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Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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• (1200)

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

Welcome to the 20th meeting of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

I want to remind those who are participating by video conference that, when they talk, they must use the channel that corresponds to the language they are speaking in.

[*English*]

As usual, please direct your remarks through the chair.

[*Translation*]

We are moving on to ministerial announcements.

[*English*]

I understand that there are no ministerial announcements today, so we'll move on.

[*Translation*]

We will now move on to document submissions.

[*English*]

The honourable minister, Mr. Blair.

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Mr. Chair, today I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2019 annual report on the RCMP's use of the law enforcement justification provisions. This report addresses the RCMP's use of specified provisions within the law enforcement justification regime, which is set out in subsections 25(1) to 25(4) of the Criminal Code. This report also documents the nature of the investigations in which these provisions were used.

The Chair: On tabling of documents, we have Minister Sajjan.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2018-19 progress report on Canada's

national action plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security".

The Chair: Now we'll go to presenting petitions.

I would like to remind members that any petition presented during the meeting of a special committee must have already been certified by the clerk of petitions.

[*Translation*]

Members who are participating in the meeting in person are kindly asked to bring the signed certificate to the office once the petition has been presented.

[*English*]

Presenting petitions, Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, I rise to present two petitions. They both pertain to the protection of our natural world.

One is an e-petition, and it relates to the threat to pollinators globally. We know that honey bees and other pollinators are essential to food production. The petitioners note that research from around the world points to a threat to pollinators, particularly from a class of pesticides known as neonicotinoids. The European Union has taken action on this. The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to practise a precautionary principle and remove from use neonicotinoids in Canada to protect our pollinators.

The second petition relates to the ongoing threat to the southern resident killer whales. These iconic whales are much beloved in Saanich—Gulf Islands, throughout coastal British Columbia and indeed across Canada. The petitioners are calling for more action to be taken as the population of southern resident killer whales continues to decline, more action for boat-free safety zones, more prohibitions around whale tourism to make sure that the whales are safe from those who are keen to watch them from too close a distance, and more of a credible enforcement regime to support these measures to keep the southern resident killer whale population in our waters and not on the list of species that have become extinct.

• (1205)

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

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Chair, for over 10 years, members of Parliament from various parties have been trying to pass legislation to deal with the horrific practice of forced organ harvesting and trafficking.

Irwin Cotler, Borys Wrzesnewskyj, Senator Salma Ataullahjan and I have all proposed bills on this.

The petitioners want the House to support Bill S-204. This is another bill that would make it a criminal offence for someone to go abroad and receive an organ for which there has not been consent. I'm sure petitioners would want me to add that, given the urgency of this issue, perhaps the government could consider bringing forward a government bill on this issue, which would allow the process to move much faster.

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

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Chair, I rise here today to present a petition from Canadian citizens in support of motion M-1, which was placed in this House by my colleague the member for New Westminster—Burnaby on the green new deal. These citizens point out that climate change has escalated into a global climate emergency and that Canada must act with ambition and urgency.

They call on the government to support M-1, a made in Canada green new deal, to take bold and rapid action to adopt socially equitable climate action to tackle the climate emergency and address worsening socio-economic and racial inequalities at the same time while ending fossil fuel subsidies, closing offshore tax havens, and supporting workers impacted by the transition by creating well-paying, unionized jobs in the shift to a clean and renewable energy economy.

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

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, it's an honour and privilege to table e-petition 2577, which was sponsored by Chris Alemany from Port Alberni and is supported by 5,183 petitioners. They're calling on the Government of Canada to work urgently across party lines and in partnership with provincial and territorial governments to implement a guaranteed, consistent, national and livable universal basic income system for all Canadians.

The petition is very timely, coming almost one year to the day since the completion of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which also called on the government to establish a guaranteed annual livable income for all Canadians.

Whether it's about providing a safety net to get through a global pandemic, the means to keep your children out of poverty at any time, or simply being able to afford safe housing or transportation, it's time for Canada to have this conversation.

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

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Chair, it's an honour and a privilege to present a petition on behalf of the constituents of Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

People are concerned about gas fracking and the use of methane and the destruction that methane causes to our atmosphere and with climate change. They're calling on the government to commit to upholding the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action by immediately halting all existing and planned construction of the Coastal GasLink project on the Wet'suwet'en territory, and by or-

dering the RCMP to dismantle their exclusion zone and to stand down. They also call on the government to schedule nation-to-nation talks between the Wet'suwet'en nation and the federal and provincial governments—which is something that we're happy to see has been happening and I commend the government for that effort—and to prioritize the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, like Canada, Guyana is part of the Commonwealth, and many constituents of Winnipeg North have raised the issue with regard to the presidential election back in March, when it was being called into question. There have been some very positive indications in recent days, but the petitioners are asking the Government of Canada, and in fact all members of Parliament, to be aware of what's taking place in Guyana, and as much as possible, to be advocates for democracy and make sure that we're being diligent in supporting what the people of Guyana want to see.

● (1210)

The Chair: I just want to remind the honourable members, when presenting petitions, to be as concise as possible. I notice they're starting to stretch a bit and it's something we all tend to do.

Now we'll go to Statements by Members.

The first statement will be from Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I just want to say thank you to the industrious people of Sudbury who have risen to the challenge and joined forces in the face of COVID-19. I am proud of all my constituents, and all Canadians, including first responders, volunteers, health care and essential workers, local miners, the farmers and produce growers who are feeding our families, and local businesses who are staying connected with their staff.

I also salute all our homegrown innovations such as ProStitch and King Sportswear face masks; Crosscut Distillery hand sanitizer; Nobel Prize winner SNOLAB's work on ventilators, which earned a federal contract; Vale Canada's \$1 million in seed capital to small firms developing COVID-19 health solutions; and many more.

[*Translation*]

We are all in the same boat, but we will get out of it together.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Chair, Pitt Meadows is one of Canada's most beautiful communities. It's tucked in between the Fraser and Pitt rivers and is in the shadow of Golden Ears mountain. Most of the area consists of farmland, golf courses, parks and conservation areas. It also has Pitt Lake, which is among the largest freshwater tidal lakes in the world. Pitt Meadows' history dates back thousands of years with Katzie First Nation.

In the 1900s Dutch immigrants drained and diked the marshes allowing for today's bumper crops of cranberries and blueberries. It's hard to believe that this community is only a short commute to Vancouver and has one of the nation's busiest general aviation airports. Last weekend the community came together to celebrate Pitt Meadows Day a little differently because of COVID. In a great show of community spirit, from their front yards and balconies, thousands of residents came out to cheer for first responders and essential workers as we paraded throughout the city.

I am thankful to have raised my family here, taught in the schools and to now be the member of Parliament representing this wonderful community.

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

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Chair, over the last few months I have watched constituents in my riding come together to look out for one another during these challenging times. Regardless of how deep and painful this pandemic has been, it continues to amaze me just how brightly the collective character of Cape Breton—Canso shines through. Whether it is someone like Glen Muise, who delivers iPads to seniors' homes so they can connect with loved ones, teachers who deliver meals to students in need, Liam and Lucus Sakalauskas, two young boys who keep youth informed across the east coast, or Rose Fitzgerald, who delivered bouquets made from the remaining flowers from her shop to essential workers across her county, constituents in Cape Breton—Canso have stepped up to support their community and to support those in need.

Mr. Chair, as you know it is with great pride that I represent my constituents in Cape Breton—Canso. The people in Cape Breton and northeastern Nova Scotia care deeply about one another. They know that as a community, we're only as strong as our most vulnerable people, and I cannot help but be filled with joy when I see these gestures happening across my riding.

Thanks so much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Bérubé, go ahead.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Chair, unacceptable incidents of police brutality against aboriginals have prompted former member Romeo Saganash, whose commitment I commend, to call for a commission of inquiry similar to the Viens commission in Quebec.

The Bloc is open to the idea, but we shouldn't wait for such an inquiry to be recommended to take action. There are already potential solutions for taking action. Commissions have been issuing reports for decades, and Ottawa has been tabling them. Last year alone, the Viens report and the report stemming from the National

Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls contained dozens of recommendations.

The federal government must work with indigenous peoples, Quebec and the provinces to establish adequate funding for indigenous police forces. Civilian ethics organizations should be created to oversee the RCMP. Police officers and the general population must be better educated on indigenous realities and cultures. Hundreds of pages must be written and actions taken to restore confidence in law enforcement so as to achieve the long-overdue reconciliation.

Let's take action.

The Chair: I give the floor to Mr. MacKinnon.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Chair, on behalf of myself and my parliamentary colleagues, I want to congratulate students from our high school class of 2020. We know that, owing to the pandemic, graduation celebrations will be different this year, as students will be deprived of their prom, their graduation ceremony and, in some cases, their goodbyes to friends and teachers.

I know how disappointed students from the high schools of du Versant, Le Carrefour, Nicolas-Gatineau, de l'Érablière, Collège Saint-Alexandre, Collège Nouvelles Frontières, Collège Saint-Joseph, Philemon-Wright and other regional schools, are not to be able to celebrate their five years of incredible efforts surrounded by their families and friends who were by their side on a daily basis.

However, that takes nothing away from their accomplishment. So when they receive their diploma, here is what I will say to them: "Surge ahead! The future belongs to you. Be ambitious, follow your dreams and, most importantly, continue to change the Outaouais and the world!"

The class of 2020 will be remembered for a long time.

• (1215)

[*English*]

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

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am delighted to rise to talk about the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre, which is now under construction in my riding in Winnipeg. This state-of-the-art addictions recovery facility was made into a reality by Scott, Anne and Darcy Oake in memory of their son and brother Bruce, who passed away tragically from an accidental overdose in 2011.

The Bruce Oake Recovery Centre will provide help to thousands of Manitobans to manage their addiction and reintegrate into the community.

I was proud to support this project when I voted for it during my time on Winnipeg City Council. The addictions crisis in Canada needs action. With approximately eight million Canadians suffering from addictions, we need centres like these to help them recover so that no other family will face a heartbreaking loss due to addiction.

I want to congratulate the Oakes for their commitment to making recovery for many a reality. Addictions affect us all, and we all have a part to play in contributing to the solution.

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

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to recognize the compassion and generosity demonstrated in my riding of Richmond Hill. Week after week residents and organizations have come together to support our most vulnerable during a time of great difficulty.

I want to thank the champions of the community who were generous enough to donate masks and other supplies as well as services. I would also like to recognize the charities and care centres which, upon receiving these donations, redoubled their efforts to serve their communities.

Special thanks go to the Mon Sheong Foundation Long-Term Care Centre, Divine Favour Senior Homecare, the Community & Home Assistance to Seniors, the True Compassion Home Health centre, Blue Door, the Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold program, Yellow Brick House, Hill House Hospice, Community Living York South, and Parya Trillium Foundation for continuing to support the residents in my riding of Richmond Hill.

