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Chair: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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• (1200)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to the 21st meeting of the House of Commons Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

For those joining via video conference, I would like to remind you that when you're speaking you should be on the same channel as the language that you're speaking.

[*Translation*]

As usual, please direct your remarks through the chair.

[*English*]

I understand that we don't have any ministerial announcements today.

We'll go on to presenting petitions.

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

[*Translation*]

For members participating in person, we ask that they please come and drop the signed certificate off at the table once the petition is presented.

[*English*]

Our first petition will be presented by Mr. Genuis.

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

I'm pleased to be presenting a petition in support of Bill S-204. It's a bill in the Senate that would make it a criminal offence for someone to receive an organ that has been taken by force from an unwilling patient. This is a practice that we know happens in certain places.

For instance, in China there is a well-established series of events that has led to forced organ harvesting and trafficking happening

there, with the consent of the government. Many people are concerned about this gross violation of human rights.

I hope that we'll be able to get support to quickly pass Bill S-204. Petitioners are calling on all members to support the swift passage of this bill to address this horrific practice.

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

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm honoured to present petition E-2492, signed by over 3,000 Canadians who note that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic hundreds of thousands of critically and chronically ill patients, including children, seniors and veterans, are at risk of losing access to medical cannabis.

The petitioners are calling on the federal government to recognize the provision of medical cannabis as an essential, constitutionally protected service so that all activities involved in preserving patient access qualify as essential services throughout the current pandemic and beyond.

The Chair: We will continue with presenting petitions.

Seeing none, we'll now proceed to statements by members.

[*Translation*]

The first statement will be presented by Mrs. Brière.

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the businesses that registered for the Sherbrooke recovery forum, which I organized in co-operation with the Sherbrooke chamber of commerce and industry.

The forum, held last Thursday, gave us the opportunity to discuss and find solutions to help our businesses restart to their full potential. It was also an opportunity to hear testimonials from SMEs that have been able to innovate during the crisis. Mohamed Laaroussi of E2 Metrix, for instance, found an ingenious, inexpensive and environmentally friendly way to transform water into a disinfectant.

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank my colleague the President of the Treasury Board and Jean-Guy Côté of the Institut du Québec for agreeing to speak at the event, which was a great success. Our government provided our SMEs with the necessary levers to overcome the pandemic.

Thanks to the ingenuity of people in our region, I'm confident we'll have a dynamic recovery.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Chair, on Tuesday, MPs from all parties of the finance committee unanimously passed a motion calling on the government to fully fund the Auditor General. Massive pre-COVID spending, a failing infrastructure program with 20,000 projects unaccounted for, new Crown corporations with giant budgets and unprecedented COVID support programs have vastly increased the Auditor General's workload.

Yesterday the Minister of Canadian Heritage said that if the Auditor General needed more money all he had to do was ask. Mr. Chair, he's already asked. The Auditor General has repeatedly asked for an additional \$11 million. They've been asking for this money since 2018 and the government keeps saying no. Now, the Auditor General has stopped working on performance audits and for two years in a row has testified at the public accounts committee that the Office of the Auditor General doesn't have enough money to do its job.

This government is hiding from Parliament and it's hiding from the Auditor General, while hundreds of billions of dollars are being rushed out the door.

• (1205)

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Van Bynen.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Newmarket—Aurora has been the proud home of the York region pride parade for the past four years, and while we won't be waving flags, spreading love and embracing inclusion and diversity as we walk along Main Street this year, we'll be celebrating Pride Month from home.

I want to thank York Pride for making digital pride happen this year to celebrate safely and virtually as we continue to face this pandemic. After all, pride is much more than a parade. It's about providing a safe place for diversity and individuality, encouraging acceptance and inclusivity, and recognizing the contributions of LGBTQ+ people in our community. These are values that we must uphold beyond Pride Month.

I want to wish a happy Pride Month to the LGBTQ+ communities in Newmarket—Aurora, across York region and all of Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Larouche has the floor.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A family in Shefford has experienced something extraordinary. The Casavant-Marois family decided to support the cause of sick children.

Showing resilience after the arrival of their second child, born prematurely at 30 weeks of pregnancy nearly 13 years ago, the family wanted to pay it forward and give thanks for being able to welcome Jeremy.

The family decided to embark on a wonderful adventure to celebrate health and enjoy every moment. The parents had planned to cycle with their children for a year, to travel across Canada to the West Coast and then down to Cuba.

This sizeable challenge was a great opportunity to provide the members of this family with meaningful memories, and to allow them to meet people, to discover new corners of the continent, to learn languages, to open their minds to new customs and to discover their hidden strength. It was a return to the roots of simplicity and humanity, but COVID-19 hastened their return. They still partnered with Opération Enfant Soleil to raise donations. I was supposed to welcome them when they arrived, but I couldn't do it.

Kassandra, Sébastien, Julianne, Jérémy, Mary-Ann and Zack, thank you for inspiring us. Every dollar counts, and together we can improve the living conditions of many children throughout Quebec.

I thank the donors who encouraged them.

The Chair: We're continuing with Mr. Scarpaleggia.

[*English*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Chair, Montreal's west island is known for its civic spirit. I would like to highlight three volunteer-driven organizations that have rallied to support the community during this challenging time.

Prior to COVID-19, Katy Johnston was getting ready to open a non-profit workshop called FabZone to make 3D printers and sewing machines available to the community. She quickly changed gears, organizing volunteers to make free PPE for CHSLDs, hospitals and other centres.

Another group called Protection Collective is using 3D printers to produce face shields for front-line workers with the help of sterilized assembly space donated by satellite maker MDA.

Finally, a group called Trash Talk founded by Lucas Hygate to clean up litter in local spaces has adapted to offer grocery delivery to seniors and others who are homebound.

Thank you to the dedicated volunteers of these three organizations for all they are doing to keep us safe at this time of pandemic.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell now has the floor.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Eighty years ago today, Canadian soldiers, including those from the Royal 22^e Régiment, were posted to Hong Kong to defend freedom. The citizens of Hong Kong remember this and are grateful. That's why a group from Hong Kong decided to donate medical equipment to Canada to fight the pandemic.

Under the patronage of my colleague from British Columbia, the honourable member for Steveston—Richmond East, thousands of products have been distributed out west, in Ontario and in Quebec.

For example, on Friday, May 29, I saw that 26,000 three-ply masks, hundreds of protective jackets, hundreds of goggles and many other things were distributed in the area around the old capital.

I'd like to acknowledge the co-operation and collaboration of the public health authorities in Quebec, and I thank the honourable member for Chauveau, Sylvain Lévesque, for facilitating the process.

Above all, I thank these generous donors from Hong Kong. Canadians will always be grateful to them.

• (1210)

The Chair: We are continuing with Mr. Robillard.

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Chair, in recent decades, food banks have become an integral part of the lives of many citizens. They do a tremendous amount of work for our communities year-round, and especially in these times of pandemic.

I'm thinking in particular of the various food banks in my riding of Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, which have worked hard to meet the growing demand from the people of Laval. In fact, several food banks have had to combine a decline in the availability of food with a steady increase in requests for assistance. More than 800,000 people a week use these food banks.

I'd therefore like to take this opportunity to appeal to the solidarity and generosity of all Canadians and to encourage them to make donations. It's a crucial gesture to ensure the survival of our food banks.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Chair, in Surrey—Newton, DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society empowers newcomers to build a better life in Canada. For over 40 years, DIVERSEcity's specialized services have been invaluable to thousands of individuals and families trying to find their way in a new country.

I am proud to now announce that DIVERSEcity's building resilience for a sustainable recovery program has been approved for nearly \$2.2 million in funding under Health Canada's substance abuse and addictions program.

With a focus on culturally appropriate assistance, substance use and mental health treatment will now be offered in the multicultural mosaic that is in Surrey.

Mr. Chair, I want to acknowledge and commend DIVERSEcity for providing critically important services to our community, and I wish them the best of luck with their program.

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

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to acknowledge the tremendous ef-

forts of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke residents in keeping the COVID-19 virus at bay and out of the region.

So far there has been one death attributed to the virus. The few cases registered were brought into our area, which is a real concern in rural areas such as ours.

In my riding, people are afraid, but not of catching the virus. They are worried about having no job to return to. They are concerned about losing their homes. Family businesses already stressed by more government regulation and the carbon tax are now faced with the prospect of having to close their doors permanently.

In the absence of a federal budget and no plan to reopen the economy, the public has lost confidence in this government. Canadians know the longer the federal government keeps us in lockdown, the worse the coming recession will be.

It's time for democracy to resume and for Parliament to return.

The Chair: We will now continue with Ms. Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as Canadians turn inward to focus on the COVID-19 emergency, we must not forget about human rights abuses around the world.

I joined a virtual meeting of MPs from around the world, hosted by Parliamentarians for Global Action, to establish a parliamentary rapid response team, a network of MPs who will speak out when MPs elsewhere in the world are arrested or face violence or roll-backs of democracy.

[*Translation*]

Urgent action alerts have already been issued regarding the Malaysian government, which has closed Parliament to avoid a vote of confidence. Another alert was issued yesterday on the intimidation of parliamentarians in El Salvador.

[*English*]

Consider, when putting on your COVID-19 face masks, the MPs around the world who are literally silenced, jailed and isolated just for speaking out on human rights.

[*Translation*]

Parliamentarians are on the front lines of democracy. Working together, we have a very strong voice.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Martel has the floor.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Chair, the Canada Economic Development Agency, or CED, has traditionally contributed to the development and diversification of the economy in the regions.

Yesterday, the government announced \$71 million for SMEs in the regions of Quebec, even though this money had already been announced on May 13, 2020. The icing on the cake is that the minister is taking the money intended for the regions through the regional relief and recovery fund and giving it to Montreal.

