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# House of Commons Debates

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Monday, April 20, 2020

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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 20, 2020

The House met at 11 a.m.

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*Prayer*

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• (1105)

[*English*]

## PRIVILEGE

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. This is my earliest opportunity.

I must start by reflecting on the enormous tragedy that took place over the weekend in Nova Scotia. I am sure that none of us is unaffected by this horrific event. That tragedy only adds to the urgency of my request.

Your role, Mr. Speaker, is to protect the rights and privileges of every member in this place. Historically, the Speaker has also been responsible for the physical safety of members and indeed of all who work in Parliament. That we are currently in a global pandemic due to the COVID-19 virus is clear. The impact of that pandemic is the reason that this House, by unanimous consent on March 13, 2020, agreed to adjourn until this date.

However, I submit that the date of April 20 was a mere placeholder. No one knew on March 13 what living in a pandemic meant. We knew nothing about flattening the curve. Now we do. I submit that when we agreed to the adjournment on March 13, we placed in that motion a simple expedient to continue adjournment in keeping with public health advice. All that had to happen until any time yesterday was for the House leaders of the four larger parties to sign a letter to you, Mr. Speaker, requesting further adjournment. The responsibility for such a letter not being sent rests on one party in this place, and now here we are.

The rights and privileges of many members are *prima facie* violated by any motion to proceed with regular sittings of the House in which they cannot participate. All members from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador cannot participate under provincial quarantine orders without having a 14-day quarantine upon returning to their home province and must isolate even from their families.

This is particularly painful, given that today, in the aftermath of those terrible murders, our colleagues from Nova Scotia cannot gather. They cannot console their bereaved constituents. None of

us, from the Prime Minister to the Governor General, can go to Nova Scotia to console them. Our hearts go out to each and every Nova Scotian and those across Canada affected. My colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands, a former Nova Scotia resident and proud Cape Bretoner, knows one of the family members of a victim. This is a terrible time to be debating procedural motions in Parliament.

For my other colleague, the hon. member for Fredericton, her rights and privileges are violated. Should she attempt to represent her constituents physically in this place, which is her duty and her right, she would be required to self-isolate from her husband and children on her return, for 14 days.

Quebec members have also been asked by their government not to travel. The idea of a small number of MPs meeting in Ottawa violates their privileges and offends the efforts of the Quebec government.

[*Translation*]

The rights of Quebec MPs have been violated.

[*English*]

Parliament is not a debating club for the benefits of large organized political groups or parties. Political parties are not mentioned in our Constitution. Parliament is an assembly of duly elected members. All MPs are equal, just as their constituents and constituencies are equal.

On this day we are in uncharted territory. As Green MPs, we seek to rely on the rules and procedures of this place that have protected Westminster parliamentary democracies for centuries. Those rules evolve, but most fundamentally, the Speaker's role is to protect the rights of each and every MP.

*Government Orders*

In a pandemic, this surely means that the Speaker should find a question of privilege and, in light of the affront to Parliament of continuing debate on the matters, I ask that you, Mr. Speaker, find a prima facie question of privilege and that you forthwith refer the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs currently meeting virtually. I also ask that you take protection of the House into your own hands, deciding to adjourn immediately *sine die* and that you inform us when we shall resume sittings of the House, based on public health advice as to when it is possible for every MP to exercise his or her rights and privileges in this place. I also ask that you continue to pursue the unanimous wishes of those in this place under the existing unanimous consent orders of April 11, to pursue without delay a virtual question period and to reconvene only when a compelling legislative need is identified.

• (1110)

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of points with respect to the hon. member's question of privilege.

First, I would remind the House that the procedure and House affairs committee is dealing, in a very short time frame, with the issue of a virtual Parliament.

Second, we would reserve the right to respond to the member's question of privilege.

**The Speaker:** I will take that under advisement and return with a ruling as quickly as possible.

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**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

## SUSPENSION OF CERTAIN STANDING ORDERS FOR CURRENT SITTING

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I think that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, the application of Standing Orders 15, 17 and 56.1 be suspended for the current sitting.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Speaker:** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE AND COMMITTEES**

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I think that you will find unanimous consent for me to move a motion.

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to move a motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, during today's sitting, a minister of the Crown be authorized to move, without notice, a motion concerning the proceedings of the House and its committees.

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House:

(a) today shall not be considered as a sitting day for the purposes of Standing Orders 34(1), 37(3), 51(1) and 110 and subsection 28(12) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons;

(b) the government response to petition 431-00125, 431-00129, 431-00134, 431-00136 and 431-00139 be tabled immediately and that the responses to questions on the Order Paper numbered Q-369 to Q-379 and a supplemental response to Q-330 be made into orders for return and that the said returns be tabled immediately;

(c) Statements by Ministers be taken up immediately following the adoption of this order, that a member of the Green Party also be permitted to reply to the statement and that the time allocated for replies be not less than 10 minutes per party;

(d) following the responses to the ministerial statement, the House shall resolve itself into a committee of the whole to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic provided that, during the proceedings of the committee,

(i) the Speaker may preside,

(ii) the Chair may preside from the Speaker's chair,

(iii) the Chair shall call members from all recognized parties and one member who does not belong to a recognized party in a fashion consistent with the proportions observed during Oral Questions,

(iv) no member shall be recognized for more than five minutes at a time which may be used for posing questions to a minister of the Crown or a parliamentary secretary acting on behalf of the minister, and

(v) members may be permitted to split their time with one or more members by so indicating to the Chair; and

at the conclusion of 27 five-minute interventions, or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, the committee shall rise;

(e) when the committee of the whole rises, a motion "That the House take note of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic" shall be deemed proposed and a member of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party may speak to the said motion for not more than 10 minutes, followed by 5 minutes for questions and comments, provided that members may be permitted to split their time with another member; and, at the conclusion of the time provided for the debate or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, the House shall adjourn until Monday, May 25, 2020, provided that, for the purposes of any Standing Order, it shall be deemed adjourned pursuant to Standing Order 28, and, if the Speaker receives a notice from the House leaders of all four recognized parties indicating that it is in the public interest that the House remain adjourned until a future date or until future notice is given to the Speaker, the House will remain adjourned accordingly;

(f) for greater certainty, the following provisions remain in effect:

(i) paragraphs (m) to (p) of the order adopted on Friday, March 13, 2020,

(ii) paragraphs (i) to (m) of the order adopted on Tuesday, March 24, 2020, provided that

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- (A) in paragraph (i), the words “paragraph (f)” shall be deemed to refer to paragraph (e) of this order, and
- (B) in paragraph (l), the words “paragraphs (e) or (f) of this order” shall be deemed to refer to paragraph (e) of this order, and
- (iii) paragraphs (k) to (n) and (p) to (t) of the order adopted on Saturday, April 11, 2020, provided that the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs be added to the list of committees in paragraph (l) of that order;
- (g) during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order, any petition certified by the Clerk of Petitions may be filed electronically with the Clerk of the House on any Wednesday and shall be deemed for all purposes to have been presented to the House on that date;
- (h) a Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic shall be established, composed of all members of the House, and which shall meet for the purposes of
- (i) considering ministerial announcements,
  - (ii) allowing members to present petitions, and
  - (iii) questioning ministers of the Crown, including the Prime Minister, in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic, provided that
  - (iv) during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order and commencing on Tuesday, April 28, 2020, the committee shall meet at noon every Tuesday and Wednesday and, commencing on Thursday, May 7, 2020, the committee shall also meet at noon every Thursday, provided that the committee shall not meet on a day referred to in Standing Order 28(1),
  - (v) on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the committee shall meet by videoconference and members shall participate by videoconference and on Wednesdays, the committee shall meet in the chamber and members shall participate in person, provided that meetings by videoconference shall be subject by such limits as the House administration may indicate are necessary,
  - (vi) the Speaker shall be the chair of the committee,
  - (vii) seven members shall constitute a quorum,
  - (viii) ministerial announcements, if any, shall be considered at the opening of the meeting and the proceedings shall be conducted in the same manner as Statements by Ministers under Standing Order 33(1), provided that a member of the Green Party also be permitted to reply to the statement,
  - (ix) after any ministerial announcements, any member desiring to present a petition may do so during a period not exceeding 15 minutes, provided that the provisions of Standing Order 36 shall apply, except for Standing Order 36(5), and any petition presented shall be deemed for all purposes to have been presented to the House,
  - (x) after any ministerial announcements and the presentation of petitions, proceedings on questioning ministers shall be conducted, for not more than 90 minutes on a Tuesday or a Thursday and for not more than two hours and 15 minutes on a Wednesday, in the same manner as provided for in paragraph (d), provided that questions shall be answered by ministers,
  - (xi) upon the conclusion of proceedings on questioning ministers on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the committee shall adjourn to the next day provided for in subparagraph (iv),
  - (xii) upon the conclusion of proceedings on questioning ministers on Wednesdays, the committee shall consider a motion “That the committee take note of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic” for not more than two hours and 10 minutes, provided that each recognized party shall be allotted 30 minutes for debate which may be shared among members of that party and a total of 10 minutes shall be allotted for debate by members who do not belong to a recognized party and at the conclusion of the time provided or when no member wishes to speak, whichever is earlier, the committee shall adjourn to the next day provided for in subparagraph (iv), provided that, if the House sits on a Wednesday pursuant to paragraph (i) of this order, the committee shall adjourn upon the conclusion of proceedings on questioning ministers,
  - (xiii) if the Speaker receives a notice from the House leaders of all four recognized parties indicating that it is in the public interest that the committee remain adjourned until a future date or until future notice is given to the Speaker, the committee will remain adjourned accordingly,
  - (xiv) meetings of the committee shall be televised, following the usual practices observed for sittings of the House,
  - (xv) any document may be presented by a minister of the Crown, or a parliamentary secretary acting on behalf of a minister, at any time during a meeting
- of the committee and shall be deemed for all purposes to have been presented to or laid before the House,
- (xvi) the committee shall have the power to sit while the House stands adjourned and to print, from day to day, such papers and evidence as may be ordered by them,
- (xvii) upon the resumption of regular sittings of the House, the committee shall cease to exist, and
- (xviii) following the report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs pursuant to its order of reference of Saturday, April 11, 2020, the House leaders of all four recognized parties may indicate to the Speaker that there is an agreement among the parties to implement one or several of the recommendations of the committee and the Speaker shall give effect to that agreement;
- (i) during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order, and without limiting the application of Standing Order 28(3), if the Speaker is satisfied, after consultation with the government, that the public interest requires that the House should meet in order to consider measures to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the lives of Canadians, the Speaker may give notice that being so satisfied the House shall meet, and thereupon the House shall meet to transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time, provided that, in respect of a sitting convened under this paragraph,
- (i) the House shall meet on a Wednesday, at the later of 2:30 p.m. and the conclusion of the proceedings of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic,
  - (ii) notice of the sitting shall be given no later than 6:00 p.m. on the preceding Monday,
  - (iii) notices may be filed with the clerk no later than 6:00 p.m. on the preceding Monday and shall be printed in the Notice Paper to be published for that sitting,
  - (iv) the application of Standing Orders 15, 17, 36(8)(b) and 39(5)(b) shall be suspended,
  - (v) the order of business shall be Introduction of Government Bills, followed by Government Orders,
  - (vi) the only Orders of the Day which may be considered under Government Orders shall relate to the COVID-19 pandemic and measures necessary to respond to it,
  - (vii) an embargoed copy of any measure to be considered shall be provided to the House leaders of the recognized parties no later than 6:00 p.m. on the preceding Saturday,
  - (viii) before any measure is considered, a minister of the Crown must state that there is agreement among the representatives of all recognized parties to govern the proceedings in relation to the said measure and, the minister may propose a motion, without notice, setting forth the terms of such agreement and every such motion shall be decided forthwith,
  - (ix) no motions may be received or considered under Standing Orders 26, 38, 52, 53, 56.1, 57, 78(2) or (3), 81 or 84,
  - (x) any day the House sits pursuant to this paragraph shall not be considered as a sitting day for the purposes of Standing Orders 34(1), 37(3), 51(1) and 110 and subsection 28(12) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, and
  - (xi) when the proceedings governed by the motion described in subparagraph (viii) have been completed, or if that motion is negative or a minister does not state that there is an agreement, the Speaker shall adjourn the House to the date fixed under paragraph (e), and the House shall be deemed, for the purposes of any order, to stand adjourned pursuant to this order;
- (j) for the purposes of committee meetings convened under paragraph (h) of this order and paragraphs (l) and (m) of the order adopted on Saturday, April 11, 2020, priority for the use of House resources shall be given, in the following order, to
- (i) meetings of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic,
  - (ii) meetings of the Standing Committee on Health,
  - (iii) meetings of the Standing Committee on Finance,
  - (iv) meetings which are specified by the agreement of the whips of all recognized parties,
  - (v) all other meetings, in the order in which the meetings were convened;

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(k) the House, recalling the untimely death of Michael Ferguson on February 2, 2019, call upon the government to propose the nomination of a permanent Auditor General of Canada, pursuant to subsection 3(1) of the Auditor General Act and Standing Order 111.1, provided that

- (i) the government consent with opposition parties within 30 days of the adoption of this order;
  - (ii) the certificate of nomination may be tabled pursuant to paragraph (k) of the order adopted on Saturday, April 11, 2020, as renewed by subparagraph (f)(iii) of this order,
  - (iii) the Standing Committee on Public Accounts shall meet within seven days of the tabling of the certificate of nomination and, if the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order, the provisions applying to committees enumerated in paragraphs (l) and (n) of the order adopted on Saturday, April 11, 2020, as renewed by subparagraph (f)(iii) of this order, shall apply to the committee for the purposes of this study; however, the committee may consider motions related to the adoption of a draft report in relation to this study,
  - (iv) the committee be instructed to present a report within seven days of first meeting on this order of reference,
  - (v) the question on a motion to ratify the appointment shall be put, without debate or amendment, after a report has been presented under subparagraph (iv), at the earlier of the next following regular sitting of the House, during Routine Proceedings, or the next following sitting of the House convened under paragraph (i), at the opening of the sitting;
- (l) Standing Order 81 shall, for the calendar year 2020, be amended as follows:
- (i) in section (4), by replacing
    - (A) “May 31”, wherever it appears, with “November 27”, and
    - (B) “May 1” with “October 30”,
  - (ii) in section (8), by replacing “June” with “December”,
  - (iii) in paragraph (10)(a), by replacing all the words before the word “provided” with the following: “In the calendar year 2020, eight sitting days shall be allotted to the business of supply for the period ending not later than March 13; five additional days shall be allotted to the business of supply in the period ending not later than June 23; and nine additional days shall be allotted to the business of supply in the period ending not later than December 10;”, and
  - (iv) in paragraph (10)(b), by adding the following: “and that, in making this determination, the Speaker shall include in the period ending not later than December 10 the two allotted days which had not yet been designated pursuant to the order adopted on Monday, March 9, 2020.”,
  - (v) in section (12), by replacing “June 23” with “December 10”,
  - (vi) in paragraph (14)(a), by replacing “June 23” with “December 10”,
  - (vii) in section (17), by replacing
    - (A) “periods ending December 10 and March 26” with “period ending June 23”, and
    - (B) “each of the said periods” with “the said period”, and
  - (viii) in section (18), by replacing “June 23” with “December 10”,
- provided that, for greater certainty, a motion to concur in additional interim supply for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021, may be considered on the last allotted day in the supply period ending June 23, 2020; and
- m) in the event of the Speaker being unable to act for any purpose required by this order, owing to illness or other cause, the Deputy Speaker or either of the Assistant Deputy Speakers shall act in the Speaker’s stead for any such purpose.

• (1130)

[Translation]

**The Speaker:** Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

• (1135)

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Mr. Speaker, greetings to all the members here today.

[English]

Before I begin, I would like to offer my condolences to the families of the many people who have been killed this weekend in Nova Scotia. This senseless violence has shocked all of us and has caused deep pain. To the families and friends of those who were killed, our thoughts are with them. To the people of Nova Scotia and all those in this country who are grieving, we are with them on this horrible day.

[Translation]

I want to express my most sincere condolences to family and friends of the victims of the absolutely senseless act that took place in Nova Scotia. Our hearts go out to them.

The horrible and incomprehensible tragedy that occurred in Nova Scotia comes on top of the coronavirus tragedy that all Canadians and people around the world are going through. The pandemic is a unique situation that is affecting everyone no matter where they live, especially older people, especially our seniors, who have devoted their lives to building the society we live in today. We owe them so much. This is a difficult situation for them, for their friends and for their family members.

This is also a very difficult situation for those who have lost a loved one. I know that first-hand because I lost a very close friend two days ago. It is hard not being able to say goodbye to our loved ones, not being able to hug them before they go, not being with our loved ones, friends and family. As horrible and difficult as the crisis we are going through is, that makes it even worse.

I have spoken long enough about the motion. I would now like to hear what my colleagues have to say about it. In my opinion, this motion strikes a balance between letting Parliament play the fundamental role that all members of the House hold dear and respecting the public health guidelines. It also enables us to do what we are telling the public to do, and that is to self-isolate as much as possible and limit travel.

I would like to thank the members of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP for supporting the motion. I would also like to recognize the Green Party’s support for virtual sittings. The government, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP have come to an agreement. We continue to reach out to the Conservative Party so that we can unite and work together.

We all agree that there is not a second to lose on partisanship, particularly today, in light of the dual crises affecting our nation, namely what happened in Nova Scotia and what continues to happen every day.

Once again, I am reaching out to my Conservative colleagues and asking them to join in the consensus reached between the government, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. Together, we can continue to enable Parliament to play its absolutely fundamental role, while abiding by the guidelines issued by Health Canada and taking into account the health and safety of those in the House and all those who are there for us outside the House.

• (1140)

[English]

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one of the issues the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has been seized with is looking at a virtual Parliament. We had our first exploratory meeting the other day. We have not, at this point, developed a witness list. I expect we will be doing that tomorrow.

There have been some suggestions that have come forward at that committee. However, there are several issues that all members of the procedure and house affairs committee brought up that could be problematic in a virtual setting. For example, tomorrow the Speaker will be a witness at the committee on several issues.

Why would we preclude the work of PROC and the challenges that have been identified by all members of all parties, including the government, on that committee and allow virtual sittings to potentially be held, given the challenges that could exist with them?

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Mr. Speaker, of course the work done by PROC is extremely important, and I thank all members of that committee for their work. At the same time, I know that the member's team is also working on this. Of course, we will take into consideration the recommendations of the members of PROC, but in the meantime we want to make sure that the government is accountable and can answer in a very responsible way. The responsible way of doing this is by limiting the time we spend here and making sure there are other, virtual opportunities for the opposition to ask questions. This is exactly what we are doing.

[Translation]

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Beloeil—sorry, I mean the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, you almost moved me into the riding of the Bloc Québécois leader. I am not the member for Beloeil—Chambly, I still represent the riding of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

I have a question for the government leader in the House. Our parliamentary system is based on ministerial responsibility. Parliament's role is to hold the government accountable. The current circumstances are so unique that now is our chance to be inventive, creative and innovative. We can do things differently.

We in the NDP believe that one in-person sitting per week here in Parliament would be enough. We do not necessarily have to go beyond that. We would not be setting a good example for our constituents by gathering more often and asking all parliamentary staff to put themselves at risk as well.

The NDP has tabled a proposal to hold two 90-minute virtual question periods. That way, MPs from all provinces and remote regions who are unable to travel to Ottawa could still represent their constituents and ask questions of the ministers or the Prime Minister.

I would like to hear the member's thoughts on how it might be advantageous to hold virtual or online sittings. It is 2020, and we do not have to cling to the old ways of doing things. These are excep-

### Government Orders

tional circumstances, and we have a chance to do things differently and innovate.

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, and I completely agree with him. These are extraordinary times.

This is an extremely difficult time for all Canadians and everyone around the world. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. In an ideal world, we would all be here every weekday, debating as usual, but that is not the case. That is not our reality. The reality is quite different.

I also agree with the member that one day a week would be sufficient, as long as we add virtual sittings. That is why the motion stipulates that we will meet physically once this week. Next week, in addition to one physical sitting, we will also have one virtual sitting. Beginning the following week, we would add another virtual sitting, as the NDP has recommended. Thus, going forward, we would have one physical sitting and two virtual sittings each week.

I should acknowledge that this input came from the NDP, and I thank them for it. This is a government motion, but it reflects changes made by the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party.

This goes to show how terribly important this extraordinary collaboration is during these extraordinary times.

• (1145)

[English]

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, we are in extraordinary times that make it very important for us to uphold our democracy. It is important to hold the government to account and to ask questions. My concern is that we have members of Parliament from sea to sea to sea in this country and that having them travel to Ottawa to represent the country in a fair way is not possible in this place at this time.

How are we going to reach beyond Ottawa to ensure that those voices are heard and that we get this virtual Parliament up and running as quickly as possible so that we can hear those questions? When I ask questions in the House of Commons, I am not always satisfied with the answers. However, I have been writing to ministers and getting responses dealing with the issues my constituents are facing and getting good, positive feedback about how we can help out.

Is there a reason we cannot have physical distancing for question period? With a virtual Parliament, we can avoid having to travel and having staff in this place. Do we need to meet? Do we need to have this in this place at this time?

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague that these are exceptional times, and exceptional times require exceptional measures.

*Government Orders*

I also agree with the fact that virtual sittings have become more and more important. That is why you and your team, Mr. Speaker, are working on this, and that is why PROC is working on this. We are getting to that solution whereby members from different parts of the country, members who play a fundamental role for their constituents, will be able to ask questions.

In an ideal world, we would be back here every day of the week, and there would be questions and answers back and forth, but this is not an ideal world. These are troubled times, historic times, when we have to find very different solutions, and this is what we are doing. This is why we are here today. This is why we will meet once a week physically. This is why we will have virtual sessions, to make sure that Parliament plays its role, but at the same time to take care of the health and security of all the people working in this place.

**Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the government House leader for his explanation to Canadians as to why this Parliament cannot sit, in these extraordinary times, with the reduced numbers as we have seen today, three days a week, as was proposed by the official opposition.

Given the fact that we have seen the huge challenges that the virtual committee meetings present, we can imagine having 338 of us trying to navigate through what a committee cannot do now. As well, many of our colleagues in this place who are in rural ridings do not have a proper Internet broadband connection and would not be able to participate, so how is their privilege going to be infringed upon by imposing a virtual Parliament?

• (1150)

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Mr. Speaker, every time we come here, there are at least 50 people from the House coming at the same time. If we count the 30 or 40 MPs and the people working in the lobbies, that is over 100 people. I am not counting security, because I do not know how many there are, and we are not supposed to know. We are talking about dozens and dozens of people every day. If we sit one day, they are at risk. If we sit two days, we double the risk. That is why the responsible way is to look at a virtual Parliament and implement it as soon as possible.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my remarks today by expressing my heartfelt condolences on behalf of my entire caucus and our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of Constable Heidi Stevenson and all those who lost their lives in the senseless attack over the weekend in Nova Scotia. As more and more details come out as to the scale of the tragedy, I know it is weighing heavily upon all Canadians at this time, and all members of Parliament. To those members of Parliament from Nova Scotia, I would particularly like to convey, through them to their constituents, our solidarity with them. I know the whole country is grieving with them for their loss as well. We are also praying for a speedy recovery for the RCMP officer who was injured in the line of duty. Each one of the victims leaves behind heartbroken family, friends and a community reeling from such an unthinkable act.

[Translation]

I wish to extend my sincere condolences to the family and friends of Constable Heidi Stevenson and all those who lost their

lives in this senseless attack in Nova Scotia on the weekend. I also wish a speedy recovery to the RCMP officer who was injured in the line of duty. Every victim leaves behind a family, friends and a community torn apart by this outrageous act.

[English]

It is made all the more difficult because in this time, comfort will have to be offered at a distance, but as we, as a nation, mourn with those who mourn, I hope that the affected families and communities know that right across Canada we hold them closely in our hearts.

These are difficult times. There has been far too much sadness and grief in our nation over the last month. Over 1,600 Canadians have now died from COVID-19, and more than 36,000 Canadians have fallen sick. Canadians' lives and livelihoods literally depend on the government getting the response to this pandemic right. Given what is at stake, Conservatives would like to see more than the one accountability session per week that the other parties appear to have agreed to.

[Translation]

We also believe that virtual accountability sessions should be designed in the all-party forum that is already working on this issue.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs held its first meeting last week, and it should be allowed to carry out the job it has been assigned. If the NDP and the Bloc have agreed with the Liberals to limit accountability, they will have to explain themselves to Canadians in the coming weeks.

[English]

Conservatives believe in oversight and accountability. Millions of Canadians are going to work every single day to help their neighbours get through this pandemic. Parliamentarians should be doing the same thing. Right here on Parliament Hill, construction workers are continuing to renovate Centre Block, a project that is expected to take at least 10 years. If they can safely renovate the building that houses our Parliament, then surely we can do our duty to uphold the bedrock of our democracy.

• (1155)

[Translation]

That is the issue: democracy. Canadians have the right to be represented by their government. Their concerns must be heard and their questions must be answered.

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[English]

There have been so many questions raised throughout this pandemic, and Conservatives have been asking those questions. We have not always gotten answers, but we are going to continue to press for them. The need for these accountability sessions is made evident day after day.

Why can the Prime Minister not tell Canadians when new ventilators will arrive? It was in this chamber, on March 12, when I asked the Deputy Prime Minister what the government was doing to obtain new ventilators. She said at that time that the government was leading a national procurement strategy. Thirty days later, the Prime Minister, in this chamber, said that the first ventilators would be weeks away. That is unacceptable.

Why were millions of masks and protective equipment destroyed and not replaced? Why are government programs changing every single day? These are the kinds of questions that Canadians have, and they deserve answers from their government, because vulnerable Canadians do not have another month to wait around for help.

[Translation]

Canadians' lives and livelihoods literally depend on the government getting its response to this pandemic right.

[English]

The Prime Minister continues to warn that this process will be long and arduous, but so far that has not just meant dealing with this pandemic but also the decision-making process. We owe it to Canadians to work our absolute hardest to get this right.

Since this crisis first began to take shape, it has been the opposition that has often been leading the way on the useful, practical actions that have been taken to protect Canadians. We called for tighter restrictions on travel and at the border. We called for the wage subsidy to be raised from 10% to 75%. We called for seasonal workers and those with limited incomes to qualify for the emergency response benefit. The Prime Minister said that he wanted a team Canada approach, and we have given him one, putting forward constructive solutions every day to help Canadians affected by this crisis.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister and his ministers have chosen to try to do this on their own, and the result is that virtually every day they are having to make changes to their policies. If we were working these policies out together, each side playing to its strength, every region of this country represented as it is supposed to be, the government would get things right the first time around more often.

The Conservative caucus is determined to do the job we were elected to do: represent the voices of Canadians from coast to coast to keep Canadians as healthy and safe as possible. We are here because we know that Canadians are depending on us, and in this Conservative caucus we will not stop working.

[Translation]

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said that the government continues to reach out a hand of co-operation. I assure him that the same is true for the opposition.

[English]

The government House leader said that this is not about partisanship. I will remind him that it was his leader, his Prime Minister, who yesterday told something to Canadians that he knew was not true. He said that today there would be 338 MPs. I invite members to look around. We have done exactly what we told Canadians we would do: We would be here in a responsible manner, respecting public health guidelines while still representing Canadians.

For the Prime Minister to try to conjure up fears when he knew that was never going to be the case not only was disingenuous, but it undermines his credibility. At a time when Canadians are looking to him to be open and forthright and he does things like that, it shakes the confidence that Canadians have that he is being truthful on other matters. It was a shameful example of partisanship yesterday.

I have heard so many comments from members that, to me, indicate they are allowing the perfect to become the enemy of the good. It is clear that there are going to be challenges for in-person sittings. We could have spent the last two weeks talking about how best to deal with that, how best to limit the impact in the House of Commons and how best to ensure that representations from each caucus would be allowed to participate.

The default position is for Parliament to sit, and it is incumbent upon the government to explain why it should not in a time of crisis. We have already seen examples of the government using this crisis to its advantage. Do members remember the first time we were called here? I know the hon. House leader does, because we were both here until very early in the morning. When we were told to come to Ottawa to pass legislation to help get benefits into the hands of Canadians, the current government wrote itself massive new powers, giving itself broad powers, ignoring the role of Parliament in terms of taxation and spending. It was because Conservatives refused to go along with that that we were able to protect our democratic institutions.

The second time we came here, we were given a bill and we were told that it had to be passed by the end of the day on that Saturday. We rolled up our sleeves.

● (1200)

[Translation]

Other parties such as the Bloc Québécois gave the government carte blanche by stating that they would support the bill. However, our team did its job last week. We identified weaknesses in the government's bill, and our efforts improved it. Although the other parties do not want to do their job, we are ready to do the work that Canadians have asked us to do.

[English]

On behalf of the millions of Canadians whom we represent here, I move:

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That the motion be amended, in paragraph (h),

(a) by replacing subparagraphs (iv) and (v) with the following: “(iv) during the period the House stands adjourned pursuant to this order, the committee shall meet in the chamber at noon every Tuesday and Wednesday, provided that the committee shall not meet on a day referred to in Standing Order 28(1);”;

(b) by deleting, in subparagraph (x), the words “or a Thursday”;

(c) by deleting, in subparagraph (xi), the words “and Thursdays”; and

(d) by replacing subparagraph (xviii) with the following: “(xviii) following the report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs pursuant to its order of reference of Saturday, April 11, 2020, if that committee recommends the implementation of virtual sittings and if the Clerk of the House indicates that they are technologically feasible, the House leaders of all four recognized parties may indicate to the Speaker that there is an agreement among the parties to hold one additional meeting of the committee each week by videoconference, notwithstanding subparagraph (iv), with members participating by videoconference, and the Speaker shall give effect to that agreement;”.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the hon. member and leader of Her Majesty's official opposition is quite right that during the course of negotiations to bring the House back, the Conservatives were very respectful, understanding public health guidelines and the fact that we had done this two times prior. Not only had we done it, but legislatures across this country are meeting on a regular basis. The Alberta legislature is meeting three times a weeks, for example, and the Ontario legislature has met.

The hon. leader of Her Majesty's opposition said in his speech that it was disingenuous for the Prime Minister to declare yesterday that the Conservatives were holding up the process because we wanted a full Parliament. I was wondering if he could follow up on what the Prime Minister said yesterday.

• (1205)

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Madam Speaker, it is more than disingenuous, but fortunately the rules of the House prevent me from using words to describe what it actually is.

Those in the government, the Green Party and other parties are acting like today is some kind of extraordinary sitting. We were always going to come back on April 20. This was always the date that was agreed to by the House in previous sittings. A sitting of the House was also going to be needed to adopt whatever work plan was agreed upon by all parties. It is completely erroneous and misleading to suggest that today would not have happened if there had been some kind of all-party agreement.

My hon. colleague touched on something. Yesterday in his press conference, the Prime Minister raised the spectre of 338 MPs travelling from all around the country to sit together in this space at the same time. Let us look around. This was never what was intended.

Throughout the week, in good faith, our House leader, the government House leader and the House leaders of other parties were in constant communication, and we made it abundantly clear that we were not going to ask our MPs to fill the seats in this chamber. We proposed multiple solutions to the government to have a drastically reduced number of MPs in this chamber, which would alleviate the demand on the support staff for the administration. The types of arguments we heard are completely phony.

The real question is why the Prime Minister does not want to come into this chamber. I believe it is quite simple: He prefers the controlled environment in front of Rideau Cottage every day, where he controls the number of questions and can call an end to them whenever he likes. We are not able to present the questions and concerns we are hearing from our constituents every single day. He is avoiding that. That is why we have not reached an agreement on the work plan going forward.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Madam Speaker, yesterday, Quebec reported 72 new COVID-19 deaths, bringing its total to 877. Quebec has hit its COVID-19 peak. In Montreal, there is no one on the streets and everyone, or almost everyone, is in lockdown, except for essential workers. People are making sacrifices to curtail the spread of the pandemic, and the regions are closed.

At first, the leader of the official opposition proposed that the House sit four times a week. He thought about it for a while and then proposed that it sit three times a week. This morning, he had dropped to twice a week. Perhaps by early afternoon he will be suggesting that we meet once a week.

My question is simple. When I listen to the Conservatives, it seems to me that they are out of touch with what is happening in Quebec. Does the leader of the official opposition realize that Quebec is in the midst of a full-blown pandemic?

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Madam Speaker, we did indeed propose four sittings. Then, in good faith and in order to come to an agreement among all parties, we agreed to hold three sittings per week. Now, we feel that two sittings a week is better than one. This is proof of the good faith we have shown throughout the negotiations.

Yes, we are in a crisis, and because of this crisis and because Quebecers and Canadians fear for their health, their livelihoods and their jobs, we must be here to ensure that this government's legislation, programs and services address their needs.

I know that members of the Bloc Québécois did not want to be here during the last two sittings and did not want to speak on behalf of their constituents. Conservative Party members from Quebec and from all provinces across the country are prepared to do their jobs to assure Canadians that we are addressing their needs during this crisis.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the Conservative Party is the official opposition here in the House, and, to be perfectly honest, I have had just about enough of its childishness and obstruction when people are dying out there and others are risking their lives to care for the sick, including elderly people in seniors' homes and long-term care facilities.

The Conservatives—the official opposition—say they want three sittings a week so they can ask the government questions because the government needs to be held to account. Of course the government needs to be held to account, and I have lots of questions for the government too. However, we need to lead by example. One in-person sitting per week is enough. Two additional virtual online sittings with a new procedure would enable us to do our work as the people's representatives and hold the government to account.

Why is the Conservative Party rejecting modernity? Why is it clinging to the old ways?

• (1210)

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Madam Speaker, it is true that many Canadians are taking great risks to do their jobs and play their part.

The role of Parliament is to ensure that the government's responses meet Canadians' needs. If the members of the other parties are not ready to do their job, we, on this side, are. We have already seen that when opposition parties do their job, they obtain better results for Canadians. This is not conjecture, because we have seen it happen twice already.

Obviously, during a crisis we cannot let the government do whatever it wants. We cannot abandon our role nor shirk our responsibilities. We can prove to Canadians that during a crisis, their democratic institutions continue to function and continue to ensure that the government implements the programs that Canadians need.

That is the role of the opposition and of all MPs, and that is the role that the Conservatives will continue to play.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Madam Speaker, I agree that we need to model behaviour, be responsible and listen to the health authorities and what they have asked us to do. They have asked us to stay in place.

Originally, when the border was closed, we were told that it was supposed to open tomorrow, but the government is now going to extend that border closure for another 30 days. The opposition did its job on Bill C-13. We did not agree to what was written in that legislation and we all got together and it was changed.

Did the hon. member not see the member for Carleton questioning the Minister of Finance at the finance committee? That was televised. We are seeing accountability through our committees.

If schoolteachers can hold Zoom classes and control the meeting with children asking questions, why can our Speaker not control a question period virtually? I am seriously disappointed that we are not modelling the kind of behaviour that we should be to Canadians. We should be resting in place, we should be doing what the health authorities have asked of us and we should be using the virtual tools we have to hold the government to account.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Madam Speaker, there are a couple of very simple reasons.

We cannot wait for weeks for the technology and the capacity of the House of Commons to provide us with the ability to have all members of Parliament participate in a virtual question period. We need more accountability, not less. We should be clamouring. All of

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us in opposition should be finding more ways to hold the government to account, because it has gotten so many things wrong from the beginning.

Remember, it was the current government, as late as early March, that said travel restrictions would not work and that it was not contemplating closing the border. There was advice from the government that people should not use masks, until it indicated that using masks was beneficial. A wage subsidy was set at 10% and had to be raised to 75%.

It is clearly the case that in this pandemic crisis we need more accountability and more oversight, not less.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the most hon. member for Shefford.

We must take time to reflect on the other tragedy being faced by the people of Nova Scotia today. I find it hard to imagine what this senseless trail of violence, played out over some 120 kilometres, is like. This violence, no matter the reason, cannot be justified, and we must focus our minds on understanding how such things could happen and how we can prevent them. Our thoughts and hearts are with the people of Nova Scotia.