The compassionate generosity demonstrated by these donors and organizations makes me proud to represent my community in Parliament.

The Chair: We'll now go to Madam Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Usually, at this time of the year, I have the pleasure of being invited to the graduation ceremony of the grade 12 students in Orléans. However, we will all have to adapt to a new reality this year.

[*English*]

I cannot express enough how, in these exceptional times, I have witnessed the strength, resilience and community spirit of our graduates.

[*Translation*]

I also know that a number of high schools have made significant efforts to celebrate the success of their graduating class. Young graduate Maryanne Collard was amazed to see that people from her school, the École secondaire catholique Béatrice-Desloges, had installed a sign in her garden to congratulate her on her academic success.

[*English*]

As we move forward we must not forget that youth in this country are our future. We have a responsibility to be there for them and to believe in them. We will not fail.

[*Translation*]

I thank the teachers, the support staff and school management who are continuing to do their work.

[*English*]

Congratulations to all graduates of 2020.

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

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Chair, COVID-19 has changed and challenged how we go about our daily lives. For many this includes a shift to working from home or attending school remotely. The sad reality is that even before the crisis hit, most rural Canadians simply did not have access to a strong and stable Internet connection, even though Internet is an essential service. Those in underserved areas, including many parts of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, cannot work from home and their children cannot keep up with their classmates.

For many of my indigenous constituents, Internet services are stuck in the 1990s because telecom companies don't want to serve them. I, along with my colleagues, launched community consultations to address this critical issue and provide solutions.

We call on the government to outline and implement a concrete action plan to address Internet connectivity deficits between rural and urban Canada. This is an issue I will continue to press on until results are achieved.

• (1220)

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

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Chair, Canada has been awarded its first-ever Equator Prize from the United Nations Development Programme. Congratulations go to Lutsël K'è Dene First Nation and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation, with support from Deninu K'ue First Nation and the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, for the establishment of the Thaidene Nënë territorial protected area. It's 14,000 square kilometres of the most beautiful land and waters you'll find anywhere on earth.

I would also like to thank the previous minister of the environment for securing Canada's \$7.9-million commitment, along with our visit to celebrate the new park last year. The award is given to groups that have exemplified actions to protect critical ecosystems and biodiversity for generations to come and to show how indigenous peoples and local communities have confronted legacies of disadvantage and discrimination in support of their communities and the world at large.

Congratulations to Lutsël K'è.

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

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Chair, the Liberal government has tabled \$87 billion in spending and allocated just four hours for Parliament to study, debate and pass it. The allocated time is wholly inadequate. Canadians deserve to know how that money is being spent. They deserve to know that this government spending was scrutinized and passed through the rigours of Parliament.

It is Canadian taxpayers of today and tomorrow who will have the responsibility to pay for this government's spending. It is Canadian workers and businesses who will have to do the hard work of rebuilding our economy. It is real Canadians who fall through the cracks when this Liberal government's programs fail to meet their intended goals.

A rubber stamp under the guise of health and safety is not democracy. Canadians are owed better. Just as we gather four days a week for a hybrid committee meeting, parliamentarians can gather to do the full scope of the work that Canadians elected us to do.

[Translation]

The Chair: We now go to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Our planet is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Our daily lives have been turned upside down. I am thinking of you, our seniors, valuable individuals who built our country. You have gone through a very restrictive confinement. You have had to sacrifice time spent with your families.

Our students also had to adapt. Their school year was turned on its head. Our graduating class, especially, saw their dream of a proper graduation vanish. The future belongs to them. They must follow their dreams.

I want to say to all the essential staff and the many support organizations that they are really changing things. We have all taken on our important responsibility, that of following the guidelines. The results have been most compelling in my riding.

I want to say how proud I am to represent you here, in the Canadian Parliament. I thank each and everyone of you. You are helping Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier flourish. You have shown resilience, creativity, innovation and solidarity. That is commendable. Together, we will get through this ordeal and come out stronger.

[English]

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

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, today I rise to honour Justice 4 Black Lives Winnipeg, led by women and non-binary individuals, who stood together and mobilized our city to state clearly that we will not stand by and stay silent in the face of police brutality. We will not stand by in the face of systemic racism. We will not stand by while we witness our bodies being abused by centuries of racism supported through legislation that has left us vulnerable at the hands of those who abuse their power.

We will speak out against police violence. We will speak out against systemic racism. We will join together to ensure that laws are instituted that are designed to protect us, not abuse us. We will call out those who abuse their power. We will rise. We will rise. We will rise.

To all the women and non-binary folks who are standing, I say, let's continue to sound our voices in solidarity and support of one another until indigenous and black lives are honoured and respected. Our liberation is intertwined. Solidarity.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mrs. DeBellefeuille, go ahead.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Chair, this is not the time for governments to get complacent about COVID-19. However, the last few days have shown that we are once again dealing with a reckless Prime Minister.

First, he locked down Parliament to avoid being accountable to the opposition, while the economic recovery must be prepared. He is refusing to provide an economic update, even though the Parliamentary Budget Officer is calling for it. We need to know how much flexibility we have in case of a second wave of the pandemic.

He is refusing to hold a first ministers meeting on unconditional health transfers. The increase Quebec needs is for hiring health care staff before a second wave, and not after it. Finally, today, he is refusing to negotiate with any party to get his bill passed. He is behaving as if he had a majority government.

This is not a time for recklessness. Governing means anticipating. I am asking the Prime Minister to pull himself together.

• (1225)

[English]

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

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Mr. Chair, I rise to give thanks and recognition to the contributions of many businesses and organizations across my riding of Edmonton Mill Woods that have stepped up in a major way during this pandemic.

I joined my friends in the Filipino community who partnered with Mill Woods' Calvary Community Church to deliver care packages to seniors. Varinder Bhullar and his Green Scholars of Alberta team and Dil-E-Punjab restaurant provided thousands of free meals. Sikh Youth Edmonton delivered free groceries to families, seniors and students. Edmonton Towing and its full team with Dukh Nivaran Gudwara prepared food packages for any truckers who were coming through Edmonton. The Bhartiya Cultural Society Hindu temple provided free meals to anyone who needed them. Punjab Insurance and The Punjab chain of restaurants provided free meals in downtown Edmonton. The staff, nurses and doctors of Grey Nuns Community Hospital in the heart of Mill Woods have been keeping people safe and healthy.

I want to thank our Mill Woods community as a whole for its continued strength, resilience and compassion as we move forward together.

The Chair: We'll now proceed to Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Chair, today is Portugal Day, celebrated both in Portugal and around the world by Portuguese. In Canada, June has been recognized as Portuguese Heritage Month. We're truly happy to recognize the great contributions made by Canadians of Portuguese descent.

This year is a difficult one, though, for all of us, including our Portuguese diaspora community across the globe that is deeply affected by the COVID situation. Our prayers and well wishes are with everyone.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our *luso* community of over half a million members in Canada from coast to coast for staying strong during these difficult times. Your warmth, hard work and team spirit resonate well across my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville and globally.

As a Portuguese immigrant who came to Canada at the age of two with my family, I know this year will be a lot different from previous years. I encourage all of you to stay safe and enjoy a Portuguese meal, and please continue to support our local businesses.

[Member spoke in Portuguese]

[Translation]

The Chair: We now begin the period of questions for ministers.

[English]

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

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

[Translation]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister is doing everything to avoid being accountable to Canadians. He is refusing to table a budget, refusing to provide an economic update and refusing to let the House of Commons do its work.

Will he at least provide the Auditor General with the additional funding she needs to look into government expenditures?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Chair, not only are we introducing a bill this afternoon to help Canadians with the Canada emergency response benefit and those living with disabilities, but we are also proposing to the opposition parties that we hold a debate and a vote on that. I hope the opposition parties will allow a vote and a debate in the House on this important bill.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister wants parliamentarians to vote on aspects of the government's spending. We want the Auditor General to be able to examine that government spending.

Under the government, the Auditor General has had to do more with less, and her ability to conduct audits is being affected. The Auditor General has indicated that she will be able to do half as many audits, despite an almost doubling in the size of government spending.

I have a simple question. Will the Prime Minister give the Auditor General the money she needs to do her job, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we worked with the Auditor General to increase the funding of the Auditor General's office in 2018-19, and the equivalent of 38 full-time staff were added. We

support the Auditor General, unlike the Conservative government, which fired 60 people from the Auditor General's office.

We are now proposing that we sit down to debate legislation this afternoon, and I certainly hope that members opposite will vote for debate.

● (1230)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: The Prime Minister is again engaged in revisionist history. He well knows that it was the Auditor General's office that volunteered to make administrative efficiencies, which did not affect its ability to do the job. In fact, as the interim auditor general, John Wiersema, said, "We would not have proposed [this] if we didn't think it was the right thing to do and that we'd be able to carry out our role for Parliament." Only the government's refusal to grant that extra funding is hampering the Auditor General's ability to give Canadians the answers they deserve, and we wonder why.

This is the government that cannot explain where 20,000 infrastructure projects went and where five billion dollars' worth of supposed infrastructure investments have gone. They can't identify that. Then there is, of course, the \$35-billion Infrastructure Bank, which has completed precisely zero projects.

Are these the reasons the Prime Minister is so intent on withholding funds from the Auditor General?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, talking of revisionist history, Stephen Harper's Conservatives cut \$6.5 million from the Auditor General's budget and fired 60 staff. On the contrary, we worked with the Auditor General's office and increased its funding and added the equivalent of 38 new full-time staff.

We will continue to demonstrate openness and transparency. We will continue to respect the officers of Parliament, whom the Conservatives, in their time in office, showed no respect for. We will continue to move forward in a way that has led, for example, to proposing debate and voting on important legislation this afternoon to help Canadians. The Conservatives don't seem to want that debate or vote.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, it's no surprise that the Prime Minister likes to reach back into history from before the 2015 election to justify his position. The 2015 election was the only time he got more votes than the Conservative Party did, so I understand why he likes to live in the past.

In May, the interim auditor general said, "Ten years ago, we were completing about 27 performance audits every year. With our current resources, we expect to be able to deliver 14 performance audits each year." That's half the number of audits, despite a massive explosion in government spending.

The Auditor General's office has requested more funds to be able to do the job that Canadians expect to be done. Will the Prime Minister give those additional funds to the Auditor General's office, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we very much look forward to working with the new Auditor General to ensure that her office has the ability to continue the important audits and transparency measures that are foundational to our institutions.

Speaking of what is foundational to our institutions, this afternoon we're putting forward a bill that would help Canadians across the country, and we've proposed to debate and vote on that bill. It actually looks like the Conservatives and other opposition parties might not want this. They have been complaining about not having debates and votes in Parliament, and now they're proposing not to have them. That's a little head-scratching. We hope they're going to help Canadians.