Of course, we must be sorry about the major economic impact that the big cities have suffered during the pandemic, but it's inconceivable that subsidies for the regions would be taken away and given to the big cities. It's like stealing from Peter to pay Paul.

According to the government, Montreal's financial health has a direct impact on that of the regions. The regions need winning conditions to attract private investment. The CED must be more flexible to better meet rural needs. That's a win-win situation for Montreal.

Montreal needs the regions, not the other way around.

• (1215)

[English]

The Chair: Before going to the next statement, I just want to remind all the members of the House, especially the front benches, the government and official opposition, that someone is reading, and we would like some respect for their statement.

We'll go on to Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to take this time today to congratulate the City of Oshawa, Durham Region, and our many mental health and addiction support organizations on a successful campaign to relocate many of our homeless citizens to Camp Samac in north Oshawa, where they are better protected from COVID-19.

The lodging for 25 people also includes shower and laundry facilities, meals prepared by our local Durham College culinary program, addiction and mental health support, and on-site connections with the Ontario Works and the Ontario disability programs. Each resident is also being tested on site.

Oshawa has always been a city of the greatest problem-solvers and innovators in Canada, and I'm proud to represent those same people who are changing lives today. Even during a pandemic, the leaders of Oshawa find a way to improve the lives of the most vulnerable.

I'd like to thank Durham Region commissioner of social services Stella Danos-Papaconstantinou, Councillor Bob Chapman and Mayor Dan Carter for their tireless work that has made this initiative a roaring success.

The Chair: Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As NDP MPs push for a responsible, caring government response to the pandemic, folks at home in Elmwood—Transcona are connecting with people in need and delivering immediate support.

Volunteers at the Transcona Food Bank kept it going with volunteers like Don and Midge Barry, feeding up to 100 families during the pandemic. Elke Pielahn helped out by sewing reusable masks

for all the volunteers, and she kept on sewing and exchanged masks for donations to the food bank.

The Chalmers Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation partnered with Riverwood Church and the Elmwood Resource Centre to deliver frozen meals to seniors in our community.

Volunteers at the Transcona Council for Seniors have been regularly checking in with area seniors and dispatching volunteer drivers to run needed errands.

The Elmwood East Kildonan Active Living Centre has been coordinating volunteers to pick up groceries and medication for shut-in residents.

Above all, kindness and caring will see us through the pandemic. Thank you to everyone in our community who is contributing what he or she can to that effort.

[Translation]

The Chair: We'll continue with Mr. Desilets.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Chair, last Saturday was Canadian Armed Forces Day, which annually honours current and former members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I'd like to recognize the courage and sacrifice of these women and men who work every day to protect our democracy and our values.

I would add that the current crisis has accelerated the need to review the Veterans Affairs disability claims system. Indeed, the complexity and administrative burden means that, as of today, 20,233 files exceed the normal response time of 12 weeks, which corresponds to 19,223 veterans. This is a 17% increase from March 31.

I therefore call on the government to provide a war effort for our veterans by pre-approving all backlogged files. They fought for us, and now it is up to us to fight for them.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Chair, yesterday, in a stunning display of ignorance the Minister of Canadian Heritage stated that the government would be happy to provide the Auditor General with additional resources, if only the Auditor General asked.

Well, news flash to the minister, both the former and current Auditor General have very publicly stated that the office is underfunded by \$11 million. As a result, nearly all non-COVID-related audits will be put on hold this year. For a government that is spending more than half a trillion dollars a year, surely it can find \$11 million, a rounding error, so that the Auditor General can follow the money and do his job. Canadian taxpayers deserve nothing less.

The Chair: Mr. Virani.

• (1220)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'm a brown-skinned Muslim refugee, but any of the barriers I have faced pale in comparison to those faced by black people. These last two weeks have laid bare for all of us the devastating impact of discrimination on the black community. This is not just an American problem.

The very same week of George Floyd's murder, my constituent Regis Korchinski-Paquet, a 29-year-old black woman, died in the presence of police, a death that has galvanized the streets of Toronto. Since that day, repeated incidents of mistreatment of racialized and indigenous persons at the hands of Canadian police have surfaced.

For persons of colour, interacting with law enforcement in this country is often frightening and too often lethal. That's an unacceptable state of affairs that we must change. Change starts with the words we use, so let me be very clear. Racism exists in Canada, systemic racism is real, anti-black racism is pernicious and black lives matter.

Change also means acting quickly to reform our justice and corrections systems and be better allies.

I commit to redoubling my efforts to combat racism and I ask that all of us in this chamber to do the same. George, Regis and all people of colour deserve no less.

[Translation]

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

[English]

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

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

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Chair, today, the Prime Minister is shamefully misleading Canadians, trying to shirk responsibility for his failures in providing help for people with disabilities. He is letting people with disabilities down. He is the one who waited months before bringing proposals forward to help people with disabilities. Then yesterday, when Conservatives proposed a motion to have Parliament meet to debate this legislation, it was Liberals who said no. Can the Deputy Prime Minister explain why Liberals refused to allow the House to debate this bill yesterday?

The Chair: The honourable Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am very glad to hear that question, because it allows me to make an offer to the Conservative Party to correct what may well have been an honest mistake they made in the parliamentary hurly-burly yesterday.

Yesterday, a clear opportunity was offered to all members of this House to have a vote specifically and narrowly on the question of

whether we would offer Canadians with disabilities up to \$600 of additional—

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

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, the mistake yesterday was the Liberals shamefully saying no to allowing Parliament to deal with that legislation and then, disgustingly, today trying to play petty politics on the backs of people with disabilities. That's shameful, and Canadians won't forget it.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, yesterday The Globe and Mail revealed that the Minister of Foreign Affairs had two mortgages on two properties worth over \$1 million with the Bank of China, which is owned by the Chinese government.

Does the Prime Minister believe that it's appropriate for his Minister of Foreign Affairs to be personally indebted to the Chinese Communist Party?

[English]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, what is shameful is to allow partisan politics and procedural manoeuvring to stop Canadians with disabilities who are truly facing additional challenges because of coronavirus. What is shameful, and indeed disgusting, is to prevent those Canadians from getting that \$600.

Members of other parties were prepared to support that measure and, in good faith, we would be very prepared to have that vote and allow us all to get that money to Canadians and to fight about other issues.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, she must have been talking about herself and her own party during her response. Conservatives stand ready. The second she wants to recall Parliament, we will be here to get the help that Canadians expect.

The question was about another Liberal minister getting into trouble because of a fancy European property. This time, it's the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Monsieur Champagne, who owns two posh apartments in London and owes an arm of the Chinese government over a million dollars.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister think it's appropriate to have a minister of the Crown owing an arm of the Chinese government over a million dollars?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, Minister Champagne disclosed those two mortgages, along with all other liabilities and assets, to the Ethics Commissioner, and they have been placed in the online public registry since the minister entered politics. It has been clearly disclosed. Everyone is aware of it, including all relevant government agencies and our Ethics Commissioner, and Canadians have all the transparency they need and deserve.

• (1225)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I have just a simple question for the Deputy Prime Minister. Have Mr. Champagne's mortgages come up for renewal since he has been a member of Parliament?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, while I of course am extremely familiar with all the positions our government takes on foreign policy, I'm afraid I'm not familiar with the details of the personal—

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

Hon. Andrew Scheer: It's a relevant point, because if he was a sitting member of Parliament when the mortgage came up for renewal and he decided to renew with the bank that is run by the Communist Party of China, the negotiations or dealings around that would be very relevant.

Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs disclose what interest rate he is being charged for the two mortgages on his two London flats?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, since the Conservatives have chosen to go into matters of personal finance and property arrangements of members of this House, I might point out that of the two people exchanging ideas right now, one of us lives in government property. When—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you now have the floor.

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

The military's mission in long-term care facilities ends tomorrow. However, before asking my question, I want to make sure I'm addressing the right person.

If I want to know whether the government will extend the military's mission in long-term care facilities, should I address my question to the minister or to his office?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I thank the honourable member for his question, which is very important for all Canadians and all Quebeckers.

I can say clearly that Canada, the federal government, will be there for Quebec's seniors. That is absolutely important.

Obviously, we're in the process of—

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, if I've understood correctly, everything is still vague.

However, yesterday, the Minister of Public Safety confirmed that the military's mission in long-term care facilities would continue until mid-September—the Deputy Prime Minister has just told me that it isn't very clear—but immediately afterwards, the office of the Minister of Public Safety said the opposite.

I'd like to know who's telling the truth.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I thank the honourable member for his question.

I understand how concerned Quebeckers are. I can speak on behalf of the government. I can assure the honourable member and Quebeckers that the federal government and the Canadian Armed Forces will be there.

I should also say that we are in discussions with Quebec as to how to do this. I think everyone agrees—

The Chair: We are continuing with Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: What I understand is that there is no agreement.

The deadline is tomorrow. How can you think that two governments are going to come to an agreement when the people in the party that forms the government can't even agree amongst themselves?

The minister said the military would remain in long-term care facilities. Are they going to?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I've made it extremely clear: Canada will stay there.

I would add that everyone should thank the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces who have saved and continue to save—

The Chair: We now return to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, will the military be in long-term care facilities after tomorrow, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Yes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Until when, Mr. Chair?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Is the honourable member asking me until what time they'll be there?

An hon. member: No, he wants to know how long they'll be there.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: The military are there, and they will be there until their services are no longer needed, obviously.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If I understand correctly, an agreement with the Government of Quebec is on the table, and it has been signed.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Quebec has asked the federal government to help Quebec's seniors. We were—

• (1230)

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe has the floor.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, I want it clearly stated that the military will remain in long-term care facilities until mid-September.

Have I understood correctly?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, as a former journalist, I try to choose very specific words.