We have spent the past few days and hours, and taken up a lot of media time, discussing how we would meet here today, and in many respects, it was a lot of dithering. I sincerely doubt that Canadians and Quebeckers are interested in seeing a bunch of parliamentarians talking to other parliamentarians about parliamentary matters to figure out how to fix them as parliamentarians. Even I am not very interested in that. However, now that we are here, we have a job to do and there are some things we need to address.

Heaven knows that such issues as who will talk the most or the least, who will ask three additional questions on Tuesday or Wednesday afternoon, or whether the House should sit two and a half days instead of two days do have the appearance of being partisan, even if they are not meant to be.

I could have said that I am not really enthusiastic about that and that I do not have much respect for anyone who claims that the Bloc Québécois does not speak on behalf of its constituents. It is almost funny, and I am becoming more familiar with Saskatchewan's sense of humour. People have already expressed their opinions and, at some point, they will have the opportunity to do so again and to choose the person who will best represent them. When that day comes, we will see the impact of this type of rather useless talk.

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I have spoken in the media about “tataouinage”. In English Canada, there has been a whole debate about what that word means. The people we represent all know what it means, and perhaps it will be added to dictionaries one day. It means to dilly-dally.

At some point in time we have to move on from this sort of approach. The Conservatives want to negotiate and go on TV. I understand that they need to grow their voter base, but they should not be doing so at the expense of those who are suffering. They are saying that Parliament is an essential service. However, I would like them to name something that is more essential to a lot of people than their health, and banks. I imagine that a typical Conservative would think that banks are essential, and I would like them to find one bank that does not offer virtual banking services.

We are capable of working virtually and sitting remotely, knowing that the Standing Orders require us to be physically present to vote. We will live with that requirement. We could have said that we will come only to vote, but every time would have been “ReFeLeMeLe”, another tricky expression to translate, this one from the group Rock et Belles Oreilles, meaning do it again. Every time, we would have to address the nature of the negotiations, the need for our vote, the fact that we do not agree or that we will claim to disagree, but vote in favour anyway. I would prefer that we focus on bringing in rules for a virtual Parliament, a transition that is bound to happen sooner or later.

I especially want us to focus on our seniors. I have been asking about this for two weeks now. I do not expect the government to acknowledge that the hon. member for Belœil—Chambly has made demands and that they all need to be met.

● (1215)

The examples we have seen so far show that it worked fairly well. The government has talked to almost everybody, and there is a general sense of urgency and necessity.

I do not want to be the kind of person who takes credit for everything good, but the Bloc Québécois contributed to the wage subsidy, the addition of fixed costs, the recognition of social economy enterprises, and the changes made for growing businesses.

Sadly, when we ask questions about seniors, we do not hear a peep in response. In a pandemic, there is no group more vulnerable than the elderly, especially in terms of health. When it comes to seniors, the numbers do not just speak for themselves; they positively shriek.

Seniors are also more vulnerable economically. That is why we have put forward a number of demands. These demands are not perfect, but we can talk them over. We can study them, adjust them and lay them out. We can do a lot of things. The only thing we cannot do is nothing. We need to do something for seniors.

Since we are gathered here in the House, I will take this opportunity to strongly emphasize the importance of addressing the issues facing seniors.

Our requests have to do with old age security benefits, the guaranteed income supplement, drug prices and Internet access. This has all been clearly explained, and I am confident that the government has been listening.

Allow me to provide some numbers. All told, the government has freed up \$250 billion in cash in the context of this crisis, including roughly \$107 billion in direct spending. Increasing old age security benefits by \$110 a month for seniors in Canada and Quebec for a three-month period would cost \$1 billion. That is 250 times less than what has already been committed for so many people, and seniors are the most vulnerable. How has this not already been done?

The Liberals could have returned our phone call to at least talk about it. The last time we did this, we were given a briefing. In a briefing, someone tells us what has already been decided, and we have no say in the matter. We would like to be more involved when it comes to seniors.

Last week I did a very friendly comparison with the oil and gas industry. I do not think Alberta oil workers should have to suffer more than workers in any other industry. They are employees who are working for a business.

I am okay with the way things were, meaning that employees would have their jobs back. I am not saying that I am not somewhat uneasy, but I am sure that my colleague from Laurier—Sainte-Marie is keeping an eye on the situation.

At first glance, investing in cleaning up orphan wells is not a bad idea. Are we subsidizing businesses that should have shouldered their share of the responsibility? Maybe, but at least it is something.

I worry about what happens down the road. We cannot allow this to become a Trojan horse used to pour money into the oil and gas industry. Are our seniors not just as important as oil and gas? That is a question that springs to mind, but the answer is pretty obvious.

I want to raise two other cases that I would like us to discuss.

Most students are not eligible for the Canada emergency response benefit. There are probably several people among us who studied for quite some time. We will recall that having financial anxiety as a student is no joke.

Those young people are experiencing economic anxiety, but there is nothing specifically for them. I do not want the federal government to intervene in areas under provincial jurisdiction, but I do want to see students in Quebec and elsewhere get back the money their parents paid. A measure could be implemented for that. The Canada emergency response benefit should handle it. I will come back to that.

As I said, knowledge and science will enable us to overcome this crisis. We need to recognize what research has to offer. We also need to provide additional support for research.

I will conclude by paraphrasing Jean Gabin. We think we know everything, but the next day we discover that we do not. Basically, any time we think we know something and think we have found a solution to something, that is not necessarily the case.

The crisis is not over, and I hope we will all work together and, more importantly, in good faith.

• (1220)

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I do not think the leader of the Bloc Québécois understands the role of an opposition member. The leader of an opposition party is not meant to say “yes” to the government as quickly as possible. The first time that we held a special sitting, the government tried to take some powers and the Bloc leader left negotiations to go for dinner. We stayed to protect our democracy.

During the second special sitting, the government introduced a bill, and the leader of the Bloc Québécois said that we needed to pass it as quickly as possible. On Tuesday morning, he said that the Bloc would support the bill. Our members, including the ones from Quebec, worked all week to improve the bill. We did not immediately say “yes” on Twitter, and we took the time to do our job. That is how Canadians and Quebecers ended up with a better program.

I hope that the leader of the Bloc will have a better understanding of the role of an opposition party leader for the remainder of this Parliament.

• (1225)

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet:** Madam Speaker, I was waiting for a question. I guess question marks are not part of the English grammar.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** These are questions and comments.

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet:** Still, the role of an MP, whether in government or in opposition, is first and foremost to be the voice of the people. Furthermore, whether we are a member of the opposition or not, our role is not to always say no to everything. Not everything that comes from others or from other sources is automatically bad, whether it comes from a Liberal, a Bloc member or, worse yet, a Chinese person. That is not my mindset.

We are not trying to take over the role of others. That is not what we are all about. We speak for Quebec and just for Quebec. The Bloc Québécois will never say no to something that could clearly be good for Quebec. That is a partisan exercise, a display of jealousy of the work of others, and we are not going to get involved in that. If that is what Conservatives think it means to be an MP, I am even more pleased to say that I will never be a Conservative.

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for his speech.

I am going to change the subject. Let us talk about essential services. We know about health care professionals and all those in civil society who are getting up every day and going to work. I represent many federal public service employees, including employees from Public Services and Procurement Canada, the department for which I am the parliamentary secretary. Procurement is only getting done because they are working around the clock. My colleague

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from Orléans and I represent people who are working day and night to make sure Canadians get their income support.

I want to give my colleague a chance to offer his own praise for the essential work that Government of Canada employees are doing around the clock during this crisis.

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet:** Madam Speaker, it is hard to go wrong there. The people who are being called upon to keep working every day are certainly operating under difficult conditions. We are hearing more and more reports about the extreme anxiety plaguing health care workers, especially in long-term care homes in Quebec. This demands a level of courage and self-sacrifice that deserves all our respect. People who are working and doing a little bit extra to try to help as many people as possible deserve all our respect. People who do it for totally altruistic reasons deserve even more respect.

I want to spend 10 seconds going back to the well-worn subject of gaps in the research sector. People who work in research will be essential as we overcome this crisis and in the future. Relatively short-term measures need to be taken to support researchers, research centres and science. We will make some proposals in that regard.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for sharing his time with me. Before going any further, I too would like to offer my condolences to the people of Nova Scotia.

As the Bloc Québécois critic for seniors, I want to say what a privilege it is to be here in the House today. We are meeting in exceptional and dramatic circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic is overwhelming Quebec and wreaking havoc in retirement homes and long-term care centres, known as CHSLDs in Quebec. We have learned that 99% of the deceased in Quebec were over 60 years old and half of them had been living in CHSLDs.

This disease is particularly devastating among people whose health is already fragile, but this situation is exposing a problem that has been plaguing us for some time now, namely, how precarious the living conditions of our seniors are. Many seniors have died alone, and sometimes their loved ones are not even notified.

Children and grandchildren, for whom those relationships are so important, go to see their dad, their mom, their grandpa or grandma through the window in their place of residence. All they can do is shout “I love you” and “take care of yourself” from beneath their balconies, if they are lucky.

There are horror stories, and even though it may be difficult, we cannot make generalizations and blame staff who are exhausted and overwhelmed by the situation. From the bottom of my heart, I want to commend and thank all of the health care and support staff who are helping our seniors in spite of the suffering and fear, which the people they care for also feel. If there have indeed been cases of neglect, then the guilty parties should be made an example of.

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The prosperous society that will enable us to get through this crisis was built by seniors, many of whom will likely not make it through themselves. It would be shameful for us to abandon them, as parliamentarians and legislators, but also as citizens and human beings.

Improving the living conditions for our seniors should have been a priority long before this crisis. I have been fighting for improvements for a long time. Before my election I was a project manager, promoting awareness of elder abuse and bullying. I worked with people who provided home care and the community organizations that provide services to seniors. Nevertheless, I have heard my share of horror stories.

As our leader has already been saying for a few days now, the Bloc Québécois has always fought for seniors' rights. When I was a political aide from 2007 to 2011, which is quite some time ago now, the Bloc Québécois already had a reputation for standing up for seniors. Recently, we made several proposals. Had they been implemented in time, things likely would have been a lot different. We spoke about them during the election, in fact.

When I first arrived in the House, I had the opportunity to ask the Minister of Seniors a question about increasing the old age pension starting at age 65 rather than at age 75 to avoid creating two classes of seniors. She even told me that that was a good question. Anticipating and preventing rather than reacting once the harm has been done is an essential approach for a government. That is why seniors should not be divided into two classes.

The government should have called on that strength of the Bloc Québécois, but the situation is now too urgent to talk about what the government should have done. We need to take action immediately. In order to ensure that the health of our seniors is never compromised for financial reasons, we suggest that the old age pension be increased by \$110 a month and that the guaranteed income supplement, the GIS, be enhanced. As the Bloc Québécois leader so clearly pointed out, that is just a drop in the bucket compared to all of the investments being made. It would cost \$1 billion. However, it is still difficult to understand why the government would want to limit that increase to seniors aged 75 and over. As I have said time and time again, seniors need that help as of the age of 65.

● (1230)

Seniors are going into debt. Their debt load has nearly doubled in the past 20 years. The percentage of seniors with substantial debts has risen from 27% to 42%. Many seniors have to continue working to make ends meet. The percentage of seniors reporting that they have worked nearly doubled between 1995 and 2015. That increase is largely the result of seasonal work or part-time work.

In 2015, one in five Canadians aged 65 or older, so nearly 1.1 million seniors, reported having worked at some point that year. That is the highest proportion recorded since the 1981 census. Employment income was the main source of income for 43.8% of seniors who worked in 2015, which is an increase compared to 40.4% recorded in 2005 and 38.8% recorded in 1995. Many factors can contribute to financial distress among seniors, including grief, separation, illness, inadequate private pension plans and the increased cost of living. More than 200,000 seniors are living in poverty in Canada and every month they wonder whether they will have to

choose between paying the rent, buying groceries or getting their medication. This should never happen.

The Bloc Québécois's proposals would enable seniors to maintain some degree of buying power and continue to drive the economy, an economy that those generations helped build. These are stabilizing measures because we need to see seniors not as a liability, but as a driving force.

There was a lot of concern when they were left out of the Canada emergency response benefit, the CERB. Still, we commend the government for showing humility and modifying the criteria to help them by excluding old age benefits from their income and enabling people working part-time to access the emergency benefit.

I should also mention the gap between seniors living in urban centres and those living in rural areas. The latter are more likely to keep working. Thanks to public pension plans, the poverty rate for those over 65 is 6.7% compared to 14% for people aged 55 to 64.

This crisis also shows that deeming the Internet an essential service could have helped seniors feel less isolated, especially these days. For some seniors, a video call was the only way to say goodbye to their loved ones. Health care needs to be enhanced yet again and then we will keep talking about the Canada health transfer. The government needs to enhance the employment insurance benefit period for caregivers and provide a tax credit for setting up intergenerational homes. We will have other opportunities to share new ideas to improve the situation for our seniors. The importance of these measures seems clear today and shows that the Bloc was right.

As for pension funds, our seniors' financial situation is compounded by the drop in value of pension plans. Entire life savings have dwindled in a month. Let us hope that this situation is temporary and that the value of retirement investments will go back up. We suggest suspending the withdrawal requirement from pension plans that are currently posting a negative rate of return. Increasing the guaranteed income supplement will help seniors until the economy recovers.

There is another proposal that we were working on before the crisis and that we are still working on now that is proving to be very relevant today, and that is the designation of private pension plans as preferred creditors in the event of bankruptcy. Since the beginning of this Parliament, the Bloc Québécois has always been constructive and collaborative and we hope to continue in that vein. Our seniors need solutions that address their problems. It is our duty to propose solutions and the Bloc Québécois is prepared to do so immediately.

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In closing, I have heard, from FADOQ in particular, that our party does not treat seniors as though they were already dead, but rather as living, breathing human beings who are able to contribute to society. It is said that seniors are knowledge keepers. We should also remember that they are not just part of the past; after the crisis they will be part of the future, and we are going to need them.

• (1235)

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

During this crisis, I, too, am hearing about the many problems faced by seniors. It is in this place, in this Parliament, that we can debate such issues.

[*English*]

I would like to thank my colleague for bringing this up, because this is not the kind of thing that we can bring up on Twitter. These are not the kinds of issues we can challenge the government on in a virtual setting, at least not yet.

How important does my hon. colleague think this Parliament is, in the history of our country, for debating these kinds of issues and bringing them up for seniors? How important is that to her?

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that excellent question.

I think that all the parties have collectively demonstrated that it is possible to advocate for causes like seniors' issues by being here in the House. The proposal on the table is to come here once a week, followed by two virtual sittings. There seem to have been discussions and agreements between the Green Party, the NDP, the Liberals and us. I think that that is how we can advocate for seniors, not by being obstructive.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Madam Speaker, I was a bit offended by the Leader of the Opposition's comments about the Bloc Québécois members not being concerned about their constituents. They are dealing with a pandemic in Quebec. People are dying. The seniors homes are a serious issue. I have a large number of seniors in my community, and it is important that we listen to these health rules and the instructions that have been given to us. We do not want to throw our seniors under the bus in this pandemic.

Does the hon. member for Shefford agree with my question of parliamentary privilege that we should adjourn the House?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

I definitely agree with him on the question of privilege. He highlighted a problem, and I thank him for that. It is true that by being here today, I am representing not only my constituents, but the people of Quebec.

As my colleague also points out, there are differences between each of the regions of Canada. It is true that long-term care homes are a crucial issue in Quebec right now, and we are here to report on it.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her speech and say that we share her concerns about seniors, especially those living in long-term care homes.

This situation has been dragging on for years, along with underfunding, worker shortages and gruelling working conditions.

If possible, I would like my colleague to talk about the federal government's responsibility with regard to cuts to provincial health transfers and the need to increase those transfers.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The Bloc has indeed raised this issue many times.

We are talking about the current crisis in long-term care centres, or CHSLDs, but as long as transfers are not increased, nothing will change in Quebec. For years, the government has failed to invest or to transfer the money that is sitting idle in Ottawa to the provinces so that they can take care of their health care systems and their citizens.

We are talking about seniors in CHSLDs, but I would also like to come back to home care, which I talked about in my speech. Although we are talking about seniors in CHSLDs, there are also seniors who live at home, and right now their buying power is diminishing because the cost of groceries is increasing. They end up living in isolation, and we know that isolation is a determinant of health. We need to keep trying to end their isolation.

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I first want to commend my colleague for Shefford for her rather persuasive remarks.

We all know that, during the pandemic, various levels of government provided assistance to all economic stakeholders in our communities. What surprises me is that, even though seniors are likely the ones being hit the hardest by this pandemic, they are still waiting for help.

I would therefore like to ask my colleague the following question: Is she surprised to see that seniors have been completely forgotten in the crisis caused by this pandemic?

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, unfortunately that is the case, but I am not surprised. We talked about this and made it a budget priority, but all we have gotten so far is radio silence. We have not heard anything.

*Government Orders**[English]*

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to begin by expressing our sadness as New Democrats and all Canadians. We are grieving today as a nation for the horrible loss suffered by those living in Nova Scotia. The senseless violence and loss of life is all that much more painful given the safety precautions and measures that need to be taken with COVID-19 and how these will limit loved ones from coming together to mourn in the usual way.

I want to remember RCMP Constable Heidi Stevenson for her bravery and for showing courage to help and save others, and she lost her life doing so. Again, I want to send a message to people in Nova Scotia: They are not alone. We are grieving together as a nation. We are reeling from the pain of this loss.

● (1245)

Today, we are talking about a motion that touches on the work of Parliament. During a global pandemic, when there are so many Canadians deeply impacted by this crisis through the loss of work and the impact on business, we need to be focusing all our efforts on doing whatever we can to help Canadians.

I also want to mention that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

The focus of our work in Parliament must be on keeping families, workers and small businesses safe and on saving lives. People are still in desperate need of help. There are still far too many people falling through the cracks.

Our position remains very clear. First, we believe that instead of having complicated criteria and tests for people to apply to themselves, we should send direct financial assistance to all Canadians, both immediately and during the crisis as it goes on. Second, we should make the CERB universal. The Prime Minister should stand in Parliament and make it very clear that if any people in our country need help, they should apply for the CERB.

We also need to ensure that those who are putting themselves at risk, the essential front-line workers who are risking their lives and safety and potentially endangering their families, are acknowledged with the equipment to stay safe but also with a courage bonus to acknowledge the risk and danger they are going through. People who are working low-wage jobs need a top-up. They need additional financial support to acknowledge the risk they are putting themselves in for the benefit of all of us.

We are still hearing many examples of people who are falling through the cracks. Although we are proud of the work that we were able to do in the last emergency session, when we obtained guarantees to close the gap for so many Canadians who were not able to access the CERB, we are still hearing many stories of Canadians who are falling through the cracks. One group in particular that has been missed by the programs offered, and one that has been ignored by the government, is students.

The reality is that the proposals the government is talking about regarding Canada summer jobs, or additional funding for summer jobs, are not going to be enough. Students no longer have an opportunity to work. There are no longer those jobs they were hoping to

work at this summer. In this upcoming summer, those jobs will not be available.

To fix this problem and make sure students are not ignored and left behind, we can make some simple changes. One of those is to change the wording in the current legislation from those who have ceased working as a result of COVID-19 to those who are unable to work as a result of COVID-19. It would address the students who are falling through the cracks. Many students were hoping to work this summer, but those jobs are simply unavailable. That is why we need to make sure they are not forgotten.

I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister outlining this amendment, asking him to ensure that students are not forgotten and that we do not leave students behind. While we have not received an adequate response, we will not give up on students. We will continue to fight to make sure they receive the supports they need.

Another concern that has been raised is that people are worried about the cost of rent. While people have lost their income, they still have to pay rent, and many people are worried about losing their homes. Many families are also worried about paying their mortgages. Small businesses are also worried about paying commercial rents and mortgages. We maintain that the simplest solution is to use the powers we have at the federal level to put a pause on mortgages and then work with provincial governments for a pause on rents.

While we are encouraged that the government has said it will take some steps to help people or businesses with rents, these are just not enough. There are significant powers we have at the federal level. We need to use them.

● (1250)

*[Translation]*

We also need to help renters. The housing crisis was already making it hard for people to find a safe place to call home. Being in danger of losing one's home because one cannot pay the rent is even harder.

*[English]*

What we need to do is ensure there is more help for more people, and do it faster. Our proposal allows us to do exactly that. We are proposing having a regular, planned meeting here in Parliament in person to give us the chance to vote on legislation that needs to be changed to help more people.

*Government Orders*

Two days of virtual sessions would ensure that people who are in regions across the country are represented, and their members of Parliament could ask questions on behalf of those constituents. In Parliament, we are limited to a small number, and that is often the people who are close to Ottawa. By having a virtual session, we can ensure that those MPs who represent communities far from Ottawa still have a voice, that their voice is heard and the stories of their constituents are shared, including stories that we continue to hear about health care workers who do not have adequate personal protective equipment to stay safe.

Those who are running to danger, putting their lives at risk for our lives, do not have the equipment they need to stay healthy. In addition, we are hearing stories of health care workers who are forced to sleep in their cars because they do not want to go home and put their families at risk. This is not the way health care workers should be treated in our country. We need to do more than just thank them. We need to ensure that they have the right equipment and conditions to be safe.

Small businesses have raised concerns about waiting weeks for help and not knowing if they are going to be able to continue with their livelihoods, if they are going to be able to continue to pay their staff, or if their businesses will remain open. They are waiting for help.

We have heard stories about people worried about their parents in long-term care homes. They are going through, in some cases, deplorable conditions. It is heartbreaking to think of seniors who have worked their whole lives and sacrificed so much ending up in long-term care homes with substandard conditions. This is the result of years of neglect by Liberal and Conservative governments at both federal and provincial levels. In long-term care homes, we are witnessing the horrific consequences of this neglect.

We have heard from indigenous leaders who have shared stories about their fears and worries about keeping their communities safe. They are worried about being able to keep their communities safe with no access to basic human rights, such as clean drinking water and adequate housing.

In the last weeks, we have seen Canadians rise to a challenge that none of us imagined months ago. Again and again we have seen Canadians show how much they want to take care of one another and how much they want to make sure government holds this value of caring for one another above all else. That should be the test of what we do as government. Government should make its decisions based on whether they actually help take better care of people.

Let us not hope for things to return to normal. Instead, let us chart a course forward to a new normal, where we measure the decisions we make and the wealth of our nations by how well we take care of one another.

• (1255)

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the member has been a strong proponent of virtual sittings, and clearly three other parties have as well. As it stands, the procedure and House affairs committee has been charged with looking into the possibility of virtual sittings, and the Speaker has said that we are a minimum four weeks away. He said that last week.

The member for North Island—Powell River, who is a member of the PROC committee, expressed concerns at our first meeting the other day about security, rural broadband and connectivity. There are procedural issues, issues of privilege, constitutional issues, connectivity issues and many more that have to be looked at. I do not understand why the member would stand up and endorse virtual sittings when many of those issues have not yet been addressed. Right now, under our procedures, Standing Orders and rules, and I would argue constitutionally, there is only one mechanism for us to meet and meet effectively, where the privileges of members are not in a position to be breached, and that is the House of Commons.

In advance of the work of PROC, why would the member decide or agree that virtual is the way to go, when no report has been written yet recommending that and there has been no witness testimony, and there has been concern, even from his party, about some of the issues we will be facing?

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Madam Speaker, I would hope that during a pandemic we would be spending our time in Parliament talking about how to better help people, how we can provide help to front-line health care providers and how we can help people in long-term care homes. That is what we should be spending our time on in this Parliament, but the Conservatives would rather talk about procedures and how we sit in the House.

I want to make something very clear. We want to hear the stories of people from across this country, and having a limited number of parliamentarians in Ottawa will exclude their voices. People from my home province of B.C. will not have their voices heard.

I believe we need to use technology. We have seen other organizations use it successfully. As the Parliament of Canada, we can absolutely find a way to ensure that people in this country have their voices heard through a virtual sitting. We need to minimize the risk of exposure to illness. We should have one day to make changes to legislation and two days to ask questions and hear the stories and voices of people from across Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I have a question about help for people who need it most. What are his thoughts on benefits for seniors? Should they be eligible at 65 or 75?

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

*Government Orders*

That is exactly why we proposed a universal benefit and sending money directly to people. Too many people are slipping through the cracks. We think a universal benefit is the solution to this problem. If we provide a universal benefit, we can help seniors, students and everyone else who has slipped through the cracks.

This situation is totally unacceptable. Seniors do not have access to adequate resources to ensure a reasonable standard of living. That is exactly why we are fighting for everyone who needs help now, including seniors and students.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Burnaby South for his excellent speech.

I would like him to explain to us why the current situation provides us with an opportunity, despite all the tragedy and the fact that this crisis is unprecedented. Often, crises enable us to make fundamental changes. In these situations, getting back to normal is not realistic because “normal” is part of the problem.

How should we, as a society, seize this opportunity to change how we do things?

• (1300)

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Madam Speaker, I thank my deputy leader for his question.

That is exactly right. For weeks now, over the course of this crisis, we have witnessed acts of courage and compassion from Canadians. We have seen that people want to take care of each other, and it is very important to tap into this energy, this movement, to bring about positive change. We can create a new normal, where people take better care of each other. We can improve existing social programs and services. We can create—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Order.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, as all parliamentarians here in the House have done, I would like to dedicate the first part of my speech to the victims of the appalling shooting that took place in Nova Scotia today and to their families. We are already going through difficult times as a community and a society. I cannot begin to imagine how dreadful this must be right now for that Nova Scotia community. In particular, my thoughts go out to RCMP Constable Heidi Stevenson, who lost her life to this unthinkable tragedy. I believe we will all have to collectively reflect on many issues, be it mental health or access to firearms.

Similarly, speaking of condolences, I would like to highlight the work of the first care attendant in Quebec to die from COVID-19, namely Victoria Salvan, who worked at the Grace Dart CHSLD in Montreal. After 25 years of loyal service and constant dedication to her patients, generously giving them much of her time, she tragically passed away this weekend as a result of this horrible pandemic.

I want to acknowledge the tremendous work of some of her colleagues. They are anxious and scared. It is understandable. On the weekend, I heard one of her colleagues say that she has decided to

isolate herself from her children and no longer see them for as long as she continues to work with seniors at this long-term care home. She is not the only one to make that sacrifice. I think it is a major sacrifice that needs to be acknowledged.

I again urge the government to take every necessary measure to provide them with the best medical protective equipment and ensure their health and safety. I also want to acknowledge the recent work of union representatives, the local union president Jonathan Deschamps and union representative Alexandre Prigent.

That being said, I want to say a few words on the motion before us here in Parliament. It is an interesting motion. As I was saying before, it is a reminder of how our democracy works, the role of a Parliament and the role of MPs and parliamentarians in general. Obviously, our role is to find solutions and make proposals, but is also to keep the government accountable. Sometimes the government makes bad decisions, or no decisions, or the decisions it makes need to be changed and improved. The role of the 338 people in this room, although we are not 338 today, is to push the government to make the best possible decisions for our society and our community.

These are extraordinary times we are living in. I find that the proposal on the table is entirely reasonable and in line with the public health guidelines that we are all being asked to heed. I think that as parliamentarians and elected members we must lead by example and tell our constituents that the situation is serious and we must do everything we can to try to minimize the repercussions, while tens of thousands of people are already infected and hundreds of people have sadly died of this virus.

Getting together several times a week, even in limited numbers, is not necessarily the best idea. We represent Canadians in 10 provinces, certain territories and remote regions. By coming here and forcing House of Commons staff to put themselves at risk, given that they have to provide services while we are here, we are increasing the possibility of contagion and infection in our own homes, in our ridings and in our communities when we go home. We need to strike a balance between adhering to public health guidelines and enabling MPs to represent their constituents and ask questions, because some things need to be improved promptly.

*Government Orders*

● (1305)

The Liberal government suggested holding one in-person sitting and one virtual sitting per week. The NDP felt that a single 90-minute virtual sitting would not be enough, because it would only allow enough time for 18 MPs, not including those who are in Ottawa, to question the government every week. That did not seem like much to us. We countered by proposing a second 90-minute virtual sitting, which would bring up to 36 the number of MPs who would get to question the ministers and Prime Minister each week without having to be in Ottawa. Our proposal was accepted by the Liberal Party, and I think the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party also agreed.

The Conservative Party says its chief concern is to ensure that MPs can do their job and ask questions at least three times a week. However, the motion before us would do just that. It allows us to hold one in-person sitting and two virtual sittings to ask questions. We know that four parliamentary committees are currently meeting. They are using technology to question witnesses by video conference. I think we could just move forward and strike that balance between the need to protect ourselves and our constituents and the need to hold the government accountable.

Since we are talking about accountability, I want to address some things that are going on right now and that we, including the NDP leader, have mentioned. Students have been largely forgotten, since those who did not earn \$5,000 over the past 12 months are not eligible for the CERB. Thousands of people are living with a lot of anxiety and are not getting any help. We are putting pressure on the government to find a solution.

If the government had accepted the NDP's proposal to make the benefit universal from the get-go, students would have been covered, as would seniors. We must all ask this government questions and put pressure on it to find a solution.

People are writing to our offices because they are impatient, anxious and stressed. They do not know how they will manage to pay their rent and bills. I have two stories to share. The first is from a couple of students at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. They told me that they had research contracts at the university that covered their rent, but these contracts had been suspended. Since they do not earn \$5,000 a year, they told me that they were not eligible for the emergency assistance. They asked me if they could expect anything in the future.

I hope that asking questions of this government will eventually enable me to tell them that something is coming. That is our job as parliamentarians. I think we can all do our jobs virtually, by video conference or online.

The other example is a woman named Camille, a student in the psychoeducation program at the University of Montreal. She receives loans and bursaries for the school year, but she has not accumulated enough hours of work to qualify for EI. She had some animation contracts lined up outside of her academic activities, but they were all cancelled because of the pandemic. Since her income was under \$5,000, considering her loans and bursaries, she is not getting anything. She planned to work as a day camp counsellor this summer, but she still does not know whether this will pan out. She also does not qualify for any social assistance because of her

loans and bursaries. In her message, she said she was afraid of being told not to worry and that she would not be overlooked, when she is in fact being overlooked. She said she wants something concrete, that she is scared, sad and disappointed. She has always done everything she could to get by and ensure a brighter future, she said.

There are hundreds if not thousands of people like Camille who are knocking on our doors. They want us to take action and come up with real solutions. Yes, we need to pressure the government to help these people. That is our job as parliamentarians. However, we also need to set an example and not come together here in the House in large numbers several times per week.

I would now like to talk about another problem. The biggest food bank in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie cannot access the federal assistance program for food banks because it got a very modest donation from the United Way. There are some inconsistencies in the programs that have been implemented, and some improvements need to be made.

● (1310)

I understand that mistakes are being made because everyone is trying to work quickly. This is the type of situation where, as an opposition MP, I want to be able to ask questions, but I do not want to compromise the safety of my constituents by doing so.

[English]

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I echo what the member across the way had to say, especially when it comes to groups of people and businesses that are falling through the cracks. We have all experienced that within our constituencies. This is one of the reasons why we need to be here in Parliament. Given that we are sitting today, the NDP seems to have agreed to one sitting day a week. However, that said, the New Democrats have also said they are open to two virtual sittings.

Despite the problems we have talked about on this side of the House regarding virtual sittings and access to broadband Internet in rural communities and access to security, given that PROC has not really started its meetings looking into this, can the New Democrats explain to Parliament when they expect these virtual sittings to begin?

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

*Government Orders*

In our discussions with the government, we talked about holding the first virtual sitting next week and then holding two virtual sittings per week, starting on the following week. I imagine that was for technical reasons, to give House of Commons staff the chance to get everything set up. Likely, it is also to give the employees in our riding offices the opportunity to set up all the necessary equipment, microphones, cameras, software and what have you, so that we can hold these very important virtual sittings.

I have all kinds of questions for the Minister of Canadian Heritage, and I have no problem at all asking them via video conference.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

I heard a lot of concerns about rent.

Has the hon. member heard questions about the rent paid by SMEs?

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP leader for his question.

In Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, and in several other ridings, jobs are created mainly by SMEs. At this time they are experiencing very high levels of stress and anxiety. May 1 is around the corner and they do not know if they will be able to pay their rent. Between 50% and 60% of our small businesses could go bankrupt because they do not have the support they need just to pay the rent.

The wage subsidy is a good thing, but it is not enough to pay tens of thousands of dollars in rent for several months. The federal government must tell the banks, as we have asked, to suspend commercial rent payments to help our businesses. We must also apply pressure to help renters who may not be able to pay their rent at all.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I too have many constituents who are bringing forward these concerns. They include small business operators who do not fit the parameters of these programs and students, seniors and other workers. I have employers in my riding who say that some people on the CERB do not want to go back to work because they do not want to earn more than \$1,000 and lose out on the other \$2,000. Therefore, we have a program that is meant for a bailout and that is not a bucket, but a sieve and needs a lot of work.

Would the hon. member not agree that we would be better off with a guaranteed livable income so that every Canadian would have a base level of income they could not fall below but would keep them at a stable living standard, covering their rent, paying for their food and dealing with this emergency in a way that nobody gets left behind?

• (1315)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague in the Green Party for his question.

I believe that the current crisis gives us pause. We must help people as quickly as possible. There are also questions about what kind

of society we want, for example a society where no one is left behind or abandoned.

We thought our social safety net was fairly robust, but we are realizing that it has many holes and that EI does not meet all needs.

I believe this brings back to the forefront the concept of a guaranteed livable income. If we had an efficient tax system, all those who did not need it could just pay it back at the end of the year when they pay their taxes.

[*English*]

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, like other members, I will begin by echoing the comments by the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle, the leader of Her Majesty's official opposition, that our prayers and thoughts are with the victims of the shooting over the weekend. It reminds members how precious life is and how short time is on this earth of ours.

I have been tasked by my caucus to speak on their behalf during this period of questioning and to make sure that I reflect their thoughts and comments on what we are all hearing from our constituents back home, both on matters of policy involving the different subsidy programs that are meant to offset some of the costs related to the shutdowns and for our constituents who are hurting because they cannot work or be with their family members because they have been asked to self-isolate.

For many weeks I have been dealing with constituents who have been trying to be repatriated to Canada, especially from Peru. I want to make sure I thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs for his work on the file and making sure these many Canadians were repatriated. It was a difficult task to accomplish.

Before I move on to some of the caucus commentary I have heard over the last little while, I will mention virtual Parliaments. I need to address that, as the chairman of one of the larger caucuses in this chamber that includes our senators. I can tell the House what a virtual Parliament is going to look like and what the defects and deficiencies will be of trying to host a meeting with over 150 people in it, including the very few staff members who are permitted by our caucus to join us on these calls.

There is a seniors lodge in my riding that has been affected by the spread of COVID-19, the McKenzie Towne Continuing Care Centre. I want to make sure I give my thanks to the staff and tell the seniors in that facility that our thoughts are with them during this time.

Many seniors have passed away in that facility, but there is one I would like to mention, 93-year-old Keith Earl van Vliet, who tested positive for COVID-19. He recovered just today, so I want to make sure I mention him. I mention it too because he comes from a long line of Loyalists who crossed the border many centuries ago into Canada. Van Vliet is not a typical Québécois name, but his family members were Loyalist Quebeckers for a very long time and then moved out west. They are very proud of their background. They are anglophone Loyalists who decided to speak French. He comes from a long line of them, so I wanted to make sure I mentioned them and the fact that the patriarch of that family has recovered.

At 3 p.m. every day, residents in my riding go to this home. While maintaining physical distancing, they cheer the residents on from outside the home just to bolster their morale. They held a monster truck rally on Friday outside the home and on Saturday some friendly dinosaurs showed up as well. I wanted to be sure I mentioned them. It is appreciated by the residents and the operator of the facility, and also by the staff members who have been affected.

• (1320)

It is said that being the chair of the Conservative caucus in this chamber is like wearing a crown of thorns. I will confirm that in fact it is; it is not an easy thing to do. It is unprecedented what this country is going through, this viral pandemic. There have been many in the past, and this Parliament has continued to meet through difficult times, including through world wars, great depressions, very severe recessions as well as pandemics.

