of Langley—Aldergrove is in metro Vancouver's TransLink service and, like transit authorities across the country, it is really hurting these days. It didn't qualify for the wage subsidy. Thankfully, the provincial government came to the rescue, but still TransLink is losing \$50 million a month.

Can the government confirm it will help Canadian transit authorities?

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance): As you know, our government has stepped up to provide direct relief to businesses while at the same time trying to find other ways to support municipalities. We will continue to work with provinces to make sure our businesses and transits are supported.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I don't know if that was an answer to the question, but I'll move on.

I have a question about the government's loan program, the \$40,000 loan for small businesses to create liquidity. Many small businesses are falling through the cracks. A couple of residents in my riding, Michael and Darryl, told me that they check off all the boxes except for one: They don't have a business account, apparently.

Will the government commit at looking at that program again to get rid of that unnecessary obstacle?

• (1310)

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business and Export Promotion): We have expanded the eligibility for this important loan that is helping many small businesses across the country. About 660,000 businesses are being helped. Yes indeed, we are working on a solution so those businesses that have a personal bank account will be helped through this loan program.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I'm happy with the answer, but I would like to know from the minister when that will happen. I told Michael and Darryl that I would try to have an answer for them when they got back to Langley.

Hon. Mary Ng: I want to thank the honourable member for his strong advocacy for his small business owners. I can assure him that we are working with the financial institutions literally around the clock so that we can get that solution out to those small business owners.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I'd still like to know when that would happen.

We heard the Prime Minister talk about flexibility for the CERB program. Will the government come with the same spirit of flexibility to programs that are supposed to help small business owners stay afloat through this crisis? Saying when would be a really good answer.

Hon. Mary Ng: Madam Chair, I think that the record will stand for itself. We have made a couple of changes to this loan program, precisely by listening to our colleagues here on all sides of the House and also by listening to business owners themselves. We're really pleased to expand the criteria for CEBA, and we will ensure that this gets out to those small business owners as soon as possible.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Chair, the Liberal Party of Canada has dipped into the wage subsidy, when it raked in \$8 million last year and \$3 million this year. Everyone knows that it isn't in trouble.

Let's start with the principle of communicating vessels. The wage subsidy money that the Liberal Party has taken will go into its election funds. My question is simple. Will this party tell the worker who lost his job during COVID-19 that the taxes he paid, even though he is not a Liberal, will go into the Liberal Party of Canada's election fund?

Hon. Mona Fortier: From the beginning, our government has made Canadian workers and families a priority. The wage subsidy does just that. It is designed to help employers to protect the jobs Canadians depend on and to rehire workers who have been laid off. We will continue to provide this support to employers to ensure that jobs are protected until the end of August. We are continuing to ensure that workers are protected during this crisis.

Mr. Alain Therrien: This is similar to the principle of double-dipping. This party told us it was taking \$210,000 a month in wage subsidies. That's \$630,000 that it will put into its election fund. It's going to spend that money. Once it's been spent, the party will receive a 50% reimbursement from the Chief Electoral Officer. That's double-dipping.

Does this party know that during a pandemic, double-dipping doesn't follow the public health guidelines?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, our message to Quebeckers and Canadians is clear: no matter who they work for, our government supports them.

The wage subsidy is intended to help workers throughout the economy to get through this crisis. To date, more than 2.5 million employees across the country are supported by the wage subsidy. This ensures that they can continue to count on a decent income during this unprecedented challenge. Our government is there for Canadians, and it will continue to be there for Canadians.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Chair, I'm going to talk about another principle, the glutton principle. When you try to feed a glutton, you end up running out because a glutton always wants more. It's the same thing with the Liberal Party. They have raked in \$210,000 a month, which is \$630,000 in three months. The Liberals thought they could get more money by extending the wage subsidy.

Does that bother you?

• (1315)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, last week, I had the opportunity to speak with a number of employers across the country to see how the wage subsidy was helping them to support their employees. They told us very clearly that we need to keep it in order to support employers and protect jobs across Canada.

We'll continue to do so. Already, more than 2.5 million employees across the country are supported by the wage subsidy. We won't discriminate between workers.

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Chair, the minister went to the Minister of National Revenue to find out how not to answer questions. She's very effective in her ineffectiveness.

We've seen the principle of communicating vessels, the principle of double-dipping and the principle of the glutton.

Under the "full stop" principle, will the Liberals pay back the money they've taken from taxpayers, when their party is one of the richest in Canada?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Again, I think it's clear that the Canada emergency wage subsidy has been a support and a help for employers and, more importantly, for protecting jobs across the country.

Over 2.5 million employees across Canada are protected by this wage subsidy.

We'll keep doing it.

Mr. Alain Therrien: It's a bit disconcerting.

I'll ask a simple question.

Does the Liberal Party still have principles?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): The Liberal Party of Canada is built on the principles, ideas and values of sharing, respect for others and economic development for the benefit of others. Those are the principles of the Liberal Party.

I can repeat them if my colleague asks me another question.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Your time is up, Mr. Therrien.

We'll now go to the next member.

Ms. Koutrakis.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Madam Chair, I'll be sharing my time with the hon. member for Nepean.