What I said, and I'll repeat it, is that Canada will be there.

Canada—

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, we've heard that the army could leave long-term care facilities and train civilians, the people from the Canadian Red Cross, to do the work it's doing right now. That's not what the Government of Quebec is asking for.

Can the minister confirm that the military personnel currently present will remain there until the Government of Quebec decides that it no longer needs them?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: I have a question for the honourable member. Does he speak on behalf of the Government of Quebec? I thought it was the Government of Quebec that spoke for the province.

What I can say—

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have about 10 seconds to ask your question.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I speak on behalf of Quebecers.

Nurses and attendants need the military's help.

I'd like confirmation on that, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, what I am pleased to confirm is that when Quebec needed help to save the lives of seniors, Canada—

The Chair: We are now continuing with Mr. Singh.

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

Canadians living with disabilities need help, but the Liberal government has completely dropped the ball.

Is the Liberal government prepared to implement a program to help all Canadians living with disabilities?

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

I fully agree with the leader of the NDP that Canadians living with disabilities need help. That's why the government yesterday proposed \$600 in assistance for each Canadian—

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

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The problem with the Liberal plan is that it completely misses 60% of Canadians who live with a disability.

Now, any help will do, but will the Liberal government consider a plan that helps those who are most vulnerable as well? Those who are being missed by the Liberal plan are those who are amongst the poorest. Will the Liberals propose a plan that helps all Canadians living with a disability?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member opposite for his really important question, because it highlights what, when you set aside the sound and fury of politics and of parliamentary debate, is the most important issue at stake this week: Will we, together, support Canadians with disabilities or not?

Our government wants to do that. We put forward a plan to do it, up to \$600—

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I have a direct question for the government. Many people are contacting me because they are afraid that the CERB is going to run out and they are not going to have any way to put food on the table. Will the Liberal government extend the CERB for families in need?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I would like to commit clearly to Canadians, just as we said at the beginning of the coron-

avirus health and economic crisis, that our government will be there to support Canadians. We have the fiscal—

The Chair: We're back to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We need a more clear answer.

Taylor from Windsor is a recent grad. He had a job but lost that job because of COVID-19. He is on the CERB, but the CERB is going to run out soon, and he is literally afraid. He is worried that he won't be able to put food on the table. He applies for a job every single day and finds nothing.

Will Taylor have the certainty of knowing that the CERB will be continued, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, I'd like to say to Taylor, and to all Canadians who quite rightly, as the member opposite says, are anxious about their situation, that our government will do whatever it takes to support them. And do you know what? Actions do speak louder than words. We have spent \$152 billion supporting Canadians. That is nearly 11% of GDP. We have put our money where our mouth is—

• (1235)

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Chair, Taylor just wants a "yes". Taylor wants to know that, yes, the CERB will be extended.

Will it be extended, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, our government's record in supporting Canadians economically through this crisis speaks for itself. Nearly eight million Canadians supported through the CERB—

The Chair: Back to Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I didn't ask about the government's record. I'm saying that Taylor is worried. He doesn't know if the CERB is going to continue or not.

Will you continue the CERB, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: As I said, Mr. Chair, our record speaks for itself. Canadians can have confidence that we intend to continue to support them. We know that this is a profound—

The Chair: Mr. Singh.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I want to give another really concrete example.

I got another message, this one from Derek, who lives in Alberta. Derek is a welder. There is no work for Derek. His family lost their home, so they're no longer able to live at their home. They've had to move in with his parents. He had to leave them to go and find work. He hasn't seen them in months. He is searching for work but can't find it. This is a family that would benefit from the CERB if it were extended.

Will you extend the CERB so that families like Derek's can apply for it?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Chair, it is a really important question, and I am glad to be asked it. It gives me an opportunity to assure Canadians that just as our government, from the start of the crisis, has been prepared to put the vast fiscal firepower of the federal government behind supporting Canadians, we are going to continue to do that.

I've given you a few examples. Let me talk about the wage subsidy, which has been particularly valuable to Albertans. More than—

The Chair: We'll now suspend for about 45 seconds so that our staff up in the crow's nest and down in the operating rooms can change over safely.

Thank you.

We'll now continue with Mr. Uppal.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC): Mr. Chair, over the last 10 years, the size of the government has doubled, but the number of audits conducted by the Auditor General has gone down by half. Massive Liberal spending programs lack basic accountability and transparency. For their \$180-billion infrastructure program, they can't even provide a full list of the number of projects.

What is the government trying to hide by starving the Auditor General's office by not properly funding it?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

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

I'm delighted to take this question and to signal both the urgency and transparency of our actions, especially in the current context. We look forward to providing the support the Auditor General requires, as we've done over the last few years. We know how important the work is, and we'll continue to work with the Auditor General.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Chair, they say they want to work with the Auditor General, and that's nice to hear, but the fact is the former interim auditor general testified at two public accounts committees that he asked this government twice for additional funds, first in 2018 and again in 2019, only for those requests to be ignored.

Canadians deserve to know how their money is being spent. This government must be properly audited. When will this government finally be accountable to taxpayers and fully fund the Auditor General's office?

• (1240)

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

Again, to provide the information Canadians need and deserve is our priority. We are doing this over time, especially in an emergency context. In 2018, we were pleased to substantially increase the budget of the Auditor General. We are going to work closely with her.

By the way, I congratulate her on her important appointment.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Speaker, the fact is the newly appointed Auditor General started earlier this week and before she even start-

ed, she expressed concerns about the lack of funding from the government for her office. Will the government give the Auditor General the money her office requires to properly run the Auditor General's office?

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

That's a great opportunity. I'm grateful for that to continue and to say that not only are we proud of her appointment, but we also are proud of the important work she will do on behalf of all Canadians, and all members of this House, to make sure Canadians and members of this House are able to follow the important investments we are making in the—

The Chair: Back to Mr. Uppal.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Chair, it's nice to hear the Liberals continue to make more investments, but what we need is, as they're spending, the number of audits should go up, not be cut down, and that's the situation right now.

Tuesday the finance committee unanimously approved a Conservative motion calling on the government to fully fund the Auditor General and for her to fully audit all federal programs and any other work she deems appropriate. Will the government listen to its own members who voted for that motion, respect taxpayer dollars and fully fund the Auditor General?

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

We're proud and pleased to see the Conservatives did bring that motion, given the fact that in 2014 they cut the budget of the Auditor General.

We are working in a different framework. We are going to make sure the Auditor General—I again congratulate her on her appointment—has all the tools she needs to do the work that Canadians and members of Parliament expect of her.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Chair, the government loves to reach back in history and try to blame someone else for its mistakes. Yes, several years ago—actually two auditors general ago—the Auditor General at that time volunteered reductions to his office, but this did not affect the number of audits it conducted. Right now, the fact is that spending has doubled and the number of audits has gone down. How does the Treasury Board president explain that?

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

I think we all agree, including the opposition members, on the important role the Auditor General in general and the new Auditor General in particular have in our democracy. That's why we increased the budget of the Auditor General at that time in 2018, leading to the creation of more positions in that office to provide the important information Canadians need and deserve.

The Chair: Mr. Uppal you have time for a question of 10 seconds or less, please.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask why the many businesses in my riding, especially those that opened up recently, do not qualify for any government support. They are ready to open, they're ready to hire employees, but they're not getting the support they need. Why won't this government support those businesses?

The Chair: The honourable minister, in 15 seconds or less, please.

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

I have too little time to answer that question. Many of my colleagues would be able to answer it really well, because we are doing everything we need to do to go through this crisis together.

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

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Last night, The Globe and Mail revealed that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has two mortgages valued at nearly \$2 million with the state-owned Bank of China. What interest rate is Minister Champagne paying?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Chair, the minister lived many years in the U.K. He purchased two apartments in London, one in 2009 and the other one in 2013, which he continues to own. Since entering politics, the two mortgages and other liabilities and assets have been fully disclosed.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Does the Prime Minister believe it's appropriate for his foreign minister to be so personally indebted to the Communist Party of China?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: As I said, Mr. Chair, the two mortgages and other liabilities have been fully disclosed to the Ethics Commissioner and placed on the online public registry. Mr. Chair, everything is public.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Chair, the foreign minister is required to obtain a high security clearance not only to attend cabinet but also because he has access to some of Canada's most secret intelligence.

Can the Prime Minister explain how his minister obtained the security clearance, given his financial obligations to the Communist Party of China?

• (1245)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, this could be long.

As I said earlier, since the minister entered politics, the two mortgages and liabilities and assets have been fully disclosed to the Ethics Commissioner—fully disclosed, Mr. Chair—and placed on the online public registry. Everything is public.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Chair, the minister has placed himself in a blatant conflict of interest. It's absolutely inappropriate for him to have a financial relationship with a Chinese government-owned bank.

Will the minister immediately remove himself from his conflict and find a new bank to do business with?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: That's a little bit far-fetched, Mr. Chair. I thought this was an important meeting to discuss the pandemic and important things related to the lives of Canadians, including the creation of jobs, saving jobs and helping Canadians across the country—

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Chair, there seems to be a real conflict of interest here. Maybe the question should be this: Is this why Minister Champagne could barely say thank you to Taiwan for the medical supplies they sent us?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chair, once again, everything has been fully disclosed to the Ethics Commissioner and placed online on the public registry. Everything is public, Mr. Chair. It is fully public.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Chair, two Canadians have been jailed in China since 2018. Is the Minister of Foreign Affairs working to free them, or is this conflict hampering those efforts?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade): Mr. Chair, I want to assure the honourable member that the two Canadians remain our absolute priority. We are going to continue to work tirelessly to secure their immediate release and to stand up for them as a government, as Canadians.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Chair, I'm going to switch gears here.