[Translation]

The Chair: We will continue with Mr. Blanchet.

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

We may have a chance here to replace a problem with a good opportunity.

This morning, we heard many groups and organizations that represent people with a disability express their concerns over the bill introduced by the government, which I feel is chocolate pudding containing cod liver oil.

We agree with the chocolate pudding. We are favourable to helping people with a disability. People don't know the rules. They don't know—I am telling them now—that a bill can be divided. It can be cut into parts and voted on in parts.

The rest of the bill can be enhanced. I am saying to the Prime Minister that, if he presents the part on disabled individuals, it will be passed at the speed of light. He won't even see it happen.

Is he prepared to divide the bill, so that we can work together to help people with a disability?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: The bill that we are proposing this afternoon will certainly help people living with disabilities. We can always recognize that this is important, and every party should be open to it.

We will also increase the flexibility of the Canada emergency response benefit from four-week intervals to two weeks. We will also expand the scope of the wage subsidy so that more businesses will have access to it.

I am always willing to work with members of the opposition to ensure that we adopt these measures, all or some of the measures. We want to help Canadians. We look forward to debating and voting on this later today.

• (1235)

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: It is a glorious day. I heard “all or some of the measures.” That means that we are not adopting them all at the same time and that the bill is being split.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that he is in fact going to split his bill so that we can address the various components separately, since they have nothing to do with each other, and improve them, in keeping with our mandate as elected officials?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Our goal on this side of the House, and it is shared by all members of the House, is to help Canadians during the pandemic.

We have put forward a number of measures that will help Canadians in a tangible way. Yes, that includes Canadians living with disabilities, but it also includes businesses that cannot, but should be able to, access the wage subsidy. In addition, we are going to make the Canada emergency response benefit more flexible.

I look forward to continuing the discussions—

The Chair: Mr. Blanchet has the floor.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: We almost had some clarity, but one swallow does not make a summer.

Yes, there is a need for discussions on the Canada emergency response benefit. The government says that it wants to transform the program into something very coercive, without admitting that the lack of an employment incentive has essentially sabotaged another program, the wage subsidy.

That deserves some thought. That is what we are elected to do. We do not need to spend eight months on this, we can fix it in a few hours. When the government says that we are going to have to vote on this, it means rubber stamping its bill. We have the right to debate it, to have discussions and to improve it.

I watched the election on the night of October 21. It was a beautiful night. It was more fun than a hockey game. People elected a minority government.

Can the government admit that?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: We are not proposing only to vote on this bill this afternoon, we are proposing to debate it. It is the role and responsibility of all of us in the House to exchange ideas and to work together to help Canadians. That is exactly what we are proposing this afternoon. It is about helping people with disabilities, increasing the flexibility of the CERB, and expanding the scope of the wage subsidy so that more businesses have access to it.

I look forward to debating this with my colleagues opposite.

The Chair: Mr. Blanchet, you have 43 seconds left.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: That will be enough.

I would be remiss if I allowed the Prime Minister to mislead people quite unintentionally—I say this in accordance with the Standing Orders. When we introduce a bill, we discuss it at second reading, we vote, we continue to discuss it and we send it to committee. All that can be done very quickly. However, we must be able to amend and improve this bill.

That is how the normal Parliament works. The government doesn't like being in a minority situation. It behaves as if it were a majority government, but it is not.

Can we follow the real procedures of Parliament, do a proper job, and then have a vote that is likely to suit the majority of members, not just the Prime Minister?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, my hon. colleague seems to completely forget that we are going through a pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis requires different actions on our part. That is why we provided the text of the bill to the opposition parties four days ago. We have been working with them for hours over the past three or four days to amend the bill, if they had amendments to propose.

That is how we are taking action to help Canadians quickly during this crisis, and that is what we will continue to do.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Chair, will the Prime Minister make a clear and direct commitment today to extend the CERB for families who need it?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, we are introducing legislation this afternoon that will directly help Canadians living with disabilities, will expand the scope of the wage subsidy and will increase the flexibility of the Canada emergency response benefit. We hope to be able to debate it.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Will the Prime Minister extend the CERB for families in need, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: As I said, Mr. Chair, discussions are ongoing on that, but I can assure Canadians we will continue to be there for them and support them, as we have been.

• (1240)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, a family that needs to buy groceries can't take those pretty words and buy groceries with them. We're asking the Prime Minister to extend the CERB for families in need. Will the Prime Minister do that, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, as I said, we will continue to be there for Canadians in the right way. We are engaged with stakeholders, with opposition parties and with Canadians to ensure that we continue to support them the way they need to be supported.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, I can tell you what the right way is.

Don from Burnaby sent me a note saying he's an arts worker and there is no forecast for his job to be reopened. He is now dependent on the CERB. He wants to go back to work, but there's no work. He sent an email saying he's faced with a "grim reality"—his words—and he's frightened that if the CERB runs out, and it is planned to run out at the end of this month, then he will have no way to afford to make ends meet. Will the Prime Minister extend the CERB so Don does not have to live in fear?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, as I said, and as we have been saying from the beginning, we will continue to be there to support Canadians who need it.

The member opposite is not actually looking at the fact that we are proposing three significant helps for Canadians this afternoon. We are proposing to help Canadians with disabilities, to expand the wage subsidy for more businesses and to create flexibility for the CERB. He doesn't even want to debate those things. He doesn't even want to be voting on them. Will the NDP allow us to move forward on these important measures for Canadians?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, let's talk about those measures.

One of the things we asked the government to do five weeks ago was to bring in help for Canadians living with disabilities. Now the government's plan is only going to help 40% of Canadians living with disabilities. Will the government commit to helping all Canadians living with disabilities and propose a plan that will do so?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, the NDP leader seems to have decided that rather than help 40%, or a significant portion, of people with disabilities, he wants to help none of them, because he's not going to allow the debate to move forward on this bill. That's unfortunate. We're always happy to look at how we can do more. We have demonstrated from the beginning that we want to do more for Canadians. I look forward to working with the NDP. I am hoping those members change their minds and allow us to have an important debate this afternoon.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, I appreciate that the Prime Minister accepts that his plan only helps 40% of Canadians living with disabilities. Let's talk about the 60% who aren't being helped. They are veterans living with disabilities, those who receive CPP and those who receive disability payments. Often it's the poorest of Canadians living with disabilities who won't be helped with the plan the government is proposing. Will the government help all Canadians living with disabilities?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, our proposal will help 100% of Canadians who receive the disability tax credit, including many veterans. The fact is that we are there to support the disability community. We are there to support Canadians with disabilities. Why is the NDP not allowing us to move forward on debating and voting on this important legislation?

The Chair: Mr. Singh, we have 43 seconds for a question and an answer.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, that's the exact problem with the Liberal proposal. It's a tax credit approach, which excludes the vast majority of Canadians living with disabilities. That is the wrong approach. We made it very clear that if the government extends the CERB, if it ensures there are no penalties on those who are desperately in need of help and if it helps all Canadians living with disabilities, we will move forward. Will the government do that?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, as I have said from the beginning, we look forward to continuing to work with the members opposite to keep moving forward to help Canadians. However, we need the opposition parties to actually choose to help Canadians and not to play political games. I hope we're going to be able to actually have a debate and a vote on this important legislation this afternoon.

The Chair: We're now going to take a short pause to allow staff to change up in a safe way respecting COVID-19 procedure.

• (1245)

The floor now goes to Mr. Rayes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Chair, can the Prime Minister tell us whether we will have an economic update by the end of June?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

It is of course very important to be transparent. When the situation is stable, we will have—

The Chair: Once again, the floor goes to Mr. Rayes.

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Chair, most of the provinces in Canada are working on tabling economic updates by the end of June. Why is the Liberal government unable to do so as well?

Hon. Bill Morneau: I understand the importance of transparency and that is why we are trying every day to explain our investments to Canadians and to continue to be transparent with them.

Mr. Alain Rayes: The Liberal government announced hundreds of billions of dollars in new spending during the pandemic, but it still refuses to provide an economic update in order to be transparent with Canadians.

In times of crisis, monitoring the situation is more important than ever. I repeat my question: why does this government not want to table an economic update by the end of June, when the provinces are doing so?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Every day, we explain the economic situation, our investments, the changes we are making, and our programs to improve the situation of Canadians during the pandemic. We will continue our approach to being transparent.

Mr. Alain Rayes: The Parliamentary Budget Officer himself does not understand why the federal government cannot deliver an economic update when the provinces can.

Why are the government and the minister defying the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who is an independent officer and is requesting an economic update?

Hon. Bill Morneau: We will continue with our approach, which is one of transparency. We know that it's very difficult to make projections given the very dynamic nature of the situation. We think our approach of providing information daily is appropriate and we will continue to be transparent about our investments.

Mr. Alain Rayes: That is incredible. When we listen to the minister and the Prime Minister talk, you would think we were in the

pesky “terrible twos” phase that children go through, when they keep saying no, no, no.

I find it funny that the provinces are able to table an economic update in a crisis situation. The opposition parties are asking for it, as are experts and officials. When the time comes for the government to listen to the scientists, it has no problem doing so. However, if people do not think like the government, it ignores them.

The provinces are doing it, the opposition parties are calling for it and the Parliamentary Budget Officer is calling for it. Why will the Minister of Finance not table an economic update so that all members of Parliament can do their verification work?

Hon. Bill Morneau: I will continue to provide daily information on our measures and investments. Projections are clearly very difficult to make. However, when the situation is more stable, we will be able to provide more information to Canadians. In the meantime, we will be adapting to the situation on a daily basis and making sure that we have the information we need to make our decisions and to make sure that Canadians understand our situation.

• (1250)

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

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Chair, one month ago, the Prime Minister announced with great fanfare that the eligibility criteria for the \$40,000 emergency loans for businesses would be more flexible to help self-employed entrepreneurs and businesses that pay themselves dividends to have access to them.

However, as of today—it has been four weeks since that announcement—businesses are still banging their heads on the doors of their financial institutions. They do not have access to the information because it is not available on official websites. In addition, even senior officials confirmed to me during a technical call on June 2, last Tuesday, that this information would not be available for several weeks.

Can the Minister of Finance, who says he wants to act quickly to help our businesses, explain why, after four weeks, it is still not possible to get the information the Prime Minister promised us from his doorstep?

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance): Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been listening and responding to small businesses and entrepreneurs across the country.

In fact, we have even announced the expansion of the program's eligibility criteria to include many owner-managed small businesses with payrolls of less than \$20,000. The new criteria have forced financial institutions to adapt to be able to provide this program to new applicants.