In this chamber we are duty bound. We all ran for public office with the expectation that we would be required at times to make difficult decisions to be away from our families and to ask more of our staff members than sometimes they would like to give in the first place. I know I have depended on staff members in my office to make sure that our caucus can continue to meet virtually, but it is not the same thing as meeting in person. It is absolutely not the same thing.

Every single government program announced thus far has been amended at some point, either by press conference in the morning by the Prime Minister or during the technical briefings. We are always informed after the fact, whether it is regarding CEBA, CEWS or CERB, programs that many of our constituents across the country are taking advantage of.

A great deal of those changes were brought forward by opposition parties, by both this caucus and others, and not to criticize but to improve and make it better, make it actually work for the people we are hearing from. I have double the volume of phone calls in my office on a regular basis. I have about triple the emails now on a regular basis. In many of these cases, if it was easy, they would simply call Service Canada if they could actually get through. If it was easy, they would go online and log on to their MyCRA account. However, every single case is either unique, falling through the cracks, or is a hardship case that is unusual. It is something Canadians expect their members of Parliament to resolve and bring up in the House, which has been called the “cathedral of democracy” by many current, outgoing and past members. Perhaps in this time, that description is more ephemeral and people may think

### *Government Orders*

about those as nice words, but democracy is an essential service, and our democracy functions here.

I was looking at what other countries have been doing. Japan, Italy, France, Germany, Greece, Sweden, Finland and the European Union parliaments are meeting on a limited basis. We were accused on this side of wanting to have 338 members of Parliament here. We can see that that is absolutely not the case. We are sitting respectfully at a distance from each other. We have listened to the direction given to us by the public health agencies.

I was speaking with the speaker of the Alberta legislature, which is meeting three times a week. Of course, a reduced number of members are showing up in that chamber, but they still hold question period and still have a Q and A back and forth. In fact, the premier and the leader of Her Majesty's opposition in Alberta had a one-hour back-and-forth debate between each other on what was going on in Alberta and how Alberta was dealing with it. There are many legislatures in our country that continue to meet, and so can we.

Our proposals were made in good faith. We were always going to return on this date. That was the original agreement. We have done it before. On March 13, when this chamber met, we agreed to return on April 20. We have returned twice already to pass important legislation that the government wanted to see passed. Now, members will excuse us in not being entirely trusting of the government's wishes when it tables legislation that is far in excess of what was discussed between House leaders and then shared with caucus members. We have a certain expectation that good faith negotiations will continue, and we did. Our intention all along was to do right by our constituents and on the issues we were hearing about.

I come from a western province, but there are many areas right across this country that we hear from in our caucus calls. There are issues for our farmers, ranchers, small business owners and golfing club owners. It is a very difficult time for all types of businesses, and now the government will get to discover how business owners organize themselves in order to make a living.

I was speaking with one of the small business owners in my riding, a franchisee of the OPA! of Greece restaurants. I think it is timely since it is the Orthodox holiday now. This gentleman, Raj Chahal, who is obviously not Greek, owns these restaurants. He lost 60% of his staff, and not solely related to COVID-19, but to the government's CERB program whose generosity means that his employees are choosing to stay home. Now, he has worked it out with some of them who wish to come to work so he can continue to serve people. There are other people who are delivering our food to our doors with Uber Eats, DoorDash and other options. I think everybody is taking advantage of this right now. They are essential, just like democracy is essential.

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Before I continue, I would like to thank the interpreters in this chamber who are doing, no doubt, incredible work. I want to thank the clerks, security guards and the people who do IT security for us. Some of these people would be in this building regardless of whether or not we were sitting.

Turning to virtual parliaments, we host virtual caucus meetings every Wednesday, as usual, and more as needed. That is the tradition. Our caucus meetings have interpretation services.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Our caucus meetings have interpretation services. The members of my caucus wanted me to be their chair. We are a bilingual country, and I want to make sure that we can do our job in the House of Commons in both official languages.

However, I cannot do this alone; I depend on the House interpreters. Every Wednesday, I ask them to come to Parliament Hill. In fact, their director just informed me that interpreters are required to work on site, whether in the House or committee rooms. We have caucus meetings every Wednesday and we consequently have interpretation services. I ask my staff and computer services personnel to come to the Hill in order to help us do our job. We certainly follow social and physical distancing instructions, but certain House personnel will need to be here, whether we are sitting in the Chamber in person or virtually.

I chair a Conservative caucus of 150 people, including 121 members, over 20 senators and a few staffers who were authorized by our caucus to sit in during our calls. Holding these meetings is no easy task. Just look at how the virtual meetings of the Standing Committee on Health and the Standing Committee on Finance are unfolding; they have encountered some major problems.

It is not easy to raise a point of order in a virtual committee meeting. Aside from the issue of interpretation into English or French, there are multiple buttons that need to be clicked so that members can be heard by their colleagues. I am not just thinking of unilingual francophone MPs, but also unilingual anglophone MPs. I sometimes end up interpreting for my members, which slows down our meetings, meaning that a meeting that should take an hour or two can stretch out to four or five. No one wants to spend four or five hours on a call. I see the President of the Treasury Board nodding in agreement.

In a virtual Parliament consisting of 338 MPs located across the country, either at home or in their constituency offices, we will have problems with time zones and calls being dropped. Some MPs will not be able to connect, while others will not be able to understand what is being said. These problems are already cropping up during our own caucus meetings, even with MPs located in Canada's big cities, who sometimes struggle to hear their colleagues. There are so many things that can go wrong during a virtual meeting and cause a total breakdown, yet I still hear the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons saying that we are basically going to ignore the work done by the procedure and House affairs committee and move directly to a virtual Parliament.

Sometimes an MP wants to ask the Clerk a question. How can we do this in a virtual Parliament without interrupting debate in the

House? It took me almost four years to learn enough about all the House procedures to be able to defend my rights as an MP and the privileges of my constituents. How are members supposed to do that in a virtual Parliament?

• (1330)

[*English*]

In a virtual chamber, nothing stops government ministers or other members from having those around them give answers and help them. We expect a certain amount of preparation by every single minister in the House to bring us the answers to what we are asking. We are not trying to fulfill our personal curiosities. We are trying to get answers on behalf of our constituents. Constituents are asking us why certain government programs ignore their businesses. They ask, "If I am a sole proprietor, why am I ignored in this program?"

I had a call in my office, one I still intend to return, regarding RDSPs. There is nobody manning those phone banks right now. They are completely shut down, but people have to file. They have to call to make sure that all the transactions are done, but there is nobody picking up those phones right now.

We are not asking for the impossible. I thank the staff who are here making it possible for our democracy to work and for members of Parliament to be here. We are being responsible in how we do our work, and we are being responsible in how we address public health concerns. We could have negotiated, perhaps, a month-long stay for MPs so those who come to Ottawa can stay here and not travel back to their constituencies.

This is the important place where we get answers from the government, stuff that cannot be done on Twitter or Facebook, where different people are exchanging ideas. A lot of our political debates now happen there, but there are things that can only be done in this chamber and can only be done on behalf of our constituents when we rise in the House.

It is an honour and a privilege for us to be selected by the residents in our ridings to come here and do that work for them. That is their expectation. In fact, while sitting here I have received several text messages and emails from constituents in my riding saying they expected me to be here. I hear a member opposite saying no, but I have them. Their expectation was that I would come here and speak on their behalf. I am also conscious that I have to speak on behalf of the other members of my caucus who are not here to speak on behalf of their constituents and their issues with many government programs.

Many of us build relationships with ministers and try our hardest to make sure we bring individual cases to a minister's attention when a person has fallen through all the cracks. We have passed into legislation broad policy measures that the government has proposed. We have expedited them. In fact, the reason we are having this debate today is that we have expedited the motion. We said they did not need to give us a notice and that we would debate it right away and deal with the measures therein. We accept the fact that we find ourselves in an unusual situation, but our house leaders could not reach an agreed-upon consensus ahead of time.

Our caucus is very active. It wants to be heard. It wants an opportunity to test the knowledge and be able to challenge individual ministers to make sure they are not affected by groupthink.

In the United Kingdom, the Conservative government house leader, Jacob Rees-Mogg, mentioned that he welcomed that they continued sitting. Now they are going to have virtual Parliament sittings, which is something we might want to look at. They are bringing screens into the chamber. Physically, ministers and the Prime Minister will still be expected to be there.

I do not know how that would work in this chamber, and I do not know how that would work IT-wise or how many people would be required to make it happen, but Jacob Rees-Mogg mentioned that he wanted to avoid groupthink among his own ministers and within his own party. That is what we are trying to get at. We are trying to make sure that government decisions and policy mechanisms being used to address certain industrial sectors and all the job losses we are seeing are improved. This is about our constituents who are losing their jobs and being left behind by various government programs. This is about landlords, both residential and commercial, who are being left behind and have no measures.

● (1335)

[*Translation*]

I am going to switch to French to ensure that everyone understands. We are a bilingual country. We are supposed to work in both official languages in the House and when we do all parliamentary and committee work.

I want the government and you, Mr. Speaker, to defend our rights and privileges, not just on our behalf but also for future members, so that we are able to work in both official languages, move motions and amendments, and conduct all parliamentary business in accordance with the wishes of our constituents. That is very important.

As I mentioned, I chair a virtual meeting of a caucus of almost 150 people every week. It is not easy to ensure that 150 people can follow the agenda, ask questions and make comments to contribute to the work of Parliament. I believe that it will be an enormous challenge. The government says that we are immediately moving to virtual sittings without giving the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs the opportunity to decide how this should work or if it should work in this way.

In conclusion, I want to point out that we are here to work on behalf of our constituents. This is not about advancing our political careers or doing polling. We are here to ensure that all government policies and programs truly help the people who need it most dur-

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ing this pandemic, during which the government has forced the majority of private sector businesses to shut down.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to address the House.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am a member of Parliament from Quebec, and I would simply like to inform my colleague that the Quebec National Assembly has suspended until May 5.

I have a three-month-old grandson I have not seen in a month, because Quebecers are remarkable in that they listen to the Government of Quebec's instructions so as to prevent tragedy and death and avoid infecting our seniors.

My colleague's comments today sound nothing like what I am hearing from my constituents. They are asking why some members of Parliament insist on coming here to sit more than one day during this crisis. Since my colleague is his party's caucus chair, I would like to inform him and ask him to listen to Quebecers and Ontarians. These provinces have far more people infected with coronavirus than the others. Does he realize that asking us to cross regions that have restricted access means that we are endangering the health of Quebec and Canadian seniors?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Salaberry—Suroît for her question.

All members of our Conservative caucus, particularly those from Quebec, such as the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, stand up for the rights and health of Quebecers. I can assure the member that the Quebec MPs in our caucus remind me every day of Quebec's challenges and concerns and of the need to have our meetings take place effectively in both official languages and with respect for the language of Molière.

There are procedures in place in the House to ensure that not all 338 members are required to be here at the same time. We have been accused of wanting everyone to be here at once, but that is clearly not the case. Members could be paired by the whips for voting and, that way, we could reduce the number of members required to hold a sitting of the Parliament of Canada.

I know that the Bloc's fondest wish is for the Parliament of Canada to be closed for the coming months, but we do not think that is a good idea. It is not a good idea for Quebecers or for any of the constituents in our ridings who are asking us to do our job.

● (1340)

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and for having raised these concerns.

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I am the heritage critic. Montreal is home to a vast number of artists and a truly vibrant cultural scene. However, that community is getting hit hard by the crisis we are all currently experiencing. There have been announcements, but no details. A number of people have told me they were planning on organizing festivals this summer and have already invested money on that. They are asking me whether they will be reimbursed if the festivals cannot be held. Furthermore, many artists are not eligible for the CERB.

I therefore have many questions for the Minister of Canadian Heritage. However, I do not want to endanger my constituents or family members by inappropriately travelling to a given place for a sitting. Is there a reason why I could not ask my questions to the minister by video conference? He could simply answer me in the time normally allotted to him.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his question.

With respect to any questions that he, as NDP critic, would like to ask the heritage minister, I am sure his experience is similar to mine, which is to say, government ministers do not really answer our questions; they just talk. Lots of words are exchanged on both sides, but we do not generally receive much in the way of answers to our questions. We can send emails to ministers, but that process is secret and lacks transparency. The government is not being accountable in public before all Canadians, and that is the big difference.

A virtual Parliament could work, and we are not saying no. However, we want the procedure and House affairs committee to do its job and explain to us how that would work and whether it is the best option. I would also remind my colleague that there are 121 Conservative members in the House and that we have had varying degrees of success with our virtual caucus meetings so far. Canada is a big country, and many of our colleagues are in far-flung regions, where they do not have Internet connections that enable them to work efficiently and participate in their caucus meetings.

It seems to me that many members, along with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the NDP leader, have not given enough thought to how a virtual Parliament would work in practice. That is why we have a Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which can hear from witnesses. I believe the committee has not yet decided which witnesses to invite for its study of how all this would work for the House of Commons.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I agree that it is very important to hold government to account and to be able to ask questions. Often in question period, I hear questions from opposition members that do not get comprehensive answers. I think it is very often the case that opposition members find they do not get a response they are happy with.

We do have people in rural areas that have serious problems with Internet connection, and this COVID-19 crisis is actually exposing that. There are many people in this country who are like second-class citizens because of the Internet access in their communities. I used to be a satellite installer. We could be getting satellite connection for members of Parliament to make sure that they can connect

in a virtual Parliament and make sure that those connections are strong.

Does the member not think that it is imperative that all members from all regions, from coast to coast to coast, have an opportunity to take part in the debate in this House and be able to ask questions, rather than just a select few?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Speaker, I am glad to see you in the chair.

To the hon. member, that is exactly the point I have been trying to make. I want every member to be heard and every member to be able to participate in a virtual Parliament. However, do members think that satellite installation is going to be instantaneous, right away, or that satellite installation will not require individuals to travel to make sure the infrastructure works? We had one meeting of our caucus, I remember, way before this, when I had to complain to the Speaker vociferously that our interpretation booth failed; physically, the hardware failed in the room.

How many technology and IT staff will be required to come to this building and other buildings in the precinct to make sure that we can actually host virtual meetings where every single member can participate? Participation is not just listening; it is having an opportunity to participate fully in whatever language members choose in this country. I think that is really important to remember.

The member over there was willing to let the House leaders of recognized parties decide when this Parliament should meet again. We have decided that today is the day we are going to sort out, through motions and an amendment, how this Parliament will function for the next few weeks. That is exactly what Canadians expect of us. It is exactly the expectation that they have. We are going to meet today. We are going to deal with issues expeditiously and make sure we hold the government to account.

● (1345)

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Madam Speaker, like my colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith, I have also worked in the telecommunications industry. In my experience, satellite technology will unequivocally fail and would not work for our constituents.

Could the member say unequivocally that our virtual meetings have worked seamlessly and without flaw for our weekly caucus meetings?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Speaker, I am going to confirm that it does not work seamlessly, but I do enjoy the ability to mute microphones at will, something that is impossible to do in person. I am sure you will share this pain with me, Madam Speaker, and there are opportunities for virtual Parliament to do this.

There is an expectation among Canadians that we can have a meeting of 20 people on Zoom, Skype or some other software and it works pretty well. However, once we get to the level where there are 338 people with video, we have to confirm their identities and have interpretation. There needs to be the ability for back and forth between members to change something on the agenda, and in the House, in this case, to move a point of order or to move changes. We see the struggle that the parliamentary committees are having, and that is just two committees a week, with what I have been told is 45 minutes to an hour of prep time in the lead-up. We have 30 committees in the House, and that does not include the shared committees with the Senate.

There is a lot more work that needs to be done by PROC to verify how this will actually work in a 338-member Parliament.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am very glad to be in the House of Commons in this limited-capacity Parliament, considering that we are facing a crisis caused by COVID-19. We are in the process of developing procedures. We realize that this is the first time that the Canadian government is confronted with this type of situation. Us Conservatives understand the situation and are working with the government to ensure that Canadians and businesses have the tools they need to get through this crisis.

I was there this morning when the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons moved his motion, the purpose of which is to muzzle parliamentarians, plain and simple. The motion asks us to be here once per week. To ask that question is to answer it.

The Prime Minister has decided to limit question period. Every day, this Prime Minister takes questions from journalists, whose job it is to report the news. Our job as parliamentarians is to ask questions in order to improve the situation. I am not saying that the government has only made wrong decisions over the course of this extraordinary situation. I am able to acknowledge that it had no frame of reference in the matter. The government had to act, readjust and I would even say improvise. What I am saying is not negative.

The thing is, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit is a combination of two programs: the support program for victims of COVID-19 and the assistance program. There is support and assistance. In short, they combined two programs together and created the CERB. That is fine, because some changes were made. We made suggestions in that and many other cases.

I have a list, which is not exhaustive, of some of the things our party proposed. The Conservative Party, the official opposition in the House of Commons, advanced measures and programs that the government put in place. We are being accused of being difficult and unco-operative.

Let us look at the facts. Our suggestions have helped volunteer firefighters meet the needs of their municipalities in this crisis without their CERB being reduced. It is a matter of public safety. The government listened to us and changed course. That is our job as the opposition.

This morning, the government House leader, with support from his Bloc friends, said that it was irresponsible to be here in the

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House of Commons to do our job and work together on finding the tools that will enable Canadians and businesses to receive support in this exceptional situation.

Let us look at what is happening on both sides of the House. We are respecting social distancing rules. If we did not want to co-operate, the opposition benches would be full. That is not what we did. We co-operated. Our leader is negotiating. He had originally proposed four meetings per week. The two other opposition parties, the independents and the government all rejected that proposal, so we proposed three days, and we are still being called the bad guys.

The Conservative Party is responsible, and parliamentarians are important. Defending democracy is fundamental to parliamentarians. Of course, the Bloc Québécois is reducing Canadian parliamentary procedure to a simple expression: “tataouinage”, or “dilly-dallying” in English. The Bloc Québécois leader put on quite a show this morning as he described the term. Everyone knows his background and where he comes from, which certainly shone through this morning when he was talking about dilly-dallying. That said, the Bloc is another problem altogether.

● (1350)

For our part, we are here to work together. We want to help, but we want to ask questions. What is the incentive for this minority government—yes, I said “minority government”—to stay away from the House in order to limit the opportunities available to the opposition to challenge it? Is it because the government does not feel comfortable?

Canadians elected a minority government. As a parliamentarian, as an elected official, my interpretation of the word “minority” is that there are doubts about the government's effectiveness and the confidence people have in it. The people have agreed to give it power, but they also want a strong opposition that will protect the public purse and remind the government exactly what our citizens expect. In my case, it is the citizens of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, but I am speaking on behalf of all members, on both this side of the House as well as the other side, that is, the government.

Our job is to report the concerns of our constituents, and we need to be able to do that here in the Parliament of Canada, where the future is determined and where we implement programs that will improve the lives of Canadians.

It really bothers me when the Conservatives take the blame in news reports and are accused of being the bad guys. That is completely untrue and I would like that to be set right. These are facts. No one can contradict what I just said. We are willing to work together, but that does not mean that we are in bed with the Liberal Party. We are not the Bloc Québécois. We are the Conservative Party of Canada. We want to protect the Canadian federation. As a Quebecker, I am happy to be part of Canada because Canada is currently helping Quebec. I thank the government for its collaboration.

*Statements by Members*

That is what the Canadian federation is for. The principle behind it is that sometimes we need something and sometimes we give something. I am proud to rise today in the House of Commons as a Quebec MP to say thank you to our Canada for being there to help us. Now, however, we want Canada to do a better job of helping us, and what we want to do is give the government the opportunity to hear what we have to say. It is clear that it will be harder for the government to do that if we only meet once a week.

We are proud that the 338 MPs' constituency offices are much like Service Canada offices. People are worried and confused. As I was saying earlier, that is because the situation is brand new to us. We are at war with a microbe, a virus. That is why people are a little lost. Even the government is lost.

I want to emphasize that the government is only responding because the opposition is forcing it to think. However, we do not deserve all the credit, because the government is probably also working to make things better. I am also thinking of public service employees, who we know are under a lot of pressure, and I thank them for what they are doing under these unusual circumstances.

This morning, I heard the Green Party, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois say that it is alarming to see members from Quebec coming here to the House of Commons to sit in this reduced Parliament. However, I want to remind the House that construction sites are reopening today, that mechanics have been back in their garages changing winter tires since last Wednesday, and, better yet, that garden centres are open again. Canadians are adapting and practising social distancing. They are complying with guidelines. They are resilient.

• (1355)

I am very proud to represent the people of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. They are resilient, proud, and supportive of one another, and they follow public health instructions.

I have visited organizations that help those who cannot go to the grocery store. In my role as an MP, I personally delivered food baskets. I went to pick up orders at the grocery stores and delivered them to residents of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. We support one another and we can be proud of that. I now invite the government to let us work together to strengthen its programs so they meet the needs of Canadians and entrepreneurs.

We have also been talking about a virtual Parliament. We are in a new building. I have had the opportunity to travel abroad. In many parliaments, the desks have integrated monitors and members can vote electronically. We are not there yet.

Mr. Speaker, our leader asked you directly if we have the technology needed to hold a virtual Parliament while respecting the rights of all parliamentarians. What was your answer? As far as I know, we are not yet ready.

As our leader said, when we receive confirmation that it can be done efficiently and with respect for parliamentarians' rights, we will reopen the discussion. In the meantime, we are asking the government to let us meet every day. First, there were going to be four sittings, then three sittings. Perhaps we could agree on two and a half sittings.

We are acting in good faith and we are working in the best interests of Canadians. We also want to get our businesses up and running again and give them the means, when possible, to kick-start the economy and once more create prosperity in Canada.

• (1400)

**The Speaker:** We will now pause to proceed to statements by members and question period.

I want to inform the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier that he will have seven minutes and 15 seconds remaining when we resume debate.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### FRONT-LINE WORKERS

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this time to thank all of the front-line workers in my community, across Canada and around the world. It is particularly sad to note today that a number of front-line workers were among the people who were killed in Nova Scotia: care aides, corrections officers, an RCMP officer and a firefighter.

Front-line workers are living apart from their loved ones during this pandemic. A friend who is a nurse in my community has two young boys. She has not been able to hug her sons or spend time with them in person for weeks. It is a situation that is echoed in thousands of homes across the country.

Front-line workers are making huge sacrifices to protect our communities and to keep essential services operating. That is why it is imperative that the rest of us, including those of us in the House, respect their sacrifices by continuing to follow the directives of health authorities, as I called for in my question of privilege this morning.

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### COMMUNITY SERVICE IN DARTMOUTH—COLE HARBOUR

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we wish to join our colleague, the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester, to offer our deepest condolences to all those touched by the senseless violence in Nova Scotia.

*Statements by Members*

I rise now on behalf of the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour to commend Nova Scotians helping to feed others, like The Canteen restaurant in Dartmouth. When the owners were forced to close their dining room due to COVID-19, they transformed their restaurant into a community kitchen to help feed others throughout the pandemic. Owners Renée and Doug are working with incredible organizations like the Dartmouth North Community Food Centre and Margaret's House, run by Feeding Others of Dartmouth, to provide hundreds of meals per week to those in need.

I ask all members in the House to thank businesses and organizations across Canada, like The Canteen, for stepping up to help their communities. I encourage all people to lend a hand if they are able, from six feet apart of course, to help others in need.

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**WINE INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while the government's response to COVID-19 has demanded much of Parliament's attention, as it so deserves, we need to remember there are other important issues playing on in the background that also deserve Parliament's attention.

In my riding, one of these is Australia's World Trade Organization challenge against the excise tax exemption for 100% Canadian-made wines. This challenge was a major threat to our domestic wine industry before COVID-19. It is an even bigger threat now as the impacts against our wine industry could be compounded if a ruling is made this summer in Australia's favour. If that happens, our Canadian wine industry will be devastated. More than 700 wineries and 9,000 Canadian jobs are at stake.

While we are focused on responding to COVID-19 and flattening the curve, the countdown to the WTO ruling on this case continues, and it requires Parliament's attention. Should the WTO rule against Canada, I sincerely hope the government will act soon to establish a trade-legal program of equal or greater value to replace the existing excise tax exemption. Our Canadian wineries need the support. I am proud to stand in the House today and bring attention to this most important matter.

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**FRONT-LINE WORKERS**

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a number of us will be speaking on behalf of some of our colleagues who cannot be with us today. This statement is on behalf of my colleague, the member for Brampton West:

I rise in the House today to show our gratitude and appreciation to all our front-line heroes. Millions of Canadians are risking their health and safety to fight the pandemic and to serve their community as they continue to provide essential services. A front-line hero is a mother who is providing critical care in the ICU as a doctor, or a nurse who is working over-12-hour-long night shifts and testing and caring for our seniors. The heroes are support and maintenance staff. They are truck drivers and grocery store workers. This pandemic has revealed just how essential their work is and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

As someone who has experienced COVID-19 first-hand, I can truly say that we have the best health care in the world, and an outstanding health care workforce. I would like to take an opportunity to thank our public health doctors and nurses, and especially Peel Public Health, for the care and support they have provided me during these challenging times.

As our front-line heroes continue to risk their lives for us, let us all do our part and thank them by continuing to stay at home.

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● (1405)

[Translation]

**NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK**

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, during these extraordinary times, I want to acknowledge National Volunteer Week.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I thank all of the volunteers in Quebec, who work in the shadows. They were essential before COVID-19 shook Quebec, and they are even more essential now, as they are on the front lines to help their communities.

I thank all those who are the backbone of essential organizations in all of our regions. They make sure that people living in precarious situations have access to food, shelter, crisis lines and other types of support. Most importantly, they provide a sympathetic ear to people everywhere who are isolated.

During this crisis, I want to thank the 26,000 new individuals who heeded the Government of Quebec's call by offering their time.

We will get through this, in large part thanks to them, and once this is over, their help will still be just as valued.

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**ORLÉANS BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic, I have been listening to the Orléans business community, and I am proud of the actions taken by the government to date.

Thanks to the business emergency fund and, more importantly, its expansion, an audiology company with a payroll of \$46,000 or a ventilation company with a payroll of \$1.3 million is now eligible for an interest-free emergency loan.

I also welcome the Canada emergency wage subsidy initiative, which will help many employers retain or rehire their employees. The subsidy covers 75% of an employee's pay.

I know that many Orléans business people are anxiously awaiting to hear about the next measure that will be brought in to help them, namely the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program for small business.

*Statements by Members*

I want to say to those businesses that are still concerned that I will continue to work with the government and to raise their concerns.

Finally, I would like to salute all those in Orléans working in essential services. We salute them and we say thank you.

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[English]

**SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT**

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a small business owner from my riding used to employ seven part-time and full-time employees. She hopes to rehire all of them once the pandemic ends, if she is able to reopen at all. She has been able to keep two employees on payroll and has maintained a small amount of business by utilizing online sales. Any revenue goes directly back into the business to keep the lights on and her two employees paid. The emergency wage subsidy will eventually help keep those two employees hired. However, because of this, her accountant advised her that she is unable to access financial assistance for herself and her family. She would be better off to close her shop and risk losing everything.

Small businesses and job creators are the backbone of our economy. If that is true, we have to ask why this government's plan would leave a mother of three in a position where she is working harder than ever just to keep her business going without receiving any necessary support for her and her family.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FRONT-LINE WORKERS**

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my hon. colleague, the member for Alfred-Pellan, I want to express the gratitude and appreciation of all Canadians for our front-line workers and all those who deliver our essential services.

Doctors, nurses, pharmacists, health care workers, paramedics, firefighters, police officers, truckers, bus drivers, farmers, grocery store, pharmacy and restaurant staff, day care workers, volunteers and so many other essential workers are our infantry in the fight against COVID-19.

These people are on the front lines every day and put themselves in harm's way to serve their communities. They are guardian angels, and we are fortunate to have them. Their devotion and dedication is remarkable and their courage is inspiring. I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

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• (1410)

[English]

**SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT**

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague, the hon. member of Parliament for Vaughan—Woodbridge, I would like to offer our heartfelt condolences to the 14 families in the city of Vaughan who have lost loved ones due to COVID-19. Our thoughts and prayers are with you all.

COVID-19 has brought vast challenges, but our government has responded, and we are here to support workers and businesses across the country. The Canada emergency business account has helped, to date, over 200,000 businesses across Canada, including businesses such as family-owned Menchie's in Vaughan—Woodbridge which, with a \$40,000 interest-free loan, will be able to reopen for the summer.

Through such programs as the CERB, CEBA and now the Canada emergency wage subsidy, our government will ensure that Canadian families and businesses will weather the challenges as we confront the issues facing us as a country due to COVID-19. Together we will emerge stronger.

\* \* \*

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week the government signed a statement expressing full support and confidence in the WHO. In the face of COVID-19, Canadians should ask why. This, after all, is the same WHO that ignored Taiwan's early warnings about human-to-human transmission. This is the same WHO that has repeatedly praised China. This is the same WHO that criticized early travel restrictions from COVID hot spots, restrictions that saved countless lives, and this is the same WHO that waited until March 11 to declare a global pandemic after COVID had spread to 114 countries.

Instead of lavishing praise on the WHO, the government should be demanding answers.

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**TRI-CITIES COMMUNITY**

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my friend and colleague, the hon. member for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, I rise to convey his message to his community.

*Statements by Members*

COVID-19 has challenged us as a world, as businesses, as neighbours and as families, but what comes through most vividly is the essential resilience of our Tri-Cities community as we each do our part, big or small, to flatten the curve. As member of Parliament for Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, he is here to support and advocate for his constituents. He hears their concerns and continues to work hard for them every day as we adapt and respond to the problems facing us. Whether they are front-line or essential workers, restructuring their business or simply staying at home, he recognizes every individual who has stepped up, appreciates all the efforts made and admires how so many have adapted to meet the challenges head-on. We are truly all in this together. Together, we are going to prevail by staying safe and staying healthy.

\* \* \*

**SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA**

**Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart and great sorrow that I rise on behalf of my colleagues in the House to mourn the tragic loss of RCMP Constable Heidi Stevenson and the many victims taken from us this weekend in Nova Scotia. As one voice, we condemn this violence and offer our support. These are difficult and already overwhelming times, as we deal with and struggle through the challenges of the COVID crisis, and now we face this devastation.

Constable Stevenson gave her life protecting her fellow Canadians, a sacrifice that will not be forgotten. I thank all of those working on the front lines, who risk their lives every day to serve and protect us. Our hearts and prayers go out to the families, friends and colleagues who will feel this loss the most. They have our deepest sympathies and condolences. May the loved ones and communities of these victims find comfort in knowing that our entire country grieves with them.

May God give them, and all of us, strength during this difficult time.

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*[Translation]***SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA**

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as a Canadian, I am proud of the solidarity people demonstrate during times of crisis and in response to ordeals like the one we experienced yesterday.

In the wake of the unprecedented killing spree in Nova Scotia, in which many people lost their loved ones in the most unfair way possible, I would like to take a moment to express my condolences to the friends and loved ones affected by this tragedy and to all Nova Scotians. I want to commend law enforcement agencies for their work, and I salute those courageous individuals who risk their lives every day to protect us.

Among the victims was Constable Heidi Stevenson, a 23-year veteran of the RCMP. She died in the line of duty. Heidi had a 13-year-old son and an 11-year-old daughter. This tragedy has changed the lives of many children, parents, spouses and friends, who are all going through an ordeal we cannot imagine.

In closing, let me share the words of Darcy Dobson, whose mother tragically lost her life during the incident: Let our memories define the victims, not the horrible way they died.

\* \* \*

• (1415)

*[English]***LONG-TERM CARE SYSTEM**

**Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has hit our seniors and elders particularly hard, especially those in long-term care. We know seniors are more at risk, and many of us are doing everything we can to protect our parents and grandparents. All of us have watched the heartbreaking scenes of loved ones standing outside long-term care homes, trying to let their elders know they are not alone. We have all seen dedicated staff overwhelmed by it all, as well. For many years, federal and provincial governments have created cracks within our long-term care system, to the point that it cannot fully serve residents in a safe and dignified manner.

This crisis has shown us what must finally be done to properly support our long-term care system. We need national standards and the funding necessary to enact them. Our vulnerable seniors and their loved ones deserve nothing less.

\* \* \*

*[Translation]***COVID-19**

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, there are several people I want to thank today.

First and foremost, from the bottom of my heart, I want to thank the health care professionals and caregivers in our hospitals and long-term care centres, as well as everyone on the front lines helping our seniors and those who are sick.

I want to thank our workers in essential services: truck drivers, farmers, and workers in grocery stores, pharmacies and public services, to name a few.

I want to thank our artists who are using their creativity to make a name for themselves and make our situation a little brighter.

I want to thank all Quebeckers for their daily sacrifices, whether they are workers or business owners pausing their employment or a business; parents who are trying to juggle telework with their little monsters, their kids who miss their friends and their activities; grandparents who, in some cases, have not been able to meet a newborn grandchild; or families who are grieving and were not able to say a proper goodbye to a loved one.

*Oral Questions*

Thank you, everyone. We must not give up.

\* \* \*

[English]

**SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA**

**Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Bluenose province, like my home in neighbouring New Brunswick, is a place where small rural communities share a special bond. Our communities are an extension of our families, and when tragedy strikes one community, it is felt by us all.

I do not have the words to properly express how the shooting rampage in Portapique and its surroundings has shaken our nation, as has the death of Constable Heidi Stevenson, a 23-year RCMP veteran and mother of two.

It is with deep gratitude that I pay tribute to those who answered the call to protect our communities.

As to the families and colleagues who lost loved ones, we share their anguish. We will work together to get through this. They are not alone. Our nation, our country, stands with them.

\* \* \*

**SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA**

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as a son of the Maritimes it is hard to imagine the unspeakable horror that is coursing through the small communities of Nova Scotia today.

I would like to finish by reading the following statement on behalf of my colleague, the member for Cumberland—Colchester.

“In the early hours of April 19th, 2020, Cumberland—Colchester woke up to find a devastating tragedy had played out in our peaceful little corner of the world, in northern Nova Scotia. Words cannot express my sorrow for the families, friends, fellow workers and communities who have suddenly lost a loved one. My heart goes out to everyone affected by this selfish act of violence, in short all of us.

“Meanwhile, we northern Nova Scotians are strong. We will rise again to fight another day.”

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**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know that I speak for all members of the House when I say that we are all devastated by the shocking news out of Nova Scotia. A killer has taken the lives of at least 19 people, each one of them a tragic loss for families and friends. As the RCMP uncover the details of this senseless loss, our thoughts, prayers and support are with the communities reeling from the fallout of these tragic events.

We thank the first responders and medical professionals who responded to the victims, as well as the RCMP, which lost Constable

Heidi Stevenson. I cannot imagine the grief and heartache that families are going through.

Could the Prime Minister update the House as to the current situation in Nova Scotia?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday we were all shaken by the senseless violence and evil in Nova Scotia. As we learn more about what happened, it is important that we come together to support each other.

I have spoken with Premier McNeil, RCMP Commissioner Luc-ki, the minister of public safety and many Nova Scotians, including our Nova Scotia caucus. I know that people have a lot of questions. This is an ongoing investigation, but I can assure them that the RCMP will keep us updated even as they themselves grieve their own loss of Constable Heidi Stevenson.

Today, all Canadians are Nova Scotians.

\* \* \*

● (1420)

**HEALTH**

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for his response and certainly echo his sentiments.

On March 12, in this chamber, I asked the government how many ventilators it had procured to prepare for the wave of COVID-19 cases that were coming. In response, the Deputy Prime Minister said, “We are already leading a bulk national procurement effort to ensure Canadians have the necessary medical equipment.” A month later, I asked how many new ventilators the government had obtained under this strategy. The Prime Minister answered, “It will be still a few weeks before they are able to arrive.”

Today is April 20, and again I would like to ask this. How many new ventilators has the government been able to obtain under the national procurement strategy?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have sent 400 ventilators to provinces and territories, and have contracts with three Canadian companies that will supply 30,000 ventilators starting in May.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our intelligence partners continue to raise serious concerns about the accuracy of information coming out of China. The advice and direction from the WHO depend on the honesty and transparency of its member countries.

The government has ignored Canadian experts who were calling for swift and decisive action much sooner. The government chose to continue air travel between China and Canada and waited weeks to impose travel restrictions, yet the Prime Minister and his health minister continue to vouch for the Government of China.