Conservatives are on record in support of the development and implementation of the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls national action plan. We, like Canadians across the country, want to see real and measurable improvements to the lives of indigenous women and girls, and we have been waiting patiently for over a year for the national action plan.

When will the Prime Minister release this?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations): As the member knows, this is the first-ever national action plan, our first-ever national public inquiry, which requires all of our partners in the provinces and territories to be with us.

Our hearts are with all the families of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and the survivors. We will not let them down. We will work diligently with our partners to get this done in order to prevent this national tragedy.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Chair, the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations had no issue signing a backroom deal, and in fact, had a signing over Skype, but she can't get the action plan out the door.

Will the Prime Minister live up to his responsibilities to the families of the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and release this action plan today?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think the member doesn't quite understand that the commitment was that this plan would be co-developed with all of the provinces and the territories, first nations, Inuit, Métis, families and survivors. We are working every day to get this done, such that it would be accountable with the indicators and the measurements that would allow us to make sure we are making progress in stopping this national tragedy.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Once again, owners of SMEs in Canada are left to their own devices. Let us take the example of the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program, whose eligibility criteria do not meet the realities of our entrepreneurs. They have to come to an agreement with the property owners, and the owners are the ones who have to apply.

Here are two examples in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. We have a chiropractic clinic that has been offering its essential emergency services to its clients, which disqualifies it from this program. Another construction company was unable to convince its owner.

What is the government waiting for to change this program?

[*English*]

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the honourable member for that question.

Businesses like those that he just described have been at the heart of our work supporting businesses through COVID-19 and through this difficulty. The Canada emergency business account has helped over 660,000 businesses get the operating funds to help them manage through this period. We have deferred costs like the GST, HST and customs duties payments.

On commercial rent, we are working with provinces and territories to make sure that they introduce complementary measures, to make sure that this program is successful.

Nothing is more important to us than helping—

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We'll turn to Mr. Godin once again.

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Minister, I have a great deal of respect for you, but you are not meeting the needs of our businesses to reopen the Canadian economy.

Last Wednesday, I asked a virtual question in the House about the Canada business emergency account, to find out when the announced changes will be implemented.

The Prime Minister announced on May 19 that the program would be enhanced to include family SMEs that pay themselves dividends, SMEs that employ contract workers, as well as entrepreneurs who use their personal bank accounts. Well, those entrepreneurs are still waiting, and today is June 11.

Last week, I was told that it is now available, but it is not. I would like to inform the minister that those categories of businesses do not have access to the program.

I ask her again: when will this program be available?

[*English*]

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the honourable member for his hard work in raising the issues of small businesses. Indeed, it's those business owners all across the country that we have, from day one, been listening to and those entrepreneurs whom we want to respond to, and we have.

We've created the Canada emergency wage subsidy, which is helping them keep their employees. In this restart, it's going to help them keep those employees so that they can get on that road to restarting and helping our economy.

I'm also really pleased to say that the expansion to the business account, the \$40,000 interest-free loan, will be available to them within days. Within days, those entrepreneurs, those sole proprietors, those family business owners who are paying themselves through dividends and their employees through dividends, those who are paying—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: The floor goes to Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, when the government finds that it can win votes, there is an urgency to act on certain issues. In this matter, the minister told me last week that it was available. Now she has just told me that it will be available in a few days.

Can the minister give us the facts? Can we show some respect for our businesses that need help? The government says that it must help our businesses. It is right, but it must act now.

Can the minister say when it will be available?

[*English*]

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, in a few short days, through the banks and the credit unions, those incredible small business owners will have access to this funding support.

I might say, over 660,000 businesses already are getting this help. Many businesses are using these funds to help manage through this difficult time, and into recovery, they are going to be so important. We have the utmost respect for those businesses that are all over the community—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have about 15 seconds left.

Mr. Joël Godin: I would like to inform Parliament that Canadians are concerned about the attitude of this minority Liberal government. In addition to having to adapt to the COVID-19 crisis, they are worried about their future.

This government has lost control of its spending. When will we get an economic update?

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance): Mr. Chair, since the beginning of this crisis, Canadians have been a priority for us. We have been transparent and open about our spending to support them.

As soon as it is possible to have clear projections, we will provide an economic update.

[English]

The Chair: We'll now continue with Ms. Stubbs.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

There will be no economy and no economic update if the Liberals don't help the oil and gas sector survive. After five years of bad Liberal policies that devalued Canadian energy companies.... Here is an example: If Athabasca Oil asks for a \$400-million LEEFF loan, the government can own 50% of the company based on current low stock prices, on top of the crazy predatory 14% rate by year five.

The government must fix the mess it helped make. Why is the finance minister using this pandemic to seize significant control of Canadian oil and gas employers?

• (1255)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Chair, we have been working diligently with industry to provide supports both through liquidity and of course through the inactive orphaned well program, where we have seen almost an over-subscription, working with provincial governments in three provinces: Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, it's hard not to notice that the only funding that has actually flowed is that which is required for the end of the industry. It has been 78 days since the finance minister said help for the oil and gas sector was on the way in "hours". Forty-four days ago the Minister of Natural Resources said basically the same thing as today, that the BDC loans for small oil and gas companies would be "rolled out as quickly as possible" but oil and gas reps say that not a single company, not one, has received the promised liquidity through BDC loan guarantees, through EDC or through the methane reduction fund.

Press releases aren't real action and the Liberals aren't helping workers if companies can't or won't get the support they need. What day will the BDC loans actually be open for applications?

Anybody...? This is classic. No one knows.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: No, no. I was just waiting for the acknowledgement from the chair. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wanted to say, first of all, this is not an end of industry. The inactive orphaned well program is helping thousands of workers in good jobs. This is work that had to occur at some point anyway. We thought it would be a good time to do it now. It helps the environment. It keeps people going as we get through the COVID and financial crisis, and weeks ago we opened applications for the BCAP, the business credit availability program, to support SMEs. They make up 85% of the jobs in their sector.

We've opened applications for measures that will be available to larger players through the LEEFF program. We will continue to

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

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, of course, I also support the efforts for the recovery and remediation of orphaned and abandoned wells, because I brought forward a private member's bill that would unlock the private sector to do that, but in fact, as of today, the minister should know that BDC loans are not actually available to small and medium-sized oil and gas producers, and the LEEFF program is so predatory that so far no companies have either applied or will access it.

To help the economy recover, I imagine we would support the private sector. MP Poilievre and I called on the government to work with regulators to expedite assessments for \$20 billion in oil and gas projects, but guess what. The Liberals recently chose to delay the Nova Gas expansion, even though it was recommended for approval to cabinet four months ago.

Why are the Liberals again delaying yet another pipeline expansion at the very worst time?

Hon. Mary Ng: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the honourable member for that very good question, and I want to share that BDC and EDC have been steadfast in working throughout this pandemic crisis to make sure that the range of lending products we have put out into the marketplace make their way to small and medium-sized businesses, particularly those that are so important throughout Alberta and in the energy sector.

I want to assure the member that BDC and EDC are working steadfastly to ensure that those loans absolutely get out to those small and medium-sized businesses. Nothing is more important to us than helping save those jobs and save those businesses during this very difficult time.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Chair, the Liberals just keep saying the same thing over and over again, but it isn't actually doing anything in reality. It's like being in a twilight zone. The loans are not actually available for small oil and gas companies, and the Liberals should stop misleading Canadians and letting them down.

At the Hibernia oil platform in Newfoundland and Labrador, it sounds like workers may start getting laid off tomorrow. Some 260 people could lose their jobs. Again, where is the help the government has promised?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the honourable member's comment about what is happening here in Canada's offshore. As the honourable member knows, I am here in St. John's. I am fully aware of the challenges that the offshore here is going through. We are working with industry and we are working with the provinces on some unique solutions for the offshore that don't necessarily work for the onshore. There are unique challenges here. Capital is an issue and we intend to find solutions that will work effectively here on the ground.

• (1300)

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

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that the 2.5 million Canadian taxpayers' dollars provided to the WHO and UNICEF for the COVID-19 response in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza is not being sent to organizations or implementing partners with ties to groups listed on Canada's terrorist entity list?

The Chair: The honourable minister.

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development): Mr. Chair, let me be very clear that Canada is stepping up on the world stage when it comes to COVID-19, particularly in vulnerable contexts, which the West Bank and Gaza are. We have very strict rules in place when it comes to ensuring and tracing the money that we have.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Chair, in 2018, GAC provided \$1 million to UNICEF for a project with the PFLP-tied NGO, the Union of Health Work Committees. It happened just last year that Canadian funds went to UNICEF, and this has happened in the past.

What oversight mechanisms is the minister referring to that are actually in place to ensure Canadian taxpayers' dollars are not being utilized by such organizations and are being used strictly for COVID-related humanitarian activities? What mechanisms?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, I will reiterate that all of GAC's programming everywhere in the world is strictly monitored and strictly evaluated. We have very robust mechanisms in place, and I would be happy to have a further conversation with the member.

Additionally, we recognize that we need to support the poorest and the most vulnerable. That is why we provided additional funding to organizations in the West Bank and Gaza and around the world, because we recognize that until everyone everywhere is safe from COVID-19, nobody is safe.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I still don't have an answer, Mr. Chair, as to whether it's happened or not. It happened just last year, and I'd appreciate hearing what specifically the mechanisms are.

Will the Liberal government increase its transparency and publish information regarding organizations' implementing partners and activities receiving Canadian taxpayer dollars for the COVID-19 response in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza? Will they publish that information?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, that information is available, which is why the member could quote that we have given money to the WHO and to UNICEF. All of GAC program funding is available on our website. If he has further questions, I will be happy to respond to those, but just as it is available to him, so too is it available to all Canadians.