We are working around the clock to ensure that we are able to promptly provide small businesses across the country with the assistance they need.

[English]

The Chair: We will now proceed to Mr. Allison.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Chair, Canada's unemployment rate stands at 13.7%. That's the highest it's been in almost four decades. Many industries, like travel, hospitality and tourism, are getting crushed.

We rely on a lot of hospitality and tourism in my riding of Niagara West. Can the government tell us what their plans are to help the travel, hospitality and tourism industry that so many of my constituents depend on?

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

I had a good conversation with the mayor of Niagara Falls recently, and we believe in the importance of the tourism sector. That's exactly why we've extended the wage subsidy until the end of August. There is the CEBA loan, the \$40,000 loan. There is also spending through FedDev in my colleague's region. If he has clear, specific projects in the tourism sector that he needs help with, I would ask that he please come and see me and have a conversation.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, the message from the president and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Perrin Beatty, and also other industries, is that we need a clear and coherent plan from this government because there's a whole hodgepodge of regulations and confusion about what's going to happen through the strategy.

What I've told the government is that we need a strategy to reflect local conditions that is consistent and has a clear timeline so that businesses can begin to open safely and with confidence.

What is the government doing to make this happen?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Chair, we absolutely agree. It is important for businesses to have an understanding of the programs that we've put in place. We have been consulting with businesses on the appropriate way to extend the wage subsidy so that we can continue to support businesses as they turn towards a safe restart. We've also looked very carefully at how we can ensure that the programs that we've put forward—

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

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Chair, this government has come way short of meeting the Canadian demand for personal protective equipment. Some equipment procured from overseas has been substandard and couldn't be used. Because of the shortage, in my riding of Niagara West, dentists have to pay up to 10 times the amount for an N95 mask.

Compared to early March, when will the government finally begin to produce enough PPE in Canada to meet Canadian demand?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry): Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the honourable member for his question.

We have mobilized over 700 Canadian companies to help them retool and rescale their efforts to make more personal protective equipment in Canada as part of a made-in-Canada initiative. We're

going to continue to work with industry to build up domestic capacity.

Mr. Dean Allison: Global News is reporting that Canada is struggling to secure a reliable source of PPE.

What's the evidence of this? We know that the government procured 10 million substandard N95 masks that couldn't be used. Masks were sent back to suppliers for having flaws. We received mouldy swabs to be used in COVID-19 tests. Planes are arriving empty that should have been filled with PPE, and we received less than 5% of our total order of gloves.

It's clear that Canada needs to rely on Canada for PPE. When will this government finally begin to take PPE equipment issues seriously and make enough in Canada to meet demands by Canadians?

● (1255)

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement): Mr. Chair, the honourable member's questions were tainted with inaccuracies.

Regarding the flights that returned from China without federal cargo, Air Canada did reimburse the federal government for that amount. In addition, with regard to the N95 masks that were referenced, the Government of Canada will not pay for masks that it does not use. Furthermore, as my colleague Minister Bains just stated, we are mobilizing and retooling the domestic industry. Over half of the face shields that we have received were produced in Canada.

Mr. Dean Allison: At a time when the Prime Minister has ordered Canadians to stay home and businesses to remain closed, at a time when Canadians have had to say goodbye to their relatives over Skype, at a time when Canadians are not allowed to get married, at a time when Canadians are being fined for taking their kids to the park, at a time when restaurants are being fined \$800 for allowing customers to eat outside and not being socially distanced, in these times, the Prime Minister's son attended a mass gathering with thousands of people while not socially distancing.

Mr. Chair, why is it that there seems to be one set of rules in this country for some people but a different set for the Prime Minister? Why the double standard?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health): Mr. Chair, as the member knows, this country has been gripped with the need to stand up with one another to fight the experience of racism that so many Canadians live with and that so many of our American cousins live with.

As the member knows, local public health sets advice for regions that he specified, and I would encourage all Canadians to check with local public health advice before they resume activities.

The Chair: Now we'll go to Mr. Chiu.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Many Canadian veterans are noticing that medical providers are increasing their costs. Everything is more expensive these days, including medicine, etc. It can take upwards of a year for Veterans Affairs to adjust their rate scale to compensate, and they do not allow for retroactive reimbursement. What are the government's actions to alleviate this hardship for our men and women who stood guard for this country, our veterans?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Chair, the fact is that when we inherited the government, Veterans Affairs needed a lot of support from government. In fact, at that time, we invested \$10 billion to make sure that Veterans Affairs was put in place and that we could provide the appropriate supports for veterans, like the pension for life, the centre of excellence on PTSD and the chronic pain centre of excellence. All of these things are so important.

We have to realize that with government previously—

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

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for answering—or responding—to my question, although that really did not provide an answer, in my humble opinion.

Part of the side effect of spending hundreds of millions of dollars is inflation. My constituents in Steveston—Richmond East are overwhelmingly finding this government's support for seniors inadequate. The opposition has put forward clear proposals, such as a one-time tax-free withdrawal being allowed for an RRSP or a RRIF. So far, the government has not taken any action on this.

Why is the government ignoring suggestions to help Canadian seniors?

Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors): Mr. Chair, I want seniors to know that they are not alone. To help preserve their registered retirement income fund assets, we are reducing minimum withdrawals by 25% for 2020. We're also providing direct financial support so that seniors can get the help they need now. As the market is volatile during this time, we continue to look at all ways that we can best help seniors during this difficult time.

• (1300)

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Mr. Chair, the Hong Kong government has arrested 9,000 civilians just in the past year. This is equivalent to the arrest of 42,000 people, proportional to Canada's population.

It is anticipated that more unjust incarcerations will occur as Beijing imposes the national security law in Hong Kong. Has our government started preparing a list of names for Magnitsky-style sanctions, yes or no?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport): Mr. Chair, as we have said, we and our allies are deeply concerned with Beijing's decision to impose a national security law on Hong Kong. With hundreds of thousands of Canadians living in Hong Kong, we have a vested interest in its stability and prosperity, the foundations of which are Hong Kong's relative autonomy and basic freedoms. The proposed law would also undermine the one country, two systems framework.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: I thank the minister for responding. Again, however, words are not enough. It's time for action, because the Chinese embassy has said, in response to Canada's expressed concern, that they deplore, reject and condemn our response and our concerns thus far.

What are the conditions for this government using Magnitsky sanctions should China continue to incarcerate Canadians and jeopardize the human rights of its citizens?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, we have been very clear. We will continue to encourage all parties to engage in peaceful and meaningful dialogue to address the legitimate concerns expressed by the Hong Kong population.

Canada will always support and promote freedom of speech, freedom of expression and freedom of the press around the world.

The Chair: Mr. Chiu, we have about 22 seconds, so you have time for a very quick question and hopefully a very quick answer.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Okay, here's a quick question.

The Communist Chinese government has lied about COVID-19. They have issued statements against Canada and they have yet to release the two Canadians being held hostage. My constituents are concerned over this.

When will this government listen to Canadians and call for a stronger, more effective and truly independent international investigation into COVID-19's origin?

The Chair: The honourable minister has 22 seconds or less, please.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, we are dealing with a global pandemic, COVID-19. It is critically important that all countries in the world work together in a transparent, open and respectful manner so that we understand what is going on and how we can bring it to an end as quickly as possible.

The Chair: The next question will come from Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Chair, if the government orders someone who has been exposed to a confirmed COVID case into a 14-day quarantine, why won't the government allow them to take an antibody test to lift the quarantine so they can go back to work?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: As the member opposite may or may not know, testing strategies are determined by provinces and territories. Furthermore, the testing of a particular person has to be done at the right point in time—

The Chair: We go back to Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chair, there have already been some tests that have been approved. My friend and colleague here, Colin Carrie, from the constituency of Oshawa, has a constituent who has a test. It's 90% accurate and it's being sold to the United States and other countries.

Why won't they provide a DIN number to it so that Canadians have access to it as well, regardless of which province or territory they live in?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I think the member is talking about two separate things. Any test kit that would be approved by Health Canada would be accessible to wherever that company chose to market that test kit.

Furthermore, it's really important that test kits that are approved by Health Canada be accurate and have been tested with rigour with regard to their ability to provide credible and accurate information to the people who are using that test.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chair, the test has proven to have an accuracy rate of 90% in identifying whether or not an individual has antibodies.

Why won't she allow it to be used here?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I am happy to follow up with the member opposite's office when she is able to provide me with the name of the company.

As you can imagine, there are many vendors trying to—

• (1305)

The Chair: We go back to Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How long will it take for an antibody test to be approved by this government once you have the name of the company and the test and the evidence in front of you?

The Chair: Before we go to the honourable minister, I just want to remind the honourable members to place their questions through the chair and not directly.

Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We have an expedited process that could be completed in as little as five to seven days, depending on the accuracy of the test and the information supplied by the vendor.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Through you, Mr. Chair, will Health Canada use reputable data from other countries to speed their determinations about antibody effectiveness, or just continue to withhold access?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Canadians expect us, at Health Canada, to ensure the accuracy and the safety of all equipment approved for use in Canada.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chairman, if the minister can approve tests and studies within five days, why is it taking over 30, over 60, or over 90 days to approve an antibody test that exists?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I appreciate the member opposite's interest in urgent and quick approvals; however, sometimes, depending on the company, there may be further questions and further tests that need to be run to ensure the accuracy or safety of that equipment.

Should she wish me to check into the process for a particular—

The Chair: We will go back to Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Have officials provided the government with a target for a daily antibody test to complete an initial survey or the initial phase of a study?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I assume the member opposite is talking about the work of the immunity task force, which is, as you know, a group of scientists who have been funded by the Government of Canada—

The Chair: We'll go back to Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Through you, Mr. Chair, would the minister please provide the names of the people on the task force to which she just referred?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I will forward those names to the office of the member opposite.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I hope that will be within the next two days or so, and not wait until after the crisis has passed, Mr. Chairman.

Why isn't the Prime Minister showing as much fervour for antibody testing as he is for getting a vaccine on the market?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I reject the premise of that question. In fact, the Prime Minister has shown fervour for all aspects of dealing with the coronavirus from the very inception of the virus on the world stage. To allege otherwise is quite disingenuous.

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

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): When will the government give the Auditor General the funds she needs to do her job?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage): First, Mr. Chair, I would like to offer my congratulations to the new Auditor General for her appointment.

On behalf of the government, I would also like to offer her our full support and collaboration—

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I share the minister's wish to congratulate the new Auditor General on her position. I will now ask him again when he will give her the funds she needs to do her job.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, her role is essential to our democracy. We are eager to work with her. She's more than welcome to share her concerns directly with the government. I can assure her that my—

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Chair, I didn't ask him if he would like to work with the Auditor General. I asked him if he will give the Auditor General the money she needs to do her job.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, our government has added 38 permanent staff positions to her office, while the Conservative government, under their leadership, cut the funding for more than 60—

The Chair: We'll move on to Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Chair, through you, I caution the minister to not mislead this House. If he will look at the committee transcripts of the time, he will know that it was the Auditor General's decision to reduce their own budget. The Conservatives did not cut positions. That is a matter of fact.