Going forward, will the government continue to trust information coming from the Communist government of China?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning we followed the best public health advice. We engaged early to keep Canadians safe and prevent the spread of the virus.

On January 2, the Public Health Agency of Canada alerted all provincial health authorities. On January 14, Dr. Theresa Tam and the Public Health Agency of Canada convened a meeting of the Canadian Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health. We convened the incident response group in January. We enhanced airport screening measures in January and increased them as the situation evolved.

We will continue to respond to the situation as it evolves, and we will continue to base our decisions on the best available facts and evidence.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are reports that three Canadian planes that left for China to pick up medical equipment from China returned to Canada empty. The planes were supposed to return last night.

Can the government confirm whether or not those planes were in fact scheduled, whether or not they arrived and whether or not they were able to obtain the medical equipment that they were sent to obtain?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, over the past weeks we have been engaged in unprecedented efforts, collaborating with partners and friends around the world to ensure that we can get the PPE and medical equipment so necessary for Canadians on the front lines in hospitals across the country. That is what we continue to do.

We have teams on the ground in China and elsewhere to coordinate the departure and arrival of shipments. We have had challenges with those shipments, as the global competition for these items is fierce.

We will continue to work as best we can to ensure that we continue to deliver all the necessary equipment to our heroes working on the front lines.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to that equipment, after the 2015 election the government decided to cut funding for pandemic preparedness. In 2014, the funding for those health security measures was \$73 million. The funding for this year is just \$51 million. The government also decided to dump millions of masks and gloves, and decided to close the warehouses that were holding this extra equipment in case of a pandemic. It was only because the owner of a dumpster company, who put in a bid for the contract to dispose of these items, that we even have these details.

I have a simple question for the Prime Minister: When did he sign off on the plan to throw away personal protective equipment?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are very troubled about the reports of valuable medical supplies in our national stockpile being destroyed. As we looked into it, we discovered that those items had actually been expired for five

years and of course after five years are not suitable for use anywhere else.

That is why we have to ask ourselves questions about how items that approach the end of their lives could, instead of being kept in stockpiles, instead be shipped for immediate use in places that could use them and get those items replaced. Obviously that did not happen, and we need to make sure we have better protocols going forward so we do not find ourselves in a situation like this.

\* \* \*

● (1425)

[*Translation*]

## SENIORS

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, we will certainly have the opportunity to come back to some aspects of this issue later. For now, I would like to focus on ideas and solutions rather than nitpicking and finger-pointing. I am asking the House to believe in the absolutely genuine concern I have for our society's seniors.

Can the Prime Minister summarize for the House what he has done so far during this crisis to help seniors in Canada and Quebec?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beloil—Chambly who has long been paying particular attention to seniors. We thank him for his leadership and suggestions.

Indeed, seniors are in great need of services and support as a result of COVID-19. We are helping protect their financial security through an extra GST/HST credit payment for low- and modest-income individuals. We reduced by 25% the minimum amount that has to be withdrawn from registered retirement income funds. We are also contributing \$9 million through the United Way of Canada to help seniors get food, drugs and other essentials.

We will continue to work with the provinces to ensure that seniors in long-term care facilities are protected.

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, without wishing to seem ungrateful, I, like seniors, believe that this does not amount to much.

Can the Prime Minister give us a clear, written response, since the Bloc Québécois's recommendations and suggestions have been very clear and very public for about two weeks now? Can we have a response before we leave the House?

Perhaps we could even have a discussion about possible solutions that, on the whole, will look very inexpensive compared to everything that has been put in place so far in this crisis.

*Oral Questions*

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we continue to work on measures, including measures recommended by members of the opposition, to better support our seniors during this crisis. They are facing a challenge that targets them specifically, and that is COVID-19. They often end up isolated and they are worried about the impact of the employees working around them in their residences. There are a lot of concerns about seniors, and we will continue to work together to address these challenges.

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**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Camille, a student at the University of Montreal, did not accumulate enough hours to be eligible for employment insurance and she is not eligible for the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB. She told us that she is scared, sad and disappointed.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to say today that if someone needs help, that person can have access to the CERB?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we understand that this is an extremely stressful situation for Canadians, particularly post-secondary students.

Many of them would normally be starting a summer job, but they are finding themselves alone, not knowing what will happen in the coming months. We made changes to the Canada summer jobs program, which will create up to 70,000 opportunities for young people. That will help them stay in the labour market in some way and save for their future.

The wage subsidy will also help more employers hire young people. Students who had a job last summer or who worked during the school year are eligible for the CERB if they earned over \$5,000. Many students are eligible. However, we recognize that we need to do more for students like Camille, and we will do just that.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is far too many Canadians are falling through the cracks, in particular students. Summer jobs have disappeared, on-campus jobs have disappeared and students do not qualify for the CERB. Students are just one of many examples of people who are falling through the cracks because of the criteria. Will the Prime Minister announce today that the CERB is universal, and that anyone who needs access to help now can get that help?

• (1430)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** We recognize the particular stressors on students who would normally be starting their summer jobs and right now have no money to pay their rent, and no prospects of summer jobs to get the experience they need. Many of them are even uncertain about being able to pay next year's tuition. We understand these stressors and are looking at ways to support students. Many students qualify for the CERB because they had jobs last year, full time or part time, which allows them to claim the CERB, having made \$5,000 in income over the past year, but many do not. That is why we have made increases to the summer jobs program. That is why we are also going to be moving forward with more initiatives to help students in particular.

**HEALTH**

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we know the medical intelligence cell of the Department of National Defence reported on the risk of COVID-19 in early January and Global Affairs would have been reporting on it around the same time. It is very likely that the ministers of National Defence and Global Affairs at a minimum would have been briefed on the detailed warnings and analysis about the emergence of the deadly potential of the coronavirus in Wuhan, China. It is even more likely that the Privy Council Office would have briefed the Prime Minister on the emerging threat.

On what date did the PCO prepare a briefing note for the Prime Minister?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the coronavirus is a global pandemic and, as such, poses a profound security threat to Canada. For that reason, Canada's intelligence community has been deeply engaged in informing the government's actions. That is why in January the incident response group was convened by the Prime Minister, where briefings were shared and discussed.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in early January, MEDINT, a cell of our country's military intelligence branch, began producing those detailed warnings. On January 30, the WHO declared the outbreak a "public health emergency of international concern". In the backdrop of these two warnings, our government shipped 16 tonnes of personal protective equipment to China in February and left Canada scrambling to find supplies to protect our front-line health care workers.

Did the Minister of Health know about the DND report and did she receive a briefing note from the Privy Council Office on it?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in a global pandemic, the principle is that all countries work together to defeat the virus where it is most present. In January, the outbreak in Wuhan, China was posing a significant public health threat to the entire world. As such, and as a partner country with the WHO, Canada supplied some personal protective equipment that was rapidly becoming out of date to Canada and that could certainly be used in Wuhan's efforts to fight the virus there.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, because it was slow to close Canada's borders, this government allowed thousands of people from at-risk areas to enter the country and put Canadians at risk.

After many calls from our party, Roxham Road was finally closed, but, once again, we saw that many people crossed the border illegally and no security measures were taken.

My question is simple. I would like to know how many illegal migrants entered Canada since the pandemic began.

[English]

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in early March we began discussions with our allies and partners who share the Canada-U.S. border with us on how we could restrict non-essential travel. That discussion took place and culminated in an agreement between our two countries to restrict non-essential travel while still allowing essential workers and trade to continue to move forward. As part of that agreement, we implemented significant new restrictions on people who cross our borders irregularly as non-essential. That has been a very effective measure that has been put in place. Since the time of that agreement, now 30 days ago, there have been fewer than 10 individuals who have crossed the border and been subsequently directed back to the United States.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our business owners are worried. Some are not sure if they will be able to reopen. Bills are piling up, and revenues are obviously down. Assistance seems to be a long time coming, including the commercial rent assistance program. SMEs had to pay rent for the month of March.

When will our SMEs, the backbone of our economy, get details about this assistance program that is supposed to help them pay commercial rent and reopen when the time comes? It is a simple question.

● (1435)

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as Canadians take steps to fight COVID-19, we know that many businesses worry about not being able to pay the rent. Property owners across the country have risen to the occasion by forgoing rent and helping their tenants through these tough times. Our government salutes their leadership.

Recognizing the challenges that Canadian businesses and property owners are facing, our government intends to introduce the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program for small businesses. To do that, we will need a partnership with the provincial and territorial governments, and we are working on that right now.

[English]

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Tony Gareau, Marlee Gagnon, Carolyn Turner and Paul Ledaire are just some of the small business health professionals in my riding who are being left behind by the gaps in the Canada emergency business account and the wage subsidy programs. These programs continue to exclude tens of thousands of small businesses from receiving help by refusing to recognize dividend income as employment income. As Conservatives, we have been calling on the government to fix the gap.

Why will the government not consider dividends as a form of salary for entrepreneurs, so that they can qualify for emergency supports they desperately need?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian small businesses that the hon. member talks about are really important to all of our businesses in every community across the country. That is why we have made supports available through the Canada emergency business account, as well as the Canada emergency wage subsidy, so that businesses all across the country can access funds to help bridge some of the costs during this period and keep their employees.

This is about saving businesses and saving employees all across the country.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, CFIB data suggests that one-third of Canadian small businesses will never open again, if the government continues to drag its feet in getting financial support into their hands. Small business loan programs established through BDC and Export Development Canada are desperately needed, but many small business owners worry that it simply won't be enough to save them.

To the Minister of Finance, or any minister in the government, how many small businesses have received funding from BDC and EDC, separately reported over the regular loan volume, and what is the government doing to speed up program deployment?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are listening to small businesses all across the country. As of Friday, and today those numbers would be even higher, almost a quarter of a million business owners and businesses across the country have seen those loans approved. This is real help that will help all of our businesses across the country.

We will continue to help them because we have expanded the criteria so that more businesses can access a \$40,000 interest-free loan, for businesses with \$20,000 of payroll up to \$1.5 million of payroll.

*Oral Questions*

We are going to help even more businesses in the country. Nothing is more important than helping our businesses right now.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**SENIORS**

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, allow me to start by offering my sincere condolences to the victims of COVID-19 who have lost a loved one without being able to properly say goodbye.

Seniors are the people most affected by COVID-19 and the ones who receive the least support. They are bearing the brunt of the increased cost of groceries and the decline in pension funds. Their purchasing power is vanishing before their eyes. That is why I want to reiterate one of the Bloc's proposals for seniors.

Will the government listen to their call for help and increase their old age pension by \$110 a month?

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

We are obviously concerned about everything that Canadians are going through right now, especially seniors. We are currently giving low- and modest-income seniors an extra GST credit payment of up to \$400 per adult and \$600 per couple.

We are also giving seniors some flexibility when it comes to the withdrawal requirements for registered retirement income. We are lowering the minimum RRIF withdrawal amounts by 25% and will continue to support seniors during this terrible pandemic.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it seems that the increase in the GST was not enough.

Our seniors need support for their purchasing power to help them through this crisis. Once the crisis is over, we are going to need them to kick-start the economy, especially in the regions. However, seniors are getting poorer right now because of rising prices. It is absolutely crucial that the old age benefit be enhanced by \$110 per month. That is the bare minimum. It just makes sense. On top of everything else, pension plans are not performing well.

First of all, will the government increase old age security benefits? Second, will it remove RRIF mandatory withdrawal amounts?

• (1440)

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we will continue to support seniors and provide some flexibility when it comes to the withdrawal requirements for registered retirement income.

We are lowering the minimum RRIF withdrawal amounts by 25% for 2020. This will help keep assets in RRIFs during this time of market volatility. In addition, seniors who have stopped working because of COVID-19 are eligible for the Canada emergency response benefit, which provides \$2,000 a month.

We will continue to support seniors during this very difficult time.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, since we are talking about helping seniors, I would like to say that our riding offices across Quebec have been inundated with calls from seniors who need the government's help. However, Service Canada offices are closed. It is impossible to reach anyone at Service Canada or the Canada Revenue Agency. The government is leaving seniors to fend for themselves on the Internet and they are not receiving the help they need.

What will the government do to improve access to these services? Will it establish a direct line so that we, the MPs, can help seniors?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring that Canadians have access to the benefits they need and are provided by Service Canada.

[English]

We will ensure that we are dispatching Service Canada community liaison officers to vulnerable communities, working also with intermediary trusted organizations to enable people to be aware of alternative modes of service online as well as telephone numbers. We have also increased the capacity of our phone lines and other supports to make sure that people can get the help they need.

We will ensure that, even when people do not have a barrier to those services, we make an exceptional circumstance and an appointment may be made to help them.

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**HEALTH**

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, public health measures are working to stop the spread of COVID-19, with the number of new cases starting to stabilize. Now is the time to begin to prepare to ensure we are ready at the earliest possible moment to restart our economy.

What is the national strategy for supporting virus and antibody testing? When will widespread contact tracing be available? How will the government address critical shortages of medical items? Canadians need to see a plan. When will the Liberals provide a national plan to get this country back to work?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member opposite that this needs to be a coordinated national plan, and that is why right now we are working with provinces and territories to address the many facets that she identifies. Whether it is research, support for public health or boosting our health care system across the country, these are steps we need to take together and in a coordinated fashion. We will continue that hard work and we will come back to Canadians when we have a plan that will protect their safety first and foremost and allow people to get back to work.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the provinces, health professionals and front-line workers are doing incredible work to fight the virus and keep us safe.

Now the federal government needs to work with us to get Canada back to normal. Certain conditions must be met before restrictions are lifted. For example, the government needs to address the shortage of equipment and medication. When will the government share its plan to reopen Canada?

*[English]*

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member opposite. It is extremely important that we work together with provinces and territories to ensure we have a strong fabric to protect Canadians' health and safety while we begin the long, hard work of restarting our economy and getting Canadians back to work. This will require research. This will require evidence. This will also require investments in public health and supporting local and provincial governments to do the hard work of contact tracing and isolating close contacts. I am looking forward to that work with my colleagues and we will continue to update the House as we do it.

**Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as Canada moves from self-isolation and closures to a gradual reopening of communities and businesses, a high level of testing for COVID-19 will be needed, especially in areas that experience a second wave, yet concerns are increasing that the federal government has not adequately ramped up the availability of tests, as was successfully done in Taiwan and South Korea.

What is the government's plan to initiate large-scale testing to coincide with a lifting of self-isolation, and how many test kits are needed to begin?

• (1445)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in Canada we have one of the highest testing rates in the world.

We are very proud of the work that is happening all across the country at all levels of government, but also from private industry which has been racing to ensure that we have new tools and new testing approaches as the science develops. We are constantly working, for example, to increase laboratory capacity and approve testing kits. In fact, we have approved the use of 10 new testing kits across the country which will help accelerate testing and speed up results. This is a work in progress, but we are confident we are on the right track.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, an article on Ricochet reveals troubling information about errors made and the lack of pandemic preparedness.

SARS hit in 2003, but the government does not seem to have learned anything from that experience. On the other side of the world, South Korea had what it needed. They tested all their people. They had masks for everyone. Here, we are still scrambling for equipment. As a result, Quebec's death rate is 23 times higher than South Korea's.

What steps will the government take to provide protective equipment to health workers?

*[English]*

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it has been all hands on deck to try to secure personal protective equipment for our health care workers across the provinces and territories.

The federal government has been working very closely with our counterparts to ensure that we find supplies, that we place those orders together and that we are able to get those orders out of countries. Also, we have been ramping up our ability to produce personal protective equipment and other medical supplies domestically, which will greatly increase our capacity to ensure an ongoing supply going forward.

It is a tragedy that so many people have lost their lives across this country, particularly in long-term care homes, which I know the province of Quebec is struggling with. We continue to work with our counterparts to protect those lives.

\* \* \*

*[Translation]***TAXATION**

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, sometimes, the best solutions are the simplest ones. We are all working incredibly hard to get through this crisis. We are investing billions of dollars to help people and businesses.

Poland and Denmark just had the brilliant idea to make companies that are registered in tax havens ineligible for public assistance. Companies that cheat and do not pay their fair share should not receive our assistance.

Is the government prepared to follow this example?

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in these extraordinary times, Canadians should not be worrying about paying bills and rent or feeding their families.

Our government is committed to supporting Canadians, our health care system and our economy. As part of the first phase of Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan, we are providing immediate assistance to Canadians and businesses, and we will continue to do so in the coming weeks.

*Oral Questions***THE ECONOMY**

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in these uncertain times, we rely on the talent and ingenuity of Canadians across the country.

Canadians understand that we must focus on manufacturing essential products in Canada.

[*English*]

By ramping up production in Canada, not only are we supporting our health care and front-line workers but we are also ensuring small and medium-sized businesses can stay open across the country.

Could the minister update this House on Canadian businesses' response to the government's call to action?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Orléans for her question. In the past few weeks, she has worked hard to stand up for the businesses in her riding.

[*English*]

During these difficult times, we have seen our small business owners put up their hands and ask us what they can do to help. Because of them, our government is investing \$2 billion to purchase personal protective equipment, including things like more masks, face shields, gowns, ventilators, test kits, swabs and hand sanitizers.

We have launched Canada's plans to mobilize industry to fight COVID-19 to ensure that we can quickly produce right here in Canada the things that we need to prevent the spread of the virus. We admire the innovation of our small business owners. This is their trademark and it is why they are the core of our plan. Our businesses are the backbone of our economy. They are helping us get—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

\* \* \*

● (1450)

**FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the forestry industry was in crisis before the pandemic with mills closing down and thousands of jobs lost. If our forestry industry is in jeopardy, the production of medical supplies, toilet paper and other essential products is also in jeopardy.

Has the government analyzed the impact of the sawmill closures on downstream production, such as toilet paper and PPE? What specific measures will the government take to ensure the long-term viability of the forestry sector?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member opposite about how important our forestry sector is. The crisis today reminds us of how essential products of that industry are.

The pulp that is produced by Harmac on Vancouver Island is an essential input into many of the medical goods which are saving lives today. Over the past week, I have had many discussions with leaders in our forestry sector and with the provinces about what we can do to support the industry today.

\* \* \*

**REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the tourism industry has been devastated and the recovery post-COVID-19 is uncertain. Bookings have been cancelled well into 2021. Small businesses in my riding are reeling from inconsistencies in the BDC. SMEs who took out loans just prior to the shutdown and had not opened are expected to pay the interest on principal they are not yet required to pay.

I have two questions. First, will the government consider extending the wage subsidy program for tourism-based small businesses? Second, will the government consider giving SMEs struggling under COVID-19 a break on their interest payments?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we recognize that some sectors, like tourism as well as seasonal businesses, are facing unique realities and challenges of COVID-19. That is why the Prime Minister and our Minister of Economic Development announced an investment of \$675 million in our six regional development agencies and \$287 million in the Community Futures Network. These supports and investments are going to help this very critical sector and those many small and medium-sized businesses across the country.

\* \* \*

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, three weeks ago, the finance minister said that help was coming for the energy sector within hours, and then nothing; crickets. Finally, the government announced something for orphan wells; however, it is woefully inadequate for an energy sector and economy already decimated by the Liberal government.

What will the Prime Minister's plan be when 7% of our GDP, hundreds of thousands of jobs and hundreds of billions of dollars in federal and provincial tax revenues are permanently lost because of his continued indifference and hostility towards Canada's energy sector?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government is far from indifferent to Canada's oil and gas sector. We know how essential the energy sector is to our country and how the energy sector is the source of hundreds of thousands of well-paying, middle-class jobs.

That is why last week our government announced unprecedented support for workers in the energy sector in the form of support for orphan wells. This work is long overdue, and let me point out to the member opposite that it was welcomed by the Premier of Alberta.

\* \* \*

#### AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, grain and oilseed farmers are in a cash crunch crisis as they prepare for spring seeding. They are trying to buy seed, fuel and fertilizer. Most do not qualify for the Canada emergency business account, and the funding to Farm Credit Canada only benefits existing FCC customers. According to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, only 25% of Canadian farmers will benefit from the additional credit to FCC.

Since the government has failed to account for the specific needs of farmers, when will it announce a real plan that will help feed the people who feed this country?

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I can assure members that we are with the farmers. I am speaking to farmers, food processors and retailers every day.

Yes, we have put in place some additional measures through FCC, and more than \$2 billion has been given in terms of loans to support them with their cash flow challenges. We have also announced a stay of default to the advance payments program. As well, we have invested \$20 million through the CFIA to make sure that food safety is assured in Canada and that we support our food processing plants.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

#### PENSIONS

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, workers and retirees are worried. They need reassurance. After the COVID-19 pandemic, we could end up with a bankruptcy pandemic.

With the stock market at its very lowest, virtually all pension plans are in deficit. As it stands now, in the event of a bankruptcy, retirees are last in line.

What does the government intend to do to better protect pension plans?

• (1455)

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question about pensions.

#### Oral Questions

We have implemented emergency measures and an economic plan to help Canadians in the current pandemic. We will be looking ahead to see how we can continue to support Canadians and retirees in the coming weeks.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, if there is one thing that the pandemic reminds us of, it is that when it comes to the economy, nothing is more important than protecting our people. Right now, workers and retirees are poorly protected. If a company goes bankrupt, the banks come first. Even the government comes before them. They risk ending up with meagre pensions even though they paid into them their entire lives. By the time the number of bankruptcies grows, it will be too late to do anything about it.

Is the government going to make pension plans priority creditors?

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, once again, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

For several weeks now, we have been working on implementing an emergency program, an economic plan that will help Canadians and businesses get through this crisis. We will continue to support Canadians and retirees.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Chinese Communist regime repeatedly destroyed and falsified information about the spread of COVID-19, all the while imprisoning whistle-blowers. As a result, a regional health problem became a global catastrophe.

What measures is the government prepared to undertake to hold the Chinese Communist regime accountable?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is a global pandemic. That is why international co-operation and information sharing are absolutely essential. We can all help each other and save lives by gathering and sharing the most accurate information possible. Having said that, decisions about Canada are made by Canadians based on the advice of Canada's world-renowned experts.

Finally, I think everyone in this House appreciates that democracies are transparent in a way authoritarian regimes can never be.

*Oral Questions***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, under normal circumstances, Commons committees have the power to summon witnesses or to send for documents, but the Liberal chair of the health committee has ruled that right now, when his committee needs these powers the most, these powers have been taken away under the terms of the special order adopted on April 11 in this House.

Given this interpretation, will the government amend the special order it is imposing today to allow all currently sitting committees, including the health committee, to have the full powers they normally enjoy?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in a perfect world, the House would be full of MPs. We would be operating normally, and all committees would be operating normally. That is not the case. This is not a normal situation, and that is why we have taken very responsible measures that enable us to meet here from time to time, to continue sitting virtually, to ensure that House committees can continue to function so that my fellow MPs can ask the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance and a number of other ministers questions, and to ensure that all MPs can keep doing their work.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the essential service personnel crossing our land borders to deliver the products we need and provide much-needed health care, including in hard-hit areas like Detroit, Michigan, make us all proud of our fellow citizens. However, Global News has reported, and the CBSA union has confirmed, that there are no health officers monitoring these borders.

Testing must be done to ensure that those most vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 have not contracted this disease. When will the Liberals send health officers to our land borders to stop the spread and protect all Canadians?

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is a very important question because the health and safety of Canadians, but also those men and women who protect our borders, are critically important to us.

I want to assure the member opposite that all steps are being taken to ensure, first of all, the protection of our border services officers so they have access to the personal protection equipment, in particular, that they need to do their job safely. At the same time, I want to assure him, for those essential workers who are crossing each and every day, we are making available to them adequate screening and support through personal protection equipment to make sure that they can do their job safely. I take this opportunity to thank them for their dedication to serving their fellow humans.

• (1500)

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it has been over a month since the world has become deeply engaged with this global health emergency. This government has demonstrated great leadership in putting in place health measures to protect Canadians. We know, though, that these health measures have been difficult on workers and have caused economic uncertainty for Canadian families across the country.

Can the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development update this House on how many Canadians the Canadian emergency response benefit, CERB, has been able to help since its launch two weeks ago?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad to salute the work of the member of Parliament for Fleetwood—Port Kells. As he said, millions of families and workers across Canada are feeling the pain and the suffering that this emergency situation is bringing, and that is why we have also implemented emergency measures. One of them is the Canada emergency response benefit.

I am pleased to report that as of today, a total of 6.7 million Canadians have applied for the Canada emergency response benefit, for a total of 8.7 million applications. Of them, 8.4 million have been treated already.

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**REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, businesses in the north have a very different need from the rest of the country. With a shorter business season and industries like junior mining and exploration, it is clear that the government's one-size-fits-all approach to emergency business measures has, sadly, done little to support our northern economy. The Yukon Chamber of Mines and the Northwest Territories and Nunavut Chamber of Mines, as well as other northern businesses, have said programs like the Canada emergency wage subsidy will not work for the north.

Will the government listen to these leaders and make changes so that our businesses in the north have a fighting chance to survive?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, those businesses indeed are really important to the communities in the north, and indeed to the Canadian economy. This is why we have introduced a number of measures, and one of the measures that we announced just the other day is support through the regional development agencies that will help those businesses in the north, support them in this very difficult time and get them on the road to recovery when it is safe to do so.

### EMPLOYMENT

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, earlier the Prime Minister said that students would be eligible for CERB if they made \$5,000 in the last year. However, to be eligible they would also have to have lost a job due to COVID. The vast majority of students had not started summer jobs when the crisis hit, and as a result are not eligible.

Why did the Prime Minister say that these students would now be eligible? Can the government confirm now that it is going to expand CERB for the benefit of all students?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for highlighting the very difficult times that Canadians, and students in particular, are going through. That is why we have reacted quickly by extending, for instance, student loans for at least six months, removing all interest and all capital payments; that is why we have also introduced the wage subsidy, so that many employers will be able to hire or re-hire students; that is why we also introduced the Canada emergency response benefit, which is helping many students at this particularly difficult time; and that is why we will continue to work very hard to support our students.

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### SERVICE CANADA

**Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, during this difficult time, Canadians are reaching out for answers, clarity and reassurance. My office is receiving hundreds of calls and emails daily with enquiries about government programs. Canadians are very frustrated at not being able to get through on phone lines, and if they do get through, they can be on hold for hours. With enhanced safety measures, grocery stores, pharmacies and banks all remain open to serve Canadians.

Why, during the most needed time, do Service Canada locations remain closed?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we took the decision to close in-person Service Canada centres for the safety of the public in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and also for the safety of our staff. However, we have enhanced and redeployed staff to make sure that there are many alternative modes of service, including on-line and telephone; we have dispatched community liaison officers to the most vulnerable communities in Canada to assure them that we will be there to serve them through other modes of service, as well as through trusted intermediary organizations; and finally, for folks who are not able to fill out those forms even with phone assistance, we will make the extraordinary attempt to have appointments in person.

\* \* \*

● (1505)

[Translation]

### CANADIAN HERITAGE

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, now more than ever, Canadians and the people of Orléans are realizing that art and culture are an integral part of their lives. It is at times

### Oral Questions

like these that Canadians need art and culture the most to lift their spirits during isolation.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell the House about measures the government has taken to ensure that our artists, our creators and our athletes can continue to inspire us and bring us together even while we are apart during this difficult time?

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Orléans for her question.

Even though we must all keep our distance from one another, I know all Canadians understand that our creators and our athletes keep us united and strong at home.

On Friday, I announced a \$500-million investment to support organizations in the arts, sport and culture during this difficult time by meeting their distinct financial needs. Our government is making sure that more jobs are protected, fewer people are left behind and organizations can keep contributing to the sector after the pandemic. Our goal is to make this money available as soon as possible.

I hope to have more details for you soon.

\* \* \*

[English]

### SMALL BUSINESS

**Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Corey Palmer is a small business owner in London, Ontario. Crane Wise Inc. is Corey's brand new business, and he employs five people. Through the pandemic, Corey is keeping his employees on payroll, but because of the overly restrictive rules in the Liberals' wage subsidy, Corey and his employees are being left behind. Universal benefits would help Corey, his staff and so many others. Why will the Liberals not make the CERB universal for everyone in Canada and open up a wage subsidy to help small business owners and their employees through this pandemic?

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. However, we made the CERB decision for two reasons: the first was to get money quickly to Canadian workers and families, as they need it immediately, and the second was to get more money in the hands of those who need it, as opposed to sending a small amount of money to everyone.

*Routine Proceedings*

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, will the government implement an emergency guaranteed livable income so that no Canadian is left behind in this COVID-19 crisis?

My inbox is full of messages from constituents who are not eligible for the programs that have been put out, such as students who are not eligible for these programs and seniors and people on disability who are dealing with a spiked increase in the cost of living. Small business start-ups are not eligible for any of the business programs. Farmers are not eligible for any of these programs. Some restaurants that have just started up are not eligible. I have people who were on sick leave last year who are not eligible for this program because they were not working and did not earn \$5,000.

I have a lot of people who need help and I am wondering when the government is going to help with a guaranteed livable income to help all the Canadians affected by this crisis.

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that yes, a lot of Canadian families, workers and students are facing difficult times in the context of COVID-19, but our government is steadfast in making sure that we deliver help to everyone who needs help, whether through the Canada emergency response benefit, which will enable many workers who have lost their jobs or who have been laid off as a result of COVID-19 to get the help they need, or through the wage subsidy, which will help many businesses keep staff and rehire laid-off staff. As well, there is the help we have already delivered for students, as well as more that we can do as necessary to fill the gaps.

\* \* \*

**SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA**

**The Speaker:** Today we grieve with the people of Portapique in Nova Scotia and with the families of those who lost their lives so tragically through an act of senseless violence.

[*Translation*]

These are difficult times for us all, but, today, our thoughts go out to the families who have suffered the cruelest of losses. May they find comfort in the sadness shared by all Canadians.

[*English*]

I ask all members to rise for a moment of silence.

[*A moment of silence observed*]

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**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

• (1510)

[*English*]

**SHOOTINGS IN NOVA SCOTIA**

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on this day in this chamber as all of us and all Canadians are heartbroken. We are heartbroken for the 18 people confirmed killed in a senseless act of violence in Nova Scotia, heartbroken because the people whose lives were taken away will never be with us again.

Among them was Constable Heidi Stevenson, who died in the line of duty. She was kind and she was gifted. She was great police and she was a great mom. She embodied the values that built this country, values like integrity, honesty, compassion. For her community, she paid the ultimate price, and her service will never be forgotten.

Like Constable Stevenson, many of the victims were also serving their community in the best way they knew how: a teacher, a nurse, a child's grandparent, a parent's child. Who has the words to ease our sorrow? There are no words for the pain their families and loved ones feel today. I want them to know that all Canadians are with them, that this senseless, evil act will not define Nova Scotia, that today all Canadians are Nova Scotians. We share their grief. We are mourning their loss and we will be there for them in the difficult days, weeks and months ahead.

We have 11 colleagues in this House who represent the people of Nova Scotia. They are where they need to be today, with their communities across the province, grieving and supporting them. We stand with them today and every day.

[*Translation*]

It is hard for people to believe that such a tragedy could have happened in communities such as Portapique, Truro or Enfield, in places where people know and trust each other, the kind of place where people do not lock their doors. As Senator Kutcher said this morning, in Nova Scotia, there are not six degrees of separation between people; there are two. Everyone knows each other. Everyone is in shock. As shock gives way to grief, many will be as angry as the families and friends who are mourning the loss of their loved ones, angry that they will not be able to gather together to celebrate the lives of those taken from us.

[*English*]

This has been a heartbreaking year for Canadians. From January onwards, it felt as if every time we turned on the news, we would see reports of violence that could not be stopped, of lives that could not be saved. This horrific tragedy happened at a time when Canadians from coast to coast to coast are making sacrifices to keep each other safe, at a time when they are making the right choices every single day to prevent more heartbreak and more tragedy, so when we awoke yesterday to horrific reports coming out of Nova Scotia, many of us probably asked ourselves, "Just how much more can we take?"

*Routine Proceedings*

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

In our darkest hour, what drives us forward is our shared pursuit of a better future. Our country's very recent history is not without its obstacles or sadness. Three years ago, we mourned the loss of six innocent people who were murdered while they were praying in Sainte-Foy. We did not let that act of hatred prevent us from seeking a better future.

[*English*]

Two years ago, we mourned a young woman, a little girl and the many injured on Toronto's Danforth Avenue while they were simply enjoying a summer evening in the neighbourhood. We did not let that stop us from a common pursuit of a better tomorrow. Over this past year, we have seen far too many communities shattered, far too many families torn apart by violence and by acts of hate. We will not let that stop us from our common pursuit of a better tomorrow.

In our darkest hours, we have always answered hate with hope. We have chosen unity over division, because no one man's actions, no matter how cruel, how destructive or how evil, can build a wall of despair between us and that better tomorrow.

Today is a heartbreaking day for all Canadians, but while we are united in our grief, we must also be united in our resolve to uphold our values, to live by the example of those who left us too soon, to let hope, love and compassion guide us during the difficult days, weeks and months ahead, because our better tomorrow will come. It might not be this week or even this month, but it will come.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Conservative Party of Canada, I would like to express our heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathies to the families and friends of all those who have lost their lives in the senseless attack over the weekend in Nova Scotia.

[*Translation*]

My thoughts and prayers and those of the entire official opposition are with their families and loved ones.

[*English*]

These are just a few of the Canadians killed during this most atrocious shooting in Canadian history: Constable Heidi Stevenson, a 23-year veteran of the RCMP, a mother of two and a loving wife, killed in the line of duty; Aaron Tuck, Jolene Oliver and Emily Tuck, a family of three; Heather O'Brien, a licensed practical nurse; Kristen Beaton, a continuing care assistant; Lisa McCully, a teacher at Debert Elementary School; Sean McLeod, a corrections officer at Springhill Institution; Alanna Jenkins, a corrections officer at the Nova Institution for Women; Tom Bagley, a neighbour who reportedly died trying to help.

[*Translation*]

My thoughts, my heart and my prayers are with the loved ones of those who lost their lives in this unspeakable attack.

[*English*]

I would also like to wish a speedy recovery to Constable Chad Morrison, who was injured.

What has unfolded is incomprehensible. Nova Scotians, and indeed all Canadians, have not only lost incredible members of their communities, but they have lost a sense of security.

[*Translation*]

In the face of this immoral and vicious crime, one question we ask ourselves is why. How could this have happened? Why did it happen?

[*English*]

This tragedy is a painful reminder of the risks that all of our first responders take to keep Canadians safe. As they put on their uniforms and brave the unknown, Canadians rest easy knowing that they are protected in their communities.

[*Translation*]

Every day, our brave law enforcement officers put their lives on the line, and their families bear the burden. I would like to take a moment to thank all of the first responders who are dealing with this difficult situation with professionalism, and my thoughts are with those who have lost colleagues.

• (1520)

[*English*]

I would like to thank them for putting their lives on the line in service for all of us.

All Nova Scotians reeling from this attack should know that our nation stands with them in this moment of darkness. Our hearts are with them, and we will be here to support them in the difficult days, weeks and months ahead. Even though we cannot gather in person during these difficult times, they should know that they are never alone.

It is a wonderful truth that Nova Scotians are great storytellers. I know that this will be not only a story of great loss, but a story of love and strength. Canadians are known for their resilience and for their love of country, family and community.

Let us rely on that community now and in the weeks ahead to celebrate the beautiful lives lost and give each other much-needed strength to carry on. Let us honour the memory of those lost by sharing their stories and remembering their names.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, we are living in times often marked by sadness, but the tragedy unfolding in Nova Scotia is fraught with anger and disbelief.

*Routine Proceedings*

We experienced this with the Dawson College shooting, the École polytechnique massacre and the Quebec City mosque shooting, all acts associated with a time when there was heightened fear of terrorist activities. We even experienced this right here, on Parliament Hill, and in several places across Canada. One thousand violent acts are committed every day. A more violent person assaults another person and, all too often, commits murder.

We have to move beyond the rhetoric about the exception, the isolated gesture and madness. No matter the reason for murdering another, it is a definitely an act of madness. Each individual, each incident, is one too many. I believe that we must change our relationship with violence. We will definitely come back to that. We have to change our relationship with instruments of violence.

In the meantime, this does not change the tragedy that has befallen the entire population of Nova Scotia and anyone who is compassionate. All I can do is extend our most heartfelt expression of support and encouragement to all those people and to all whose fear is heightened by every tragedy.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to express the sadness we all feel with respect to the senseless violence that took place yesterday in Nova Scotia. Every victim is a tremendous loss for their family and community.