Mr. Marty Morantz: That's simply incorrect, Mr. Chair. Although it is published that the WHO and UNICEF received these monies, the implementing organizations that those organizations provide funds to are not published. The minister should get her facts straight.

Budget 2018 indicated the government's commitment to enhancing transparency in Canada's international assistance programming. Budget 2019 allocated \$788 million to international humanitarian assistance.

Can the minister confirm that the Government of Canada is not funding terrorist-related organizations as part of any COVID-19-related international humanitarian assistance?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Chair, I think all members in this House would agree that Canadians play an important role when it comes to humanitarian affairs. For example, the director of the World Food Programme is predicting a doubling of people who are going into food crisis because of COVID-19. Whether it's providing humanitarian assistance through direct food assistance or ensuring that there are medical supplies and capacities, I firmly believe that Canadians think we should be providing this crucial support to the world's most needy and most vulnerable.

As I have said, Global Affairs Canada has strong enforcement and oversight mechanisms. I would be happy to have a further conversation with the member and enable him to speak directly to officials if he would like more details.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Chair, I look forward to receiving that information as to which implementing organizations are actually receiving Canadian taxpayer funds.

Turning to the CRA, I note in the supplementary estimates that there are zero new dollars requested for CRA. CRA has been a major implementer of the emergency programs. Does CRA have adequate resources to continue implementing the emergency programs or not?

• (1305)

The Chair: The honourable minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Chair, the Canada Revenue Agency's priority is to ensure that emergency response payments are transferred quickly and efficiently to eligible Canadians.

The agency has safeguards in place to ensure that payments are issued appropriately. As with all other benefits administered by the agency, we may undertake audit activities at future dates. If we find that payments were made in error—

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

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix.

Two months ago, to the day, the Bloc Québécois advised the government that it had to assume its responsibilities and manage the quarantine of temporary foreign workers. However, it chose to shirk its responsibilities by promising money, which no one has seen. In addition, the government is asking for a lot of paperwork to get this money.

Does the government realize that it is responsible for the outbreaks we are seeing all over the country?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Mr. Chair, as we can guess, several ministers are very concerned about this issue, including the Minister of Health, the Minister of Employment, the Minister of Immigration and myself, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. I can assure my colleague that we are all working together, in partnership with local public health authorities, to find the best possible solutions.

We take the situation extremely seriously. Seeing sick workers affects us, and losing some is even more difficult.

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Chair, with all due respect, we are a little tired of being told that the government is working hard. We want concrete answers. That takes leadership. The federal government has offloaded its responsibilities onto agricultural producers, who already have their hands full. Is it going to assume its responsibilities?

One VegPro International farm ended up with 18 cases. It had to incur significant costs, hire a nurse and take distancing measures. The people on the ground are assuming their responsibilities.

Will the government take responsibility and pay the bill?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, we take this situation extremely seriously. We are talking about people's health and lives right now. That is why we very quickly put in place, right from the start, a \$50-million program to help producers and employers receive foreign workers and to ensure that they had the means to quarantine them for 14 days.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out that those 14 days of isolation are going well. It is often afterwards, during interactions with the community, that there is a risk of—

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

Mr. Yves Perron: Today, in the House, we are asking the government to take responsibility, to assume all the costs and to pay the money to producers without them having to take any action. They do not have time to fill out paperwork.

This is a serious situation. That is one point on which I agree with the minister: this is a serious situation. We are talking about human lives and responsibilities. It would be nice if the federal government assumed its responsibilities when they are its responsibilities to assume.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Chair, if there is one thing we are doing, it is certainly assuming our responsibilities. We have put in place a number of broad measures to help all Canadians, businesses, Canadian workers and foreign workers. We have invested \$50 million to help producers and employers of foreign workers in the agriculture sector to enable them to do the 14 days—

The Chair: We will now take a short break to replace the person in the chair.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): The floor goes to Mrs. Desbiens.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Chair, today I am representing the Théâtre du Rideau Vert. For the seventh time in 10 years, the Canada Council for the Arts has denied a grant essential to the theatre's future.

I have a question for the Minister of Canadian Heritage, since the Rideau Vert is the oldest francophone theatre in America. It is one of Quebec's jewels. What measures does the minister intend to take to help the Théâtre du Rideau Vert?

● (1310)

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

As she knows full well, the Canada Council for the Arts is an independent organization. The organization provides the funding. It is responsible for establishing its programs, free from any political interference or influence. In addition, grants are awarded with the help of a panel of experts in the field, meaning peers, artists, theatre administrators and other arts professionals from across Canada.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: I'm not sure that the cultural community will be satisfied with the answer. Clearly, the Canada Council for the Arts falls under the minister's department. In fact, the Théâtre du Rideau Vert is in his backyard, literally across the street from his riding.

I am sure the minister has the power to do something. If the Council is not making the appropriate decisions, perhaps he can intervene or discuss with those in charge.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I thank my colleague for her question.

We have implemented processes to depoliticize the funding system in the arts. What my colleague from the Bloc Québécois is asking me to do is to make those policies more political and more politicized.

I am not sure that is what our artists and artisans in the arts and culture sector are asking us to do.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Personally, I am convinced that the Canada Council for the Arts would like to recognize the Théâtre du Rideau Vert as a cultural institution. That's the issue here. The theatre is being stripped of its status as a cultural institution, while the community as a whole recognizes that status. Perhaps it's just a matter of changing a few commas and words.

I am sure he can review this with his entire team.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: As I said, and I repeat, the grants are awarded through a peer review committee. The artists and artisans in the sector may or may not make favourable recommendations for funding. In the case of the Théâtre du Rideau Vert, an expert peer review committee concluded that the grant should not be awarded.

[English]

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

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Brome—Missisquoi.

In the Waterloo region this past week, there have been numerous rallies and marches of solidarity condemning racism and injustice in all its forms. Peaceful demonstrations like these have highlighted the need to do better and to be better as a community and as a nation. In my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga, I've heard from concerned citizens, community leaders and faith-based leaders who share their emotional stories and are turning to our government to lead the way to a more inclusive society.

Although we are apart, we can stand together, united. Racism can be difficult to discuss, and it will be even more difficult to overcome, but we must have these conversations. We cannot remain silent. We must take action, and we must do what's necessary, even when it's difficult. That is what Canadians do.

Can the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth explain how we can address these issues head-on, what steps we have taken, and what we can do as a nation to ensure that everyone is treated equally and has the same opportunities here in Canada?

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

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth): Madam Chair, I thank the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for taking a stand and not choosing silence.

Anti-black, anti-indigenous, anti-Asian—racism exists. It is ingrained in our institutions, and we can no longer choose to ignore it. Keeping silent is to condone racism. The Prime Minister has tasked me to work with colleagues to develop policies that tackle systemic discrimination and unconscious bias, including anti-black racism, within our institutions.

The member asked what we can do. We can listen. We can take these voices seriously. Right now, we have the opportunity to build back better and to advance policies and programs informed by lived experiences. Our institutions have an opportunity to internalize the criticisms and concerns being raised. They can listen and learn from the stories being shared by the many communities speaking out against injustice and become more inclusive.

Additionally, I commend the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for being a strong voice for all of his constituents. This pride season, the LGBTQ2 communities and allies in Kitchener—Conestoga can rest assured that their MP will also stand up for them.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I now give the floor to Mrs. Bessette.

• (1315)

Mrs. Lyne Bessette (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The tourism industry opens our beautiful country to the world by showcasing its culture, its diversity, its natural beauty and its unique experiences. Tourism is an important economic driver and a

source of pride. It generates local jobs for many communities across Canada, including in my riding of Brome—Missisquoi.

However, this industry is also one of those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The tourism industry faces unique challenges, and in these exceptional times, we must support it.

Can the minister responsible for tourism tell us more about what the government is doing to support this major industry, which is the livelihood of so many Canadians?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages): I thank my colleague from Brome—Missisquoi. She represents a magnificent region of Quebec that is populated and run by a number of operators of tourist attractions, hotels and restaurants. Since she is a staunch defender of tourism, let me tell her that we have implemented a number of measures to help those folks.

First, we extended the wage subsidy until August. Second, there is a new agreement with the Government of Quebec to increase support for commercial rent. Third, there is certainly help with the cash flow of those businesses.

However, we wanted to go further. That is why we are going to invest \$6.35 million in the beautiful Estrie region, in which the riding of Brome—Missisquoi is located, through the Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs). We are also going to support local and regional tourism campaigns across the country by investing \$30 million in Destination Canada.

I would also like to tell my colleague that there will be more good news soon for the tourism sector in Quebec. So she can be confident about the future, and she can also pass the message to the residents of her constituency.

[English]

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

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

Madam Chair, imagine you're in Pukatawagan, a remote first nation in northern Manitoba. Like every first nation in your region, you are doing everything possible to lock down and keep your community safe. Then, out of nowhere, you find out from the national media that you're getting tents, tents that you never asked for. Then you find out that the government purchased these tents from a company connected to a former provincial Liberal cabinet minister, a Liberal who sat on the government's COVID-19 supply council.

There they go again, another Liberal government benefiting its Liberal friends. What is Indigenous Services doing to get to the bottom of this tent scandal?

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Chair, my question was for the Minister of Indigenous Services.

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: Is the timer being stopped?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Yes, it has been stopped.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Chair, thank you.

I thank the honourable member for the question, and I do believe that the understanding of what tents are is a misunderstanding. A lot of the communities have been asking for these very large portable structures that can be put up immediately to be able to isolate infected patients or protect family members. I'm sure that—

Ms. Niki Ashton: With all due respect, this is not the answer. This community did not ask for tents, and that's what we need to get to the bottom of.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Please go through the Chair, Ms. Ashton. You do not interrupt like that, I'm sorry.