The point is that the Auditor General now does not have the money to do her job. She has cut performance audits and she has stopped work on performance audits. When will this government give the Auditor General the money she needs to do her job?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: With us, it was 38 new positions, Mr. Chair. With them, it was 60 positions fewer.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Chair, this government has drastically expanded its spending and is avoiding accountability in every way it can.

The finance committee yesterday, with the support of Liberal backbench MPs who are on that committee, unanimously passed a motion to fund the Auditor General in full so that her office can do her job. If this minister will not listen to me, will he at least listen to his own backbenchers?

• (1310)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, our government is fully committed to supporting the important and ongoing work of the Auditor General, an independent officer of Parliament. If the Auditor General identifies the need for additional resources, we will work with the Office of the Auditor General to ensure that they have all the resources they need to continue fulfilling their mandate efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Chair, the Auditor General has consistently, since 2018, told this government that the office doesn't have enough funds. It's not a mystery. The Auditor General has told the public accounts committee that it cannot do its job. It's the first time in history that the Auditor General has had to tell public accounts that they don't have the resources to do their job.

It's not a matter of "if" the Auditor General needs more funds. The Auditor General couldn't be more clear. When will this government actually do the right thing and fully fund the Office of the Auditor General?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, maybe I'm not making myself clear in English. I will switch to my native tongue, French, in case it becomes clearer.

[*Translation*]

If the Auditor General identifies a need for additional resources, we will work with her to ensure that her office can continue to deliver its mandate efficiently and effectively.

In addition, our government worked with the Auditor General to increase funding in 2018-09. With this increase, the office was able to add the equivalent of 38 new full-time staff to its team. That's 38 more employees—

The Chair: The floor goes to Mr. Kelly.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Chair, this isn't an "if" situation. The Auditor General has already told this government that her office does not have funds. This has been ongoing since 2018.

I would ask the minister to please stop with the platitudes and actually just say yes or no. Will the government give the Auditor General the money that the Auditor General has already asked for?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, we have already increased the budget of the Office of the Auditor General in the 2018-19 period.

The Chair: Before we continue, we're going to suspend for a second to bring in the next chair.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.)): There's a point of order.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Chair, I know that no member would knowingly mislead the House. No member wants to do that. It's always customary to give members a chance to correct the record, so I call upon the minister to do so now, and perhaps even the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister misled the House in his response to a question. I have here the transcripts of the public accounts committee, and they will confirm that the—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): This is beginning to sound a bit like debate. We will proceed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

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

First, I would like to take this opportunity to say hi from Portugal. I would also like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague and friend, the member for Lac-Saint-Jean. *Obrigado.*

While Quebec estimates its additional health care costs related to COVID-19 at \$3 billion, Ottawa is transferring around \$115 million, which is not even 4%.

Does the government recognize that this is clearly insufficient?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, as the member opposite knows, we invested an initial \$500 million in transfers to the provinces and territories to manage the extreme pressure put on health care systems as a result of their supporting people living with COVID and in preventing COVID.

We want to thank the provinces and territories for their work, and as the member opposite knows, we will continue to be there for the provinces and territories. This is a significant transfer, and we think—

• (1315)

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, the minister says that this is a substantial transfer. Yes, it is a lot of money. The government is giving about \$115 million to Quebec, but that is not even 4% of what is being requested.

Does the minister recognize that much more is needed?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We have been working with the provinces and territories from the beginning to respond to the crisis. We have increased health care transfers, provided medical protective equipment and responded to all requests for assistance. We have been able to make so much progress in the fight against COVID-19 precisely because of this co-operation.

Stirring up an imaginary quarrel between the federal government and Quebec—

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

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, it isn't about squabbling, it's about needs. The share that the federal government is giving isn't enough. We should act now, before we see a possible second wave. What we're seeing today are the results of massive disinvestment by the federal government in health care. This isn't good enough. The government must act quickly.

Can the government commit to better funding to the health care sector and to organizing a meeting with Quebec and the provinces on this exact topic, in September at the latest? We can't afford to wait.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. minister's response will have to be brief.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, with respect to the transfers to provinces and territories, the member opposite knows that our government, in our last mandate, significantly increased transfers to the provinces and territories for health services, including mental health and home care services. In fact, the funding we're providing is in addition to the \$40 billion that was transferred—

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[The member spoke in Portuguese as follows:]

Tudo bem? Tudo bom?

[English]

Today in *La Presse*, we learned that the government has extended its military presence in long-term care homes.

Can the minister confirm this information, and can he also confirm that the presence of these 500 soldiers is indeed in response to a request from the Government of Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Chair, let me assure the member that when Quebec made a request for assistance at the beginning of

April, we answered the call. When they asked for an extension of that, we said we would continue to provide that assistance.

I had a conversation today with Minister Guilbault, my counterpart in Quebec, and we have renewed our commitment to continuing to provide assistance. That assistance can take additional forms and can include involving the Canadian Red Cross, but we remain committed to providing the assistance that Quebec needs.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If I understand correctly, negotiations are still under way with the Government of Quebec, even though it needs these soldiers.

The mission ends Friday. This isn't really the time to negotiate anymore. We have to make sure that the military will stay in our long-term care homes as long as we need their services in Quebec, and until new attendants have been trained.

Can the minister confirm that the mission will indeed be extended?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: I'd like to assure this House that we have assured Quebec that the Canadian Armed Forces will continue to provide support until such time as other trained professional people are able to do that job. We're working very hard with the Province of Quebec. We're working with the Canadian Armed Forces and the Canadian Red Cross. We will be there for Quebeckers because they need our help, and as long as they need our help, we'll be there to support them.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: This isn't the time to play cat-and-mouse. The only thing we have to do is to give the Government of Quebec what it's asking for. Quebec pays 23% of the army's budget, so Quebeckers are entitled to this support.

Quebec has more than 5,000 deaths from COVID-19, 90% of which have been in seniors' residences or long-term care homes. The military's presence is vital because they play an extraordinary and essential role.

Will the minister commit to extending the mission now and putting an end to this uncertainty? It's certainly bad for both the military and the health care workers, who rely on this support.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. minister has 10 seconds.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, Madam Chair, let me be very clear. We have made a commitment to the Province of Quebec that we will continue to provide that support until the middle of September, exactly as they have requested, but we are also working to ensure that we have a sustainable, effective solution to the request that Quebec has made, so we're working with the Province of Quebec, the Canadian Armed Forces and the Canadian Red Cross to ensure the help that is needed is there.

• (1320)

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go now to Bryan May.

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure and an honour to be with you all today. I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member of Parliament for Scarborough North.

Madam Chair, COVID-19 continues to create challenges for all Canadians, including those with disabilities, and exacerbates those experienced by Canadians with disabilities. As we mark the end of National AccessAbility Week, I would like to remind our colleagues that our commitment to making Canada more inclusive and equitable is ongoing, including our passing of the Accessible Canada Act.

Would the minister inform the House about the government's plans to support Canadians with disabilities who are experiencing increased costs due to COVID-19?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion): Madam Chair, last week was the first National AccessAbility Week that was legislated under the historic Accessible Canada Act, and I thank every party in this House for the consent they gave to that legislation. I'm hoping we have the same spirit of camaraderie for people with disabilities this afternoon.

Since the beginning, Madam Chair, we have taken a disability inclusion approach on how we support people with disabilities in this time of pandemic, including the establishment of our COVID-19 disability advisory group, which has given us invaluable advice. I thank them so much for their contributions to our efforts.

Last week we announced a suite of measures to support people with disabilities that complement existing measures that are in place. This includes a one-time payment of \$600 to 1.25 million citizens with disabilities, which again is the subject matter of the legislation this afternoon, as well as a \$15-million investment in an accessible workplace initiative that will ensure, moving forward... We know that as we move back into employment situations it will be very tough for people with disabilities.

Finally, there are five really exciting accessible technology initiatives, including working on point-of-sale terminals for Canadians who are blind or visually impaired.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): You may have a very short question, Mr. May.

Mr. Bryan May: I want to take this opportunity to thank the minister and her department for all the work they are doing to ensure that accessibility is at the forefront of everybody's mind through this crisis.

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

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Madam Chair, as humanity battles COVID-19, we are confronted by the stark realities of another disease.

On May 25, George Floyd fell unconscious and died as a police officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes. This all happened after the 46-year-old black man was handcuffed and put in a position where he could do no harm.

In Canada, we have come a long way since Viola Desmond, yet there is much more to do. Anti-black racism is institutionalized, hidden under dominant narratives of a free and multicultural society. Hatred has no boundaries, whether it is against black communities or is anti-Asian sentiment fuelled by COVID-19.

The question always is this: Who is next? We must all stand up together against hatred and for justice and reconciliation, to dismantle systems of oppression that long remained unquestioned.

Recent data from Statistics Canada shows that Canada is failing black youth, creating the conditions that push them into the justice system. To the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, my question is this: What is the government doing to address the unique challenges faced by black youth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth): Madam Chair, the member for Scarborough North is absolutely correct. We must all do what we can to stand up against hatred and injustice. We often say that today's youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow but the leaders of today, so we need to equip them for success by investing in youth.

According to the 2016 census, black Canadians accounted for 1.2 million people, and more than a quarter of that population is under the age of 15. Socio-economic gaps, such as in employment and education, exist between black and non-black youth. We need to do better.

Our government has brought forward youth so they can inform the decisions we make. We have Canada's first youth policy, and it was created by youth for youth to ensure that all young people are equipped to live healthy and fulfilling lives, and are empowered to create positive change for themselves and their communities.

Our government launched the community support for black Canadian youth program, which supported 56 projects geared to address the unique challenges faced by black Canadian youth through the development of leadership skills and civic engagement, while empowering them through the promotion of black history, culture and identity.

To address the challenges of the pandemic, our government has implemented a suite of measures designed to help youth and students, including with employment and service opportunities. My office is working with community organizations who serve black youth to make sure they too are both aware of and benefiting from these measures.

• (1325)

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

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will be splitting my time with the member for Timmins—James Bay.

Schools in many provinces remain closed, and many child care providers want to reopen. They must reduce their capacity due to COVID-19. Now more than ever we need universal, publicly funded child care to restart the economy.

Will the government bring in legislation that would enshrine into law access to, and federal funding for, quality affordable child care?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development): Madam Chair, we are, of course, committed to investments in child care. We have constantly worked with provinces and territories to ensure that we provide the supports they need to provide quality, affordable and accessible child care.