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis and its impact on the economic situation of many families has left many Canadians food insecure. Thousands of food banks and organizations such as community kitchens across the country have stepped up to the challenge of meeting the basic needs of many families across the country.

I'm thinking of Meals on Wheels services like the one at the SCAMA centre in Chomedey in my riding of Vimy. This community service and assisted living centre provides, among other things, over 30,000 hot meals at home each year and allows nearly 350 seniors to stay safely in their homes.

It's inspiring to see these organizations go above and beyond to serve a broader clientele, while protecting the health of all. Right now, even though the economy is gradually recovering, food banks and community organizations still have a lot to do.

Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food inform the House what the government is doing to support these organizations?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Madam Chair, I thank Ms. Koutrakis, the hon. member for Vimy, for her question.

The COVID-19 crisis has left many Canadians food insecure. To help them, thousands of food banks and community organizations have taken on challenges that are each far more complicated. We're here to help them.

In fact, we announced \$100 million specifically to help food banks. Today, I'm pleased to announce that we are launching the second call for proposals for the local food infrastructure fund. This program, which is part of our food policy, is a \$50 million fund. To date, this fund has supported 362 projects across the country for a total value of \$6.6 million.

The program aims to support the strengthening of local food systems. Organizations are eligible for a contribution of up to \$250,000 over three years for projects led by community-based organizations that strengthen local food systems.

• (1320)

[*English*]

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

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Chair, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has seen dramatic changes. The global economy has slowed. People are staying home from work. Borders around the world have almost completely closed.

I know that our government has been working extremely diligently, and in every way, Canadians have stepped up, from socially distancing in public spaces to adhering to the sometimes difficult travel restrictions that have kept them separated from their families.

Canada is known for not only the strength and resilience of its people but also the strength and flexibility of its institutions. We have seen our immigration system respond to immense challenges before. As the response to the coronavirus pandemic continues, can the minister update us on the steps the government has taken to ensure that Canadians and their families are taken care of both at home and abroad?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also want to express my gratitude to the honourable member for Nepean for the good question and for his hard work.

Madam Chair, the honourable member is right: The world has changed, and our government has adjusted and responded to this crisis with the best interests of Canadians and their families at heart. Our immigration system is a global leader in family reunification and in attracting foreign talent and experience, whether that's international students seeking to attend our world-class institutions or workers who are looking to contribute to our economy.

Since the closure of borders around the world, our government has made changes to make sure this new environment still works for Canada. That's why we've moved quickly to ensure that essential workers are able to pass through the border to provide the critical services Canadians depend on, such as on our farms and in our hospitals. We're safeguarding our economy and protecting the industries that keep Canada going.

We know that while the travel restrictions have allowed us to prevent the spread of COVID-19, it has also been a very difficult time for some Canadians with families abroad. Yesterday we made it possible for family members of citizens and permanent residents to come home to Canada while ensuring the strict protocols we put in place continue to be followed. Our government understands how

hard it can be to be separated from family during this time, and we've taken the measures and deliberate actions that are necessary to ensure that family reunification is now a reality.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

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

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

As my first question, Nunavummiut, especially women, need to feel safe when they call police in an emergency and not worry that they will be harassed or humiliated. The allegations brought forward in yesterday's CBC report highlighted over 30 cases in which the RCMP failed to live up to that expectation.

We know these circumstances are not isolated incidents and that racism, discrimination, stereotypes and assumptions played a real part in each of these incidents.

Will the government investigate systemic racism in the RCMP and review policing in Nunavut?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): I want to thank the member opposite for a very important question, a question that occupies my time and our government in making sure that we do what is right in indigenous communities right across this country.

We have been working very closely with the territories in particular with respect to delivery of professional, culturally competent and respectful police services that can be wholly accountable to the territory and to the community.

One of the things we are going to undertake is the development of a new legislative framework for the delivery of indigenous policing services across the country.

To respond directly to the member's question, the trust of the people that police are sworn to serve and protect is absolutely critical, and that trust is always predicated on accountability and a respectful relationship. It is my expectation that every police service, particularly the one for which I'm responsible, the RCMP—

• (1325)

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

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In Inuit Nunaat, 73% of our communities have no dedicated safe space for women. We know that organizations like Pauktuutit have asked for dedicated funding for Inuit-specific safe spaces.

This government is more interested in words than action, especially when it comes to reconciliation. When will the government follow through on a national action plan to address the 231 calls to justice of the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls report?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): I thank the member for the question and for the ongoing advocacy. I think across all our government, including Minister Vandal, Minister Monsef and Minister Miller, we are really working toward that goal of safe spaces.

Pauktuutit President Kudloo and Elisapee Sheutiapik have provided a very good road map to go forward, and with that partnership we will be able to have a strong national action plan that respects the jurisdiction—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Every year our agriculture and agri-food industries rely on tens of thousands of temporary foreign workers. The pandemic has exposed just how essential migrant workers are to our farms, which raises serious questions about our country's food security.

Two young migrant workers have died and hundreds have become infected by COVID-19. The federal government is responsible for allowing these workers to come to Canada and it has a duty to ensure their safety.

Why is the federal government not protecting these workers? Where is the accountability?