Ms. Niki Ashton: The question is for the Minister of Indigenous Services. This is under his department. I wonder where the minister is. The question is about tents that were not asked for, not a clarification—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Ms. Ashton, the questions are being directed to the ministers who are available to answer.

The honourable minister has the floor, please.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Chair, I hope that the member will be watching the press conference with the Minister of Indigenous Services, who is announcing money for indigenous businesses and tourism. That it is very good news today.

We will certainly look into her concerns, but I do believe that the response to COVID-19 has been extraordinarily good because of the hard work of the communities, and we will look—

• (1320)

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Chair, my second question is for the Minister of Public Services and Procurement.

Let's look at the Liberals' approach to procurement. The COVID-19 supply council created by the minister to advise her on procurement has people like David McHattie, with the oil industry and a pipeline company, and Jodi Hall, who represents for-profit, private long-term care homes. They and other lobbyists from the COVID-19 supply council have met with representatives from the government at least 218 times.

What are they discussing with the government, its support for big oil or its support for for-profit long-term care homes? But don't worry, says the government, they were asked to fill out a form and volunteer—

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

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement): Madam Chair, as I mentioned to the honourable member at committee earlier this week, the members of the supply council have absolutely no role in procurement.

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

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Chair, the government made people living with disabilities wait three months for an announcement five weeks after it promised to do it without delay, and when it did announce it, it left over 60% of Canadians living with disabilities behind. It is shameful.

Three weeks ago, the Prime Minister promised changes to help more small businesses. Today the minister said that they have to wait even more days. Without these changes, in my riding of Edmonton Strathcona, Johnny's tattoo shop, Mark's chiropractic office, Jen's dance studio and Brittany's learning centre might all have to shut their doors for good.

When exactly, what date, will this help come, and why have the Liberals made small businesses in my community wait so long?

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

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion): Madam Chair, that completely misrepresents the help we've given to date to millions of people with disabilities. Workers with disabilities have accessed the CERB in record numbers. Many people with disabilities received the GST one-time payment. Families of children with disabilities received the CCB payment. Seniors with disabilities received the seniors' payment. Community organizations focused on serving people with disabilities are accessing the \$350-million community fund.

We are committed to people with disabilities. We know there's more to do. We're trying to do more, but despite our best efforts, political interference is really thwarting our attempts to make good on this.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Chair, that is really frustrating, because that wasn't the actual question I asked.

Small business owners are also struggling with rent, and if their landlords won't apply for the Liberal rent scheme, they might not survive another month.

My constituents Doris and Patrick own one of the best French restaurants in Edmonton, and they can't get rent relief from their landlord. Chantel, who runs a dance studio in Lendrum, cannot get her landlord to apply either.

When will these small business owners be able to get the help they were promised as tenants?

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

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, our government is working closely with provinces and territories to deliver the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance. Although the tenant-landlord relationship is ultimately a responsibility of provinces and territories, our government has stepped up to support businesses. We have also brought tools, through the CMHC, to make sure there is availability and relief for rent.

We're continuing to monitor this program, and we will continue to support businesses throughout this pandemic.

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

Mr. Pat Kelly: How much interest will Canadians have to pay to service this year's estimated \$260-billion deficit?

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

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, we are currently monitoring our investments, and we're making sure we're supporting Canadians, supporting businesses and making sure we're protecting jobs. That's what we're doing currently.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Chair, I didn't ask whether they were supporting Canadians. I asked how much the debt service will cost.

Again, how much will it cost to service this year's deficit?

● (1325)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, no Canadian should be having trouble paying their bills right now. That's what we're putting our priorities on. Our different measures are going to support families, are supporting businesses and workers. We're going to continue to put—

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Chair, in Tuesday's address from the cottage, the Prime Minister refused to give a straight answer to the question about the cost to service Canada's debt.

Again, what will it cost to service the additional debt resulting from the COVID response measures?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Again, Madam Chair, no Canadians should have to worry about paying their bills at this time. We entered into this crisis with a strong fiscal position, and Canada is ready and able to respond to the challenges posed by COVID-19. We're acting right now and will be unwavering in our family, business and worker support.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank goodness for the previous government that gave this government the fiscal position that it inherited.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer and private sector economists seem to be able to do their jobs and provide economic updates. Why will this government not do so?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madame Chair, again I would like to say that we are bringing forward different programs to support families, to support businesses, to make sure that we protect jobs. With our strong fiscal position, we are ready and able to respond to the challenge posed by COVID-19. We will continue to make sure that we monitor and continue to invest in Canadians during this pandemic.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Minister Fortier, you didn't even try to answer that question. I asked you about the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Why will Minister Fortier not answer the question?

The question was this: Why will this government not provide an economic update? The PBO is able to do their job. Economists in the private sector can do their jobs. Why will this government not provide an economic update?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madame Chair, I will speak through you to the honourable member. We know that Canada's economy is in a period of extraordinary uncertainty, and that's why we will continue to be open and transparent and provide the necessary information on how much spending we've done to support Canadians. Once it is possible to provide a clear economic projection, we will provide an update.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Chair, the minister is not being transparent and clear. She's being evasive. She's not answering the questions.

Small business owners in my riding have contacted me this week. One is someone who pays himself through dividends from his private corporation, and another is an owner-operator who does not have a formal payroll. Both have reported to me this week that they still can't access the CEBA.

It was weeks ago that the government claimed to have addressed this issue. When will these people who have fallen through the cracks of these aid measures get access to the CEBA?

Hon. Mary Ng: I want to thank the honourable member for that question.

I want to assure the honourable member that the expanded criteria for the bank loan will be available through Canada's financial institutions, credit unions and banks within days. Financial institutions have had to adapt to the new criteria to make sure they're able to do this programming with the new applicants. I can assure you that everyone is working as hard as they can. Nothing is more important to us than helping those small businesses from coast to coast.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Your question?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thousands of people in my riding work in the oil and gas industry. At the finance committee last week, a witness described the LEEFF program as "a Faustian bargain masquerading as a payday loan with a smile."

When will the government design actual, realistic relief for the energy sector and the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who work in it?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Madam Chair, we have been working with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and with industry from the get-go, from the beginning of this crisis.

Their number one issue was liquidity. We have worked with them from the get-go to make sure that this liquidity was offered, and as we get further and further along, we will continue to work with them to fine-tune it and make sure it does what it is meant to do, which is to keep those companies in place to ensure that we have jobs and we get through this whole.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will take a break for a few minutes so that new teams can take over.

We will resume the meeting.

Mr. Dalton has the floor.

• (1330)

[English]

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madame Chair, Croatian Canadians living in Canada have a right to vote in Croatia's upcoming parliamentary elections. Why is this government refusing to allow the Croatian embassy or the consulate in Canada to host polling?

Hon. Mary Ng: Madam Chair, thank you to the honourable member for that question. I will have to get back to you on that one. Thank you very much.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Madame Chair, when the second round of applications for the Canada summer jobs program was announced, it was mentioned that additional funding could be forthcoming. Now I'm hearing from qualified applicants like the Downtown Maple Ridge Business Improvement Association that they are being denied. Service Canada is telling members of Parliament to tell applicants, "Sorry, but there wasn't enough money."

Madame Chair, why should we do the government's bidding for them? There's not enough money? Madame Chair, how is it possible that the Liberal government has \$105 million to spend on jets for the minister and her colleagues to fly around the country and not enough money for a \$4,000 youth summer job in my community?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I'll remind the member that since our government came to power, we have doubled the number of Canada summer jobs available to communities across the country. This year, as part of our \$9-billion investment in students, we created an additional 116,000 jobs.

The fact that there are so many jobs out there is great news for young people, Madam Chair. This program is indeed oversubscribed because of the flexibilities we added and a second round of calls. We're working to see how we can support businesses.

Let's not forget, Madam Chair, that this is great news for our future.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Madam Chair, the Downtown Maple Ridge Business Improvement Association was going to use their summer jobs funding to hire two downtown ambassadors to work with struggling small businesses with a system of signage and pamphlets, educating the public regarding social distancing, directing them to use ten washing stations and providing masks. They have received Canada summer jobs funding for years and have been a tremendous service to our community.

I have been in communication with the executive director over the past months. I told her that based on their history and past funding and how important their work is, especially during this time of COVID, I was confident they would receive funding; we just had to wait and wait.

How in the world is it possible, Madam Chair, that the government has money for private jets but no money for a non-profit that is trying to help struggling small businesses improve public health and safety?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, I am happy to work with the member on CSJA applications and allotment. I can tell him that I know how beautiful Maple Ridge is, as I've been there many times. I look forward to figuring out how we can support employers in his riding and across the country as we invest in more jobs for young people.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Madam Chair, despite what this government claims about having adequate supplies of PPE for those who need it most, for our front-line workers and those assisting vulnerable populations the reality is far different.

Last week, I delivered masks to our local Legion, care homes and our seniors. I'm arranging another batch for child care facilities, local businesses and non-profits. These masks did not come to me from the government; rather, they were a generous donation from overseas.

Why is it, Madam Chair, that our most vulnerable populations have to wait for Hong Kong philanthropists to step up and do the job their government should have been doing?

• (1335)

Hon. Anita Anand: Madam Chair, the honourable member is mistaken in terms of the PPE that has been coming to the federal government from international and domestic sources. Over half of the face shields we have ordered have been produced domestically. In addition, we have millions of gloves, gowns, hand sanitizers, N95 respirators and surgical masks coming in daily on over 50 flights from China. Our stock is continuing to increase and our domestic capacity is continuing to grow.

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

Mr. Marc Dalton: Going back to Canada summer jobs, there are organizations in my riding that have done nothing but wait for this government with respect to jobs. They've had to wait longer for applications. Since winter they've had to revise criteria.

Madam Chair, how does this government justify spending money on fridges for Loblaws and private jets for themselves while non-profits in my riding see the funding that they have so long relied on cut or slashed?