Since 2015, we have created over 40,000 child care spaces. We are committed to creating an additional 250,000 before-school and after-school child care spaces.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: The government doesn't seem to understand that this is not universal child care.

During COVID-19, women have lost the majority of jobs, and they have taken on the majority of additional child care responsibilities. Canadian women want and need to return to work, but this government doesn't understand that without affordable child care, they simply cannot re-enter the workforce.

For 26 years, Liberal governments have been promising, but failing to deliver, a universal child care program. Parents are paying the price. How much longer do parents have to wait?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, I want to thank the honourable member for the important question.

Since 2015, we have created 40,000 affordable, accessible, quality child care spaces across the country. We are on track to continue to invest \$7.5 billion over 11 years to create additional child care spaces and support provinces and territories. We're constantly in touch with our counterparts to work to strengthen that sector. We are also keeping our promise and our commitment to create an additional 250,000 spaces.

We will be there for parents as they get back to work, and we will continue to reinforce the early learning and child care sector.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): You have time for a very short question, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Without universal child care, we are crippling our economy. We are not providing an affordable system, and this stops women from returning to work. Instead of helping parents return to work, the government is now bringing forward legislation that's penalizing them.

Why is the government looking to sentence mothers and fathers to jail time and large fines when they cannot find the child care that—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The honourable minister has time for a short answer.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We are committed to the early learning and child care sector. We will move forward with the creation of an early learning and child care secretariat. We will continue to invest in this sector. We recognize its importance.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Now we will go to Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to be here, and I'm hoping that you and your family stay safe at this time.

COVID has shaken up Canada's middle class, so my question is for the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity.

This morning I spoke with a businesswoman. She runs her own business, a travel agency, but because of COVID she has been wiped out. She's on CERB, and it's ticking down. There's no work to go back to, so in four weeks she hits the economic wall.

Will the minister fight for an extension of CERB so this woman can stay in the middle class?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, we know how worried Canadians are as they see their final four-week period of the CERB approaching, and we're working very hard to ensure that the CERB continues to serve an important purpose as we move into economic recovery.

I'll note that when we created the CERB, there was a different purpose in mind. We were asking people to stay home. Now we're asking people to go back to work if it's safe for them to do so.

We're going to make sure that the wage subsidy and the CERB complement each other. In fact, the measures in today's legislation will help us to get the flexibility to be able to do just that.

• (1330)

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We did give you a little more time.

We will go to Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you for that.

What I've seen with their legislation today is that they're talking about jailing people. We need a Minister of Middle Class Prosperity in a time of middle-class disparity, and she has talked about middle-class criminality.

Let's talk about this again, about people going back to work. I spoke with a 51-year-old bartender. He's a professional; this is his job. There is no job to go back to.

Will the minister assure us that this man will be able to stay in the middle class because the CERB will still be there in July, yes or no?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, since the beginning of the crisis, we've been helping Canadians by putting programs in place.

We will continue to support families during the crisis, and afterwards as well.

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Angus, you have time for a very short comment or question.

Mr. Charlie Angus: The issue here is that when COVID hit, millions of Canadians were living in such precarious working conditions that they didn't even have enough money to pay their rent. That is a damning indictment.

In four weeks, those Canadians are going to hit the economic wall again. What I need to know from the minister, and what Canadians need to know, is whether she will commit, yes or no, that the CERB will be there for those who have no work to go back to.

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

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, since the beginning of the crisis, we have been helping families with a supplement to the Canada child benefit. We have put in place the Canada emergency response benefit.

We will continue to find ways to support Canadian families during this crisis.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It was all the way back on March 25 that the Minister of Finance stated that help for the energy sector was coming within hours, possibly days.

Well, as it turns out, it hasn't been hours. It hasn't been days. It hasn't even been weeks. Indeed, months later, help has yet to arrive. Seventy-seven days after the minister made that statement, not a single energy company has received financing under EDC, the BDC, or the LEEFF program.

As the energy sector faces an unprecedented liquidity crisis, how can this government possibly justify such a delay?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources): Madam Chair, weeks ago we opened applications through the business credit availability program to support the small and medium-sized players that make up 85% of the jobs in our sector. We've also

opened applications for measures that will be available to our larger players through our LEEFF program.

We will continue to work with industry. We will continue to support workers, and we will continue to do so to get through this unprecedented challenge.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, on June 2, the vice-president of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers said, "The entire industry is frustrated with the delay that we are facing."

The Saskatchewan Minister of Energy and Resources has spoken about a gaping hole that exists in terms of support for the energy sector. The gaping hole that I'm speaking of is the EDC and BDC programs that this government has failed to deliver upon. Indeed, it was on April 17 that those programs were announced, and 54 days later, not only has not a single energy company received financing, but guess what? They can't even apply, and the eligibility criteria have yet to be finalized after 54 days. If that is not failing to deliver for the energy sector, what is?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Chair, the Business Council of Alberta has said that the LEEFF program is a positive development showing that the federal government recognizes the needs and value of Canada's large corporations. We agree. It is essential that we support our oil and gas sector as it suffers through two crises: the impacts of COVID and the effects of a global price war initiated by Russia and Saudi Arabia. That's why, weeks ago, we opened applications for liquidity measures to support the small and medium-sized players that make up 85% of the jobs in our sector. We also announced liquidity made available to our larger players through the LEEFF program. We will continue to work with industry to make sure these programs are effective.

• (1335)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, contrary to the representations of the minister, neither the EDC program nor BDC programs are accepting applications. Just yesterday officials from both BDC and EDC were before the finance committee, where I posed precisely those questions to them.

We know, Madam Chair, that the application process isn't up and running and that eligibility criteria remain to be determined, but I guess this government has some good news for the energy sector after 77 days. Now energy sector companies can go on the BDC website and apply for email updates.

Is that the kind of help the Minister of Finance had in mind after 77 days: email updates instead of real relief for the energy sector?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Chair, the Alberta finance minister, Travis Toews, said in a LEEFF announcement that in combination with earlier measures for small and medium-sized companies, it represented an expression of confidence in our industries.

It is essential that we support our oil and gas sector as it suffers through these two crises—as I said, the impact of COVID, and then on top of that, the effect of a global price war.

We opened up applications for liquidity measures as the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers asked. Their top five asks were all liquidity.

We supported small and medium-sized players essential to the supply chain, who make up 85% of the jobs in that sector, and then we announced liquidity made available to our larger players through the LEEFF program. We will continue to work with industry and—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I now have to interrupt for a few moments to allow our technicians to change places.

With that done, Monsieur Martel, you may now go ahead..

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Chair, there has recently been positive progress in André Gauthier's case, and I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Deputy Prime Minister for their co-operation in this matter. However, Mr. Gauthier is currently on his own in the United Arab Emirates, without a passport, waiting to settle civil lawsuits.

What services does the minister intend to provide to help him, and when does he plan to repatriate André Gauthier to Canada?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Madam Chair, in all cases similar to Mr. Gauthier's, the Government of Canada, through its consular services, tries to do the best it can under the circumstances. This file is still active.

Mr. Richard Martel: The House recognized on February 18, 2020, that the 15 weeks of sickness benefits provided by employment insurance were insufficient.

Citizens who became ill before March 15 are now without help. They are being denied the CERB because they didn't lose their jobs because of COVID-19. They are being denied EI regular benefits because they are unable to work. In addition, some citizens are waiting for surgery, which is being delayed because of COVID-19.

Is the government letting these people down?

• (1340)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: No, Madam Chair, that's absolutely not the case.

Of course, we understand that people who are no longer receiving EI benefits should have access to the CERB. We have committed to extending the emergency sickness benefit to 26 weeks. We're working with everyone here to make that happen. We're taking into account the needs and circumstances of all citizens in our efforts to help Canadians.

Mr. Richard Martel: I've called on the Minister of Economic Development several times to be more flexible in establishing these programs, so that they are better adapted to the realities of the regions. Recently, it was the SMEs in Montreal that were monopolizing the funds earmarked for the regions.

When will the Liberal government listen to the needs of regions like Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I thank my colleague for the opportunity to announce the good news that was mentioned on Radio-Canada this morning, namely, \$71 million more for the regions of Quebec.

Of course, we're here for the regions. I will be happy to work with my colleague to ensure that the CFDC in his region can support businesses. We have to support businesses in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and across the country.

Mr. Richard Martel: I think that's a canned speech.

According to a survey conducted by the Université de Trois-Rivières in Quebec, the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region is apparently the most economically affected by COVID-19. We have many projects, but they depend on the government's leadership to be carried out.

Our region has forestry, the aluminum sector, GNL Québec, tourism, the Port of Saguenay, Davie Canada, a military base and a tax centre. It's all here.

We know we'll have to get the economy moving again soon. When will the government act to help our region?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Every day, we act to help my colleague's region. I've had good conversations with Promotion Saguenay. I've also spoken several times with various stakeholders in my colleague's beautiful region. We will always be there for them.

I'd like to tell my colleague that there will be other announcements to support the economic development of the beautiful region of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. I will be happy to work with him to achieve good results.

Mr. Richard Martel: Sustainable forestry development is at the heart of the economic development of Canada and for Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

Canadians have reason to be proud of the use of the boreal forest in the fight against climate change. Currently, our innovative forest industry is experiencing many problems, and on top of that, there is the COVID-19 crisis.

Who will defend our forestry workers?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Of course, we believe in the importance of regional economic development. That's why we're always there to defend our forestry workers.

I will also be pleased to work with my colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, who is very familiar with the matter and who knows the challenges faced by the various businesses in the forestry sector, as well as the employees.

We will always be there to support employees and create more jobs across Quebec and the country.

[*English*]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. Sahota is next. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

We continue to see significant gaps in the Liberals' programs. There are still people who are falling through the cracks and being left behind. We are hearing from women who are pregnant or who have just given birth and are being left out or told to go back to work.

When will this government stop letting Canadians down?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: We know that there are many situations of Canadians who are about to or are just going on maternity or parental benefits who might not have access to their EI benefits due to not having accumulated enough time for COVID reasons. We're working very hard to make sure, as we did for fish harvesters, that we support all Canadians in these situations.

I look forward to advising Canadians of our approach on this very soon.

• (1345)

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Chair, that simply isn't good enough.

This is something that has been brought to the government's attention for months now, and still nothing has been done. These families deserve answers now.

Had the government conducted a GBA+ analysis, they would have discovered this prior to rolling out inadequate programs for women. Why wasn't a GBA+ conducted?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I can assure everyone in this House that we are very aware and deeply concerned about the disproportionate impact of this pandemic on women and girls.