We remember RCMP Constable Heidi Stevenson, who lost her life protecting others. Many were also injured, including a member of the RCMP. The families are going through tough times, which are made more difficult because they may not be able to visit their loved ones in hospital because of COVID-19.

• (1525)

[English]

In the past several weeks, we have seen the courage of first responders in the face of COVID-19, those who are running to harm's way to keep us safe. Now we have an example of an RCMP constable who did exactly that. She ran toward the fire, ran toward harm, to save the lives of others, and in saving the lives of others, she lost hers.

She was a 23-year veteran of the RCMP, a mother of two young children. When we think about her sacrifice and we think about this senseless violent act and how it has hurt an entire province, I want to send a message on behalf of all of us here and all New Democrats that though Nova Scotians are grieving, they are not grieving alone. An entire nation grieves with them.

While we often look to the south and think of mass shootings as a reality for the States but not something that happens here in Canada, we have to acknowledge that it happens here as well. École Polytechnique was an example of a mass shooting that targeted women, violence against women. Now, we do not know the details, but there is clearly a problem with violence, and we have to do something about it.

I agree with my colleague who raised the point that it is no longer enough to have rhetoric about the senseless violence. We have to do something about violence. We have to get at the root cause. We have to understand where the gaps occurred that allowed

this to happen and what we can do to prevent this from ever happening again in our country.

While today we mourn with our brothers and sisters from Nova Scotia, while we mourn as a nation, tomorrow we also have to talk about how we can move forward together to prevent this type of harm from ever happening again. The only way to truly remember and honour the lives that were lost is to commit to changing the future so this never happens again.

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Green Party of Canada, I would like to extend our deepest condolences. Our hearts go out to each and every Nova Scotian and to all those across Canada affected by this horrific tragedy.

Premier Stephen McNeil has said, “We will not be defined by this tragedy, we will be defined by how we deal with it.” Provincial interim Green Party leader Jo-Ann Roberts added that, “As Nova Scotians, as Canadians, we will reach out to each other, we will support the families of those who died. We will make muffins, sing and say prayers, we will provide counselling, we will love, and we will remember.”

Nova Scotia is a province where there are close connections. Everyone will be affected. My colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands, a former Nova Scotia resident and proud Cape Bretoner, knows a family member of one of the victims. Nova Scotians have had their sense of security and safety shattered, but they are strong and resilient and will support each other through this.

In our mourning, we are united. Our hope for a brighter tomorrow is rooted in knowing that we are greater than this tragedy. Our love and prayers go to the loved ones of the 18 Nova Scotians who have died.

I am impressed with the way Nova Scotians are responding to this tragedy, showing love and support even in this time of COVID-19 physical distancing. As a musician myself, I am feeling the comfort from shared music on the virtual Nova Scotia kitchen party. Citizens are lining the highway, while staying two metres apart, leading to the local RCMP station. A virtual vigil is being planned for Friday, art is being shared and friends and loved ones are calling each other and supporting each other in so many ways.

The names of the deceased so far are Lisa McCully, a teacher; Heather O'Brien, a care aide; Kristen Beaton, a care aide; Sean McLeod and Alanna Jenkins, both corrections officers; Tom Bagley, a volunteer firefighter; Constable Heidi Stevenson of the RCMP; Emily Tuck and her parents, Jolene Oliver and Aaron Tuck; and Greg and Jamie Blair.

This is a poem that was written by Sheree Fitch, who lives in the area of the tragedy:

*Government Orders*

**QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

● (1535)

[*English*]

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE AND COMMITTEES**

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

**The Speaker:** I understand we have had some changes. I wish to inform the House that, because of the ministerial statements, Government Orders will be extended by another 22 minutes.

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Speaker:** All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Speaker:** In my opinion the yeas have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Speaker:** Call in the members.

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

*(Division No. 21)*

**YEAS**

Members

Alleslev  
Brassard  
Godin  
Lewis (Essex)  
Patzer  
Scheer  
Shipley  
Zimmer — 15

Baldinelli  
Cooper  
Kmiec  
Motz  
Reid  
Schmale  
Williamson

**NAYS**

Members

Bibeau  
Boulerice  
Fortier

Blanchet  
Duclos  
Freeland

Because We Love, We Cry  
Sometimes there is no sense to things my child  
Sometimes there is no answer to the questions why  
Sometimes things beyond all understanding  
Sometimes, people die.  
When it hurts like this my child  
When you are scared, suffering, confused  
Even if we are not together  
Together, let us cry  
Remember there is so much love  
Because we love, we cry.  
Sometimes the sadness takes away your breath  
Sometimes the pain seems endless, deep  
Sometimes you cannot find the sun  
Sometimes you wish you were asleep.  
When it hurts like this, my child  
When you are scared, suffering, confused  
Even if we are not together,  
Together, let us cry.  
Remember there is still so much love  
Because we love, we cry.  
Pray that I had answers, child  
Pray this wasn't so  
There are impossible things, child  
I cannot bear for you to know.  
When it hurts like this, my child  
When you are scared, suffering, confused  
Even if we are not together  
Together, let us cry  
Yes, there is still so SO So much love  
Because we love, we cry.

This will be one of the hardest days for so many. I think of the children, but we are all children. I think of how all of us are traumatized and shocked. I think of West Grey and Fredericton. Let us go gentle into this day as we learn more, and learn more names of loved ones and realize who we know, but we are each other.

\* \* \*

● (1530)

[*Translation*]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT**

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-242, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (illness, injury or quarantine).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to table the bill to amend the Employment Insurance Act with regard to illness, injury or quarantine.

On February 19, the House of Commons unanimously voted in favour of a motion calling on the government to increase the special employment insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in order to support people with serious illnesses, such as cancer.

In light of the current crisis, I fervently hope that the government will support the amendment proposed by the Bloc Québécois and the member for Salaberry—Suroît to help sick workers suffering from serious illnesses.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

*Government Orders*

Guilbeault	Hajdu
Holland	Hussen
Lalonde	Larouche
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Manly
Mathysen	McKenna
Miller	Ng
Rodriguez	Singh
Ste-Marie	Trudeau— 22

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the amendment lost.

• (1540)

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Speaker:** In my opinion the nays have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Speaker:** Call in the members.

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 22)*

## YEAS

## Members

Bibeau	Blanchet
Boulerice	Duclos
Fortier	Freeland
Guilbeault	Hajdu
Holland	Hussen
Lalonde	Larouche
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Manly
Mathysen	McKenna
Miller	Ng
Rodriguez	Singh
Ste-Marie	Trudeau— 22

## NAYS

## Members

Alleslev	Baldinelli
Brassard	Cooper
Godin	Kmieciak
Lewis (Essex)	Motz
Patzer	Reid
Scheer	Schmale
Shiplay	Williamson
Zimmer— 15	

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to order made earlier today, the House will now proceed to statements by ministers.

The hon. Minister of Health.

\* \* \*

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by joining my voice with that of our Prime Minister and offer my sincere condolences to the people of Nova Scotia, following this weekend's horrific events. My heart goes out to the families, friends and colleagues of the victims. It is beyond comprehension that the people of Nova Scotia should have to deal with this mass shooting and the loss of life while coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.

This pandemic has changed how we live, how we work and how we interact with each other. It has created great uncertainty and hardship for many Canadians and indeed people all around the world.

Over the past few months, we have seen a steady increase in the number of positive COVID-19 cases, especially among vulnerable Canadians, including our beloved seniors who live in long-term care homes and the workers who support them. As Dr. Tam, our chief public health officer, reported earlier today, there are now 36,216 confirmed cases in Canada and 1,611 deaths. Though these are numbers, behind each number is a story of a life, a family and a journey interrupted.

To respond to a crisis of this magnitude, the Government of Canada has taken a whole-of-government approach that allows us to act quickly and decisively while remaining flexible so we can adapt to emerging science and the changing circumstances. As Minister of Health, I will speak to some of the actions we have taken from a federal health perspective.

Since the onset of this pandemic, the Public Health Agency of Canada has been providing Canadians with clear, concise and timely information about how they can protect their health and our broader health care systems. The agency bases its information on the latest scientific evidence, and this advice can and does evolve as we learn more about this new coronavirus.

Our dedicated website, [Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus), has had more than 100 million visits since its launch, and the toll-free COVID-19 information line has fielded more than 100,000 calls. We also launched the Canada COVID-19 app, which to date has been downloaded more than 430,000 times. This app includes a link to the recently launched wellness together Canada portal. This mental health and substance use support portal provides Canadians with access to tools to support their mental health and well-being, allows them to obtain credible and reliable information about mental health and substance use and even acts as confidential mental health and substance use support services.

From the beginning, Canada has recognized the need to work closely together with our global partners and the need to support international organizations like the World Health Organization and other international bodies. Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's public health officer, is an expert adviser to the World Health Organization committee and is in almost daily contact with her international counterparts. I am very grateful for her leadership as well as that of Dr. Njoo, the deputy chief public health officer. Our public health officials, including both public health officers, are working day and night, seven days a week, and we should be extremely proud of our public service now, as it is working harder than it ever has to support and serve Canadians.

The federal health portfolio has also been working hand in glove with provincial and territorial governments to coordinate our response across a wide spectrum of issues, including the purchase of personal protective equipment, essential drugs, medical devices and ventilators. To ensure that we have the right tools to fight COVID-19, Health Canada streamlined the regulatory process to expedite the review and approval of needed drugs and medical devices in Canada. If shortages do occur, these amendments give us the flexibility to quickly facilitate rapid access to an international supply of health products in exceptional circumstances.

I also put into place an interim approach that allows Health Canada to facilitate access to hand sanitizers, disinfectants and other kinds of personal protective equipment to respond to the unprecedented demand for these products. In addition, I signed an interim order that has enabled the authorization of new diagnostic test kits. This has greatly sped up access to COVID-19 test kits, which allows the provinces and territories to identify new cases of the virus. As of today, April 20, Canada is testing an average of 20,000 more patients per day across the country, with a total of more than 550,000 people tested to date.

It is important to note that Canada's total case counts have been increasing more slowly than many other countries'. Canada has had the opportunity to watch and learn from the experience of other countries, the approaches they have taken and the lessons they have learned. This has allowed Canada to act early and decisively as the situation has evolved globally and at home.

● (1545)

As the world struggles to understand and control COVID-19, it must also understand so much more about immunity, mutation and many other scientific aspects. In that regard, our government is investing heavily in research. More than \$52 million was earmarked for the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and this money is supporting 96 projects that are working on countermeasures to COVID-19. This is part of our \$275-million commitment to enhance the capacity to advance work on antivirals, develop vaccines and support clinical trials and manufacturing in Canada.

This is just a snapshot of some of the actions that have been taken to protect the health and safety of Canadians from COVID-19. As members can imagine, an incalculable amount of work is going on behind the scenes with our many partners across all orders of government. All of this work will deepen our understanding of the disease and give us the scientific evidence and data that we need to

### *Government Orders*

inform our public health responses, decision-making and planning at local, national and international levels.

I can assure members that the Government of Canada will continue to do everything in its power and jurisdiction to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic; protect the health, safety and well-being of Canadians; and help guide them through these difficult and uncertain times.

It is up to all of us to ensure that Canadians come through this crisis healthy and strong.

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today, MPs from across the country once again demonstrated the importance of continuing to hold in-person sittings.

We put questions to the Prime Minister and his ministers. Even though we did not get all the answers we were hoping for, we exercised our right as parliamentarians and got to fulfill our role of representing Canadians. We, the opposition members, were not elected to blindly support the government. We play a crucial role: namely, to monitor the government, hold it accountable, and secure better results for Canadians.

[*English*]

Canadians have serious questions about the government's response to the pandemic thus far. My constituents were shocked to learn that the government destroyed stockpiles of medical supplies without replacing them. After all, the Prime Minister has warned of a second and third wave of this pandemic. Are we going to be ready for that? Has the government learned from its mistakes? Does it have a plan in place to get Canadians through the crisis?

Canadians across the country have been following physical distancing guidelines and are trying to keep up with the government's ever-changing recommendations, because they were told we needed to flatten the curve in order to give the government time. However, while announcements keep getting made, the government has not been able to provide clear timelines. Provinces have received defective masks and contaminated test kits. New benefits get announced, but the eligibility criteria keeps changing. The government seems so focused on fixing its own mistakes that it does not seem to have a plan to restart our economy when the health crisis passes.

[*Translation*]

The United States has already announced a plan to reopen its economy. Other countries are doing the same. Yes, we must address the very real and immediate danger of COVID-19, but not while ignoring the other impacts of this shutdown.

*Government Orders**[English]*

We cannot do this without recognizing the impact that it has had on Canadians suffering from other serious health situations whose surgeries and treatments have been postponed, not without recognizing the mental health toll that this is taking on Canadians across the country and not without recognizing the long-term impacts of a historic economic recession.

What is the government's plan to help Canadians who are facing bankruptcy? No amount of government aid can fully replace the power of the Canadian economy. For example, the Connexus Credit Union has already received 700 applications and processed \$28 million in loans for businesses. Only a quarter of that is eligible for complete forgiveness. Those businesses will need to make around \$21 million collectively in profits by the end of the year in order to avoid paying interest on their loans. It is nearly May. How should they plan to do that with a government that has ordered the shutdown to continue?

Will the government finally accept our proposal to rebate the GST to small businesses that it has collected in the last year so that they have the immediate cash flow to pay their workers?

*[Translation]*

Canadians deserve to know what the plan is to get this country back to work. Will the government continue to listen exclusively to the recommendations of the World Health Organization or will it start to look to countries that are listening to their own experts and finding creative solutions to minimize the spread of infection and enable society to function much more freely?

• (1555)

*[English]*

From the beginning of this crisis, the Liberals have been slow to react, slow to close our borders, slow to put in place enhanced screening measures at airports, slow to admit that masks could prevent the spread of this disease, slow to work with Canadian companies to retool and start producing much-needed medical supplies, slow to increase the wage subsidy and devastatingly slow to offer any help to the energy sector. The government was consistently slow to react in the early days of the crisis and Canadians have paid the price. It will be disastrous if it is slow to put a plan in place for Canada to come out of this crisis.

*[Translation]*

Let me be clear. The Conservatives do not want everything to go back to normal today. We are seeing signs of hope only in a few areas of the country. We must continue to help Canadians deal with the health impacts of this crisis, but that does not mean that the government should not come up with a plan to get the country back on track when the time comes.

*[English]*

The government cannot revitalize the economy on its own. That will be up to Canadians: the business owners who are just trying to scrape by until they can reopen and the employees hanging on until they can go back to work. It is hard-working and innovative Canadians who will get this country and our economy back on track, and

the government's job is to put them in the best possible position to do just that.

That means listening to Canadians, working with opposition parties, implementing our constructive solutions and actually taking a team Canada approach. The men and women working in our health care system, like the nurses, doctors and suppliers, and everyone working in essential services, like the truck drivers, pharmacists and grocery store workers, have all gone above and beyond to allow us to stay as safe and healthy as possible. They have bought us time, and I hope the government will use it well.

Today is another difficult day for Canadians across this country and they deserve a plan for a better tomorrow.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, 19% of Quebecers are 65 years of age or older. I want to focus on them. I do not want to create what I feel is an arbitrary distinction within this group, meaning I do not want to create one category for those who are between the ages of 65 and 75 and another for those who are over the age of 75, which is what the government's approach seemed to be during the election campaign and even after that.

That 19% of the population has not gotten much attention since the outset of the crisis, but today we saw that, although enthusiasm may be lacking, honourable compromises are possible. Let us try to do just that. Let us work together to come to a compromise, a position, an idea, a series of suggestions that will help seniors.

I reminded the Prime Minister a little earlier that we published a series of measures about two weeks ago. I wrote to him directly to ask him to support seniors in Quebec and Canada. These measures basically fall into six different categories.

The first was to increase the old age security pension by \$110 a month. That was our position during the election campaign, but now we are prepared to make it a temporary measure.

The second measure is an improvement to the guaranteed income supplement. The third measure, which my colleague from Joliette touched on a bit earlier, would protect private pension plans. Some businesses that have pension plans are particularly vulnerable. Some may not make it through the crisis. We hope that is not the case, but we need to be realistic. There is a serious risk that business ownership will become concentrated. There will be some takeovers that are not necessarily hostile but that may be facilitated because businesses are financially vulnerable. When businesses are driven to the brink of bankruptcy as part of these takeovers, the new owners will try to avoid having the pension plans managed by the company be treated as preferred creditors. This means that the people who contributed to these plans for years will lose all or a large part of what they are owed. We need to prevent this.

People with pension plans are required to withdraw a certain amount every year. Since most plans are currently seeing negative returns, it seems cruel to tell these people to reduce even further the capital on which they are supposed to build their own future.

There is the issue of drug prices and also the issue of isolation.

Nowadays, everyone recognizes that going online at anything but high speeds is a bit like riding a bicycle on the highway. We all recognize that high-speed Internet has become an essential service. In the past, when we talked about an essential service, we would say that something is essential if everyone needs to have it. When the power goes out, everyone agrees that that is a problem. No one would accept that a community should be deprived of something essential like electricity. Running water is an essential service, and we keep insisting and telling the government that it must ensure that all indigenous communities have access to it. Telephones are also widely considered to be essential. Today, high-speed Internet falls in that same category. Seniors, who are often isolated, need it at least as much as everyone else. In our measures, we are calling for high-speed Internet to be deemed an essential service and for the isolation of seniors to be broken.

Speaking of isolation, I want to come back to the main measure, which concerns the old age pension. One hundred and ten dollars a month is not a lot, but for everyone who gets it, particularly in the regions of Quebec, it supports purchasing power that is used immediately and spent in the community. Lord knows that seniors are not able to set any money aside given what they receive from the government.

• (1600)

It supports the regional economy. It is a way of addressing the isolation felt not only by seniors, but by people in every region right now, as we all well know.

Of course, we might ask whether these measures, or this measure in particular, are not too expensive. I will provide a few numbers. All the measures the government has taken to release cash total roughly \$270 billion. The government's direct spending to support the economy is somewhere around \$107 billion. An annual increase in the old age pension for all seniors over 65 in Canada would cost \$4 billion. If we make this a temporary measure, like the other measures, we are talking about \$1 billion.

One billion dollars is not nothing. No one is saying that it is not a lot of money, but we have to compare that to the \$250 billion in released cash flow so far. That \$250 billion went everywhere except to seniors.

The government cannot even tell us what it will cost to pay for the measures it has announced. To say that the measures it has brought in are insignificant would seem ungrateful, but that is a drop in the bucket. Twenty-five dollars a month per senior in a couple—frankly, I am not sure that would even cover the change in the price of vegetables. We need to do better and we need to do more.

I invite the government to provide funding for this measure by following the suggestions made by our NDP colleagues. If the government would do something to stop corporations, and particularly the banks, from engaging in tax avoidance, my goodness, it would

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be able to fund this measure several times over. It might even be able to fund all the measures.

People say that tax avoidance is not illegal, but that does not mean it is not immoral. Tax avoidance costs the Canadian government billions of dollars, and that money could be used to support this critical effort for seniors.

This morning I wanted to talk a bit about science and research—which does not happen very often—but I ran out of time. It was brought to my attention in recent days that every year, in the month of March, there is a deadline for something called the competitions. It is not a lottery; it is more like submissions. Research centres submit projects, certain applications are accepted, and funding is distributed among the recipients in all regions of Canada and Quebec.

Last month the competitions were simply postponed or cancelled, and this was a serious blow for the research community. In addition, research centres are not eligible for either the Canada emergency response benefit, which people cannot access, or the wage subsidy, because in some cases, these are considered to be public organizations. Research and science, which will be so crucial, are therefore being overlooked to some degree. Targeted support must be provided to innovative companies.

I will always come back to these themes, time and time again. Considering all the measures implemented to support the economy and the purchasing power of Canadians and Quebeckers, it is hard to understand why the government did not choose to specifically help the most fragile and most vulnerable among us in terms of both health and finances, in other words, our seniors.

I therefore call on the government and all parliamentarians to be particularly sensitive to seniors, because we in the Bloc Québécois will not back down on such an important issue.

• (1605)

[English]

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to begin by talking about how the COVID-19 crisis has gripped this entire country. Coast to coast to coast, we are grappling with its impact. In the face of this really difficult challenge, I have been inspired by the courage, compassion and kindness of Canadians. I want to focus on one area in particular where we need to do more than just say thanks. We have heard governments thank front-line health care workers, but those health care workers need far more than just our thanks.

Expressing gratefulness for front-line and essential workers is important, but not nearly enough. What these workers need is to be assured that they have the equipment to stay safe during this pandemic.

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I am talking about the people who are delivering our groceries, those who are working in grocery stores, those who are in the transportation sector, those who are delivering meals. I am talking about the cleaners and janitors, all the people who are helping to ensure that our workplaces and places of shopping are clean, who are doing their part to prevent the spread of the illness. There are the health care workers in personal care homes, the workers who are providing support to those living with disabilities. All of these workers from all sectors, including health care, transportation, food and janitorial services, need more than just thanks. They need the protection to stay safe while they are doing their work. They need access to personal protective equipment of the highest quality to ensure their safety is protected.

We also need the federal government to act now for essential workers who are on the front lines, whether they are delivering food services or providing financial services in credit unions. We need to ensure that workers on the front lines receive a courage bonus, a top-up to acknowledge the hard work they are doing in this crisis, and the risk and the danger they are faced with. We have called for this previously and we are calling for it again. We need to ensure these workers receive extra support during this time. While it is essentially important that those who cannot work receive access to financial supports like the CERB, we need to also help out the people who are still working and helping communities in such dramatic and important ways.

It is also important to note that for some of these workers, they are not working because of choice, because they have no choice. They need to work to be able to provide for themselves and their family. That is why it is crucially important they get extra financial support.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

There are many stories of essential workers who do not have access to personal protective equipment or who are not protected by health and safety measures. Some of these workers have already lost their lives to COVID-19. They died because they went to work.

This crisis is highlighting the defects in our existing system. The most important job in our society, the job of taking care of other people, is also one of the lowest paid.

[*English*]

That is a shocking reality that we have to come to grips with. Those who are providing some of the most essential services are among the lowest paid.

I want to point to a particular group of workers who are working very hard during this time with inadequate protections, and in some cases, very insufficient work conditions.

Jeff Bezos, the owner of Amazon, takes \$250 million a day of profit. Nobody earns that much money. He takes it from the people who work for him. He is the richest person on the planet and his workers do not have paid sick leave. He asked for public donations. Madam Speaker, imagine having the audacity to ask for public donations to cover workers who have to be isolated, and he is the richest human being on the planet.

Amazon workers report that they do not have protective equipment and some workers have been fired for speaking out, but this is a company that the Liberal government is giving Canadian tax dollars to. Instead of using our own public service, our postal service, the government is going to this private company with a very poor track record of treating its workers fairly.

I want to talk a bit about long-term care. In the face of the COVID-19 crisis, long-term care homes are now at the centre of the desperate loss that we are seeing. The impact to human lives, and the loss of lives, has been concentrated in the most dire way in long-term care homes. Our seniors, people who have contributed their whole lives and have sacrificed their whole lives, are in long-term care homes where there are deplorable conditions. These are seniors who should be treated with respect and dignity and they have not been treated that way. Nowhere is the desperation of the situation more clear than in long-term care homes.

[*Translation*]

The federal and provincial governments have known for years that our long-term and home care systems are inadequate to provide safe, dignified care to our seniors. Some of our most vulnerable citizens, who cannot defend themselves, live in long-term care homes. Even with dedicated, compassionate staff, many members of our long-term care system simply do not have the time or resources required to do work that they know is necessary.

[*English*]

Federal and provincial governments across the country, particularly Liberal and Conservative, have allowed for-profit operators to run these homes that cut corners and put families at risk. These for-profit businesses have a motive of making profits, so they are not concerned with the highest-quality care. They are concerned with the highest return on their investment. That means people suffer, and we are seeing it across the country.

New Democrats have talked about the importance of head-to-toe health care coverage, and it is nowhere more glaring and important than when it comes to the treatment of seniors. That is why we have called for national standards to be established across the country. Once those national standards are established, we need to roll long-term care homes into our Canada Health Act so that there is federal accountability for the treatment of the seniors in these homes.

I want to point out that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has laid bare the inequalities in our society and made very clear the inadequate social programs. It has become clear that Canadians want to take better care of one another, but the existing programs and our existing health care have not been sufficient. It has not been good enough, and this is not by chance. This is a decision made by governments to starve public health care of the crucial funding it needs.

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In closing, what type of Canada do we want to build? Let us not return to the old normal. Let us not go back to normal. Let us move forward to a new normal, and let us ask ourselves what that new normal looks like. It looks like health care that is well funded, that covers people from head to toe. It means social programs that take care of each other, and taking better care of each other by expanding EI to something broader and more universal. It means making sure paid sick leave is not a luxury but a right that all workers enjoy. It means better wages for the essential services and those working on the front lines to ensure they get paid in a dignified manner with a good salary that allows them to earn a good life.

I believe we can come out of this crisis stronger than before. We need to take care of each other. That is what Canadians have told us. That is our job. If we make the right choices, we can build a brighter future and more justice and equality for all Canadians.

• (1615)

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Madam Speaker, this is a very surreal time here in the House of Commons with just a few members. I had a very strange trip across the country to get here. I had the choice of taking a 16-hour red-eye trip overnight sleeping on the plane or dividing it into two days and going through airports that were empty.

The Green Party represents 1.1 million voters, so it is important I am here to represent those voters. On average, 387,000 voters voted for one MP. If we break down those numbers to other parties, we see 38,000 for the average Liberal and 50,000 for the average Conservative. I have a lot of people to speak for, so I am here to speak for those who voted Green.

We need to respect the directives of the health authorities, and we need to respect our health care workers and our front-line workers who are risking their lives to fight this pandemic. We have been working with the Liberal government behind the scenes, not playing politics during this pandemic but contacting ministers and parliamentary secretaries and bringing forward issues.

We have seen some of these programs come forward, and we have put forward ideas about how they need to change and where they are missing the mark. We have seen those changes come, sometimes not as quickly as we would like and sometimes not all that we want, but we are working together. We are all in this together.

Grocery store workers, front-line health care workers and nursing home workers all do essential work that cannot be done remotely. In addition to that, none of these workers has to go through two or three airports to get to work like I did. Corporations all over the world, including some of the biggest in the world, are working remotely. Classrooms are holding meetings on Zoom and teachers are able to give their students a chance to speak and interact. We should be able to work remotely, as well.

MPs who have limited access to the Internet could work remotely from a hotel or motel close to where they live and cut down on their travel across the country. We would save some money as well. MPs have worked effectively to this point to provide oversight, yet some of the members of the House are trying to instill fear and create a problem that does not exist.

We have a way to hold the government to account, and all one needs to do is watch the videos of the finance committee meetings to see that.

This pandemic has laid bare many of the problems we have in this country. I have spoken about the conditions in a seniors home in my own community, the Nanaimo Seniors Village. Thankfully, that operation was taken over by the Vancouver Island Health Authority, so it was able to fix the problem before the pandemic happened.

That seniors home was flipped multiple times by private operators. Every time that happened the workers were laid off, the union was decertified and then the workers were rehired at lower pay for part-time jobs with no benefits. Those workers had to go to work at multiple care homes. We are seeing this situation play out in different places across the country, and what has now happened is that those workers are spreading COVID-19 from one seniors home to another, creating a tragedy that was completely avoidable.

Students are falling between the cracks, students who did not have work and were hoping to work this summer. Students who are graduating and had jobs lined up are not eligible for any programs. Seniors and people with disabilities are facing higher costs due to COVID-19 and are not receiving the help they need.

Microbusinesses and new businesses are falling between the cracks. A microbrewery in my community started up in November. It does not meet the \$20,000 payroll requirement for last year, but it paid \$13,000 in payroll in December, it paid \$13,000 in January and it paid \$13,000 in February. These people are going to lose their life savings and hard work, all of their commitment, because there is nothing to help them.

• (1620)

I have a constituent in my riding who is a senior who has worked her entire life. Last year she was off for eight months due to an operation. She got back to work in January but does not qualify for the CERB because she did not make \$5,000 last year, even though she earned more than \$5,000 every other year of her life and paid taxes. Now she needs support but there is nothing there for her.

We have a solution to that. What we are seeing is the glaring inequality in our communities. We have a crisis of homelessness in my community and in communities across the country. A guaranteed livable income is a way that would help to make sure that no Canadian ever falls below a standard of living that gives them a place to live, good nutritious food to eat and quality of life.

*Government Orders*

We could do an emergency guaranteed livable income and send a cheque to every Canadian and use it like reverse billing where those who do not need it return it. In the end, next year in tax season those who did not need it and did not return it would be taxed back on it. That would mean that we do not miss these people. I can give a long list of people who have been missed by these programs. We need to get our economy up and running again, and we need to do it safely.

We should be looking at the example of Taiwan. My brother lives and works in Taiwan. It was in the top 10 countries affected by COVID-19 in February. It had the first presumptive case the same day that Canada did in January. When people saw the virus starting in Wuhan, Taiwan ramped up production in their factories. They used the military to help ramp up production of PPE in their factories. They stockpiled personal protective equipment.

My brother missed two weeks of teaching at school. His wife missed no work at all, so two weeks after the winter break the students all went back to school with masks on. My brother teaches class with a mask on. He goes to the pharmacy every week and he gets three masks. That is his ration. Taiwan banned hoarding and made it so that people who were price gouging would face seven years in jail or a \$700,000 fine. They took it seriously. Taiwan is now 106th on the list of countries affected by COVID-19. It has had 422 cases and six deaths. Canada is number 13. We have 36,000 cases and 1,600 deaths.

There will certainly be time, at the end of this crisis, for analysis and lessons learned. The government has been humble in acknowledging that its original response was not perfect, and it solicited advice from opposition MPs to make the programs better. Many Canadian individuals and businesses are still falling between the cracks.

Now is not the time for finger pointing and partisan bickering. We need to continue to focus on flagging the groups of individuals and businesses that are not covered by the COVID-19 assistance programs and make sure they get help.

We face an even larger crisis: the climate emergency. We have all acknowledged that. Scientists and epidemiologists have warned for years that climate change will create the conditions for pandemics. Wildfire season has already begun in B.C. Flood preparations are happening around the country. We need to listen to the scientists in this case as well and take action to avert disaster.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown us that we can do that. We can all work together. We can act. Our future, and the future of our children and grandchildren, is dependent on our action.

We have also seen that funding in health care is very important. We need to make sure that our health care system is robust, and that our infrastructure for health care is robust. It is important.

There are many lessons we can learn from this difficult situation. Right now, those are lessons that we should not forget as we navigate our way through this crisis and hold fast to the belief that we can emerge from it better together. Together we can do this.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Pursuant to order made earlier today, the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

(House in committee of the whole to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms. Alexandra Mendès in the chair)

**The Assistant Deputy Chair:** Before we begin this debate, I would like to remind hon. members of how the proceedings will unfold. Pursuant to an order made earlier today, during the proceedings of the committee no member will be recognized for more than five minutes at a time, which may be used for posing questions to a minister of the Crown or a parliamentary secretary acting on behalf of the minister.

[*Translation*]

Members may split their time with one or more members by so indicating to the Chair. Furthermore, because of the fast-paced debate in committee of the whole, we will suspend proceedings every 45 minutes to allow employees who provide support for the sitting to replace each other safely.

[*English*]

The debate will end after 27 interventions or when no member rises to speak. We will now begin the debate.

I invite the hon. Leader of the Opposition to take the floor.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Madam Chair, I wanted to point out several shortcomings in the government's wage subsidy program. There are many reports from small businesses across the country: family businesses that receive dividends, self-employed people who own and operate businesses, seasonal businesses and project companies that receive lump sum payments.

Is the Prime Minister going to continue to broaden the eligibility criteria to look at other measures so that these struggling businesses will not have to lay off Canadian workers?

I would like to point out a very specific example. Brandt Tractor is a company in my riding and a great Canadian success story. They purchased another business in October 2019, so they are not able to show a 30% drop in revenue specifically because they now have on their books the operations from the company that they purchased. However, if we take all of the activity together it is far beyond a 30% drop, yet because of the eligibility criteria, they will be unable to keep hundreds of workers on the job.

Will the Prime Minister continue to look at these types of cases to make sure this program catches as many people as it possibly can?

• (1630)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Madam Chair, when this pandemic hit, we realized we had to move extremely quickly to get help out to Canadians, so that they would be able to take the actions necessary to isolate themselves, to stay at home and to prevent the spread of this virus. In order to do that, we needed to make sure we sent supports to Canadians so that they could do that and not have to go to work in risky positions if they did not absolutely have to in order to buy groceries and pay their rents.

We also recognized, however, that this slowdown, or almost stoppage, of the Canadian economy would need to end and we would need to come back as quickly as possible. That is why we made the decision to keep people tied to their jobs as much as possible with the wage subsidy. It would allow employers to keep people on the payroll so that when we come back to restart and reopen, they would be able to get to work almost right away.

We moved very quickly and we moved very broadly, but in both the CERB and the wage subsidy, we recognize that there is a need to improve, to tweak and to fill gaps. Even though we helped the vast majority of companies and individuals right away, we realize we need to keep refining and improving to make sure that everyone who needs it gets these programs. That is why I thank all members for making suggestions as we improve the programs.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Madam Chair, I hope the Prime Minister will look at the situation that I have raised and address it, because hundreds of employees across the country will be able to continue to work if Brandt Tractor, specifically, is able to enrol in the program.

When the government talks about making changes to programs that have already been announced, I would like to draw the Prime Minister's attention to the disincentive that is built into the emergency response benefit. By bringing in the ceiling at 10 hours a week, there are many examples where people have a barrier to taking available work. We believe that the CERB should be designed in such a way that there is a gradual elimination of the benefit as people work more and more, so that Canadians are always better off taking available jobs.

Now that the program has been designed and help has gotten out the door, will the Prime Minister look at making this program more flexible, so that Canadians can work more hours while receiving this benefit?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Madam Chair, yes, we will. Indeed, we already expanded from the proposed 10 hours a week, which was about \$500 a month, to \$1,000 a month that would be eligible for someone to receive from work while still collecting the CERB. This was because we recognized that many jobs were in situations of reduced hours. Many people work in a gig economy, where they want to be able to continue to work a bit, but they need the reliability of the CERB because so much else has shut down.

### *Government Orders*

That is an example where we did hear the concerns that people have. Now they can earn up to \$1,000 a month and still collect the CERB, because I entirely agree that the more we keep people connected to the workforce and connected to their professional obligations and responsibilities, the quicker and the better we will come back after this challenge.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer:** Madam Chair, this afternoon I asked the Prime Minister whether or not he could confirm that three planes that were sent to China to pick up medical equipment were forced to return empty last night. He seemed to indicate that was the case.

I would like to find out if he could explicitly confirm that, and if he could inform the House as to whether the reason the planes were forced to return to Canada empty was because of the actions of the Chinese government, or if he could provide the House with any other explanation as to why Canada was not able to procure the equipment that the planes were sent to obtain.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Madam Chair, over the past many weeks there have been significant challenges with disrupted supply chains around the world. We remember the 3M issue with the United States. There have been other issues in procuring the necessary equipment from China, such as delays and shipments that got derailed. We know that there are going to continue to be challenges. At the same time, we have been able to procure enough PPE for the provinces up until this time, and we are now seeing Canadian companies go online.

Yes, there have been disruptions in the supply chain because of global competition, because of actions of different people and countries. At the same time, we are ensuring that we are doing everything we can to get the necessary equipment to our front-line workers, and so far we have been able to manage it.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Madam Chair, we all know that leaders in certain areas have the habit of telling their people not to come to them with a problem but rather with a solution to the problem. I am going to try to do just that.

I raised the issue of seniors many times. So far, they have gotten disproportionately little attention from the government. We estimate our request will cost about \$1 billion, while the government has committed to spending over \$250 billion in a way that seems acceptable to us overall. We helped determine how that money would be spent.