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

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, this year we've tried to provide flexibility in the program to maximize the number of jobs available for young people. It's been a success.

I thank members of Parliament for their contributions because they've had to dig in on this, but I think our young people are grateful as well.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We're now going to Mr. Deltell.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Good afternoon, Madam Chair. I am very pleased to see you again today.

Could a member of the government tell us what Canada's deficit is?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, since the beginning of this crisis, our focus and priority has been on Canadians. We have put forward a number of programs. We continue to be open and transparent with—

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

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Transparency and openness are exactly what Canadians want, Madam Minister. For that, we need numbers and data. The crisis has been going on for three months. The question is quite simple: what is Canada's deficit?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Once again, we have been very clear with Canadians and with parliamentarians and we will continue to be clear. We have put forward a number of emergency programs to support families and workers. We will continue to—

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

Mr. Gérard Deltell: My question is very clear: what is Canada's deficit?

Hon. Mona Fortier: We have put forward a number of investments, such as the emergency wage subsidy, the CERB—

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

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Chair, you cannot say that I did not try. As they say in baseball, three strikes and you are out. The government has still not provided clear information to Canadians. What is the deficit?

Perhaps now I will have a better chance of getting an answer: what have Canada's additional expenditures been since the beginning of the pandemic?

Hon. Mona Fortier: I will list the investments we have made since the beginning of the crisis through Canada's economic action plan to respond to COVID-19.

More than 2.5 million Canadian workers have had access to the wage subsidy. In terms of business accounts, 660,000 businesses have accessed—

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

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Chair, if Minister Fortier is so good with numbers, can she provide the specific number that Canadians want to hear?

How much has the government spent in the last three months?

Hon. Mona Fortier: The question from the hon. member, whom I respect a great deal, means that I can continue to provide him with information.

We are continuing to help Canadians during the crisis. In May, we even added an amount to the Canada child benefit—

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

Mr. Gérard Deltell: How can we have confidence in the government if it does not know the amount of the deficit and how much it has spent since the pandemic began?

Let me ask the question again: how much money has the government spent since the pandemic began?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Let me continue. We have invested in young people and in seniors.

We would like to invest in those living with disabilities because that is very important. We cannot do so at the moment. So—

• (1340)

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

Mr. Gérard Deltell: But it is quite extraordinary that the government cannot do what the Parliamentary Budget Officer is doing. The Parliamentary Budget Officer is able to provide numbers for the deficit and for the expenditures.

Why is the government not able to do that?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Since the crisis began, we have invested in Canadians by means of programs that have helped them to pay their bills and support their families. We are going to continue to do that.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Chair, the government has no control over its expenditures and no idea of the result.

I would like to ask the Minister one question. When will the economic update be given?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Once again, we have been very clear about that. In these extraordinary times, the government continues to be open and transparent. As soon as it is possible to provide an economic update—

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

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Chair, I cannot but applaud Minister Fortier's sense of humour. It makes no sense. She claims that the government has been clear about this, but it is anything but clear.

Why will the Government of Quebec be able to provide an economic update next week, but not Ottawa?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Let me repeat again: we have presented, in a clear and transparent way, the investments that we have made in Canadians. As soon as it is possible to provide clear projections, we—

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

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Here is what we have learned today: we have no idea about the deficit, no idea about the expenditures that have been made and no idea about when the economic update will be tabled.

Does Canada have anyone in charge at the moment?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Once again, I am very proud to say that we have supported Canadians through this crisis and we will continue to do so.

Our priorities are their health and their ability to pay their bills at the end of the month. We will continue to—

[*English*]

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

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Measuring the COVID response and the performance of your country versus other countries in the world is an important indicator of your success in that fight.

Could the minister advise what the infection rate per million is in Italy right now?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health): Madam Chair, I think a better measurement of how the country is doing in terms of our response to COVID-19 is the number of infections and deaths in our own country and the comparative capacity of Canada to respond to the infection. I am proud to say that we have—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Chair, that's a much longer answer than the question I asked.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry, but we had some technical issues. That's why the minister was continuing to answer.

Go ahead, Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: The infection rate right now in Italy per million is 6.9. Does the minister know what the infection rate per million is in France right now?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I'm not sure what the line of questioning is of the member opposite, but I can speak to Canada's experience with COVID-19 and our current work to protect Cana-

dians' health and safety. I'm happy to answer questions about our domestic response.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Chair, the rate of infection per million in France is 4.6 right now. Does the minister know what the infection rate per million is in Australia right now?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, all of that information, as the member opposite knows, is available on a number of different tracking sites. I think the member opposite is obviously trying to make a point. I'm happy to answer—

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

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The number is actually 0.49 per million.

I'm going to ask the same question with respect to New Zealand. I assume the minister does not know that number either.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to once again talk about the tremendous work that the provinces and territories have been doing to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Chair, the infection rate per million in New Zealand right now is 0.03.

Now for an easy one. Does the minister know what the current infection rate per million is right now in Canada?

• (1345)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, again, I'm happy to talk about Canada's response to COVID-19 and how we're supporting provinces and territories to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: The infection rate per million in Canada right now is 16. That is four times higher than many of our G7 counterparts. It's 40 times higher than Australia and 500 times higher than New Zealand. This is after borrowing close to \$200 billion and shutting down our economy, with the enormous effects this is having on Canadians.

How can this government explain this abysmal performance in comparison with other countries around the world?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, it's a real shame that the member opposite is so harsh in his criticism of the work of the provinces and territories to protect the health and safety of Canadians. We know this is a shared responsibility. It has been a global pandemic, and of course the answer is a complex one, which I don't have time to provide, given the shortness of his question.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Chair, our infection rate is 500 times higher than that of New Zealand. It is virtually COVID-free.

Suggesting that I shouldn't be asking these types of questions when our performance is so poor compared to other countries—40 times that of Australia—I don't think is appropriate. We are on the verge of reopening our economy all across this country, and our rate is so much higher than other countries. How can the minister justify the performance of this country versus Australia, New Zealand, Germany and France?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I see the member opposite is cherry-picking countries that have had lower infection rates than Canada, while leaving out others that have had tremendous infection rates. We know there are a number of complex factors that go into how a country fares with coronavirus.

I will say this, Madam Chair: I'm incredibly proud of the work of my colleagues at all levels of government who have worked so tirelessly over the last several months to protect the health and safety of Canadians. We know there is more to do. We know—

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will go now to the Honourable Jody Wilson-Raybould.

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

While there seems to be general consensus that systemic racism exists in Canada, there's been much recent debate about what it means. Can the government please tell this committee how it defines “systemic”, and provide specific examples of policy and legislative initiatives that are under way or being considered?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, systemic racism and systemic discrimination exist within our institutions. That's why it's important that at the decision-making table, you reflect the diversity of our country. That's why we brought forward a new appointments process. That's exactly why we have an opportunity right now to ensure the programs and policies we put in place are informed by lived experiences.

These are the measures being put forward. We have an anti-racism secretariat, as well as an anti-racism strategy that was created by Canadians for Canadians, and we look forward to working together with allies in all parties.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: I didn't hear a specific definition of “systemic racism” there, but I'll move to my next question.

With respect to indigenous peoples, would the government agree the Indian Act is one of the most, if not the most, egregious examples of systemic racism in Canada, in particular in sections 5 through 17, where the Crown is still legislating and determining who is legally an Indian, and sections 74 through 80, where the Crown is still legislating how those people so define and govern themselves? Would the government not agree that these are both examples of systemic racism?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I believe our government is working very hard to get people out of that colonial piece of legislation, the Indian Act. Working together on that path of self-determination and rights recognition whereby nations will determine who are their members will indeed be one way out of the systemic racism that has faced indigenous people coast to coast to coast.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Thank you. I'm not sure I heard agreement with my question.

Surely it is the height of racism when one group of people tells another who they are and how they make decisions about themselves. Does the minister agree that the determination of who are indigenous persons and how they govern themselves and make internal decisions should be an exclusive power of a recognized indigenous people?

• (1350)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think the member and I totally agree on this. As we move to self-determination and to nations determining who their members are, we have really no right as a country to be telling nations who and who are not their members. That is why we hope that in the future the Indian registrar position will no longer be necessary, as all nations in Canada are able to determine who is and who is not a member of their nation.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: Thank you.

Just to clarify and be certain, does the minister agree that these powers of governance should be the exclusive powers to recognize indigenous peoples?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: That is everything we're working toward, the nation building and rebuilding and the rights recognition as nations come together to determine who is a nation and who are their members. That is the work we're supporting coast to coast to coast, and my job is to accelerate that progress.

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould: This government has stated numerous times that it is committed to advancing sentencing reform that will “stand the test of time”. It also states it is “committed to... [addressing] the tragic problem of overrepresentation of indigenous peoples and marginalized Canadians while holding offenders to account and protecting victims.”

I think most members in this House would agree that the time for empty promises is over and that action is required. Evidence clearly shows that mandatory minimum penalties are a big part of the problem and not smart justice policy. There has been enough study and too much delay due to political expediency.

When will the government confirm that it will repeal mandatory minimum penalties for all but the most serious offences?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): We, as always, are very concerned with the tragedy, if you will, Madam Chair, of overrepresentation of indigenous peoples in our criminal justice system and in incarceration. We have described it as a “national shame”, so we understand that. We are working on a number of different fronts in order to reduce that. Those include continually looking at the Criminal Code and seeing where reform is possible, and that includes sentencing reform.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The floor now goes to Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

In Quebec, 55,000 people are waiting for social housing. Groups are demanding social housing. Montreal wants to provide social housing, like Quebec City and like Ottawa.

Ottawa is asking Quebec City to provide social housing, but Quebec City replies that no one can ask it to do what it already wants to do.