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

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To my colleague I would say, as I've said before, that we express our sympathies to those migrant workers who have unfortunately lost their lives due to COVID-19. That sacrifice will continue to motivate the protections that we have introduced for migrant workers, including financial support and regulatory inspection powers. There's still more to do.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, I would say that the federal government's hands-off approach is putting workers' lives and our country's food security at risk. Why is the federal government abandoning its leadership role and not enforcing national housing and workplace standards for temporary foreign workers?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Of course I respect my colleague's point of view on this, but I disagree. He would know from my testimony before the committee that we've introduced a robust compliance regime that ensures that we're maintaining a high degree of occupational health and safety.

Of course, as I've said, we're going to continue to collaborate with all members of this House and with industry leaders to make sure those protections are in place.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, I think the statistics suggest that the government needs to do more work.

My final question is this. Tens of thousands of workers are needed in our agriculture sector each year, but the government's agri-food pilot program to provide a pathway to permanent residency is accepting fewer than 3,000. If they're good enough to work, they're good enough to stay. Will the government commit to increasing the number of applicants?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, the introduction of the agri-food pilot is something that all members should celebrate because it creates that pathway to allow migrant workers to establish permanent residency in Canada. That's something that I think we should all be proud of.

Of course, we will measure the outcomes of this pilot and continue to build on the past successes of this government.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are now going to pause for a few minutes to allow the teams to do the necessary exchanges.

● (1330)

The Chair (Hon. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.)): Very good. We'll now continue with Mr. Soroka.

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

In my riding of Yellowhead, I have the town of Drayton Valley, where oil and gas has been the main employer until recent years. The councils of Drayton Valley and neighbouring Brazeau County have worked together with various partners to create a new green economic economy.

More than two weeks ago, I was informed that the new medical marijuana business needed financial assistance, and I sent an email to Minister Ng asking her for assistance for the community of Drayton Valley, to which I still haven't received a reply. This new business will create more than 50 permanent jobs in the area.

Will the minister and the government help the community of Drayton Valley by financially assisting the business to create new jobs?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

The Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Certainly the focus of this government is on ensuring that we are addressing the needs of workers from coast to coast to coast.

With respect to workers in Alberta and Saskatchewan, we have taken significant action in funding the clean-up of orphan wells, as well as funding to address and implement methane regulations to cut carbon emissions. We're working very closely with our provincial and territorial counterparts in those provinces, as elsewhere, and we will continue to work to ensure that we are addressing the economic concerns of people who live in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Mr. Chair, I sit on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and our first business at the committee was to study the business risk management programs because they are not working or helping farmers. Just as we were starting the study, it was shut down because of COVID-19.

My concern is that during the pandemic, Minister Bibeau had stated several times that an agricultural community can apply for the various BRM programs for financial help. These are the same programs that the ag committee was studying because they are not working.

If the BRM programs weren't helping farmers before COVID-19 and farmers now are in even greater financial need, why does the minister believe these programs would help farmers now?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I know that farmers would like the programs to be more generous, but it doesn't mean the programs are not working. Actually, the previous government made cuts of about \$400 million to these programs, and now we have to get all of the provinces on board to make modifications. I can tell you that this is a top priority and I am working with the provinces on a weekly basis on this.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Minister Bibeau, are you aware that the Liberal government has been in power for four and a half years? Are you saying that in four and a half years you don't have the ability to make these changes?

The Chair: I just want to remind the honourable members to place their questions and their replies through the chair and not directly to each other.

The honourable minister.

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

Actually, when you cut \$400 million from a program that needs provincial contributions, it's very hard to get all of the provinces and territories back to agree on new—

Mr. Gerald Soroka: We'll try again.

Mr. Chair, when the AgriInvest program was first established, one of its benefits that was promoted was that it could be used as a retirement savings plan for farmers. The other benefit was that farmers could invest in their businesses. It has now come to my attention that the government doesn't want to financially assist farmers until they use up all of the money in AgriInvest. At the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, a witness from Quebec said that AgriInvest is for farmers to invest in their businesses; it is not a bailout.

Is Minister Bibeau asking farmers to use up all of their AgriInvest money and be destitute before she will help them?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, we are doing a lot to support our farmers in different ways, but the business risk management programs are meant to support farmers in times of need, and AgriInvest is one of the four major programs.

The Chair: Mr. Soroka, you have 45 seconds remaining.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The government has put \$50 million into the AgriRecovery program to pay for feed so producers can hold back cattle until slaughter plants can take them. With processing capacity not even at 60% and Alberta feedlots full and backlogged for months, before this backlog can be cleared, the spring-born calves will be coming to market this fall. With very little room in the feedlots, price in the fall calf run will be very low.

Is the minister aware that this is going to happen, and what is the plan to help ranchers with the lower calf prices this fall?

• (1335)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, yes, we are doing even more than the business risk management programs for the meat industry. As you said, we have put in place the AgriRecovery program for the meat sector. For the beef sector and the pork sector, it's a \$50-million fund, and also \$77.5 million to support the processing industry.

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

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to confirm whether it's the case that at a meeting later this week, the Prime Minister will be proposing to the premiers that wherever the RCMP is contracted to serve as the provincial police force, body cams should be used by all officers on patrol.