We are working hard to ensure that everyone has the supports they need. As we move forward, we are, as I said earlier, taking into consideration improvements to the EI system, the wage subsidy and the future of CERB. All these play together as we work to provide a comprehensive forward-looking support package for Canadians.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Chair, might I remind my honourable colleague that this Prime Minister said that every piece of legislation would go through a rigorous GBA+?

Why was it not done?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, I can assure the member that we absolutely took into account the needs of women as we developed the CERB. I can tell you that women are benefiting significantly from this benefit.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Chair, it is a simple question, and I will ask again. Why was GBA+ analysis not conducted for the COVID-19 relief programs?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, as I said, the needs of women and girls were taken into consideration every step of the way, from the beginning, as we worked to provide a comprehensive suite of support for Canadians across the country.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Chair, if that's the case, then how did you miss these gaps?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, I can assure the member that we didn't miss gaps. We, from the beginning, looked to support as many people as possible. As we moved from supporting workers to supporting students to supporting seniors, and today to supporting people with disabilities, we are ensuring that everyone is covered by our measures. As this pandemic evolves and as we move into economic recovery, of course we're going to make sure that women in particular are supported in our measures.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Chair, the minister needs to take the responsibility here. These women and families deserve answers. This is a real problem happening right now.

You said you would conduct GBA+ analysis on all policy measures moving forward. Where is the assistance for these expectant mothers?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, I take responsibility. I'm very proud of how many senior women we have supported with our measures, how many women received the GST credit, how many women who lead families received the CCB one-time payment and how many women with disabilities will receive the disability support if we have all-party consent today.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. Sahota, may I remind you to please direct your questions through the chair?

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Chair, I will ask again, hoping for a straightforward answer from this minister. Why was a GBA+ analysis not conducted on the COVID-19 relief programs?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: My goodness, Madam Chair. I'll say again how important it was from the very beginning that we took into account the needs of women and girls, and as we move forward into the economic recovery phase, how completely we make women at the core of every decision.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. Sahota, you have 15 seconds.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Madam Chair, my question is still not answered. She keeps repeating the same answer. I'll keep asking the same question, hoping for a straightforward answer. Why was a GBA+ analysis not conducted on the COVID-19 relief programs?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Honourable minister, you have five seconds.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, we've taken into account the needs of women and girls from the beginning, and we'll continue to do so.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We go now to Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madame Chair, on April 29 I asked Minister Blair why Lisa Freeman, a constituent of mine, wasn't able to participate in the Parole Board hearing of her father's murderer. The minister acknowledged that this had been a mistake and that victims would now be able to attend by telephone and video conference.

Can the minister tell this House how many parole hearings have been conducted under this digital format with victims since April 29?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank my honourable colleague for the question. I'm glad to hear that Minister Blair was able to provide information on the specific case he raises.

With regard to his question, we're happy to provide it to him in due course.

• (1350)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madame Chair, on April 29 the minister said, and I quote, "Steps have been taken to make it possible for victims to participate in those parole hearings virtually by phone or video conference."

If the change has been made, can the minister please tell us how many hearings victims have been able to participate in by video conference?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, as I said, certainly we will confirm the number of hearings that may have occurred. With regard to the hearings under the Parole Board of Canada, we want to ensure that victims and others are able to participate in a fair and transparent manner.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madame Chair, the website says, "To protect the health and safety of the public, offenders, Parole Board...members and staff in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the PBC is currently conducting its hearings remotely via video conference or teleconference." However, when referring to victim participation, the PBC says it has "Implemented technological and procedural enhancements in order to provide victims...the ability to participate...via telephone."

If video conference is an option for staff and inmates, why is it not for victims?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, as I said, it is very important that all parties be able to participate before the Parole Board. The Parole Board has introduced technologies to allow victims to participate in a manner that is fair and that accords them the opportunity to express themselves.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Chair, the minister is missing the point. For victims, besides the criminal trial, the Parole Board hearings are the only chance to participate in the judicial process. Why are victims not permitted on the video conference, while staff, panels and inmates are?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, as I've said now on a number of occasions, victims are able to participate in the hearings before the Parole Board. This is as a result of technology and innovations introduced by the Parole Board. Of course, those opportunities will continue to exist going forward.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Then, Madam Chair, why did the minister and this government tell Canadians and the House that victims of crime have the opportunity to participate in parole hearings by video conference, when in fact they do not?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, as I've said, of course we are going to confirm the status of that particular request. In the meantime, as I've said on a number of occasions, victims are able to

participate in these hearings. This is consistent with the fairness of those hearings and the due process we accord to them.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Chair, it's been over a month. When will the minister finally give victims of crime the same right to parole hearings by video conference as he gives convicted inmates?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, I reject that proposition. The Parole Board is a well-established tribunal that does allow for all parties, including victims, to participate in a manner that is fair, and that allows them to express themselves so those representations can be taken into account in the decisions of the Parole Board of Canada.

Mr. Colin Carrie: He can reject it as much as he wants, Madam Chair, but it seems he thinks it's fair that inmates have that right, but victims don't. We'll follow up with him on that.

Brandon Hottot owns and operates a contracting business in my riding, and his company needs help. On May 19, the Prime Minister announced the government would allow sole proprietors and gig contractors to qualify for the Canada emergency business account; however, Brandon has still not been able to take advantage of this benefit.

When can small business owners like Brandon expect this change to finally be made? It's been over three weeks, and the clock is ticking.

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade): Madam Chair, from the very beginning, we have been working hard to support our small businesses. Over 660,000 businesses today have received access to small business loans. I want to assure my colleague that additional support will be there within about a week.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Carrie, you may have a very short question.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Okay, Madam Chair.

Shawn and Denise operate a gymnastics facility in Whitby and have been forced to close throughout COVID-19. As the economy begins to open, they are concerned about not having the money to pay their employees in the short term, especially at a reduced client capacity.

Is the government extending the wage subsidy to small businesses that have been closed and are just beginning to open now?

Hon. Mary Ng: The wage subsidy has been extended until August 31. We hope businesses like that one will be able to take advantage of the wage subsidy to keep their employees on staff.

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

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just to put it on the record, because we may or may not be debating it, the draft embargoed bill that we've seen is unacceptable to members of the Green Party caucus. My questions will relate largely to those sections that are troublesome.

I'll start with a question to the honourable minister for disabilities.

I certainly appreciate her work and I know her intentions are the best, but part 3 of this bill allows for the information to be shared so people can get a one-time payment of \$600, which is not enough to really deal with the COVID crisis for people with disabilities. It's clear—and I thank the honourable leader of the New Democratic Party for making this point clearly in question period—it will reach approximately 40% of people with disabilities because of the structure of going through the disability tax credit.

To the honourable minister, are other measures under consideration to reach the rest of the people in Canada with disabilities who need help?

• (1355)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, the disability support payment we are proposing and that we hope to get through the House today complements a whole suite of measures our government has put in place that people with disabilities have access to.

We know that people with disabilities who were precariously employed are now taking advantage of the CERB. Students with disabilities get the student benefit, including a \$750-per-month top-up for four months. Families with children with disabilities are getting the CCB payment. Disproportionately, people with disabilities are benefiting from the GST payment. I should talk about the provincial letters that are being delivered to recipients of provincial disability supports.

All around, Madam Chair, we're trying to get to every citizen with a disability, and this measure fills an important gap.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Much worse than part 3, from our point of view, is the treatment of people who are at this point potentially to be jailed for refusing to return to work when it's considered reasonable and they are recipients of CERB. I wonder about the reasonableness here. It's a subjective test. This is a wrong-headed approach to go after people and threaten them. The retroactive section has already made the Canadian Civil Liberties Association question its constitutionality.

To the minister, what's reasonable, and in whose eyes is it reasonable? In today's news, Hamilton's chief medical officer says there is a spike in cases among young people, who likely were exposed while taking public transit to get to work. Their commute wasn't safe. Who determines reasonableness in deciding it's not safe to go back to work?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, as with the current CERB, moving forward it tries to encompass the situations of people who are unemployed, people who can't work because of child care responsibilities, people who are ill or sick. Moving to a broad term of "reasonableness" allows us to look at the individual circumstances of the person. If we stuck to language like "suitable" or

"appropriate", that would qualify the job. We're trying to look at the person and their particular circumstances as we work to ensure that if someone is immunocompromised and can't take transit to their job, then it's reasonable for them not to take that job. That's the exact example we're trying to encompass with broad "reasonableness" criteria.

Ms. Elizabeth May: The approach is so very flawed, Madam Chair, in that it attempts to punish people as opposed to encouraging them. I think the Liberals have been overly influenced by the Conservative Party's cries that there's vast fraud, that Canadians are cheating. The reality is that if you want to create an incentive to go back to work, you don't threaten people. What you do is create a sliding scale. You let people continue to receive CERB, but maybe less as they begin to earn more, so that you have a transition on a sliding scale to go into the wage subsidy or into CERB.

I ask the honourable minister this: How can it be considered fair to say that someone isn't eligible, even though they believed they were? The language in this bill, particularly at proposed paragraph 12.1(1)(e) in the penalties section, is an unreasonable determination that someone has violated the act and is subject to jail time and heavy fines.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, because of parliamentary privilege, I can't and won't speak to specific acts of a piece of law that hasn't actually been introduced in the House, but I'll tell you that what we're trying to do is enhance our integrity measures. We're working with those people who made an honest mistake, those who took advantage of returning to work when they were still receiving the CERB. We're working with those people. We're absolutely confident that those people will find a path forward.

We want to deal with intentional fraudsters, people who are criminally taking advantage of seniors. Members of this House have brought fact patterns to my attention and have said, "Please deal with these." This is exactly what we're trying to deal with, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to be sharing my time with the member from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke.

Tourism is a critical part of the economy throughout my riding, and after struggling with years of forest fires and floods, tourism was set to have a record-breaking year in 2020, but the COVID epidemic has burned tourism to the ground, in the words of a local leader. Thousands of jobs have evaporated. Over half of the tourism businesses in the region are facing imminent insolvency. Many of them are small seasonal operations that don't qualify for any of the government's COVID support programs.

While funding for ad campaigns is appreciated, these businesses need direct support and they need certainty about that support. Can the finance minister pledge now to provide direct and timely support to tourism businesses in my riding?

• (1400)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you to my colleague for his important question.

I agree with him. The tourism sector has been deeply impacted by the pandemic and the economic crisis. Yes, we were looking forward to another record-breaking year in 2020, but unfortunately the pandemic happened, and therefore many businesses were impacted. That's why, as a government, we're there to help with the wage subsidy, which has been extended until the end of August, as the tourism sector has been asking us to do; with the CEBA loans, the \$40,000 loans, which also include a subsidy; and with the commercial rent relief.