Families are suffering at the moment. Can we get out of this crazy situation and release the money?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development): Madam Chair, we are committed to reaching a bilateral housing agreement with the government of Quebec. Based on the principles of partnership and collaboration, we want to ensure that we reach an agreement that works for Quebec and Quebecers, and we're committed to reaching that agreement very soon.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Well, let's go; "chop, chop", as they say.

Madam Chair, for the performing arts, for the theatre arts and for dozens of festivals, 2020 is a lost year.

Is the Minister of Canadian Heritage going to come to the aid of this aspect of our culture? When will he do so?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Madam Chair, my thanks to my colleague for his question and for his interest in arts and culture.

We acted quickly at the very beginning of the pandemic. We put almost \$2.5 billion into arts and culture through the Canada emergency response benefit and the emergency wage subsidy. As an emergency measure, we have provided \$500 million to arts, culture and sport across Canada.

We have already started to help this sector, and we will continue to help the sector get through this unprecedented crisis.

• (1355)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: The minister is very good at listing past measures, but much less so in telling us about what he is going to do in the future. For workers in tourism or culture and for the artists and craftspeople, the CERB will end on July 4.

The Union des artistes, ACTRA, and the Fédération nationale des communications et de la culture are worried.

I have one quick question. What are all those people going to do on July 5?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Madam Chair, Canadians across the country are wondering what comes next from our government, and I can assure them that although yesterday we had a massive setback when we tried to introduce flexibilities into the wage subsidy and

into the CERB that didn't work, we're looking to see how we can continue to support workers, how we can continue to ensure that jobs that are available are filled and how we can make sure that we don't disincentivize work as we move into the next phase.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Chair, it is a simple question.

For restaurant workers, for bar workers, for workers in tourism and for workers in culture, is the CERB going to be extended, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I have said a number of times, Madam Chair, that we will continue to be there for workers and their families.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: The aerospace industry represents more than 70,000 good Jobs in Quebec, in at least 245 companies.

With aircraft stuck on the ground, the future is very uncertain.

Other countries around the world are supporting their aerospace workers. Here, we do not even have a fund specific to the sector.

When will there be a national aerospace strategy that will protect our jobs?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, my colleague's question is appropriate because we know that the aerospace sector is greatly affected. It is also a major sector in Montreal, where his constituency and mine are located.

That is why we are here and why we are also here for SMEs. Through the CED, there is funding for the aerospace sector. We will continue to answer the call.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Chair, an important vote will take place next week. Canada is in contention for a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Today, Greta Thunberg and 22 scientists rapped our knuckles because they say that we continue to subsidize the oil and gas sector.

Is it possible that we may not obtain the seat on the Security Council because we are actually at the back of the pack in the fight against the climate emergency?

[English]

Hon. Mary Ng: We know that Canada must show leadership in the face of the major global challenges that we face, and more than ever Canada is playing a positive role by being a champion of diversity and inclusion, addressing climate change, leading peace and security efforts and helping the most vulnerable. A seat on the Security Council will allow Canada to be a strong voice for a fair, more inclusive and more prosperous world. This is the message that Canada wants to bring to the table.

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mrs. Vignola now has the floor.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

On Tuesday, we learned that two shipyards were getting together to try once more to squeeze Chantier Davie out of the project to build polar-class icebreakers.

Despite the fact that the submission deadline is long past, Chantier Davie prequalified.

When will it receive the contract to build polar-class icebreakers?

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand: This issue is still under decision at the current time. Davie has begun the process of qualifying to be the third shipyard, and that process is also occurring at the current time. In due course, a decision will be made about the polar icebreaker, just not at the current time.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I understand that discussions are necessary, of course. Nevertheless, Chantier Davie represents 50% of the shipbuilding capacity in Canada. Quebec has provided \$22 billion of the \$100 billion for the national shipbuilding strategy. However, we have received only 3% of those funds, about \$3 billion.

When will Chantier Davie finally have the contract in its hands?

• (1400)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, I must highlight the extraordinary work of all employees at Chantier Davie. For decades, Chantier Davie has been a major supplier to the Government of Canada and an extraordinary partner. We will always work with Chantier Davie. It will always be a pleasure to do so because the company does absolutely exceptional work.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you for your words of recognition for the work of Chantier Davie and its employees, who are indeed exceptional. However, the recognition can also translate into actions. One of those actions would be to award them the contract to build the polar-class icebreakers.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Once again, I want to highlight the excellent quality of the work done by all employees at Chantier Davie, a supplier with which the Government of Canada works on a regular basis. We are working on this matter. We understand the importance and the strategic role of Chantier Davie. We are aware of the importance of Chantier Davie to its region. We will be able to make additional announcement shortly.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: This is not the first time that companies have tried to block the awarding of shipbuilding contracts to Chantier Davie. A person representing one of those companies even said, after losing a contract because it was not able to provide the ship, that it could do so in 2029. Now, I just met with James Davies, who told me that he can deliver the ship in 2027, if he gets the contract quickly.

When will Chantier Davie and its employees finally have the pleasure of building the icebreaker?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: This gives me the opportunity to tell my colleague that, not long ago, I had a conference call with all Chantier Davie's suppliers, from Sherbrooke, from the Quebec City area, from the Côte-Nord, and from elsewhere. So I can say once more how important the strategic role of Chantier Davie is in Quebec, not only where it is currently located, but also because of its whole network of suppliers.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Actually, the network of suppliers is not just in Quebec, it is all over Canada. Chantier Davie would be a fantastic partner in getting the recovery going. The recovery could begin with the icebreaker contract.

When will Chantier Davie have its contract?

Hon. Anita Anand: As I have already said, the decision will be made in due course.

I would like to be clear, however, that our government has announced support for Chantier Davie. It was preselected to become the third strategic partner in the national shipbuilding strategy. That is a very major position.

We will be making a decision in the future.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Mrs. Vignola, you have the floor for about 15 seconds.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Does that mean the near future or the distant future? When hell freezes over, will we get our icebreaker?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, the future, by definition, is tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, or in a month. I don't know when the future is. It all depends on which future you are talking about.

However, it is certain that Chantier Davie and its suppliers play an absolutely extraordinary role. We will be here for them.

[English]

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

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Chair, my central Alberta riding has been hit with a triple whammy: the government's anti-business policies, its anti-energy policies and now COVID-related shutdowns.

How will the government ensure that traditional businesses in my riding will be able to compete on the world stage as our economy reopens?

Hon. Mary Ng: Madam Chair, I want to thank the honourable member for that question.

Right from the very beginning, we have been here to help our small businesses, but as the Minister for International Trade, it gives me great pleasure to continue to work with our Canadian small businesses, like those in Alberta, so that we can help them grow and grow into the export global marketplace.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Chair, recently the Red Deer & District Chamber of Commerce surveyed its membership. Its membership has seen relatively low uptake in federal programs because they simply don't meet the qualification criteria. Seventy-three per cent of business owners expect the economic recovery to be slow, and less than 10% plan to fully rehire laid-off staff. They don't feel like this government has their back.

What message does the minister have for these businesses that face incredible hardship because they were pushed out into the cold several years ago and now seem completely forgotten?

• (1405)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, obviously we know that Alberta has been hard hit. We know many of the business owners are going through difficult times right now. That's exactly why, in order to make sure that they would not fall through the cracks, we doubled the budget of Western Economic Diversification, which is the regional development agency for Alberta, the prairies and B.C.

We will be there for them. If my colleague has clear examples, please contact me, contact my office. Let's work together to find solutions.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Chair, Parks Canada is now enrolling long-term lease conditions in its annual business licensing process.

Can the minister explain to these businesses why?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change): Madam Chair, Parks Canada has ongoing planning processes with respect to a whole range of different issues within the national parks. We were very pleased to announce last week that we would be ensuring that rent relief was provided to businesses that operate within the parks, and we certainly are interested in seeing those businesses and those communities that are adjacent to the parks succeed as we go forward.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Chair, to the public safety minister, since his announcement on May 1, where does the RCMP keep its list of newly prohibited firearms?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Madam Chair, the answer is that the RCMP maintains, through the Canadian firearms program, the public firearms reference table, and it's being updated as quickly as possible. I would refer the member to check with that table.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Chair, to the minister, is that firearms reference table actually available to the public?

Hon. Bill Blair: I would suggest that the member or the people he represents should contact the Canadian firearms program in the RCMP to obtain that information.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: So the answer is that there is no direct public access to the firearms reference table.

If they have to access it through the RCMP, is there a way that members of the general public don't have to go through a second or a third party in order to access the firearms reference table?

The minister wrote a letter to all firearms owners across this country and told them they need to check their firearms for legality, yet he gives them no direct mechanism to do so. Why?

Hon. Bill Blair: There is very little time to correct all the mistakes in what the member just said, but let me repeat that if the member opposite wishes to check with the Canadian firearms program of the RCMP on what is on the public firearms reference table, he should contact them.

Second, the letter to which he was referring was not sent out by me but by the Canadian firearms program. I hope those facts help the member have a better understanding of how this is actually done.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Please ask a very short question.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: How many shotguns has the minister banned since May 1?

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Please give a very short answer.

Hon. Bill Blair: The answer is none, because none of those were included on the order in council. However, we did ban the frames and receivers of AR-10s and AR-15s, and the RCMP is now updating the firearms reference table to include the prohibition of those weapons containing those prohibited items.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Chair, on a point of order, I would just like to remind you that the length of these questions is related to the answers. They are supposed to be the same length. That last one was more than three times as long.

The Acting Chair (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): If you want to get an answer, I have to give the minister the time to detail what he is answering. That's the question of providing the answer, and there was no time left anyway. There was 15 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Therefore, the committee will resume its work on Monday, June 15, 2020, at noon.

The meeting is adjourned.

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