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Bill Blair: There is a very important discussion taking place, not only within the RCMP but in policing right across the country, about how to improve systems of accountability and oversight and to provide the best possible evidence of events as they transpire. For the police services for which the government is responsible, we have made a commitment to do that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Was that a yes, that it will be brought up at that meeting later this week?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you for the opportunity to finish my answer.

The Prime Minister has made it very clear that for the premiers of the provinces and territories, who are actually responsible for policing in their respective jurisdictions, this is an important discussion that he intends to raise with them as well.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, my understanding is that for the type of cameras proposed, the installed cost is about \$4,000 per officer. There are about 20,000 front-line RCMP officers across the country, so this suggests a total cost of perhaps about \$80 million to set up body cams across Canada.

Are those numbers roughly accurate?

Hon. Bill Blair: No, they're not, actually, because not every individual would require his or her own camera. We are looking at patrol circumstances where the presence of a camera can provide valuable evidence and provide enhanced accountability for the officers. I would point out that it's particularly acute in some of our indigenous and remote communities, so that's where we'll be looking first—

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, there are about 5,600 RCMP patrol vehicles across the country. Would it be correct to use the \$4,000 figure, times that number of vehicles, giving us about a \$20-million to \$30-million cost?

Hon. Bill Blair: Of course, the member raises another secondary but very important issue of in-car cameras. Many of our patrol cars are already equipped with such devices.

Mr. Scott Reid: Body cams are an excellent technology. Given the Prime Minister's newfound enthusiasm for the adoption of this excellent life-saving technology, may I be so bold as to suggest that it might be appropriate, after four years of my persistent questioning on this subject, for the government to also install automated external defibrillators in every one of the 5,600 RCMP vehicles?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm aware of, and commend the member for, his strong advocacy on that. I too am experienced in the use of these devices. I believe they can save lives. There are, of course, issues of cost and jurisdiction that need to be addressed, but the member's advocacy is very valuable.

Mr. Scott Reid: I hope the advocacy of the House of Commons as a whole is also valued.

On January 21, 2018, the House of Commons unanimously voted “That...within twelve months...the government should follow the example of other Canadian police services and act to save hundreds of lives each year by equipping all RCMP vehicles with...defibrillators...”.

That was over 24 months ago. Why has the government failed to act on the unanimous advice of the House of Commons?

Hon. Bill Blair: I again thank the member for his strong advocacy on this. It's an issue that is under discussion with the RCMP. There are a number of operational issues that need to be addressed within the police service, and priorities made on the expenditure of funds, but we are aware of the strong support of the House for this measure.

Mr. Scott Reid: The priority of funding is an excellent question, Mr. Chair. It will cost approximately a billion dollars to renovate Centre Block. I believe that's accurate. It will cost \$5 million to put these AEDs, defibrillators, into all police cruisers. This would save

300 lives per annum. Is the cost of saving 300 lives per annum—one half of 1% of a billion dollars—more or less important than renovating Centre Block?

• (1340)

Hon. Bill Blair: I certainly wouldn't want to debate the member on the value of a human life. I believe it is very important that we do everything necessary, and our first responsibility is the preservation and sanctity of life. There are a number of important operational considerations that the RCMP will undertake.

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

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm wondering if [*Inaudible—Editor*] within the 24 months that took place since this matter was raised unanimously in the House.

I have this question for the minister. There are 5,600 RCMP vehicles. It would cost \$5 million to save 300 lives per annum. A defibrillator lasts about 10 years and saves on average during its 10-year lifespan one life per every 1.7 defibrillators installed. Is this or is this not a priority that the Prime Minister will deal with by the end of this year?

Hon. Bill Blair: Unfortunately, because this is an operational decision of the RCMP...to make that commitment on behalf of the member, but I will acknowledge the value of automatic defibrillator machines in our communities. I'm certain that the RCMP is aware of that as well.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

For more than a week, my colleagues and my leader have been trying by every means possible to ask the government to be transparent when it comes to infrastructure. However, history shows that when a Liberal touches infrastructure, it always ends badly. I'm going to give the minister a chance to start from the beginning.

How many projects have been authorized by her government since the launch of the Investing in Canada plan, how many have been completed and how much federal money has been invested in them?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities): Mr. Chair, as I have said before in the House, we are investing in infrastructure all across the country. It is very important that we move forward. We have an infrastructure plan that focuses on green infrastructure and public transit for recreation centres and rural communities.

I would like to talk about the previous government—

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

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, once again, the minister is unable to give us any numbers.

The government contends that 50,000 projects have been completed in Canada. The Parliamentary Budget Officer talks about 30,000 projects. We are short 20,000. The minister cannot even tell us how many projects have been carried out in Canada under the Investing in Canada plan.

How many are there, Madam Minister?

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Collins, on a point of order.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Mr. Berthold's volume was at the same level as the interpretation. I was hoping that you could—

The Chair: Is the honourable member on the right channel? Sometimes that messes things up.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I am on the French channel, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Madam Minister, are you on the French or English channel?

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins: It seems to be working now.

[Translation]

The Chair: Perfect.

The hon. minister has the floor.