That said, we know the tourism sector also sometimes falls through the cracks. That's why we wanted to have a backstop. We came up with funding through the regional development agencies. In my colleague's riding, it's Western Economic Diversification. Some businesses have applied and have received funding. If there are more that need help, please come and see me. I would love to be there to help your community, help tourism—

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

Mr. Richard Cannings: A big part of tourism in my riding is the wine sector. One thing that has allowed the wine industry to grow so dramatically in the past few decades is the excise tax exemption. That exemption could likely end very soon if it is found to be non-compliant with our trade agreements.

The industry has proposed a trade-legal replacement, the wine growers' value-added program. The finance minister has known about this situation for months. Can he assure this House and the industry that the government will act immediately to implement this program?

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

Hon. Bill Morneau: We continue to work on this issue. We recognize how important the wine industry is in B.C., and I assure the honourable member that I will come back to him and give him an update.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Now we will go to Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Chair, this is National Blood Donor Week in Canada. While blood and plasma donations are always important, during

this pandemic they're critical. There's a simple and effective way to increase the blood supply: End the gay blood ban.

More than 17 other countries have no deferral because they know that behaviour-based screening provides better security for the blood supply than identity-based exclusions. The Liberals must agree, because they promised this in two election campaigns.

Will the Minister of Health do more than repeat those same promises today and instead take action to get this unscientific and discriminatory gay blood ban lifted?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Chair, I'm glad to be able to answer this very important question.

We indeed want to fight against discrimination. We feel this particularly strongly in the context of the last few days and the last few weeks. We are also mindful of the important contribution of scientists and other experts in this area. We look forward to working with all members in this House in making progress on that issue.

Mr. Randall Garrison: The government knows I've been calling on friends, family and allies of the gay community to donate blood this week in the place of those of us who cannot. Not only do we need routine blood donations, but to do the research we need on possible prevention and treatment of COVID-19, we urgently need plasma donations from those who have recovered. This ban means that plasma donations are being rejected for no good scientific reason.

Again, when will the Minister of Health act to get this ban lifted?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, I think the member used the right key words in referring to science and more prevention work to make sure that everyone lives in dignity and safety. Although there has been progress in the last few months and years on this important issue, there is more work to be done.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Six years ago this week, I tabled a motion in the House that called for an end to this homophobic and transphobic ban on blood donations from gay men, men who have sex with men and trans women. That was five ministers of health ago. At the time, I was told certain things had to happen before the ban could be lifted. These were all due to be completed earlier this year, before the COVID crisis.

Since we appear to have cross-party support for my new motion, M-41, that I put on the notice paper this week, would the minister and the government agree to support a unanimous consent motion to proceed with M-41 immediately?

• (1405)

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

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

Homophobia and transphobia are examples of discrimination and absolutely important things not only to recognize but to fight against. That's why we are pleased to have voices such as the member of Parliament's voice to make sure that we make progress in making sure that everyone in Canada lives in safety and in dignity.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Chair, I will share my time with the honourable member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

As Quebec starts to gradually emerge from the general lockdown, the outlook for the recovery of the tourism industry remains bleak. The economy of several regions of Quebec depends on tourism to ensure stability and balance, which will be beneficial in the coming months.

Is the Minister of Finance prepared to extend the Canada emergency response benefit beyond 16 weeks to ensure a living wage for tourism workers?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, as I said in English, we're working very hard to continue to be there for all Canadians, whether it's through the CERB or the Canada emergency wage subsidy.

Please excuse me, I'm very tired. I'll continue in English.

[English]

We're going to have news on this very soon, Madam Chair, but the point is that we want to make sure that all of these programs work well together, whether it's the wage subsidy or the CERB. We want to make sure that we incentivize work, but we still continue to be there for Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: We read that the government wants to gradually replace the Canada emergency response benefit by using the Canada emergency wage subsidy. That's all well and good, but seasonal industries aren't entitled to it under the current criteria.

If the minister is aware of the importance of the tourism industry in the economic cycle of our regions, he must commit to helping workers. If the clientele isn't there, the industry will simply no longer exist. We still need the Canada emergency response benefit. We simply need to make it an employment incentive so as not to hurt people who are lucky enough to be able to go back to work.

The question is simple: will the government commit to renewing it?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, we are working hard to make sure we continue to support Canadians as we transition through economic recovery. We want to make sure that we support Canadians, but of course we don't want to disincentivize work.

The CERB was created for a different purpose. We asked people to stay home to be safe and to self-isolate if they had symptoms. We want to make sure that as we ask people to go back to work, we don't disincentivize work, but the reality is that there won't be jobs there for everyone, and we need to continue to support everyone.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Chair, I join my colleague in extending my good wishes to you on Portugal's national day.

Apart from the fact that it is probably the most beautiful riding in Quebec, the riding of Longueuil—Saint-Hubert has surely been one of the hardest hit by the pandemic, both in terms of health and the economy. There are industries here, but also many service businesses, including bars, restaurants and theatres.

But we aren't close to being able to go back and see a show by Wajdi Mouawad or Fred Pellerin, and that's a shame. We must work to calm the anxiety of these people. The arts sector was the first to stop its activities and will be the last to resume them. There is a lot of anxiety. The CERB ends on July 4.

Will the government extend the CERB, with an employment incentive?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his question and all the work he's doing in arts and culture.

From the outset, we've been there to support our artists and arts organizations. We introduced the Canada emergency response benefit, for example, but also the emergency wage subsidy, which we made available to non-governmental organizations.

To ensure that people who receive royalties aren't penalized under the Canada emergency response benefit, we have adapted it. We announced a \$500 million fund to specifically help the arts and culture sector.

In fact, we understand very well that this sector has been severely affected by the current crisis. We've been there for our artists and artisans, and we will continue to be.

• (1410)

Mr. Denis Trudel: Perfect. Instead of giving a long preamble, I'll ask a very simple question: will the CERB be extended on July 5?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. minister has the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, I can assure the member opposite that in July we will be there for Canadian workers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: In my riding, a nice little restaurant called Crêpe Café on St-Charles Street in Longueuil has just closed its doors. It's final; it won't reopen. Another restaurant owner told me that he was going to reopen his restaurant, but he didn't know at what capacity. Would it be at 15%, 30%, 40%? No one knows.

The speed at which the economy will recover is the big unknown. How many hours a week will it be able to offer its employees? Will it be 12 hours, 15 hours, 22 hours? Will employees even want to return to work to put in 12 hours a week? If the CERB isn't adjusted, nothing will happen.

Will the government commit to extending the CERB and providing an employment incentive to get the economy moving again at full speed?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I know, of course, that the restaurant sector has been much affected. I have a great deal of empathy for what entrepreneurs and my colleague are going through in his riding. That's why we are currently helping our SMEs. We have money for economic development. The money is available through Canada Economic Development, or CED.

If my colleague wants to work with me to provide support to restaurant owners and other restaurants in Longueuil, I'd be very happy to do so.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Chair, last month, on May 5, I asked the government how it plans to support the agriculture sector. The Liberals announced a \$50-million food surplus purchase program as part of the agricultural aid package.

Now, one month later, our farmers, who provide the food we need, are still waiting on funds to be delivered. The New Brunswick potato industry is sitting on a massive amount of last year's crop that, because of the pandemic, has no buyers. When will the Prime Minister and the government step up and deliver the support our farmers so desperately need?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, without question we want to continue to support farmers. My colleague Minister Bibeau has introduced hundreds of millions of dollars for farmers. In addition to that, we have provided relief and support for migrant workers, who are ensuring that Canadians have access to safe and affordable food.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Chair, when support for the agriculture sector was announced on May 4, our agriculture sector had been sounding the alarm for weeks that they needed help to continue to meet Canadians' food needs. It has been over a month since that announcement, and our farmers are still waiting for help.

It is worth noting, Madam Chair, that vegetables like the potatoes in New Brunswick that I previously mentioned are perishable products. Our farmers do not have the luxury of time.

Again, will the Prime Minister and this government make agriculture a priority and provide them with the support they desperately need right now?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, obviously we believe in the importance of our regions and our rural communities, and that's why we've always made sure that agriculture was at the core of many of the decisions throughout this pandemic. That's why our colleague Minister Bibeau, who is the Minister of Agriculture, has been there providing the right liquidity and the right support through this pandemic.

Of course we want to make sure that we continue to partner with provinces and territories, because we need their help in this context to make sure that all together we show strong economic support for our farmers, who are going through tough times.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: On May 1 the Liberals introduced a sweeping firearms ban through an order in council that outlawed 1,500 firearms. Recent reports show that since then, more and more firearms are quietly being added to the list of banned firearms, including many common hunting rifles and shotguns.

Madam Chair, our hunters, outfitters, dealers and sport shooters are some of the most vetted members of our society. Why does the Prime Minister insist on making criminals out of law-abiding firearms owners instead of dealing with the criminals we already have?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, I am very proud of this government's record when it comes to ensuring that we take out of our communities those guns that have one objective only, and that is to kill other people. We will always stand by that record, and we will continue to take the necessary steps to keep our communities safe.

• (1415)

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Chair, the Liberals have said that to compensate firearms owners, they will implement a national buyback program.

Instead of targeting law-abiding firearms owners and their legally purchased private property, wouldn't the estimated quarter of a billion dollars needed to buy back these firearms be better utilized right now in supporting our agricultural sector, the very people who grow our food and literally keep our land?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, of course we look forward to saying more about that, but of course we remain committed to taking those guns that have only one objective, and that is to kill people.

The legislation we have introduced and the measures we have taken are designed to keep our communities safe, and of course we will do that. We will also continue to support farmers, introducing hundreds of millions of dollars in support because we know they are providing Canadians with affordable food.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mr. Bragdon, you have time for a short question.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Chair, many sole proprietors have been hit extremely hard by this pandemic. My office has heard from many who have been in business for nearly 30 years and have submitted hundreds of HST returns, yet still cannot access the CE-BA funding because they do not have a business chequing account, as a lot of small business owners use their personal chequing accounts to do their business.

The Liberals offered aid to sole proprietors but attached unnecessary hurdles that prevent many of them from accessing the funds they desperately need to keep their businesses afloat.

When will these unnecessary hurdles be removed so businesses can start to receive the relief they so desperately need?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will have a very short answer from the honourable minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We believe in the importance of making sure we're supporting our businesses, including sole proprietors. That is why our colleague, Minister Ng, the minister for small business, has been working on this and will continue to make sure we take the appropriate steps to recognize that.

Meanwhile, people can definitely come to the regional development agencies if they don't have access to funding through banks, and that's a good way to make sure there is a backstop.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Please note that, pursuant to the Standing Order made on April 20 and May 26, the House has been recalled.

Therefore, the committee will adjourn, and the House will begin sitting at 2:30 p.m. The bells will be rung to call members, and a parade will begin the sitting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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