Today there is new interest in an initiative that was launched in Denmark and that has supposedly been adopted by Poland and the United Kingdom in a way that fits their own taxation and legal systems. It involves making businesses that are registered abroad ineligible for various forms of government assistance. Such an initiative would make it possible to save a lot of money that could be used to fund the assistance we want to give seniors. That seems to be an option to consider.

*Government Orders*

The number is so big that no one can agree on how much it would be. We are talking about billions of dollars, money that legally does not come back to Canada. The fact that this tax avoidance is legal does not make it right.

As he prepares to spend tens of billions of dollars of Quebecers' and Canadians' money, did the Prime Minister consider this course of action?

Will he say that none of our measures are accessible to businesses that are registered abroad and consequently engaging in tax avoidance?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Madam Chair, at every stage of our reflection, we have remained focused on Canadians, on the workers and families who might be affected by a loss of revenue because of COVID-19.

We did not ask whether people work for small businesses or large corporations, for local businesses or multinationals. We did not judge Canadians on whether they work for a company considered morally acceptable or for a firm that sells tobacco or cigarettes. We are not passing any moral judgments on workers. We are simply saying that if they have lost their jobs because of COVID-19, we will help them.

That approach is what allowed us to bring in the Canada emergency response benefit and the wage subsidy across the country to provide Canadians with the assurance that they can stay home, get their groceries and support their families. That has been our priority from the very beginning.

Yes, tax avoidance is a serious problem. That is why we have invested billions of dollars in the Canada Revenue Agency. We are working to introduce enhanced measures to tackle those issues.

At every stage of the fight against COVID-19, we have tried to prioritize help for workers, regardless of what kind of work they do.

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet:** Madam Chair, I have given the Prime Minister ample opportunity to do the right thing. I have made it as easy as possible for him. All he had to do was take that opportunity. The solution was right in front of him. I am therefore astounded to hear him say that the government will do nothing to ensure that the businesses it is helping act morally or ethically.

For the most part, we all agree that some of the money should go to businesses, but there are “businesses”, and then there are “businesses”. Some businesses, some small local businesses, fight for survival every day and are having a lot of trouble. Other businesses have no trouble at all. They pay little or no tax in Canada but pay tax elsewhere because it is cheaper. Can those businesses be excluded because they do not need help?

We are going to have to get out of this at some point, but we cannot ask taxpayers to pay more because some businesses are not paying. That seems like a basic ethical issue to me. The scandalous part is that it is legal. Our tax system makes tax avoidance legal, but over the course of the crisis, we will be billions of dollars short, and that money will make its way to tax havens.

Does the Prime Minister agree that it is irresponsible not to get legitimate cash from those places?

• (1640)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Madam Chair, the reality is that we have chosen first and foremost to look after the workers who have lost their jobs, no matter the company they work for. I have been very clear: If people abuse the system, if they take advantage of the system to obtain money we are offering but that they are not entitled to, there will be very serious consequences.

I do not believe that the member for Beloeil—Chambly is suggesting that we not help workers if they have the misfortune of working for an unethical company, albeit it a legal one. We do not want to punish workers based on the company they work for. They have families and communities that depend on them. We will replace that work. We are focusing on the workers and not the company.

Naturally, there are concerns about companies that do not do the right thing and we have measures to address this. However, in such critical times, our priority is to help all Canadians who have lost a paycheque because of COVID-19, no matter the nature of the company they work for. That is our priority.

[English]

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Madam Chair, New Democrats have been calling on the Liberal government to help families that are struggling to pay their rent, as well as small businesses unable to pay their rent. It is encouraging to hear that the government is working with the province to deliver some relief for rent for commercial companies. We will wait to see the details.

However, will the Prime Minister commit today to including residential rent in additional to commercial rent, because so many people are struggling, whether with their businesses or their families, with paying their rent?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Madam Chair, we recognize the challenges that far too many Canadians are going through right now. That is why we put in place historic measures around a wage subsidy and around the Canada emergency response benefit that gives \$2,000 a month to people who have lost their paycheques due to COVID-19. We recognize there is more to do. We recognize there are challenges that people are facing.

We are also a government that respects provincial jurisdiction. We see that in certain areas of jurisdiction, including the relationships between renters and landlords, the province has far more tools and far more responsibility directly over what we are doing. We have made a proposal to the provinces to work with them on helping with commercial rent, because we recognize the impact on the economy and that it is a significant and uneven weight for the provinces. Many provinces are directly stepping up on support for renters in a way that is appropriate for their jurisdiction. The federal government is there to support in a broad range of ways, but I can also highlight with tremendous pride that the provincial governments are doing their part as well.

We look forward to continuing to work with a historic level of co-operation and collegiality with all provincial governments across the country, as we look to plug gaps and meet the challenges faced by Canadians through this unprecedented crisis. We will continue to work with the provinces in order to make sure that we get through this right and come back roaring strong.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Madam Chair, I am going to keep this question short, so I would respectfully ask that the Prime Minister also keep the response short.

Because they are struggling as a result of COVID-19, 81% of Canadians believe that banks should be forced to lower their interest rates. There are powers that we have at the federal level that have express jurisdiction over banks. Is the Prime Minister prepared to use those powers to waive interest rates on credit cards and personal loans, put a pause on mortgage payments and negotiate for a pause on rent as well?

• (1645)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Madam Chair, we have been in close contact with the banks to coordinate a response to COVID-19. They have committed to working with Canadians to find solutions, including up to a six-month mortgage deferral and a reduction in credit card rates for impacted customers.

The Minister of Finance will continue to engage with the banks. Our goal is to make sure the banks and Canadians have the flexibility needed to get through this time. We have seen leadership from the banks. We need to see more, but we are working with them to get that.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Madam Chair, with all due respect, we have significant federal powers, and asking nicely simply is not working. Will the Prime Minister commit to using the powers we have to force banks to stop charging exorbitant interest rates on credit cards and personal loans? Will the Prime Minister ensure that we use our powers federally to get a pause on mortgage payments so we can get a pause on rent and help families out?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Madam Chair, the big six banks announced that they would temporarily reduce credit card rates for Canadians in need. The Canadian Bankers Association said, “COVID-related mortgage deferral is available for an indefinite period and customers do not face a deadline for having to seek relief.”

[Translation]

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Madam Chair, not a day passes without hearing a tragic story about a Canadian who is unable to pay his rent or mortgage. Although some assistance is available, it is not enough for many Canadians. Last week, experts before the Standing Committee on Finance were very clear: The government must do more to help people pay their rent.

Will the Prime Minister commit to extending his rent assistance program to all Canadians in need?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Madam Chair, we have taken measures to help Canadians who lost their jobs, including through the Canada emergency response benefit. We are helping workers with the wage subsidy, which allows them to keep 75% of their salary for a maximum of \$847 a month, and keep their job. These two

### Government Orders

measures are having a huge impact on our economy during this crisis.

However, we know that Canadians are facing other challenges, including paying their rent. In our party, we respect provincial jurisdictions. We know that housing is a provincial jurisdiction and that the provinces are taking the necessary steps. We will be there to help and encourage them, but we respect their jurisdiction.

[English]

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** Madam Chair, I would like to start by thanking the Minister of Foreign Affairs for all the work he has done in repatriating the Canadians who have been stranded abroad as a result of this crisis.

To that end, we know there are significant challenges in India with bringing people back. Violence is increasing and people are finding themselves in really dire situations, not only in the major cities but in the countryside as well. It has been a challenging situation to get those people back. I am wondering if the members opposite could provide some insight on what additional flights there will be and what kinds of things we can do to get those who are still stranded in India back as soon as possible.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Chair, as the member knows, this is the largest and most complex repatriation effort that Canada has undertaken in recent history. To date, working with all members of the House, because all of us have constituents who have been touched by this, we have facilitated the repatriation of over 19,000 Canadians, on 144 flights, from 72 countries. We continue to work with our international partners to get as many Canadians home as we can.

I want to emphasize one thing to all those Canadians who are able to come home, which is that everyone is subject to a mandatory quarantine order for 14 days upon the return home. We want those Canadians to come home. As Canadians, we all have a right to return to our country, but we have to be very careful that those returns do not compromise the health of Canadians.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Madam Chair, I wonder if the Deputy Prime Minister could speak directly to the increase in the number of flights that are on the priority list for India and how many people she thinks will be able to come back from India in the near term.

• (1650)

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, I am not going to offer precise numbers of how many people will come back from India. As the member opposite knows, it is a very difficult situation in that country. It is difficult for Canadians; it is difficult for Indians. We are very aware of the situation of Canadians there and are working to safely return the people we can. I want to emphasize how important it is that anyone who comes back must obey quarantine orders.

*Government Orders*

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Madam Chair, as the new cases of coronavirus are beginning to stabilize, Canadians are looking to the next step. The government has outlined that it does, in fact, need a national plan to outline what those reopening steps might be. I am wondering if the government could identify when that national plan will be coming forth.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Madam Chair, we share the member opposite's vision of getting Canadians back to work, but we will say that it has to be done with the health and safety of all Canadians at the base and foundation of that work. Obviously, it is not a decision that the federal government makes alone. There are components of that plan that are within our jurisdiction, but it is important that we work with our provincial and territorial counterparts to make sure that, whatever the plan is, it ensures that we truly have safely passed this first wave of COVID-19 and that we have the foundation of safety available to manage future waves or future outbreaks.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Madam Chair, we recognize that we need to put many things in place, but we need to know when there will be a plan and what the criteria for that plan are. The sooner we understand what those criteria are and what the plan is, the higher success rate we will have.

When will there be a plan?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Madam Chair, "When will all this end?" is a question that I hear almost every day from multiple partners, constituents, friends and family. Certainly, we are working very diligently with our provincial and territorial counterparts to make sure that whatever plan we put in place, it is actionable and feasible, and that it has at its foundation the health and safety of all Canadians. Only then will we be able to ensure that our economy is strong and can survive future potential outbreaks of COVID-19.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Madam Chair, I asked when there will be a plan. Many other jurisdictions have a plan, and they are further behind the curve than we are. We are late in the need to have a plan. Will the plan include testing? As they say, we need more testing, so how will the government have more testing?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Madam Chair, absolutely, the plan will include ramping up of testing. As members know, Canada is one of the leading countries in terms of our testing per capita, but so much more needs to be done. We have been approving new testing options for provinces, territories and local governments, but it will also include future research on serology so that we understand this virus and we understand the questions around immunity that it poses.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Madam Chair, this afternoon during question period, the Prime Minister talked about the Canada summer jobs program in which there are apparently 70,000 new jobs.

How does the government explain that more jobs are being created in the Canada summer jobs program when, according to Service Canada documents that included a breakdown of the expenses, 50 jobs were lost?

I will give the government a hint. It is important to realize that they went from 50% to 100% of the jobs paid in the municipalities,

but they have the same budget. They are supposedly handing out new money. They claim that many new jobs were created, but that is not so. I would like someone to explain that to me.

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Madam Chair, we have made a number of changes to support students through the Canada summer jobs program at this time. We understand the difficulties they are facing with respect to the economic challenge of COVID-19, and we want to make sure that we support them adequately, which is why we have increased the wage subsidy through the Canada summer jobs program to enable students to access 100% wage subsidy while working for private businesses in the context of the Canada summer jobs program. We expect that, through this measure, the Canada summer jobs program will be taken up by more employers, and they will be able to honour their commitments to provide even more support for students at this time.

• (1655)

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Madam Chair, I appreciate my colleague's response, but it did not answer my question. There are fewer, not more, jobs. It is the same envelope, unless we have last year's information because we are in the opposition.

Can my colleague tell us whether the Canada summer jobs program has more money and more jobs?

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Madam Chair, again I want to thank the hon. member for his focus on this issue and his approach to students. I want to assure the hon. member that increasing the wage subsidy from 50% to 100% for employers would certainly ensure that more employers are able to take advantage of that opportunity to bring onto their employee list more summer students, and it would enable them to offer them employment in a way that is easier for them, as we are subsidizing those wages. We expect that through the measure of increasing that wage subsidy, more and more employers would look at that as a viable option and hire more students.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Madam Chair, I have other questions, so I will conclude that there are neither more jobs nor more money.

I have a question about the CERB. I know that this program was implemented quickly, because of the circumstances, but that has created some problems, in particular for garages in Quebec, who opened up last Wednesday to change tires. Gardening centres also opened. Construction started back up this morning. The problem is that many workers do not want to go work because of the CERB.

Does the government have a solution to help our businesses, which provide jobs? Unfortunately, low-wage workers are not motivated to work and contribute because of this program.

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Madam Chair, that is another important question from the hon. member. I want to assure him that the Canada emergency response benefit was meant exactly to provide support to workers who were laid off, or even to workers who are not EI-eligible and who have seen their jobs literally disappear, to be able to find the support they need at this difficult time.

In addition to that, we have gotten feedback from Canadians who felt that they could not qualify for the CERB, either because their EI benefits ran out in January or because they were working but were actually making less than what they would make if they were on the CERB, and we responded. We said that we need to do more to include those folks, and we have. We have taken those steps, and we will continue to listen to Canadians and take that input.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Madam Chair, of the \$305 million that was announced for the indigenous community support fund, \$15 million, or less than 5%, was allocated to urban indigenous organizations. With over 60% of indigenous people in Canada living in urban centres, can the government explain this split?

**Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Madam Chair, indeed, \$15 million of the community support fund was reserved for urban indigenous initiatives. The initial set of funding was intended to go out to first nations, Inuit and Métis in the most expeditious manner that we have at Indigenous Services Canada. We have therefore asked, in a call for submissions, for amounts to be put forth to our department so that we can do an immediate triage and attempt to push out as much money as we can to urban initiatives. Fifteen million dollars will not be enough, and we will be moving even more quickly to do a triage of the other initiatives in order to move quickly with further funding to those initiatives that have been put forward to our department.

• (1700)

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Madam Chair, it is our understanding that funding for off-reserve and non-status indigenous groups has not been approved for release by Indigenous Services Canada. When will this money flow?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Madam Chair, these are initiatives that are part of a number of ministries across our government. We are working, as part of the call for submissions for urban indigenous and off-reserve groups, to put forward those submissions. We work with them on a case-by-case basis, and we will be moving quite quickly to get those initiatives out. We will work specifically to prepare for and deal with the COVID outbreak, particularly in urban settings but also for off-reserve communities.

Again, they do not naturally fit into the funding models that we have within Indigenous Services Canada. I have asked my team to be flexible, because we are talking about dealing with an epidemic and it does not discriminate as to whether an indigenous group is on or off reserve.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Madam Chair, which off-reserve and non-status indigenous groups were at the table making the decisions on how to best allocate those \$15 million?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Madam Chair, this is not a question of being at the table; this is a question about engaging with my ministry, en-

gaging with our staff to express need and to let us know what communities need.

Again, these are emergency funds, emergency resources, that we are pushing out. There are also resources that money cannot necessarily buy, such as deployment or surge capacity, a number of multi-faceted elements that we deal with as we look at the epidemic curve if and when it hits an indigenous community. It is really done on a distinctions basis, and as a community expresses need, we will deal with it as quickly as we can.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Madam Chair, just to clarify, did the government consult at all with the three First Nations Fiscal Management Act institutions prior to designing the \$336-million indigenous business fund?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Madam Chair, indigenous businesses are the backbone of indigenous communities and their economies. Indeed, they are the backbone of the Canadian economy.

On the weekend the Prime Minister announced \$306 million in support for indigenous businesses in forms of loans, repayable loans, emergency support. These are initiatives that fill a gap that the announcements we made before have not necessarily been able to address.

I would note that a number of indigenous businesses in particular are run by women. They are smaller in nature and are in need of the support of the Government of Canada. We will not leave them behind.

I would like to thank NACCA for its support. The 59 aboriginal financial institutions that we will flow these funds principally through will be the principal administrators of them.

If the member opposite has a particular group that he would like to see funding for or that is in particular need, I would ask him to contact my office, but more importantly, the aboriginal financial institutions that serve these businesses so well.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Madam Chair, the indigenous services minister stated that his department sent packages of PPE supplies to first nations across Canada. However, there are still first nations communities that are reporting little access to this life-saving equipment.

Can the minister report on how many first nations communities are still waiting for their PPE?

*Government Orders*

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Madam Chair, that is a very important question and we need to frame the premise. Indigenous Services Canada has said that it will leave no community behind. To date, we have delivered over 550 PPE orders and equipment into communities, ones that come principally on demand from those communities. They are in addition to any PPE that is provided by the provinces or the territories, or in the case of British Columbia, from NHA. It is not an absolute number, but it is a very important indication of the amounts we have deployed into communities.

We have a limited appreciation of knowing what the burn rate is on that personal protective equipment, so communities are engaged with my staff, and indeed my staff is working around the clock to get that equipment out as quickly as it can. Again, if a community needs PPE, it should engage directly with me if it does not feel it is getting it from other sources.

**Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC):** Madam Chair, yesterday the Government of Australia joined with the United States in calling for an independent international investigation into China's handling of COVID-19.

Does the government support such an investigation, and if not, why not?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Chair, let me start by pointing out that the coronavirus is a global pandemic which knows no ideology and in order to best fight that pandemic and best protect Canadians, it is essential to work with and share information with all countries where that pandemic exists. Having said that, it is also very important for all of us as members of the international community to share as much information, and information which is as accurate as possible, in order to protect our own people and also in order to protect the rest of the world.

I hope that all members of this House would agree with my next statement. I believe very firmly that it is in the DNA of democracies to be far more transparent than any authoritarian regime can ever be. That is one of the reasons I believe so strongly in democracy, and I think that is why we are here in this House this afternoon.

● (1705)

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Chair, is the government satisfied with the WHO's response to COVID-19?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Madam Chair, we remain firmly confident in the advice of the officials who have served us so well during this time of pandemic here in Canada, and of course we engage closely with the World Health Organization. Dr. Theresa Tam is a special adviser to the special committee on COVID-19.

It is really important that for any outbreak we have an international global response. In fact, the World Health Organization has helped to coordinate that response for other infectious diseases that have recently threatened global health. Therefore, we continue to work with the organization to ensure that we combine the research and evidence and data that we, as Canadians, are collecting with that of the world so that we can come to a conclusion of this particular illness.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Chair, the Deputy Prime Minister is quite correct about the importance of sharing information as we fight COVID-19, and yet the jurisdiction that has been really the gold standard in terms of fighting COVID-19 has been Taiwan and it has been shut out of the WHO.

At the end of January, I posed a question for the Prime Minister, asking whether the government supported Taiwan's inclusion in the international discussions at the WHO about COVID-19. The Prime Minister answered in the affirmative. When will the government put those words into action and formally request Taiwan's participation?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Madam Chair, we have discussed over and over the importance of ensuring that no country is left behind in the response to COVID-19. Yes, the Prime Minister responded in the affirmative to that question, and I remember it well, that all countries should have a voice with the WHO and that we will need to work together as a world.

As long as there is one case of COVID-19 in any country, none of us is safe. That is why it is so important that we have a collaborative approach through international bodies like the World Health Organization and through strong partnerships like the G20 and G7 and many other organizations, such as CEPI and Gavi. These are international organizations that work on infectious disease protocols and vaccine production. These are really important international bodies because they help our world coordinate responses to illnesses which, as we can see, know no borders.

**Mr. Michael Cooper:** Madam Chair, the WHO in March issued a statement indicating that it was up to member states to determine the status of Taiwan. Again I repeat: Why will the government not put its words into action and formally request Taiwan's participation?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Madam Chair, there is evidence informed by the research that is being coordinated through the solidarity trials of the World Health Organization. We are a partner in those trials, as the member knows, which are seeking vaccines and other antidotes to COVID-19. It is very important that the world work together and that all countries have an opportunity to participate, not only in the research but also in the benefits of that research.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Madam Chair, the government announced for the energy sector \$1.72 billion for orphan well remediation, an emissions reduction fund and a business credit availability program. The first idea actually comes from Bill C-221, which is the MP for Lakeland's bill. A Conservative MP suggested it. The problem is the PBO's costing for that original private member's bill was \$30 billion upwards of private sector investment. Seeing that WTI is trading today as low as minus \$40.32, when can Albertans expect the rest of the energy subsidy help?

• (1710)

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Chair, the long-awaited announcement of \$1.7 billion for an active well cleanup and \$750 million for methane reduction are very positive steps for the energy sector for Alberta, Saskatchewan and B.C. They do not need to take my word for it. I am going to quote Premier Jason Kenney, who said, "Thank you to the Prime Minister...for announcing \$1.7 billion to accelerate cleanup of orphaned and abandoned wells in Canada's energy sector. This is critical to getting thousands of people in the energy sector back to work immediately."

The premier is right, and we are glad to be contributing to that.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Chair, I will finish the quote. The premier also said that was a good first step. To paraphrase, Sonya Savage, Alberta's energy minister, said on CTV News, "I'd like to see the rest of the package now, please, as well."

As I said, WTI is trading at minus \$40.32. That was the bottom. This will reset tomorrow, which means the May futures prices will be around \$20 starting tomorrow.

One of the things the energy sector and workers are expecting and have heard from the Prime Minister and his ministers is on the liquidity program provided through the BDC. It is aimed at small and medium-sized businesses, but the BDC does not list criteria size on its website or anywhere else.

What are the parameters to ensure that outcome that small and medium-sized oil and gas companies can access the help that they need?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Madam Chair, the BCAP that we have put forth provides government guarantees to Canada's financial institutions, banks and credit unions, and are absolutely available to Canadian small and medium-sized businesses of all sectors. These are not only the \$40,000 interest-free loans that are available, but indeed loans that go up to \$12.5 million are available to Canada's small and medium-sized businesses, including those in the oil and gas sector.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Chair, with all due respect to the minister, she did not quite answer my question. I was asking the criteria for size. The American payroll wage subsidy program lists a small business as 500 employees or less. Everything is bigger in America it seems.

Again, for these BDC loans for small and medium-sized businesses that small and medium oil and gas companies want to access, what is the criteria for size? Is it wages? Is it revenue? Is it an FTE count? I would like to know the number, please.

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Madam Chair, of course, for the small business loan of \$40,000, as members already know, it is a payroll size of \$20,000 to \$1.5 million. That is the eligibility criteria for that category of loans. For other loans that are available, they are up to \$12.5 million, and one can go to the financial institution and get access to that funding.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Chair, another part of the announcements was that the BDC said it would only issue loans to operators that were financially viable prior to the current economic environment. I would like to know from the government what day it used to determine the prior financial viability.

It is minus \$40 for WTI with an expectation that the price will continue to slide, and just to remind the government, Alberta's Premier Jason Kenney did mention that this year there was the full expectation of a negative price for Western Canadian Select. If we have negative pricing for WTI, we will have negative pricing for Western Canadian Select. Therefore, when is financial viability determined? On what date is that determined?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Madam Chair, it is really important for us to support all small businesses across the country, including those very important businesses in Alberta in the oil and gas sector. We want to make sure that those businesses are absolutely supported through the lending program. We have unleashed enormous liquidity into the marketplace, and we want to make sure that those businesses also get access to that liquidity through financial institutions.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** Madam Chair, the Canadian north has had many challenges. We have heard over the last number of months promises made by the government that it is going to help our northern communities, but it simply has not been the case. For example, many of these businesses that operate in the north do this solely by hiring contractors for their labour.

Can the minister tell me if the Canada emergency business account will be modified to take into account the special needs that businesses in the north have?

*Government Orders*

• (1715)

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Madam Chair, absolutely, we are continuing to do the work. We are listening to businesses all over the country, particularly the businesses that are in the north. We are continuing to do this work, which is not done yet, to make sure that businesses get the cash flow support they need during this difficult period.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Madam Chair, many businesses across the north have very different needs than the rest of the country, from short seasonal work to exploration work that does not always generate revenue right away. We have made the Minister of Finance aware of these concerns.

When will the Canadian emergency wage subsidy be amended to consider the needs of the north?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Madam Chair, the Canadian emergency wage subsidy is, of course, available so that we can help keep our businesses and save our jobs. We know that businesses are much better primed for recovery when a business and its employees are together, which is why we have implemented a program to provide a 75% wage subsidy.

I want to remind everyone that the wage subsidy is there to help those businesses that have seen a loss in revenue. For businesses in March, it was 15%, and for April and May, a decrease in revenue will mean that one can get access to the emergency wage subsidy.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Madam Chair, I thank the minister for highlighting the very reason I am asking her to fix it. Our companies do not qualify for it based on that reason.

Airlines in the north are critical for essential needs like food and medications. Can the minister please tell me what special considerations are being taken to ensure that these northern airlines are able to continue their important work that is specific to so many of these remote communities that rely on them for their very survival?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Chair, the member opposite is quite right. In our conversations with the premiers of Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, the need for support for small northern airlines has absolutely been emphasized.

As the member opposite knows, some of these communities are fly-in, fly-out communities and are dependent on airlines for their food. Some of the business operations of those airlines are compromised because of travel restrictions, including the very tight and, I would say, very admirable restrictions these northern communities have introduced to protect themselves. For that reason, last week we announced a significant support package for the north, in part specifically to support airlines.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Madam Chair, the U.S. duties on softwood lumber cannot be disbursed because they are under dispute, as ministers know. This only creates billions in held-up capital and also makes it harder for lumber companies to operate in this current situation. If lumber companies fail, then pulp mills will close and access to chips at a time when pulp products are needed for both PPE and consumer paper products like toilet paper.

Has the government approached the U.S. about releasing this money?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, those duties are indeed a real issue for the softwood lumber industry, which is going through a very difficult time. The member is right to point out how much we need that industry for its raw materials for PPE and toilet paper. It is great that Canada produces it.

We are in what I would say is very regular discussion with the U.S. about our trade dispute, and we continue to win cases.

We are also talking with leaders in the industry about ways we can support the industry.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer:** Madam Chair, our defences in the north need to be upgraded, and need to be upgraded now. The North Warning System is outdated and experts are reporting that our long- and short-range radar is essentially obsolete.

Can the government tell Canadians if there are any plans to modernize this important defence system?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, that is another excellent question. One of the things I would say has been happening in recent days and weeks as we have been working with our North American partners on the border relationship has been a heightened appreciation on both sides of the border of the extent to which the security of Canada and the United States is dependent on our working together and our NORAD relationships.

Therefore, I would say that that question is very much on the agenda and is being discussed very positively with our neighbours.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Madam Chair, I realize that managing this crisis is a challenge, and I commend the government's measures in support of Quebeckers and Canadians.

I do want to point out some grey areas in these measures that are making life difficult for many of my constituents in Shefford. There is one situation that is left out from the CERB for self-employed individuals. I had a call from a self-employed worker who was supposed to start offering dance classes this summer, but they have all been cancelled. She did not earn \$5,000 last year and is therefore not eligible for the CERB.

How is she supposed to survive?

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I understand the concerns of the hon. member. It is an important question.

We are always taking feedback on the CERB. We have already heard from folks who were working but not making as much as they would make under the CERB, so we have expanded eligibility to include folks who are working but earning less than a thousand dollars. We have also included folks whose EI had run out in January.

We will continue to listen to Canadians to include as many people as possible and get the help that they need at this difficult time.

[Translation]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Madam Chair, I could tell you about another case.

I got a call from a retiree whose pension is so meagre that he has to supplement it by working a part-time job. He lost his job, but he had not reached the threshold of \$5,000 in annual earnings. His income has therefore taken a drastic hit, so much so that he is struggling to make ends meet. Today, people have been talking about improving seniors' purchasing power, and this is an example.

What is being done for all those in similar situations?

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I thank the member for her very important question.

We want seniors to know that they are not alone. We are making sure that we include everyone in the emergency programs we have implemented.

With regard to seniors' financial security, our government has taken several new measures: introducing the extra GST credit payment for low- and modest-income Canadians, which amounts to close to \$400 for single individuals and \$600 for couples; reducing required minimum withdrawals from registered retirement income funds by 25%, which will preserve RRIF assets during a volatile market; deferring any new balances due until August 31 and extending the deadline to file income taxes to June 1; and making an investment in the United Way, food banks and other charities to help seniors get the supplies they need, such as groceries.

We know that there is still more work to do. We are going to work with all members of the House of Commons and various seniors advocacy groups to keep supporting seniors.

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Madam Chair, there is another case from the tourism industry. Two employees of the beautiful Maplewood Manor in Waterloo, the owner and the operator, pay themselves dividends instead of salaries. All events scheduled for the summer of 2020 have been cancelled, a loss of \$60,000. They cannot get the \$40,000 loan, and they do not want it anyway because they do not want to pay a loan with a loan. They cannot get the Canada emergency response benefit; it would not really help their business anyway.

This manor is considered a jewel of the Eastern Townships' tourism industry.

• (1725)

[English]

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Madam Chair, we know that sectors such as tourism, as well as seasonal businesses, are facing the unique realities and challenges of COVID-19. That is why our government announced additional supports just last week through our regional development agencies, as well as through the Community Futures Canada network, so that we can help these businesses in that sector, as well as some of the businesses that operate in rural Canada. These are targeted measures that are going to protect Canadian jobs and support these very important small and medium-sized businesses that play such a key role in the local economies. We want to make sure that these businesses in the tourism sector are indeed supported.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Chair, the crisis that we are going through also presents opportunities for transformation and profound change. Everyone is working hard and pitching in to find solutions and get through this together. Of course, I am thinking of those who work in the health, agriculture and food industries, as well as truckers, among others.

Everyone is making an effort, except for a few big corporations that cheat and do not pay their fair share. They hide their millions and their profits in the Cayman Islands or Barbados. These big tax havens are costing us billions of dollars at a time when we are in dire need of these resources to be able to provide services and fund all these new programs.

There are people who have set up small parallel systems and do not pay their taxes in Canada. The good news today is that two countries, Denmark and Poland, have announced that no company that hides its profits and millions of dollars in tax havens will get any help from the government. The NDP believes that this makes sense in the current circumstances.

My question is simple. If Denmark and Poland are able to do it, why would Canada not be able to do it too?

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

The government has invested billions of dollars in fighting tax avoidance and tax havens, and we will continue to do so.

*Government Orders*

In fact, we have made a choice. We have chosen to create an emergency economic plan to help workers and Canadians in this crisis. We have created a number of programs, we have expanded them, and we will continue to improve them in order to ensure that we put workers and Canadians first.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Madam Chair, what I understand is that they are turning a blind eye.

This system is legal and they will not touch it, even though they have the opportunity to do so, and as we have seen in other jurisdictions, this would be the time and the opportunity to do so.

There is a whole group that has been somewhat left out right now, and that is students. We know that the NDP has been talking about them a lot lately. The needs are in fact starting to become dire. Some people are having trouble paying their bills. Obviously, if the Canada emergency response benefit had been universal, the problem would have been solved right from the start. That is not the case right now, and I want to pass on a fairly simple request.

One of the criteria to qualify for the CERB is having made at least \$5,000 in the last 12 months. If scholarships or loans and bursaries counted as eligible income for students toward the \$5,000, this would solve the problem for thousands of people.

Is the government considering this solution?

[*English*]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for highlighting the plight of students in the context of COVID-19. We want to make sure that we support students at this difficult time. A substantial number of students would actually be eligible for the CERB, as they made a minimum of \$5,000 last year in employment income.

However, we have already taken steps to ensure that the ones who are not eligible for CERB are supported in another way through the enhancement of the Canada summer jobs program, increasing the subsidy for employers in the business community to consider hiring Canada's summer job students by increasing that subsidy to 100%, lengthening the time period for the Canada summer jobs program itself, and continuing to listen to students to find other ways to support them.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Madam Chair, I recently heard quite a troubling story.

The person who told the story does not qualify for the CERB. He is unemployed, and he does not qualify for employment insurance either. He lives on social assistance. He gets \$700 per month, and rent costs him \$600. He has \$100 left to live on every month. Luckily, he has friends and family. If the benefit were universal, he would not be in that situation.

There is something else that can be done, something else we have been asking for. The federal government could suspend mortgage payments. That would provide relief to this individual's landlord, and then a temporary suspension or reduction of rent pay-

ments could be negotiated, thus enabling the individual to buy groceries.

[*English*]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Madam Chair, that is another important question around protecting homeowners and renters at this difficult time. We moved very quickly, and in fact, effective March 15, we made sure that we rolled out, through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, supports for homeowners in the form of an option to defer mortgages.

We have also supported Canadians to be able to pay their rent and to put food on their table through measures like the Canada emergency response benefit and increasing the Canada child benefit.

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Madam Chair, I was very interested in what the Deputy Prime Minister had to say at the start of this session on sharing information and the fact that transparency is the DNA of any democracy, including ours.

I want to go back to a question that I asked earlier today in question period regarding the medical intelligence, MEDINT cell in our country's military intelligence, which recognized in early January that the deadly novel coronavirus was in China and that it had the potential to spread across the world. Presumably, when that report was written, it would have gone to the chief of the defence staff, the Minister of National Defence, and I expect that the Privy Council Office would have briefed the Prime Minister.

What date was the Prime Minister briefed by the Privy Council Office with respect to this report?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I want the member opposite to know that since December 31, we have been aware of the outbreak from Wuhan, China. In fact, on December 31, Dr. Tam was alerted to the outbreak of illnesses, and at that time we still did not know what we were dealing with regarding this new virus on the scene. By December 31, Dr. Tam began notifying members of the Canadian Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health. By January 2, all members of the CCMOH were advised of the outbreak of illness by Dr. Tam, and by early January I was briefed by officials on the status of this new virus.

We were aware of this virus very early on and have been actively working on Canada's response to it.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Madam Chair, my question was not about Dr. Tam. My question was about the Privy Council Office notifying and briefing the Prime Minister that this report exists within DND. When did that happen?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Chair, as my colleague has said, the government has been closely tracking the incidents of the novel coronavirus and its spread. The Public Health Agency of Canada alerted all provincial health authorities on January 2, and on January 14 the Public Health Agency convened a meeting of the Canadian Council of Chief Medical Officers of Health.

*Government Orders*

To the member's point, in January the first meeting of the incident response group was convened by the Prime Minister. That is an emergency incident response group, and of course intelligence information is shared there.

Beyond that, the confidentiality of our intelligence sharing prevents me from going into detail.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Madam Chair, businesses across this country are reeling and are anxious to see the emergency wage subsidy. When will that hit their bank accounts so that employees can go back to work?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Madam Chair, we are working very hard to get this out as soon as we possibly can, because we know how urgent and how important it is for businesses to see this support for their employees.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Madam Chair, many municipal councillors and band councillors across this country are business owners. Many of them have had to shut down their businesses, yet they continue in their role as band and municipal councillors, including in the town of Innisfil, which I represent. However, many of them do not qualify for the emergency benefits for their businesses that they have had to close.

I wonder if the government is considering extending some of these benefits to those band and municipal councillors who are working so hard in their communities to look after them during this COVID-19 crisis but cannot run their businesses right now.

• (1735)

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Madam Chair, that is a really good question. I want the hon. member to know we are listening intently. We are working on that very issue and hope to be able to share information very shortly.

**Mr. John Brassard:** Madam Chair, my last question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Has she been happy with the team Canada approach that not only Parliament but the opposition parties have utilized during this emergency crisis?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, I have been very happy with the team Canada approach of all Canadians.

I would like to particularly single out the premiers. First and foremost, health care is a provincial responsibility. The premiers and provincial and territorial governments have had the first-line responsibility of dealing with this crisis. As the member opposite knows, most of the premiers are not members of my party. I think they have worked extremely collaboratively with one another and the federal government, and I commend them for that.

**Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC):** Madam Chair, thousands of Canadians, including Clarence, Diane, Meghan and many others in my riding, do not qualify for any of the supports currently being offered by the government. They are self-employed, too small to qualify for the wage subsidy and do not qualify for CERB or CEBA. How long before these business owners can access support?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Madam Chair, all of our businesses across the country and our entrepreneurs and business

owners are really important, and it is essential that we support them through this period. That is why we launched many of the measures to help them through this difficult period.

However, as I have said before, the work is not done. We continue to listen and work on this so that we do not leave anybody behind and we continue to support our businesses and entrepreneurs in this country.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Madam Chair, cyber-attacks have risen nearly 500% globally and are a threat that collect information and exhort ransoms from our own health system, corporations and of course individual Canadians. We know that the information of at least one Canadian hospital and thousands of our Canadian health care workers has been compromised.

What resources has the government put forward to stop these hackers and protect our country's information systems and citizens?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Chair, indeed, as all of us are rightly focused on the front-line health care battle against the coronavirus, we do have to remember that this is a time when our information systems are particularly important and vulnerable.