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Chair, as I have said before in the House, we have already presented to the Parliamentary Budget Officer the 33,000 projects in which we have invested directly. We are also supporting 20,000 gas tax and CMHC projects. However, the answer—

The Chair: We now go to Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, first of all, the government waited two years before providing a list of gas tax funding to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. They did so last Friday.

Next, they said they could not give out the list of projects for security reasons. Then they said they could not give out the list because of the previous government. However, after two years of waiting, a partial list was provided to the Parliamentary Budget Officer on Friday.

Is it not time to give the Auditor General the power to investigate this Liberal infrastructure fiasco?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Chair, we have already outlined the projects in which we are directly investing, and I will speak frankly to the hon. member.

It was the Conservative government that negotiated a ten-year gas tax plan that does not require reporting on projects. Quebec is not required to report on a project-by-project basis.

I can assure you that, when we renegotiate this agreement, we will require municipalities and provinces to publicly report on projects.

I cannot believe the hon. member, a Conservative—

• (1345)

The Chair: We now go back to Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, this is unbelievable. How can the government say that there were 20,000 gas tax projects when the

minister herself says that the provinces do not have to report on the projects in which the government has invested?

In fact, we have received another answer. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has learned from Infrastructure Canada officials that the government does not collect detailed data on CMHC projects.

How can this government claim to have completed a given number of projects when, based on its own statements and those of its department, it is not able to obtain the numbers?

Why is the minister spinning her wheels so much instead of providing all the information to Canadians?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Chair, we have provided the information. I find it truly incredible to hear these questions from the Conservative Party, the hon. member's party, when the Conservatives wanted to cut our infrastructure investments in the last election campaign.

So I am asking the hon. member which projects they would have cut.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Municipalities are asking for help. A Royal Bank of Canada economic study released this morning is very clear: the COVID-19 pandemic has had a tsunami effect on municipal finances. In 2020, the revenue shortfall from lowering property taxes and user fees, including public transit, will be \$11.7 billion for Canada as a whole, including \$5 billion for Ontario.

Why is the minister playing petty politics instead of helping the municipalities?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Chair, we are helping the municipalities.

We are investing in infrastructure every day. We recognize the need to be flexible during this crisis. That is why we are advancing \$2.2 billion to municipalities to help them get back on their feet, to build more infrastructure and to create jobs. We will certainly continue to work with the provinces and territories. It is extremely important that our essential workers be able to travel by public transit.

The Chair: We now go to Mr. Lawrence.

[English]

Mr. Lawrence, go ahead.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Thank you.

Over the weekend, the Prime Minister sole-sourced a contract for over \$100 million to buy two brand new private jets to add to the government's fleet. Why was this contract sole-sourced?

Hon. Anita Anand (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the Challenger 650 aircraft is the current production version of the model that the Canadian Forces currently operates. It was determined that this commonality would result in efficiency and interoperability and—

The Chair: We now go back to Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much for that education and those great talking points. In April of 2018, however, the Royal Canadian Air Force recommended that the government purchase used private jets for between \$12 million to \$18 million, which is considerably less than \$100 million. Why would the government choose a more expensive option?

The Chair: The honourable minister.... We seem to have a technical issue.

Could the honourable minister please proceed?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence): Can you repeat the question? I was having a technical issue.

The Chair: We'll stop the time. The question was about 20 seconds long. Go ahead.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: In 2018, it was reported that the Royal Canadian Air Force recommended the government replace its fleet of private jets with used private jets that cost between \$12 million to \$18 million. That's far less than the \$100 million that was spent through the sole-source contract.

Could you please explain why the government chose the more expensive option?

The Chair: Once again, I want to remind the hon. members to place their questions through the Chair. That's just a reminder.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, when it comes to supporting our women and men, we committed to making sure that they would have the appropriate equipment they deserve. These aircraft are required for very important things, such as evacuation of Canadian Armed Forces personnel, repatriation of Canadians, such as people like Pastor Lim from North Korea, and it—

• (1350)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much for the great correction, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it.

I would also like to inquire why the military was given 40 year old F-18 planes while the Prime Minister's going to be flying around in brand new, sole-sourced private jets?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, we committed to making sure that our Canadian Armed Forces would be funded, and that's exactly what we're doing. The Challenger fleet has been transporting parliamentarians of all stripes since April. The fleet transported the leader of the opposition and his entire family to attend the emergency session in the House of Commons. These planes play a very important role and we're—

Mr. Philip Lawrence: The hypocrisy of this Liberal government knows no end. The Prime Minister said to our brave soldiers, who are out on the front line helping us through COVID and throughout the world, that they were asking for more than he was prepared to give. He won't replace 40-year-old jets that he got from the Australian government, but is perfectly happy to be flying around in these brand new private jets.

Once again, why was this contract sole-sourced and why does the Canadian military means so little to a Liberal government?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, we're not going to take any lessons from the opposition in this regard. They're the government that actually cut \$2 billion per year when it comes to the deficit re-

duction action plan, the strategic review. Our defence policy makes sure that it's fully funded and we're going to be replacing not only all of our jets with brand new aircraft, but also all of the other aircraft, whether they're for search and rescue or the Challenger fleet, because our women and men deserve the right and new equipment.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Once again, more words from this Liberal government but no action.