Our government is very focused on that. Both the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Public Safety are working with the provinces and are very aware of the fact that we need to monitor our cybersecurity. One other security threat I will share with everyone here is scamming, which is a danger. People are afraid and vulnerable, and that is something we are focused on as well.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Madam Chair, weeks ago, the government announced that it would look into releasing offenders to ease the burden on the system and prevent the spread of the coronavirus in our prisons. However, this has only shifted the problem from prisons to the police, with public safety concerns in our communities, not to mention the increased risk of spreading the virus to the general public.

What orders has the government, through the Minister of Public Safety, given to the commissioner of corrections, and what steps have been taken already to deal with this issue?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, the issue of federal correctional institutions and the coronavirus is another really important one. We have seen some worrying outbreaks in federal correctional institutions and have been working particularly closely with the Province of B.C. on the institutions there. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Bonnie Henry for the very good advice she has been giving us about those institutions.

*Government Orders*

When it comes to inmates, let me emphasize that nothing is more important than the safety of Canadians. That is the first and foremost concern the Minister of Public Safety has in mind.

• (1740)

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Madam Chair, the Minister of Public Safety promised that only non-violent criminals would be placed on parole to minimize the coronavirus outbreak in penitentiaries, as the deputy government—Deputy Prime Minister has indicated. However, media reports have recently confirmed that violent offenders are being released, and I am wondering why that is occurring.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, I do aspire to be deputy government House leader to work closely with our House leader on managing questions on this side of the House. He is laughing, and it shows that it is true.

I would ask the member opposite to please share those reports with me and the Minister of Public Safety. The situation with regard to the coronavirus in federal correctional institutions is one we do need to watch closely, as there have been outbreaks there. At the same time, it is absolutely essential to protect the safety of Canadians.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Madam Chair, this question may be more in the bailiwick of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Canada and the U.S. recently came to an agreement to extend the prohibition on all non-essential cross-border travel. Did this new agreement change any of the previous conditions, yes or no, and what criteria is the government considering that has to be met in order to reopen the border?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, the agreement did not in any way change the original agreement. It simply rolled it over for 30 days. As we approach the end of those 30 days, and indeed every day after, we will continue to have a very friendly, very neighbourly conversation with our American neighbours about what to do next.

**Mr. Glen Motz:** Madam Chair, the RCMP training centre has been closed and cadets were sent home in mid-March, of course with full pay. The RCMP has thousands of federally funded members who are fully trained. Has the government asked the RCMP to reassign the 400 recruits, and could the Deputy Prime Minister tell us how the federally funded RCMP members are helping Canadians on the front lines during this crisis?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, today of all days is a day that we should all be very grateful for the service of the RCMP across the country. I will leave it at that.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC):** Madam Chair, COVID-19 is having immediate and devastating impacts on the tourism sector across Canada. My community of Niagara Falls has been hit particularly hard. With over 16,000 hotel rooms in hotels employing almost 40,000 workers and generating over \$2.4 billion in receipts, Niagara's hotels and accommodations, restaurants and resorts and other small business operations have all been devastated by this terrible virus.

This is the third time we have had to ask. When will the government announce an economic aid package to support Canada's tourism and hospitality sector?

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Madam Chair, the health and safety of Canadians is our top priority at all times. We know that tourism has been hard hit by COVID-19, and we are working tirelessly to mitigate its impact on the Canadian economy. As a first step, we are providing immediate help to those Canadians and businesses most in need, including to people without pay because of COVID-19, whether they are sick, caring for a loved one, unemployed or have been sent home.

We remain in communication with our colleagues in the provinces and territories, as well as with indigenous leaders and communities, to ensure we have a coordinated Canada-wide approach so we face and recover from this together. Our tourism sector is strong and resilient, and we will always be there to support it.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** Madam Chair, on April 8, the finance committee met to examine issues related to Canadian tourism and how COVID-19 was negatively impacting this important economic sector. As part of the hearings, the Hotel Association of Canada put forward some immediate solutions that would help support tourism.

One recommendation would allow the sector to submit its loss carry-over for the financial year now, which would provide businesses with much-needed financial liquidity. We have also suggested that the government examine rebating the HST payments made by businesses in 2019, again with the purpose of providing them with much-needed financial liquidity quickly.

Will the government support these proposals?

• (1745)

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault:** Madam Chair, if there is one thing people recognize it is that our government has acted swiftly to help a number of Canadians and a number of businesses, small, medium and large, across the country. We are working every day, morning, day, and often night, to do even more for them. We will continue to do so until together as Canadians we make it through this crisis.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** Madam Chair, COVID-19 has heavily impacted the greenhouse sector this year. Greenhouse operators have already invested tremendously in input costs to grow their product for market, but these markets have now instantaneously disappeared because of the virus. The next eight weeks are critical for greenhouse operators to cover their costs and make their profits. However, the future looks bleak.

Will the government consider supporting the Canadian greenhouse sector by providing operational cost coverage for the fiscal year?

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I can assure you that we are working very closely with producers in all sectors, including greenhouse operators and processors. We are looking at various options to help them depending on the specific challenges they face.

As everyone knows, we have already implemented measures through Farm Credit Canada and the advance payments program. We have also helped the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. We are rolling out various measures, and we are well aware of the challenges facing greenhouse growers.

[English]

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** Madam Chair, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture has recommended that the federal government restore the AgriStability coverage rate to 85% and remove the reference margin limit for the 2020 program year and the remainder of the Canadian agricultural partnership. Over the last few weeks we have now heard how much COVID-19 is impacting our Canadian agricultural sector and how this can impact future food security throughout our country.

Will the federal government commit to these agricultural supports?

[Translation]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Madam Chair, again, I am in contact with farmers, processors, and retailers every day. I am well aware of the situation. We have formed working groups. We are looking at what might be the best programs, the best options to help them. Obviously, they might already be benefiting from a certain number of programs. I am thinking about the programs for small businesses, the small business relief program and access to funding through Farm Credit Canada. These loans help in managing working capital. We will continue to consider different programs. AgriStability is one of many.

[English]

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC):** Madam Chair, on February 26, the Standing Committee on Health passed a motion stating the following:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee order all documents, including briefing notes, memos and emails from senior officials, prepared for the Minister of Health, Minister of Transport, Minister of Public Safety, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of National Defence regarding the outbreak of the coronavirus, no later than March 15, 2020; that matters of Cabinet confidence and national security be excluded from the request; and that any redactions to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents, as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons.

The documents were provided, but they were redacted by the government in advance. As a result, the Parliamentary counsel has written to complain about this action.

Will the government reverse its course and allow the parliamentary counsel law clerk to do the redactions, rather than redacting proactively?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Madam Chair, yes, during the course of the outbreak, as it began, the HESA com-

mittee did compel what turned out to be well over a thousand documents. Our officials also appeared in front of the committee a number of times, and I also appeared in front of the committee.

We have spared no effort to try to ensure that the HESA committee has access to the professionals that it is compelling from the Government of Canada, as well as political leaders such as myself. As well, we were providing documentation even as those officials were working day and night to try to ensure that our response was strong and robust to protect Canadians' lives.

● (1750)

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Madam Chair, they were not so busy that they could not busy themselves with redacting the documents, a task that in the committee's motion was to be left specifically to Parliamentary counsel.

I ask again: Will the government submit the same documents unredacted so that Parliamentary counsel can make those decisions, as is appropriate under the privileges of the House?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Madam Chair, we will always comply with the health committee's request for appearances of officials, of ministers and of documentation that is required for them to complete their studies.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Madam Chair, part of the request was that all such redactions "be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons."

Will the minister and her government respond and respect that request?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Madam Chair, since the beginning of the outbreak, I and my department have appeared in front of HESA numerous times to answer questions to our fullest to provide technical briefings to the committee to ensure that they have the information they need to study Canada's response and Canada's next steps.

We continue to provide documentation that is requested. We completely value the work of HESA in examining the response of Canada, but also in looking for the next steps ahead.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Madam Chair, one gets the impression the answer to that is no. The minister is certainly reluctant to say so.

It is worth noting that in the special order that was adopted by the House on April 11, the health committee is set up to proceed, but only to receive evidence. It is not permitted to pass motions. If it could do so, it would of course pass a motion demanding that these documents be submitted and perhaps chastising the minister for her actions.

Why has the ability of this committee to pass motions and to make reports been taken away from it?

*Government Orders*

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Chair, the health committee has met, I think, five times. The finance committee has met around five or six times also. Other committees are meeting. I know people in the House are working really hard. The people in the committees are working really hard. We have to find ways to make those committees work, and they are working: Members of the committee can ask questions, invite people and get answers. That is what they are doing.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Madam Chair, the health committee and all the other committees, including the indigenous affairs committee, do not have the ability to make reports or to pass motions, and there is no reason in the world that they should not be able to do so. I note that on the April 11 motion, the procedure and House affairs committee was specifically mandated to adopt motions and reports.

Why is this ability being withheld from the health committee and the other committees that are sitting right now?

**Hon. Pablo Rodriguez:** Madam Chair, the committees are working on the basis of what has been approved by all parties in different motions. Everybody is working extremely hard to be able to answer the questions of parliamentarians, and that is what the committees are doing now.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ):** Madam Chair, in my riding, a businessman opened a restaurant a year ago. To take some of the pressure off of his business' finances, he decided to cash in his RRSPs for the first year of operations of his restaurant.

For a month now we have been asking the Minister of Finance the same question week after week: is this person, who cashed in his RRSPs for a year to avoid paying himself a salary and to take pressure off his new restaurant, entitled to the CERB?

[*English*]

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Madam Chair, that business, like so many of our businesses across the country, is absolutely so important to our communities. That is why we have been listening so intently to business owners' concerns and have made available the many measures to help them keep their employees, help them with the cash flow that is needed during this difficult period and help them keep their costs low by deferring the GST and HST and customs duties. All of these measures are to help our Canadian small businesses.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Madam Chair, we all know that the crisis has highlighted the fact that high-speed Internet service is now considered to be an essential service, as was the case for electricity in the last century.

In my riding, several areas do not have access to high-speed Internet. For example, the city of Rivière-Beaudette and the Domaine Drolet have no cell service or high-speed Internet service. Despite the efforts of the mayor of Rivière-Beaudette and the reeve of the Vaudreuil-Soulange RCM, nothing has been done to give these people access to high-speed Internet. We know that the government has

promised to ensure that rural areas have access to high-speed Internet by 2028.

In light of today's crisis, does the minister realize that he must move up the deadline for providing high-speed Internet to all people living in rural areas in my riding, such as Rivière-Beaudette, Sainte-Justine-de-Newton, and Hinchinbrooke, who unfortunately have not been able to telework satisfactorily because the network is inadequate?

I would like to hear what the minister has to say about possibly moving up the deadline for ensuring that municipalities and everyone who needs it have high-speed Internet access.

• (1755)

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I thank the member for her question.

Even before the coronavirus crisis, we understood the importance of having high-speed Internet, especially for rural communities. I think that everyone, the members here in particular, is aware that the coronavirus has and will continue to completely change the economy.

As the member pointed out, one of those changes will be the increased importance of telework. For that reason, I completely agree that access to high-speed Internet for all Canadians, including those in rural communities, must be a top priority for our government when we begin to relaunch the economy after the crisis. Obviously, it is too soon to start that work right now because of the measures we have taken to protect public health, but I absolutely agree that this must be a priority.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Madam Chair, there are projects and requests on the minister's desk right now, for example, those of Coop-CSUR, a small business, a small distributor in my riding. Four projects were submitted that involve getting 400 to 500 people in the riding connected. This company is waiting for federal funding. There are also other obstacles related to the major network owner.

If this is a priority, why is it taking so long to respond to the projects that small distributors submitted to connect their fellow citizens to high-speed Internet?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, I want to commend the member because people in her region understand that this is a priority for our government. We have already announced an investment of \$500 million in this project. The fact that people in the member's region have already submitted an application is a step in the right direction.

I agree that the coronavirus has changed many aspects of our economy and that we need to change how we do things going forward. One thing that will be absolutely crucial will be to further highlight the importance of high-speed Internet access for all Canadians.

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Madam Chair, my question for the government is concerning long-term care homes. We have seen deplorable conditions in long-term care homes. These are seniors who are often the most vulnerable in society. They are people who are not able to defend themselves and they are faced with horrible conditions. Right now, long-term care homes are ground zero for the number of deaths. The highest numbers of deaths reported are concentrated in long-term care homes.

Will the federal government commit to implementing national standards around long-term care homes, and then putting those into our Canada Health Act to ensure that there is accountability?

• (1800)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I share the member's dismay at the treatment of seniors in some long-term care homes across the country, who are clearly paying the price of a decade or more of neglect of a system that is meant to provide people with dignity and safety in their senior years.

I have been working with the Minister of Seniors to ensure that our government provides guidance for provinces and territories on how they ameliorate the situation in this urgent setting. We have a lot of work to do at all levels of government to fix this deplorable situation.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Madam Chair, the New Democrats worked to bring changes to the Canada emergency response benefit to get guarantees for people who were not eligible. The government said it would make the changes. However, I have a simple solution.

Can the government amend the criteria so that people who need the CERB can simply give their name and gain access to resources?

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Madam Chair, the key difference between the approach that the hon. member is suggesting and our approach is that we felt that it was important to provide a lot of support to those who need it now in the context of the economic dislocation of COVID-19.

As opposed to sending a small amount of money to everyone, we focused our attention on workers and those who have seen their jobs disappear, those who have been laid off or those who have to be home to take care of kids who are not going to school or day care or to take care of a loved one who is experiencing quarantine or COVID-19. That is the focus we have had, as well as delivering more money under the Canada child benefit and the GST credit and other supports to Canadians.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Madam Chair, that was not at all my question. I am saying that the current program, as it exists, has a whole list of criteria that are limiting people who need help right now. I have not asked to reduce the sum; I am asking if the government will commit to getting rid of its criteria with the existing program so that everyone who needs help can simply apply for that help and get it.

Again, my question is not about reducing that help; it is about reducing the barriers to accessing that help.

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen:** Madam Chair, the CERB is there to help workers who have seen their jobs disappear or who have been laid off as a result of COVID-19. The fact is that we are getting help to families through increasing the Canada child benefit. Between them, the CERB and the wage subsidy of up to 75% cover a lot of workers in Canada.

In addition to that, we have listened to feedback from Canadians on those who have been left behind by the CERB, including those who have seen their EI run out in January, as well as those Canadians who are working now who are making less money than they would be under the CERB. We have heard that concern and we have addressed it by expanding eligibility for the CERB to those folks who are making \$1,000 or less.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh:** Madam Chair, I now want to touch on indigenous services and communities.

We have heard a lot of concerns from indigenous communities about their lack of basic infrastructure, lack of basic human rights like clean drinking water and housing. On top of that, we are fast approaching the flood season, which means many people in many indigenous communities will have to be evacuated. There does not seem to be a very good plan in place to ensure that communities can be evacuated safely and in a way in which they are not going to be exposed to additional risk of COVID-19.

What is the plan to make sure that communities have the resources and the proper plan in place to protect them?

• (1805)

**Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Madam Chair, as the member notes, indeed, the historical vulnerabilities of indigenous communities compound the risk and exposure and potential consequences that indigenous communities may face. This is something that my department and the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations' department is seized of. We have invested physical resources into surge capacity to ensure that those communities are not left behind.

When it comes to the flood season or even the fire season, these issues again compound the risk.

Should the member want a full briefing, for example, on the efforts that we are deploying into Kashechewan to address the complexity COVID-19 poses to that community in particular and to other communities that are at risk, I would be glad to brief him and my department would do so readily.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC):** Madam Chair, on April 11, I asked the government in the chamber when a plan would be forthcoming for Canada's decimated international seafood market. The deputy prime minister responded that the minister was working on such a plan.

The minister of fisheries issued a statement on April 17, six days later, saying that she was still working on it and proceeded to go through some of the benefits under the emergency response plan that provide help to out-of-work Canadians. The minister has not yet surfaced. We have not heard details of that plan.

When is that plan forthcoming?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I was due to speak with the minister about this today but she is understandably very much engaged in her response to the tragedy in Nova Scotia.

I also want to take this opportunity, and was looking forward to a chance, to answer a question from the member for New Brunswick Southwest because I wanted to take this opportunity to highlight the remarkable thing that a New Brunswick company, LuminUltra, is doing.

LuminUltra in New Brunswick has taken on, at very short notice, the production of reagent. This reagent had been very hard for us to get and LuminUltra is now, one could say, the engine powering coronavirus testing across the country.

On fisheries, I am happy to answer if the member has another question about that.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Madam Chair, I will come back to the fisheries. How does that sound? We will give the minister another couple of days.

On the emergency response benefit, we have had some direction. It now applies to individuals who earn \$1,000 more a month, but what about incorporated businesses? I am thinking now of a fishing boat, for example, or a small farm where these incorporated businesses are bringing in revenue, but they are losing money. Their expenses are higher than their revenues and the individuals who work for these incorporated businesses, the owners, are not taking an income. The income is zero but they have revenue coming in.

Would these businesses qualify for the CERB benefit?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Madam Chair, in the case of small businesses in the agriculture and fishing sectors, it is true that there are situations where business owners do not give themselves a salary. They pay themselves through surpluses and dividends. It is on a case-by-case basis, but the rules are clear: The individual must have an income of at least \$5,000 in the previous year to qualify for the Canada emergency response benefit.

[*English*]

**Mr. John Williamson:** Madam Chair, I want to be very clear on this because we are getting calls from not only these businesses but also accountants who are unclear how to proceed.

I think I heard the minister say that if they have no income, zero income with a revenue stream, but they are underwater and operating in the red, that they would qualify for the CERB. They would be able to qualify for this while they are working, bringing in revenue, but their expenses are higher.

• (1810)

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Madam Chair, in fact, one of the examples I have shared recently is an example like the one the member just provided, which is of a company that has been able to take advantage of the wage subsidy to keep its employees on staff. It has been able to take advantage of the loan because it qualifies, but that employer's paycheque is now gone and because of that it has been able to take advantage of the CERB.

**Mr. John Williamson:** Madam Chair, are there other parameters on these incorporated businesses? Do they, for example, have to show a loss for the year?

I ask this because a business could be in a short-term situation where there is no income coming in. Is there a requirement that an incorporated business would have to show a loss for the year?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Madam Chair, my department does a call every day with literally over 1,000 businesses and associations, and very specific questions like this are coming up. I would like to follow up with the hon. member and provide him with information to help him with the businesses in his area.

**Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC):** Madam Chair, these are difficult days for all, and today I heard of the passing of a great Barrie resident. I will use the first valuable moments of my time to regretfully inform the House of the passing of the Hon. Aileen Carroll.

Aileen started in politics as a Barrie city councillor in 1995 and rose in politics to become a federal cabinet minister in 2003. Aileen later served in the Ontario legislature.

Aileen leaves behind her husband, Kevin, of 52 years, her children Daniel and Joanna, and her grandchildren. My thoughts go out to Aileen's family at this time. Aileen will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

I would like to remind everyone of the words "parliamentary co-operation and collaboration". We all use these buzzwords many times. In the tone of these phrases, I would like to ask the government: How can we, the opposition, help the government during this crisis and what resources does it need from us? We are all in this together.

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Chair, first of all, I thank the member for paying that moving tribute. All members in the House join him in this sorrow.

Many of the questions I have heard today have been very helpful. I have particularly been grateful for the questions where people have asked about specific issues, either in their ridings or specific issues in the areas in which they are a critic. Please know that ministers have been listening carefully, and we will get back to members on each of those specific things. That is not the only thing that has been helpful, but that is one of them, and I thank everyone who has been drawing attention to these specific areas.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Madam Chair, I have a specific question then.

During the pandemic crisis, one of the disgusting sides that has arisen is the rise in fraud. It is hard to believe that criminals are out there taking advantage of people in this time of need.

Has the government considered providing tougher sentences for individuals found to be committing fraud against individuals during this pandemic?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, perhaps in the bipartisan spirit of the Aileen Carroll tribute we have just heard, I will quote the premier of Ontario, who was rightfully very passionate in denouncing anyone who would seek to price gouge, who would seek to be fraudulent or who would seek to profit off of the pain and suffering of Canadians today. I will begin by denouncing that kind of selfish behaviour in the strongest possible terms, and as a society, we just have to not tolerate anyone behaving that way.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Madam Chair, further to that question, many police services across Canada are scrambling right now to find the resources to cover their day-to-day business. Now they have been added this increase in fraud across Canada.

Will the federal government be able to help any of the police services across Canada with some extra resources to fight this battle?

• (1815)

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland:** Madam Chair, as the member opposite knows, policing is done principally by the provinces, although of course the RCMP plays an essential role. We are very aware of the fiscal strain that provinces and municipalities are facing and that is something that we are discussing with our provincial partners.

**Mr. Doug Shipley:** Madam Chair, before I came today, I asked residents to give me some specific questions and I have some here.

Sue from my riding asked, “Studio businesses like Pilates and yoga instructors, physiotherapists, chiropractors, massage therapists and many others are falling through the cracks. They do not qualify for CEBA. Why is the government allowing these businesses to fail while propping up other businesses? What will the government do to fix this?”

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I appreciate that very good question. Know that, for those businesses, we are listening to them and we are working our way through it. We want to see all of our businesses, particularly those ones that the member just described, be supported through this very difficult time because they are at the very heart of our communities and it is important that we support them during COVID-19.

**Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC):** Madam Chair, I want to share with the House that the riding of Essex truly has world-class manu-

### *Government Orders*

facturing, but it is equalled with world-class generosity. The moment that COVID-19 hit, when so many manufacturing businesses shut down the community came together. I know this because I have sat in on numerous Zoom calls along with them. They have created test kits. They have created ventilators. They have created face masks and hand sanitizer galore. The hiccup that they are having is that they cannot get approval from Health Canada.

I have a two-pronged question. First, how long is the wait time to get approval from Health Canada currently? Second, how long will it take to clear that backlog?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I share the member opposite's true gratitude to the many companies that have come forward, not just from Essex but from all across the country, retooling their ability to manufacture personal protective equipment or other medical devices, diagnostic testing, all kinds of things. In fact, over 5,000 companies have stepped up to offer their capacity and expertise. We have actually ramped up the ability to approve very quickly, but I will remind the member opposite that there is still a process where companies have to work closely with Health Canada to ensure that the products they are marketing are in fact safe, that they do what they promise to do and that we do not have equipment or products on the market that could in any way hamper our attempts to fight this pandemic.

If the member opposite knows of a particular company that is struggling to get Health Canada approval, please send that to me through my email. I am more than happy to ensure that we take a closer look. In some cases, it is just a matter of more information that needs to be transmitted to Health Canada, but it is always valuable to take a look if there is a particular company that is struggling to get that approval.

**Mr. Chris Lewis:** Madam Chair, I certainly appreciate that help from the minister, as will my constituents.

The government sent PPE to China right before this crisis began. Later, the government trumpeted the fact that China had sent PPE to Canada; however, other countries have reported serious problems with PPE sent from China.

Is the government confident that there are no defects with personal protective equipment imported from China?

*Government Orders*

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yes, Madam Chair. Unless it is from a supplier that we have ordered from before, for example 3M, all equipment that we either receive in donation or that we purchase, no matter which country of origin, is put through a quality test to ensure it is safe to distribute and it meets requirements as set by Health Canada. The last thing we want to do is distribute PPE that in any way endangers the lives of people who are using it and depending on it.

**Mr. Chris Lewis:** Madam Chair, given that other countries have reported problems with PPE from China, is Canada experiencing the same problem?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yes, Madam Chair, some of the equipment we received was not suitable for medical care workers, and we are looking at that equipment to see if it can be repurposed for other kinds of workers who do not need the same level of protection.

• (1820)

**Mr. Chris Lewis:** Madam Chair, the Liberals shipped 16 tonnes of PPE to China in February. Did the government verify if Canada indeed had enough PPE for our own needs before sending it off to China?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Madam Chair, I will remind the member opposite that the national emergency stockpile was never designed to have PPE for all health workers in the case of a global pandemic. In fact, it supplies primarily antivirals for the experience of pandemic influenza, with the capacity to support provinces and territories for particular surges.

Having said that, yes, in fact, our contribution of nearly expired equipment to China, in particular to go to the city of Wuhan, was part of a global effort to try to contain the virus in China and provide protection for those health care workers. It is based on the principle that countries come together to support a country that is experiencing outbreaks, so that it has the best chance of success at containing that outbreak. Unfortunately, as the world knows now, that was not the case, and we now have a pandemic here in Canada. However, we have been able to complete all 33 of the current requests from provinces and territories for equipment from the national emergency stockpile.

**Mr. Chris Lewis:** Madam Chair, can the minister tell us how many ventilators we expect we are going to need in the next month from now on, based on the current projections where we sit today? If so, do we have enough ventilators to meet that projection?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Madam Chair, that is a difficult question to answer.

If we continue to flatten the curve, and it appears Canada is having some success in doing so, then the number of ventilators that we currently have might meet our needs. In fact, that is why we have worked so hard as Canadians all across the country to flatten the curve. It is not just to protect lives, which of course is the primary purpose, but it is also to protect the health care system so that we do not experience a surge, and so that we do not have doctors in the unfortunate position of many doctors around the world who have had to decide who gets a ventilator and who does not.

Having said that, we have secured additional ventilators. We have companies that are producing ventilators here domestically. We are certain that even if we do not need all of the ventilators that

we procure, we will be able to share them with other countries that are behind us in this crisis.

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Madam Chair, for weeks there have been growing concerns about maintaining our food processing capacity during a pandemic. There are emerging gaps in staffing and running processing plants. We are already at a critical junction, particularly here in Ontario. Ranchers and farmers have been asking for a temporary cattle set-aside program to effectively maintain marketing and feeding cattle. It worked during the BSE crisis.

Cargill just announced today that its facility in High River will be temporarily closing down because of a recent outbreak among its employees. It is responsible for 36% of Canada's beef processing. It is an enormous strain all down the line for producers, feeders and processors. This urgently reinforces the need for a set-aside program that producers and feeders have been calling for.

Will the Minister of Agriculture institute a temporary set-aside program for Canadian cattle producers?

[Translation]

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Madam Chair, our government is determined to keep all workers in the food industry safe. This is absolutely a challenge right now. Some food processing plants, meat packers in particular, have seen a huge reduction in their slaughter capacity. In some cases, they have even had to suspend operations for 14 days to allow their workers to self-isolate.

We are following the situation in Alberta, Ontario and the rest of the country very closely. We are looking for the best ways to help the pork, poultry and beef sectors.

[English]

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer:** Madam Chair, at \$40,000, the Canadian emergency business account is proving insufficient for livestock producers. For example, one pork farmer told me that even if he could qualify for CEBA, it would buy him feed for his hogs for maybe two days. Hog prices themselves have crashed by 20% since March 25, as COVID-19 is disrupting supply chains.

The risk of a supply chain failure increases as this pandemic drags on. Is the government going to announce a program geared specifically to agriculture?

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Madam Chair, we are aware of the challenges facing the agriculture sector right now, and this includes producers, ranchers and processors. This is one of the reasons we injected an additional \$5 billion into Farm Credit Canada. Furthermore, \$2 billion has been granted in loans so far, to help them better manage their cash flow.

I assure the member that we will continue to look at different financing options and mechanisms to help them.

• (1825)

*[English]*

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer:** Madam Chair, we are hearing that farmers do not qualify for the CEBA program, because they do not earn a salary. The agriculture minister has also stated that changes to business risk management programs to assist farmers are still on the table.

Will the minister tell us if enhancements to BRM programs are being discussed and when can we expect an announcement?

*[Translation]*

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** Madam Chair, I assure the member that discussions are under way with the provinces. I talk to my provincial counterparts at least once a week, and risk management programs are obviously on the agenda. These programs exist. I know that producers want these programs to be improved and to be made more flexible. We are working on this. I suggest that producers apply so that they can benefit from the programs.

*[English]*

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer:** Madam Chair, medical professionals and researchers across Canada are actively calling on the government to test for antibodies so we can figure out where we are in terms of our herd immunity. When will Canadians start getting tested for antibodies?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Madam Chair, in fact the whole field of serology testing is a complex one. We are lucky to have many professionals and academics who study virology and serology in this country. We are working with them now to design a national serology strategy.

It is a caution to Canadians and the member opposite that this is not the silver bullet out of the COVID-19 situation. Very little still is known about immunity and what demonstrates immunity in a particular person's blood. However, we are very excited to get started with this and will have more to say about it in the near future.

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer:** Madam Chair, there are about 53 or 55 tests waiting for approval through Health Canada in regard to testing for antibodies. I am wondering where we are with the approval process on those particular tests.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Madam Chair, the Health Canada approval process is expedited, but as I said, we are focused on making sure that nothing is approved that would give false positives or false negatives to Canadians. As one can imagine, that would be extremely dangerous.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Madam Chair, Denmark and other countries have decided not to help companies that use tax havens.

In Canada, the House of Commons is taking unprecedented measures to provide income support to individuals and businesses. We obviously agree with this, and we are happy to be able to make suggestions on how to improve those measures. In exchange, however, we expect everyone to collaborate.

Unfortunately, large companies like Toronto's big banks are not collaborating, because they are avoiding tax by using tax havens, which enable them to get out of paying the taxes they owe. Sadly for us, what they are doing is perfectly legal.

I would have liked to ask the government if it is planning to make the use of tax havens illegal, but we are coming out of a briefing with the Minister of Finance in which he seemed to close the door on that idea. Why?

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I thank my parliamentary colleague for asking that question and suggesting ideas. Right now, as we know, the government is investing billions of dollars in fighting tax evasion and tax havens. In the last few weeks, we have decided to focus on workers and Canadians with our emergency economic response plan.

We are going to keep improving it, and we are going to keep talking with our hon. colleagues to find solutions.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Madam Chair, I would like to remind the minister that the money brought forward is to fight tax evasion, which is illegal. I was talking about tax avoidance, which is being used legally by the big banks. I will give a figure that goes quite a way back, to 2007. The big five Bay Street banks alone saved \$2.7 billion, just in 2007, by using completely legal tax havens.

That is still going on, but we no longer have the numbers. At the time, the banks were required to disclose this information. Following the crisis of the last decade, that requirement was dropped. Tax avoidance through tax havens was legalized by obscure regulations in the federal Income Tax Act. It was not even legislation passed in the House, just regulations that were added later. These regulations are in section 5907 and are potentially inconsistent with the act. Using tax havens for such purposes is really not consistent with the act.

To correct the situation, the government does not even need to bring the matter before the House; it only has to amend its regulations to restore a little justice. As we know, Ottawa provides the banks with a great deal of assistance. Just look at the billions of dollars in cash or the possible repurchase of devalued assets.

*Government Orders*

Why is the government not instead prohibiting them from avoiding taxes through tax havens?

• (1830)

**Hon. Mona Fortier:** Madam Chair, once again, I thank my hon. colleague for his suggestions.

At this time, we have really focused on developing an economic response plan to help workers and Canadians in this crisis situation. I will have a discussion with the Minister of Finance so that we can find solutions as we move forward in this time of crisis.

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Madam Chair, I thank the minister for her response.

For millions of taxpayers, it is important to restore some fairness. These measures are unprecedented, and there will be a lot of debt. Those who have the means to contribute must do so and stop fleeing to islands in the south with a golden parachute.

My question is about a completely different topic, the housing agreement with Quebec. To my knowledge, this agreement is yet to be signed. The money in this agreement would obviously be huge for Quebec. Would the government be willing to give a little, sign the agreement and transfer the money, if it is still available?

[English]

**Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.):** Madam Chair, the hon. member has raised an important question with respect to the bilateral housing agreement between Canada and Quebec.

We are working very hard through our officials and making sure that we strike an agreement that, of course, reflects the unique desires, structure and formula that Quebec has asked us to consider. We are finding ways to do that while also remaining true to the national housing strategy and National Housing Act.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Madam Chair, the government announced last week that it would implement a rent abatement program for small and medium-sized enterprises, which the NDP was calling for. That was last week and there are still no details.

My constituency office is in a plaza that has a lot of other businesses, including a gym, a hairdresser studio and a clothing store. They cannot meet their rent. It does not matter; the landlord is demanding it. My neighbours, people in my riding and those small businesses that are suffering, they are scared that they are going to lose everything.

We know that small businesses are the heart of our economy. Will the government roll out its offer to small businesses to save these key enterprises?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Madam Chair, that is a really important question. The member is absolutely right. Small and medium-sized businesses are the heart of our communities. One of the most significant expenses that they take on is their rent.

We have announced that we are going to provide assistance. However, this is an area of responsibility of our territorial and provincial partners. We are in active discussions and we want to

make sure that this important support goes out to small businesses across the country.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen:** Madam Chair, I have also heard from a lot of seniors in my riding, and I know my hon. colleague from Hamilton Mountain has been working with the minister, asking for supports for seniors to come through. They are facing increased costs for groceries, for delivery, for their prescription drugs, and they are on fixed incomes. The government has said that they are getting the GST and that it has done enough for seniors because they are receiving their money, but the constituents in my riding are saying that they are not, that they are suffering and need help right now. Will the government use the existing OAS/GIS benefit structure or the CERB to provide additional supports and benefits to seniors who are in most need?

• (1835)

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Madam Chair, we do care about seniors, and we want them to know that they are not alone during these very unprecedented times. As members know, to help protect the financial security of seniors, our government passed several new measures, including providing a supplementary payment under the GST credit for those with low and modest incomes, of close to \$400 per adult and \$600 per couple. We also reduced mandatory withdrawals from registered retirement income funds by 25%. This will help preserve RRIF assets during this volatile market. Allowing any new taxes owing to be deferred until August 31 and extending the deadline to file income taxes until June 1 are other measures.

We will continue to work toward helping seniors during this very difficult time.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen:** Madam Chair, I am also hearing from the local councillors in the city of London. Their municipal budgets are under immense strain. They have been doing amazing outreach work through phone calls several times a week. They are talking to small businesses, the not-for-profit sector and charities, and all those amazing people who are doing incredible work in our municipalities, but if they do not get financial help soon, they are really going to suffer. We know that these municipal governments cannot run deficits. They cannot just go forward, so without the assistance the municipalities across Canada will get, they are going to have to cut those vital services, and that is the last thing that people in the city of London or across this country need.

Will the government give immediate help to transit agencies and offer a financial backstop to municipalities to make them eligible for the wage subsidy?

*Government Orders*

**Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.):** Madam Chair, we understand how challenging the situation is right now with municipalities, including transit authorities. Public transit is incredibly important. We know that because so many of our essential workers rely on public transit to get to their jobs. I have spoken with many mayors, heads of transit authorities, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and we understand their concerns. We also need the provinces to be part of these conversations, but we are working to support them. Of course, infrastructure investment is part of that. It is incredibly important that we continue to build good public transit.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Madam Chair, my questions are for the Minister of Small Business and Export Promotion. I want to return to a question I asked her in question period regarding the Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada. Again, I would like to know the total loan value, as of yesterday or the last few days, for both of those institutions and what is that, year to year, against how many loans they have given out. The BDC now notes on its website that it is between \$15 million and \$60 million, so I am hoping an intrepid exempt staffer may have emailed the minister with that answer.

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I will have to commit to returning with more details. What I can say is this. As part of COVID-19, the billions of dollars that we have unleashed in capital, while guaranteed by BDC and EDC, are actually provided directly through financial institutions, such as the banks and credit unions, because they exist all across the country. The speed with which that vast network can get money out to our businesses was essential, so the role for BDC and EDC during COVID-19 is to provide those guarantees, but the delivery of the loans themselves is through the financial institutions.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Chair, I would like to thank the minister for being so gracious. She extended that courtesy to the member for New Brunswick Southwest, so I was hoping she would extend it to me as well. I will expect that in the next few days.

The CEBA has a different metric, which is 0% interest on the commercial loans being provided. The ones provided through the BDC are actually commercial-rate loans for some of the larger producers in Alberta.

We are already seeing a 400,000-barrels-per-day reduction in production, and some forecasts say that the production in Alberta and western Canada will go down by one million barrels per day. We saw the incredible drop in the price of WTI today, but they expect it will bounce back tomorrow just a little bit.