Today we still have our brave airmen flying more than 40-year-old F-18s bought from the Australian government. Once again, when will the government realize that spending money on our military is a great thing to do, and not on brand new private jets when used ones would work perfectly well?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We are committed to making sure that our air force personnel have all the right tools, Mr. Chair. We are making sure that we make the appropriate investments for our people. If the Conservatives were serious about this, they would have replaced these jets a long time ago, but they didn't. We will.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I would just like to ask the minister if he's aware that the Liberal government has actually been in power for the last five years, and move on from there to ask the government about the role it certainly has....

Recently, Liberal MP Mark Gerretsen re-awoke a conversation that the national heritage minister had brought up, that we should be licensing or controlling the media. Will the government commit to not regulating the Internet and all media?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Chair, we've made it clear in the House numerous times that we have no intention of regulating the Internet.

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

Mr. Paul Manly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, the charitable and non-profit sectors contribute 8.5% of GDP and support 2.4 million jobs in Canada. Many of these organizations are struggling financially during this pandemic. Almost 75% have seen a decrease in revenue, while almost 40% have seen an increase in demands for services. These organizations serve the most vulnerable members of our society efficiently and effectively. We need them to survive the pandemic.

Will the government create a sector-specific grant program to help guarantee the survival of the charitable and non-profit organizations?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the honourable member for the really important question.

We recognize the strong services, the essential services, that non-profits and charities provide to vulnerable Canadians. That is why we moved quickly to provide the emergency community support fund, to allow non-profits and charitable organizations to continue to serve our most vulnerable populations. In fact, the \$350-million fund is allowing them to increase their capacity to deliver even more services to the most vulnerable in our communities.

• (1355)

Mr. Paul Manly: One of the key recommendations of the inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls is to create “a guaranteed annual livable income for all Canadians,” taking “into account diverse needs, realities, and geographic locations.”

It is an idea whose time has come. We need a stronger safety net, one that ensures that no one falls through the cracks. A guaranteed livable income is a fair system that alleviates poverty and rewards work. It would eliminate the need for sick leave. It would help people who provide unpaid caregiving. It would help people going back to school to improve their education and skills.

Will the government implement this key recommendation and create a guaranteed livable income for all Canadians?

Hon. Ahmed Hussien: Mr. Chair, once again I thank the honourable member for bringing forward a really important debate about universal basic income.

Philosophically we believe, of course, that we have to help the most vulnerable in our communities. We have to make sure that Canadians from coast to coast to coast have a good standard of living.

Instead of sending a modest amount of money to everyone, including those who don't need it, we chose the alternative approach of sending more supports to those who need it. We'll continue to support Canadians through this COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, and make sure we recover better and more inclusively.

Mr. Paul Manly: The three first nations communities in my riding are all unsatisfied by the level and quality of policing in their communities. There have not been staffing increases in 20 years despite a growing population both on reserve and in the surrounding community. RCMP officer rotations don't promote good relationships with the communities that they're assigned to. At the same time, we are witnessing repeated incidents of police abuse of power with indigenous people in Canada.

Will the government expand the successful Kwanlin Dun First Nation pilot project and establish a community safety officer model of policing in other first nations across the country?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Bill Blair: I thank the member opposite for a very important question. I want to assure him that we remain seized with the urgency of ensuring that we develop a new legislative framework for indigenous policing across this country, one that recognizes and acknowledges the jurisdiction of first nations and ensures that they receive the quality and respectful policing, culturally competent policing, that they deserve.

I acknowledge that there remains much work to be done. The tragic and offensive incidents that we have seen over the past several weekdays have reminded us of the urgency action and we are committed to act.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Mr. Manly, you have 45 seconds left.

Mr. Paul Manly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

People living on CPP disability in my riding are surviving on income that is below the poverty line. Many will not receive the one-time \$600 payment, because they do not receive the disability tax credit. This excludes many people who were struggling even before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Will the government expand the eligibility criteria for people with disabilities to ensure that everybody on CPP disability gets it; and will the government institute a permanent raise to CPP disability to ensure that disabled people can live a dignified life?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We looked at the myriad of measures in place and tried to complement, as best we could, the efforts to provide people with disabilities with support through CERB, to provide students with disabilities with support through the student benefit, the GST credit and the complementary measures put in place by provinces. The DTC has by far the broadest spectrum of people with disabilities that the federal government has access to. That was why we chose, through this measure, to use that as the group of people we're supporting.

The Chair: We will now go to Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Chair, I'd like to split my time with the member for Hamilton Centre.

Passenger rights in Canada are a joke to this government. Not only does the passenger bill of rights have numerous loopholes, but the system to enforce them is broken. Complaints don't get resolved, and when they do, the Canadian Transportation Agency mostly sides with the airlines.

When will the government stand up for Canadian passengers rather than airlines?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport): Mr. Chair, the Canadian Transportation Agency is an independent body, a quasi-judicial body that does rule on complaints that are sent to it with respect to passenger rights, and they make their own decisions on claims that those rights have not been respected.

• (1400)

[Translation]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, this government must stop playing games with passengers who want to be refunded for a service they can no longer use because of COVID-19.

We see that WestJet is going to refund its customers. So, what are the others doing?

When is the government going to show some backbone and demand refunds for passengers?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, I understand the frustration of those who would rather get a refund than a credit.

At the same time, as I mentioned, the airlines have been hit very hard and are making virtually no revenue at the moment. That is why the Canadian Transportation Agency has suggested that they issue credits.

However, I am encouraging airlines to compensate their passengers wherever possible, when circumstances permit.

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, you have 50 seconds left.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Chair, passengers are having to turn to class action lawsuits to get their money back for cancelled flights due to COVID-19. We know that airlines can issue refunds without going under. WestJet is doing it; why not the others?

When will the government ensure that Canadian passengers get their money back for cancelled flights?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, as I've said, I understand the frustrations of those who would prefer to be reimbursed. At the same time, many airlines have lost just about all of their revenue, and that is why many have adopted a voucher policy. I do encourage the airlines to compensate their passengers to the best of their ability, circumstances permitting.

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

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, as a former Toronto chief of police, would Minister Bill Blair finally apologize to the black community for his role in the systematic and racist practice of street checks and carding?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, I am very proud to have served as the chief of police in the most diverse city in the country, one of the most diverse in the world and, during my tenure, formerly, one of the most diverse police services. I would be happy to explain to the member all of the work that we did to serve that community in a respectful way.

Mr. Matthew Green: So despite his professions last week, we'll take that as a no.

From the tragic police shooting of Chantel Moore to the recent reports of police brutality in Nunavut, and RCMP officers now facing charges in both B.C. and Alberta, will the Minister of Public Safety commit to finally releasing the RCMP's incidents of use of force and release the total cost of civil settlements by the RCMP over the past 10 years?

Hon. Bill Blair: I believe very strongly that transparency and accountability are the foundation of the trust that has to exist between the police and the people they serve.

We're working very closely with the RCMP. I can advise the member that currently, for example, the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission, which our government established, is reviewing all the RCMP policies and procedures regarding street checks, and that work will inform the policy of this government as we move forward.

Mr. Matthew Green: Will the Minister of Public Safety investigate the use of tear gas on May 31 in Montreal by police and encourage police to prioritize de-escalation tactics over dispersal and arrest tactics in crowd control actions, much like he did during the G20 summit?

Hon. Bill Blair: I would simply remind the member that the police in Montreal are under the jurisdiction of the City of Montreal and the Government of Quebec. I will also assure him that the RCMP, which is our responsibility, is guided by very clear policies in respect of such equipment.

Mr. Matthew Green: Will the Minister of Public Safety ban the use of tear gas and chemical agents in all forms in Canada and destroy the stocks of tear gas currently owned by police and armed forces in Canada, as it was banned in the use of warfare generally by the 1925 Geneva Protocol, and specifically by the 1993 chemical weapons convention?

Hon. Bill Blair: I want to assure the member opposite that Canada has perhaps one of the most rigorous and stringent policies and controls over the use of such devices. They are very rare in Canada and should be very rare.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will now continue with Mr. Ste-Marie.

• (1405)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can the government tell us when it intends to present its economic update?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, we are well aware that the Canadian economy is going through a period of extraordinary uncertainty as a result of COVID-19. As soon as it is possible to provide economic projections—

The Chair: Back to Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, in its current form, Question Period provides us with very few answers. So we are going to try another approach. I suggest we try the format of the TV game show *Jeopardy*, which became popular in Quebec thanks to its star host R al Gigu re, who passed away last year. The format is simple. I will give the answer and the government must say what the question was.

Let us begin. The question is worth \$20. Who am I? I am a picture of the economic situation, a picture of the government's overall emergency measures and of its intention to extend them, or not extend them, over the summer, and if so, how. I am also a presentation of the government's working scenarios for economic recovery.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, the Canadian government does not play games.

At this time, we are well aware that the Canadian economy is going through a period of extraordinary uncertainty. We will continue to be open and transparent about what we are doing to support families, our healthcare system and our economy.

This includes reporting biweekly to Parliament on the total cost and status of the measures in our plan. As soon as it is possible to provide clear economic projections, we will give a comprehensive update to Canadians.

We are prepared to do whatever it takes to support families, workers and businesses in these difficult times of the pandemic.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, obviously the answer was, "What is the economic update?"

The next question is worth \$40. Who am I? I will be presenting my economic update by the end of the month.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, I think it is important to say that we will continue to be open and transparent about the measures we have taken and the measures we will continue to take to support families, our healthcare system and our—

The Chair: Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Unfortunately, the answer was "Who is the Government of Quebec?"

Quebec has indeed committed to presenting its economic update in the coming weeks. We would have liked to be able to accept "Who is the federal government?" as an answer, but they have not yet made that commitment. I wish they had done so today.

The next question is worth \$60. Who am I? I am urging the government to table an economic update in a timely manner. In the meantime, I am monitoring the government's measures and am providing an estimate of their costs and the projected deficit.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, as I understand it, that is an answer and not a question.

Is that right?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: When we ask questions, we do not get answers. So I am trying to be creative, so that we get answers. In this case, the answer was obviously "Who is the Parliamentary Budget Officer?" By the way, I would like to commend his entire team and thank them for their excellent work.

The next question is worth \$80. Who are we? We have been demanding that the government present its economic update for over a month now.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, as I understand it, the hon. member is asking a question and answering it himself. So he does not need to come here.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Chair, we are trying to be creative. When we ask questions in their classic form, we do not get answers. We are told that the economic situation is too uncertain.

Quebec will present its economic update. The Parliamentary Budget Officer says it is urgent. We have been asking for it for a month now. It makes no sense.

Who has been requesting the update for more than a month? The Bloc Québécois and the opposition parties. It is high time it was done.

I am going to ask one last question. Who am I? I am committed today to providing an economic update by the end of the month. Who am I?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: It is Gabriel Ste-Marie, MP, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Ste-Marie, you have 24 seconds left.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I am going to conclude by saying that I wish the answer was "Who is the Liberal government?" I also wish they would have told us today that they are going to present their economic update by the end of the month, which would have made a lot of sense.

Of course, we would have accepted "Where is the Liberal government?" or "What is the government doing?"

I do not think we will be trying this experiment again, Mr. Chair.

• (1410)

The Chair: We now continue with Mr. Falk.

[English]

Mr. Ted Falk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

While we don't have money to throw around like the Bloc or the Liberals, I do have some questions that I know all Canadians would be interested in hearing answers to.

In 2015, while in opposition, our now Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said, "For Parliament to work best, its members must be free to do what they have been elected to do: represent their communities and hold the government to account."

How does the Prime Minister explain to Canadians that we have more openness when he has shut down Parliament for months on end?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, the House decided on a hybrid model that allows the colleague to ask the question. There is more time for questions, questions on anything, and if we were to move to anything different, I would like my colleague to tell me how we are going to vote, for example, on PMBs, if it's not a vote by party but a vote by rote? I'd like to have an answer.

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Chair, on May 26 a Liberal motion suspended Parliament until September. If the Prime Minister believes that Parliament works best when elected officials hold the government to account, why did he work with the NDP to avoid parliamentary accountability?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, we never avoid accountability. It's quite the opposite. Actually, there is more time to ask questions.

I will take no lessons from the Conservatives on democracy. I was here and some of my colleagues were here when they shut Parliament twice. They prorogued not once but twice—

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

Mr. Ted Falk: If the Prime Minister believes in his 2015 platform statement that government should be open by default, what did the Prime Minister give to the NDP to get them to agree to shut down full parliamentary sittings?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, we're working under the hybrid model that allows the member to ask questions. If we went with the Conservatives' suggestion, he wouldn't be there. He wouldn't be asking questions—not at all, and not his neighbours, not people from any province. Only the—

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

Mr. Ted Falk: Does the Prime Minister actually believe that COVID-19 excuses him from regular parliamentary accountability?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, for four days a week there is an hour and a half of questions. We have nine committees working and being able to ask questions on anything. We are going to meet four times—

The Chair: We're going to go back to Mr. Falk.

Mr. Ted Falk: The Prime Minister doesn't seem to respect our parliamentary system. That seems to be in line with his stated admiration of China's basic dictatorship.

Speaking of being above the rules, is it true that the Prime Minister has been found guilty of contravening federal ethics laws?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, I do not see where my colleague wants to go with this.

One thing is clear: every day, the current system allows members of Parliament from across the country, including via videoconference, to ask questions and debate issues fundamental to Canadians. That is what we call democracy.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk: Is it true that no other sitting Prime Minister has ever been found guilty of breaking ethics laws?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Once again, I do not know where my colleague wants to go with this.

The important thing is we are here to debate the issues—

[*English*]

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

Mr. Ted Falk: It is true that he has been found guilty. In fact, he's been found guilty twice. Well, Mr. Trudeau promised to do things differently, and I guess that is one promise that he has kept.

During this time of COVID-19 Prime Minister Trudeau said, "Go home and stay home. This is what we all need to be doing and we're going to make sure it happens." Did the Prime Minister really say that?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, we're gathered here to debate important topics. We're in the middle of a pandemic. We're suggesting solutions to help Canadians, to help our businesses, to help people across the country to move forward and go through this.

Mr. Ted Falk: Did the Prime Minister disregard not only provincial regulations but his own directives when he crossed provincial boundaries for his weekend trip to the Quebec cottage?

• (1415)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, once again it allows me to say how important the work we're doing here is for all Canadians. I am so happy to stand up here to answer all the questions from the opposition. I'm having fun. Thank you.

Mr. Ted Falk: I guess the answer to that question is "yes".

For months, Prime Minister Trudeau has been telling us to listen to public health experts and not gather in large groups. Canadians have listened. They have not visited their dying loved ones and they haven't gone to funerals and they haven't gone to church, and now Prime Minister Trudeau has decided to that he can violate his own directives and attend a mass gathering of over 7,000 young people in Ottawa.

Can the Prime Minister tell us why once again the rules don't apply to him?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, it is important to know that public health guidelines tell us to keep at a certain distance and to follow a whole series of other factors. The Conservatives' solution would mean that there would be a lot of people here and that we would not be observing public health guidelines. At the same time, we would have no questions from a great number of members who would not be able to participate, because the whips choose who is here or not. We want everyone to be able to participate.

The Chair: That is all for today.

This meeting is adjourned.

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