For the BDC and EDC, I would like to know what definitions and timelines will be used to determine which businesses and operators will qualify for the loans.

• (1840)

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Madam Chair, for COVID-19, there has been a vast liquidity put out into the marketplace, and those loans can be available through financial institutions. The larger loans that are not the \$40,000 interest-free loans are available at commercial rates. The purpose here is that the companies themselves have a working relationship with their financial institutions, and those financial in-

stitutions are best capable of serving their clients to provide them with that lending support. That lending support is significantly guaranteed by the Government of Canada, which makes it more available.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Chair, as I am sure the minister knows, a lot of those commercial arrangements that the banks have with medium to large producers have lending covenants on them. In certain situations, these companies will become insolvent, because the product they are selling is selling at a negative price. In fact, right now, if grocery stores were open, I could purchase a pallet of bottled water, and a barrel of oil would be cheaper. A barrel of oil is free right now, essentially, and refineries all over North America do not want it.

I am concerned about those lending covenants, because BDC and EDC are taking too much time to get out what the minister called a large volume of cash, billions of dollars, because of these criteria and eligibility rules. By the time they get around to obtaining the loan, many of these companies will have banks move in on them, claim that lending covenant against them and start making business decisions for those companies in western Canada.

Will the minister commit to ensuring that this does not happen and that those chartered banks are kept aside so that the people who own the businesses and have been running them can continue to do so until they can get more liquidity?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Madam Chair, the issue raised by the hon. member is exactly what we are trying to do here during the COVID-19 period, which is to help save our businesses and provide them with the liquidity support that is needed during this difficult time. It is why the Government of Canada has provided the guarantees to the financial institutions. In fact, the decision-maker on the loan will be that financial institution, the bank or the credit union, to the customers. I would encourage businesses to go to their financial institution to see if they are able to get that support.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Madam Chair, on top of the viral pandemic, of course, we see this precipitous drop in oil prices. Is the government planning an extra series of programs of support for energy workers to get through this time, which is unprecedented in the history of oil pricing since at least the 1940s and since WTI was established? Is the government planning a second round of support programs for businesses?

*Government Orders*

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Chair, the orphan wells cleanup was specifically focused on workers, because we are so aware of the concerns of energy workers. However, I absolutely share the concern of the member opposite on the particular challenges the energy sector is facing, and that is something the government is focused on.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Madam Chair, we managed to improve various programs. I want to acknowledge that the government's ministers were listening. I want to thank them for listening to us and for helping to improve the programs in the interests of Canadians and businesses.

My question is about tourism. Canadian hotel chains are now worried about the future, since the economy in their sector is collapsing. This sector has to plan years in advance, and it faces international competition.

How does the government plan to protect the tourism industry, which will be swallowed up by foreign multinationals if it is not protected?

• (1845)

**Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Madam Chair, my colleague, the minister responsible for tourism, is working hard with the industry and various partners to find the right way to get this industry back on track.

The COVID-19 crisis has obviously had a very big impact on the tourism industry, as well as on the arts, culture and sports industries, which I represent. We are working with all our partners to find the right solutions that will get the various industries back on track once this crisis is over.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Madam Chair, I thank my colleague, and I want to tell him to talk to us if he needs ideas.

With regard to SMEs, the Conservative Party suggested a possible tool, and that is the GST rebate for SMEs. This economic sector is very important, and some experts predict that one-third to one-half of small businesses will not survive the crisis. Everyone is listening, and so I want to know when the government will implement the GST rebate for SMEs.

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his question.

We know that many small businesses are worried about being able to pay their rent, pay their suppliers and keep their employees working. As my colleague mentioned, our government is working around the clock to give affected businesses the support they need.

That is why we created the Canadian emergency wage subsidy and introduced the Canada emergency business account. What is more, we are working with the provinces and territories to implement the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance program.

We recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done, and we will continue to work with all parliamentarians to ensure that we are helping Canadians the right way.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Madam Chair, if the government needs ideas, we can help with that.

As far as the Internet is concerned, there are areas in Canada—a large country, as we know—where Internet coverage is inadequate, which we will soon realize when Parliament starts having virtual sittings. In the interest of democracy, I hope this will work, even though our party would have preferred physical sittings here in the House. We will, however, respect the democratic decision that was made earlier today.

Is the government aware of this problem? Internet is currently an essential product for our young people, but especially for our seniors. Back home in Quebec, the long-term care facilities received iPads to make our seniors feel less isolated and allow them to stay in touch with their families. What does the government plan to do to improve Internet access?

**Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleague for the question.

I completely agree. I think that the coronavirus crisis has highlighted the importance of having high speed Internet across the country and especially in the regions where this service is still not available.

I agree with my colleague that the Internet is important, not just for young people and workers who use it, but also for our seniors. I believe that families celebrated Easter over the Internet with their seniors, and we must improve access to that service. Even before the crisis, this was a priority for our government and we had announced a \$500-million investment. However, I now think that we must do more.

[*English*]

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Chair, I would like to continue with my questions around the critical shortage of medical supplies. The government consistently says that we do not have a problem and are meeting all the needs, yet the emails and phone calls I receive in my office from around the country are saying that we still have a shortage.

We have asked the government for a list of all the critical medical supplies that we need to fight this COVID-19 pandemic. Will the government provide us with a comprehensive list of all the medical supplies needed?

*Government Orders*

• (1850)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, we have been working incredibly well with provinces and territories on the need for personal protective equipment and also on the medical supplies needed to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. We have supported provinces and territories to procure equipment they have struggled to procure on their own, amplifying their own work to make sure they can distribute it to the various networks in their provinces and territories that require the personal protective equipment. We have also worked with the provinces and territories on guidance to make sure that we are using the right equipment for the right level of protection.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Mr. Chair, my question was not about the working relationship, which I am sure is very good. The question is about what are the actual tactics? What are the quantitative results? What is the list and where are the shortfalls?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, I am sure the member opposite knows that the provinces and territories have a network of distribution they control as the deliverers of health care. Our job at the federal level is not to usurp their role of distributing personal protective equipment and medical devices in a way that is appropriate to their own particular needs and their own surge, but rather to respond to their requests for additional support for either equipment or for personal protective devices that protect their front-line staff. That is exactly what we have been doing: taking our lead from provinces and territories, making sure that we can support them in their work to distribute this equipment where it is needed most.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Mr. Chair, we now understand that there is a looming critical shortage of drugs and active pharmaceutical ingredients, as well as the supplies and components that go into testing equipment. Other countries are taking active measures to ensure that they have those ingredients. What is the government doing to ensure that we have those?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, we have recently received shipment of one of the critical ingredients for testing that will support initiatives to ramp up testing across Canada. More shipments are on the way. We also have home-grown test solutions, like the Spartan kit that was just approved recently that will allow for point-of-care testing all across the country. There are about 13 test kits that have been approved in Canada to be used by provinces and territories for their specific needs.

I will conclude by saying that it is important that we understand that provincial and territorial governments deliver health care. The federal government is a trusted ally and supportive partner to make sure that happens.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Mr. Chair, I would like to understand if the seasonal workers who did not claim EI last year and who are not EI eligible are covered under CERB.

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, of course I do not wish to take the place of my colleague, who is very familiar with this issue and works on it every day.

However, I would like to say that we quickly brought in the Canada emergency response benefit so it could help employees and

workers across Canada immediately. Furthermore, last week we made it accessible to everyone who has lost their EI benefits since December 29 and can now apply for the CERB.

[English]

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Chair, the Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre in my riding serves 12,000 urban indigenous people. The centre runs on a meagre \$139,000 in core funding for the programs it runs. The centre is still running programs during this crisis, including a health centre, a youth safe house, youth and elder housing, a home for single moms, a food hamper for 150 families, and family violence counselling and addiction counselling. During normal times, they also run employment programs, adult basic education, day care, youth programs, family programs and meal programs, all with just \$139,000 in core funding.

The centre is an integral part of our local indigenous community and is struggling seriously through this crisis. It is now one of the front-line organizations dealing with the COVID-19 crisis in my community.

The government has allocated to friendship centres \$15 million of the \$305 million in relief funding allocated to first nations, Métis, Inuit and indigenous organizations. This is out of a total \$180 billion relief fund; that is, out of \$180 billion dollars, \$305 million is for indigenous organizations.

Will the government increase the relief funding and the core funding for the aboriginal friendship centres serving the urban indigenous populations across this country?

• (1855)

**Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I do want to highlight the incredible work that the member opposite has highlighted with respect to the friendship centre in his riding. Indeed, the ones across Canada do amazing work with very, very limited funds. This is why in part in budget 2019, the government invested \$60 million in infrastructure supports over five years for these friendship centres that again do critical work for the most vulnerable indigenous communities in urban settings. Given that urban settings are at the core and are the target of the COVID-19 pandemic, these supports are incredibly needed right now.

We have indeed received a submission from the national friendship centres network. This is something we are working on at this time and we will endeavour to get those funds out as quickly as possible because we know that the need is real. We know they do so much with so little and that that need needs to be supported on a constant basis.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Paul Manly:** Mr. Chair, I am very appreciative of the members of Parliament who have brought forward issues from their constituents.

I am glad to hear that the rules for the loan program for small business have changed, but there are still some people who are missing this program. I have a family business with a father and son who have poured their life into setting up a microbrewery. They opened in November. They paid \$13,000 in wages in December, \$13,000 in January and \$13,000 in February, but they are not eligible for the small loan.

I am hearing from other small businesses in the same vein, startups that need help now. Is there a way we can be more flexible in these programs and less rigid with their rules, because people need help and are going to lose their businesses?

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his advocacy and what he highlights to me directly about how our programs are helping businesses and where more needs to be done. I really thank the hon. member for his tireless work, just like the examples he has shared with us now.

I assure the member that we are listening and will continue to take his feedback and that of many businesses across the country so that we do not see businesses falling behind and that we, indeed, are supporting them through the many measures we have put in place. However, the work is not done yet and we will continue to work together to help our businesses across the country, particularly those very small businesses.

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to an order made earlier today, the committee will rise.

\* \* \*

● (1900)

[Translation]

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to order made earlier today, the motion that the House take note of the current COVID-19 pandemic is deemed moved.

[English]

A member of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party may speak to the motion for not more than 10 minutes, followed by a period of five minutes for questions and comments. Members may split their time with another member.

**Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by joining my colleagues in offering my condolences to all of those touched by the senseless act of violence in Nova Scotia yesterday. I thank Constable Heidi Stevenson for her bravery and dedication in serving her community and country so well, as well as all of the first responders who are on the front lines every day to keep us safe. We join the people of Nova Scotia in mourning this devastating loss, finding strength in each other and offering our support together as we all heal from this tragedy.

I also want to take an opportunity to pay tribute to a wonderful Canadian and a former member of Parliament who sadly passed away this weekend, the Hon. Aileen Carroll. I had the pleasure of knowing Aileen and always greatly admired her dedication to public service. She represented the people of Barrie with tremendous energy and was deeply committed to contributing to the local community, having started her career as a small business owner and a city councillor.

Aileen went on to win three successive elections and served as MP for nine years, including as parliamentary secretary to the minister of foreign affairs and then as minister of international co-operation, representing Canada on the world stage. In 2011, Aileen resigned from public life and dedicated herself to focusing on her family, grandchildren and friends, but she remained committed to serving her community through charitable causes. We are grateful for her many years of public service. Her impact will extend right across the country and her legacy will live on. Our thoughts are with her family, her friends and all her colleagues through this difficult time while they mourn.

[Translation]

I would like to acknowledge the contributions made by all the businesses and community leaders who have helped us flatten the curve by staying home and, in many cases, temporarily closing their doors.

I know that Canadian business owners and entrepreneurs are worried. They have worked hard to develop their ideas into prosperous businesses that are the heart of communities across the country and the backbone of Canada's economy.

[English]

They have worked hard to turn their ideas into successful businesses at the heart of communities across the country and the backbone of our national economy. To all of them, let me be clear: We will do whatever it takes to support them through this. Our goal is to save jobs and to save businesses. We are taking immediate, significant and decisive action to help Canadians facing hardship as a result of COVID-19.

Through the Canada emergency wage subsidy, we will keep more Canadians employed in businesses of any sizes and in any sector, covering 75% of their wages. We are helping businesses keep their costs low by allowing businesses to defer GST, HST and customs duties payments while also extending the tax filing deadline to June 1 and allowing businesses to defer any payments owing until August 31. This measure will help over 3.2 million businesses and self-employed Canadians.

We are also helping businesses keep up with their operating costs and cash flow through the Canada emergency business account, an interest-free \$40,000 loan guaranteed by the Government of Canada with up to \$10,000 forgivable if it is paid back before the end of 2022. These loans are available through one's bank or credit union now.

When we heard that many small businesses were not able to access the emergency business account because of the requirement that they have a payroll of at least \$50,000, we lowered that threshold to \$20,000. Nearly a quarter of a million businesses have already had their loans approved, and our government's recent announcement to expand the eligibility criteria for this program means that even more businesses will qualify.

This means a small furniture store that usually relies on foot traffic to stay afloat can continue paying the costs of upkeeping its warehouse space. This means that a physiotherapist practice can access the funds to rehire its employees even while it has seen its revenue drop and everyone is working from home.

For businesses with larger operational needs, we have made loans of up to \$12.5 million available. These are also available through one's local bank or credit union.

● (1905)

We have also heard from businesses that they need help paying their rent, and that is exactly what we intend to do. As the Prime Minister announced last week, we will introduce a Canada emergency rent assistance program for small businesses. This program will seek to provide loans and forgivable loans to commercial property owners who in turn will lower the rent for small businesses. Rent is an issue that falls under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories. We will continue to work closely with them on this important issue, and we will have more details to share soon.

Our government also recognizes that businesses in different parts of the country may face unique realities and challenges in the face of COVID-19. In order to give equivalent financial support to these small and medium-sized businesses, our government is investing \$675 million in Canada's regional development agencies. At the same time, we will ensure that rural businesses and communities have access to much-needed capital by investing \$287 million in the community futures network to support small businesses in rural communities. This new financing will help support businesses and their communities so that they can be strong through this crisis.

Together, these measure alleviate enormous expenses and pressures on businesses and on business owners, and will help prime them for recovery, when it is safe to do so, to ensure that they can regain ground much more quickly.

Everything we have done to date is to respond to what we have heard directly from businesses across the country, from helping them keep their employees on staff and supporting them with the funds and cash flow to operate and pay their bills, to keeping their costs low. Our government will remain unwavering in our support for Canadians, our health care system and our economy, and our work is not yet done. No measure is off the table.

Canadians are innovative, strong and resilient. In the face of COVID-19, our government recognizes the need to help innovative early-stage companies and young entrepreneurs. To better support these businesses and entrepreneurs, we are investing \$250 million through the National Research Council of Canada's industrial research assistance program, also known as IRAP, and \$20 million for Futurpreneur Canada to continue to support young en-

### *Government Orders*

trepreneurs across Canada who are facing challenges due to COVID-19.

Through this crisis, it has been so inspiring to see Canadians come together in new and amazing ways. In fact, since the Prime Minister announced Canada's plan to mobilize industry to fight COVID-19 a couple of weeks ago, about 5,000 innovative Canadian businesses have answered our call, working to provide our front-line workers with the gear that they are going to need to fight this pandemic together.

These are unprecedented times and I know that Canadian business owners and entrepreneurs are worried. However, we are all in this together and we are all helping each other as team Canada. This is who we are as Canadians and we can all take pride in that.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have two specific questions for the minister that reflect concerns I am hearing directly from business owners in my riding.

The first question is about the payroll requirement associated with the loan to businesses. I am hearing from businesses that many may operate on a dividend basis, where they pay the owner-operator through dividends. There may be cases of family-run businesses where there is not much of a payroll because everybody is chipping in and doing the work together. Is the minister open to ensuring that those who are paid through dividends or those in family-run businesses can access the business account as well?

The second question is about concerns being raised by businesses about what will happen to the wage subsidy when that is scheduled to sunset. Businesses are thinking in advance. What is going to happen if they are forced to lay people off because they are not in a position where they are able to retain them after the period set for the wage subsidy ends? Businesses are looking for clarity so that they can plan and make decisions now. They have to know what will happen at that point of sunset. I would appreciate it if the minister could answer those two specific questions.

● (1910)

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Mr. Speaker, as I said, the work is not done and nothing is off the table. We continue to listen to businesses, particularly small businesses with a range of circumstances, to make sure that we are providing support and continue to provide support, so that they can weather through this difficult period of COVID-19. That work will continue.

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With respect to the wage subsidy, the program right now provides 75% wage subsidy support for employers for April, May and June, and we have been very focused in ensuring that we are providing that support, whether it is cash flow or paying employees for those employers during this time. We wanted to make sure that support got out quickly. I want to remind everyone that this is the largest economic measures package that our country has seen, and we are going to continue to work with businesses across the country to make sure they are supported through this period.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating the minister on her speech and thanking the government for all the measures it has brought in.

I would like to ask the minister about the priority of private companies' pension plans. Would the government agree to increase this priority in order to better protect workers and pensioners by guaranteeing their pension funds when businesses go bankrupt?

[*English*]

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the work that he does so tirelessly for those that he represents.

Workers are indeed important. They are at the very heart of what we are doing. We want to make sure that during this very difficult time they are getting the support. One of the things we are doing is making sure that workers and their employers are staying together, so that they have the greatest opportunity of recovering when it is safe to do so. Workers are absolutely important, and the various measures we put in place have put workers and Canadians at the very heart of what we are doing during this crisis.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, will the minister extend the negotiations on commercial rent and expand it to residential rent as well, so that people are not faced with the scary prospect of losing their homes?

**Hon. Mary Ng:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. We want to make sure that all Canadians are supported through this difficult time. Whether it is adding to the Canada child benefit or creating the Canada emergency response benefit, many of the measures are there to help Canadians through this very difficult period.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to talk about the importance of this institution and why we are here and should continue to serve.

Before I do, I would like to send my heartfelt and sincere condolences to all the families and friends of the victims of the horrible tragedy that unfolded in Nova Scotia this past weekend. I, like my colleagues in this House, pray for the speedy recovery as well of the RCMP officer in hospital. A nation mourns with Nova Scotia. Every Nova Scotian is in our hearts at this moment.

Bringing important matters that happen in our own constituencies to the attention of all parliamentarians is one of our jobs while in Ottawa. Typically, when I rise in this place to speak about the village of Bobcaygeon and the amazing people who call it home, many Ontarians will know it as the home of Kawartha Dairy, or for its beautiful rivers, lakes, outdoor activities, cakes, cafés, restaurants and boutique shops.

Those living outside of Ontario will most likely recall Bobcaygeon from the Tragically Hip, who, in the year 2000, won a Juno for song of the year for their song named after that village. The song was about the stressful life of a Toronto police officer who found the job getting harder and often contemplated quitting, but it was the village of Bobcaygeon where that officer came to unwind, relax and put life into perspective.

Unfortunately, as we are all aware, many nursing homes throughout Canada have been affected by COVID-19. Sadly, today I mention Bobcaygeon as part of a growing list of nursing homes throughout Canada affected by the virus. We have all suffered terribly with the heartbreaking news coming out of the Pinecrest Nursing Home. My thoughts and prayers continue to be with the residents, the staff and their families as they cope with this tragedy. However, out of this darkest situation, there have been so many bright lights that demonstrate the kindness, generosity, compassion and sense of good that comes with living in a small community. The staff at Pinecrest, knowing the risks, were not deterred in their duty to care for the residents of that home. Their courage and self-sacrifice are an example to all parliamentarians, illustrating the importance for us to do our duty.

I say to the volunteers and the community of Bobcaygeon, where I actually grew up, that their strong spirit and resolve to help those in need is an example for all, including those who line the highway to honk in support of those inside Pinecrest, those who made signs to encourage those fighting and serving, and the musicians who decided to hold impromptu concerts, providing entertainment and reminding everybody that the members of this small community of about 3,000 people are behind them.

While the deaths surrounding Pinecrest are tragic, I am encouraged this week with news that one resident, 91-year-old Lorraine Button, has recovered from her positive COVID-19 diagnosis. She even took a lap around the facility to celebrate. There are many other stories of volunteers and service groups around my riding banding together to deliver groceries to those living in isolation, running errands and helping with minor repairs, especially for those who are elderly, and doing it in a safe manner.

There are a number of companies stepping up to retool their operations to meet a new demand for medical supplies and equipment. DVine Laboratories in Lindsay is producing hand sanitizer. Tekrider near Minden is now making personal protective equipment; it used to make snowmobile equipment. Rockwood Forest Nurseries in Cameron is working to increase its supply of locally grown food and then donating that food to the local food banks. These are just a small number of humbling examples to all parliamentarians in this place that this is the resolve we need to demonstrate here in Ottawa.

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One of the things I could be doing as an MP, and I cannot think of a more important one, is representing my constituents in this place and advocating for the resources they need. I do not think we can ask front-line workers, health care professionals, grocery clerks and many other essential service providers to do what we members of Parliament are not prepared to do in this painful time.

Canada's Parliament has three functions: making laws, overseeing the government and, most important, representing the electorate. Parliament by its nature is an essential service. It was illustrated quite clearly by all parties on this side of the House in question period today that there are many more questions we, as opposition members, can ask the government. It was a great debate today; there is no doubt. However, meeting once in a while is not good enough. Canadians need accountability, particularly now with the government pushing billions and billions of dollars out the door, money that Canadians and small businesses are having a hard time accessing. I believe that frequent accountability sessions in Parliament would get better results for Canadians. We have repeatedly demonstrated how debate and discussion in the House of Commons improves government.

● (1915)

The lives and livelihoods of Canadians literally depend on the government getting its response to the pandemic right.

The history of Canada's democratic institution is based on the right of representatives to gather, discuss and debate. There is a litany of uprisings that underscore this very important and hard-fought right. Indeed, these rights were forged in rebellion and war through executions and acts of despotism. The evolution of our modern Parliament is long and storied. It heralds directly from the long tradition of having a body of people who would assist and advise the king on important matters and has moved to where we are today. It is there that Canada's modern government, Parliament, the higher courts of law, the Privy Council and cabinet find their origins.

Mr. Speaker, you might recall that just a few weeks ago, while Parliament was suspended, the government took it upon itself to write a whole host of new powers that would have circumvented the authority of the House of Commons if not for the opposition parties pushing back against it. If there was ever an instance of the circumvention of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot, that was it.

Canada's parliamentary democracy is modelled on the Westminster system created many years ago in England, much of it developed against the wishes of the ruling king and other monarchs. Over time, the power of Parliament increased considerably and ensured an unprecedented stability that included moving the monarch to more of a ceremonial role. More stability in turn helped ensure more effective management, organization and efficiency. The rise of Parliament proved especially important in the sense that it limited the repercussions of dynastic complications that had so often plunged England into civil war. Parliament still ran the country, even in the absence of suitable heirs to the throne, and its legitimacy as a decision-making body reduced the royal prerogatives of kings. An important liberty for Parliament was its freedom of

speech, which I am actually practising right now and am not sure will extend to virtual sittings.

As I stated earlier, Parliament's role in the government is significant and has changed over the years. There has been a number of conflicts and even the creation of the Commonwealth, and look where we are now. However, as we have seen throughout history, pandemics have led to an expansion of the power of the state. When the black death spread across Europe in 1348, the authorities in Venice closed the city's port to vessels coming from plague-infested areas and forced all travellers into 30 days of isolation. That eventually became 40 days, hence the word "quarantine". A couple of centuries later we had the plague in England, which allowed authorities to shut individuals in their houses for up to six weeks while the plague was active. In 1604, criticizing measures imposed by the government was made illegal.

There are countries right around the world where democratically elected opposition parties are being shut out of debate and governments are seizing unprecedented power. With a simple Google search, members can read articles about this very thing. People are scared. They are looking to their representatives to protect their hard-fought democratic rights, inherited over centuries of parliamentary traditions.

There is also precedent for a Parliament sitting through difficult times. Throughout the history of representative democracies, parliaments have continued to sit no matter what crisis confronted nations, whether war, natural disaster, social tragedy or economic upheaval.

At the peak of the Spanish influenza epidemic in 1920, the House of Representatives sat for 114 days and the Senate sat for 76. That is more for either chamber than during each of the last three years of World War I, from 1916 to 1918. During the Second World War, not only did the Parliament of the United Kingdom, which was being bombed, continue to sit, but the contest of parliamentary democracy remained vigorous.

It is at these times that the representation of the most vulnerable in our society is the most important. It is at these times that civil and industrial rights need to be protected. It is at these times that the governance of this country should be scrutinized and the accidental or intentional encroachment on civil liberties should be halted.

To quote some very famous words, if we do not know where we have been, we cannot know where we are going, so let us make no mistake: COVID-19 is serious and the Conservatives take it very seriously.

I look forward to questions.

● (1920)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, highlighting what we all experienced today, even with a session that had less than the normal 338 members of Parliament, is that we still saw democracy happen.

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I travelled from Fort St. John in northern B.C. and drove 4,200 kilometres to get here. I think it is important to note this, as it matters that much to some of us to be here in this place. I think the hon. member's speech highlighted that for all Canadians.

I would rather ask this question of everyone, but did the member find the session valuable today? Did he think it was really important to do what we did today? Does he see it as something to continue in this particular setting with all the safeguards in place?

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Mr. Speaker, I hope my friend enjoyed his tour through northern Ontario as he drove from British Columbia to Ottawa. I am glad to see that he safely did that.

I found this day quite an experience, given that we had very good debate back and forth. It was point, counterpoint. We built on a number of initiatives. We talked about some of the concerns we were hearing from our constituents, and we were able to mention them directly to the government. To the government's credit, it even said it would get back to us on a number of files. I think that was very well done. Also, we have all maintained social distancing, being a safe distance apart, and all got here safely.

I think it is incumbent on us as parliamentarians to do the work that needs to be done here by asking questions of the government, having debate and ensuring that the individuals who are falling through the cracks and the businesses, a few of which I talked about, are dealt with, because it is a complex issue.

• (1925)

[Translation]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my concern with that is that people may be infected, that the illness may take up to two weeks to show up and that COVID-19 will spread. That is really what we are afraid of when we touch doorknobs, and so on.

My question for my colleague is about seniors care. Does he think that the government should do a better job of supporting the purchasing power of seniors by, for example, enhancing old age security?

[English]

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the point I was talking about. That is why we need to be here, to have these discussions. It is great for me to answer and I am happy to do that. My French is not good enough to answer in French, so I apologize for speaking in English, but this is exactly why we need to have these sittings. I think we have demonstrated today that it can be done in a safe manner.

We are asking individuals in retail, trucking, Uber Eats and pharmacies, for example, to show up and do their jobs. I think it is incumbent upon us to be here to do our jobs, to have a discussion and debate with the government to help improve some of the plans it has put out very quickly, which to its credit it has done. Some of these programs take months or years to put out, so to put something out so quickly is great. However, this is where we work to start filling the cracks to help those people and businesses falling through, like my friend mentioned with regard to seniors.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Winston Churchill was once quoted as saying that the House of Commons is the "shrine of the world's liberties."

I wonder if the member has a comment on his concerns with the notion of a virtual Parliament and the rights and privileges that MPs have, as well as the difficulties we can have. We have heard several concerns about the difficulties that some members have in getting broadband and how that touches upon a member's privilege and right to be here.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Mr. Speaker, one thing I was going to bring up was our ability to do virtual Parliaments, but I ran out of time. I know that the procedure and House affairs committee is seized with this issue. It is just starting to get this up and running. I have no doubt that there will be challenges, especially for members who come from rural areas where access to reliable high-speed Internet and cellular service is not that great. I think we need to deal with that issue.

We also have to deal with security and translation. There are a lot of issues that I could get started on, but I do not have much time. They have to be worked out to make this work. In the meantime, we should have this debate in Parliament.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, we are in an extraordinary situation, one that was unimaginable just a few weeks ago and that has prompted us to take exceptional measures.

I would like to come back to what I talked about eight days ago and remind the House that the government came here with a bill to subsidize 75% of the payroll of certain businesses in trouble. The cost of this bill alone totalled \$73 billion. Surprise! The situation is so exceptional that everyone here supported the government's proposal, which goes to show how serious the crisis is.

This is \$73 billion, and I am not even talking about the rest of the spending. The bad news is that the government is using public funds. Therefore, it has to go get these public funds from somewhere. How can a government function? It is very simple. Of course, it can go into debt. However, we dare hope that at some point it will use its revenues, namely taxes.

Who likes to pay taxes besides you and me, Mr. Speaker? Very few people like to pay taxes, even though we joke that there are only two things certain in life: death and taxes. Ironically, what do people generally try to avoid? Dying and paying taxes. That is the reality.

People are then forced to pay taxes. To have people pay taxes, however, there must be tax fairness. This means that everyone must be equal under tax laws. There is vertical equity and horizontal equity. Horizontal equity requires that individuals in the same financial situation—or simply the same situation—be subject to the same tax treatment. Vertical equity requires that people with different situations be subject to a different tax treatment, intelligently thought out.

Unfortunately, as is so often the case, there is a fly in the ointment, and that is tax havens. Some businesses, especially big ones like banks, use this strategy. Why? To avoid paying taxes. They call it “fiscal optimization” because they do not want to admit it is tax avoidance. These people look us straight in the eye and say it is legal, so nobody can come after them. Under the circumstances, why not take advantage? There is a problem though: every member of society pays taxes.

The reason those people do not pay taxes is not that they do not have money or do not make a profit. On the contrary, they make so much that they can use strategies to avoid contributing their fair share to keeping our society running.

Now those same people are asking us for help. Are we against the support the government has made available to businesses? No; everyone here voted in favour of that. However, is it morally right for a business to do whatever it takes to avoid paying taxes, use accounting strategies to avoid paying taxes, and use tax havens to avoid paying taxes, then ask the state for help and get it? Essentially, in addition to not paying their fair share, these people are taking our tax dollars and using or spending them however they please.

Are we supposed to be okay with that? No, we cannot. Is anyone here okay with that? If I asked each person here whether they are okay with that, I think everyone would say no, that is outrageous. However, that is what happens.

Does this happen because we do not have the choice, because it is already a done deal and the government cannot do anything? No. On the contrary, the government can do many different things, but that takes conviction and will.

With these massive financial measures, the Liberals have one more tool at their disposal and they can tell these people that, from now on, if they want government assistance, they will have to pay their taxes and bring their money back from tax havens.

● (1930)

Let them do their share and we will do ours. Why do they not do that? They are saying that it is legal, but it is not right. If they do not agree to use the lever they just created with their spending, then I am telling them that there is another lever, and it involves making that practice illegal.

A regulatory change to section 5907 would make the currently legal use of tax havens illegal. Let us look the members of the government in the eye. I cannot believe that these people would not agree with the idea of making the failure to pay one's fair share of taxes illegal.

We are told that we cannot deprive these people of money because they hire Quebeckers and Canadians. They need help so that

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these Canadians and Quebeckers do not find themselves unemployed. That is what the Prime Minister said earlier, but it is not true. If they have money in tax havens, perhaps it is because they have the means to get through the crisis. If the money they have in tax havens is not enough, then they should bring their money back to Canada and we will help them. That is true tax equity and fairness. It is not true to say that this is impossible and no one can do it. That is wrong-headed.

It can be done. Denmark and Poland are doing it. Denmark wants to go even further. Companies registered in tax havens get no assistance. Those paying themselves dividends get no assistance. Those buying up their stock and taking advantage of low prices and the stock market crash get no assistance. Is there anything illogical about that? All we need is the will.

There are several ways to make those people pay taxes. We could have taxed sales instead of profit. Some places do that. The OECD is on it. European countries do it. That is an important point. They are making faces. We are talking about this, and they are wondering what we are talking about, but it is very clear. I am sure you understand. You are a good man, Mr. Speaker. You know what I am talking about.

My second point concerns seniors. We are calling for immediate assistance for seniors amounting to \$110 per month. It would cost \$1 billion a year, but that is asking too much. The Liberals claim to be helping seniors by sprinkling aid here and there. They found \$73 billion to help struggling businesses cover their payroll, yet they expect me to believe that they do not have \$1 billion to help a group of people whose health is at risk, a group that is isolated and is having trouble coping with rising prices. They do not have \$1 billion to spare, even though they wanted to spend that much before the crisis. My colleagues can bear witness. They proposed assistance for Canadians 75 and older. They were ready to do it. Now that the situation is critical, we are proposing assistance for Canadians 65 and older. Their response is to pout and stare at us blankly as if they have no idea what we are talking about.

I am talking about the main victims of this incredibly difficult situation, namely seniors. The Liberals need to wake up, because we have been telling them about this for over a week and they keep staring at us as if we were from outer space. We are not from outer space. We are in touch with our community. The Liberals know this because they have listened to us many times. They have listened, and they must continue listening.

We are asking for \$1 billion to help our seniors who are having a hard time. That is one issue. If we examine the list of the other things we are proposing, there is nothing that is very difficult or onerous. We must listen to our elders, our builders, the people who contributed to a country as extraordinary as ours. I am talking about Quebec.

We must help these people and I want the government to understand the Bloc Québécois's message. We have hammered away at it. It is said that learning happens through repetition. I can say that we have repeated it often enough. It is time to take action. That is what I want for our seniors.

*Government Orders*

• (1935)

[*English*]

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with all the money that has been handed out to businesses and individuals, I would like to ask my colleague if he is at all concerned that small businesses will be the ones that will be unfairly targeted by the CRA for audits in the aftermath of this crisis.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Mr. Speaker, we have focused on assistance for small and medium-sized businesses, because by and large, they are the ones that will be struggling through this difficult period and who will keep struggling in the future. The Bloc Québécois believes that the assistance we can provide must be increased.

We talked about 75% of payroll, which is fine. However, we must also help them by subsidizing part of their fixed costs. In the April 11 motion, the government stated that it must subsidize a portion of fixed costs and the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons knows that. We are still waiting. I hope they will take action on that fairly quickly.

I am impatiently waiting for more assistance for business. We have gotten off to a good start, but we must not let certain businesses fall through the cracks.

• (1940)

**Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He talked about the conditions that allow us to help Canadians through income support measures, measures for businesses and so forth.

Another thing this crisis has highlighted is the success of the Canadian federation and the collaboration that has come out of that. I am thinking about the help from our Albertan cousins who provided medical supplies, the world-class expertise out of Quebec, the systems, the procurement and the sharing that prevails within the Canadian federation.

I think that my colleague missed a golden opportunity to commend all of the mutual support that has helped things go smoothly. I will give him the chance to commend the success of the Canadian federation, which allows us to support the public as we do.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Mr. Speaker, Quebecers pay a lot of taxes to Ottawa. It only makes sense that we get our share.

If the Canadian federation was as successful as my colleague claims, the situation in the hospitals and long-term care facilities would not be as disastrous as it is today. Health care funding should be much higher, but the federal government's contribution has decreased over the years. The Government of Quebec was forced to assume some of the federal government's responsibilities in order to provide high quality services to Quebecers. That goes to show that federalism does not work.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question for the member for La Prairie. I appreciated his tirade against tax havens. I think we agree on this aspect of social justice.

I would like to hear his thoughts on assistance for SMEs. We want the government to put more pressure on banks and to do more than simply asking them to be nice and consider suspending mortgages. I imagine that commercial rent is starting to become a big problem in his riding, as it is in ours.

Will the member work with us on this?

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We agree. We must provide adequate help for SMEs, especially with respect to rent. The Bloc Québécois has suggested that banks, big business and people with high incomes support businesses through partially subsidized government assistance. That would help support fixed costs, which includes rent.

I think we have similar opinions. I agree with him. We need to do something to support SMEs, since they will spearhead the upcoming recovery.

[*English*]

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to inform you that I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Today I want to also begin by sharing my deepest sympathies and condolences with the families, friends and loved ones of RCMP constable Heidi Stevenson and her fellow Nova Scotians who lost their lives this past weekend. This is a tragedy, and I am truly devastated by that act of meaningless violence. So, too, am I devastated by and mourn the loss of the 1,647 Canadians to date who have lost their lives to COVID-19.

I am so proud that many of our neighbours, co-workers, friends and families are doing what they can to ensure that this virus is contained to the best of their ability. Every day, people in my riding of London—Fanshawe contact me and tell me what they have lost because of COVID. They have lost their livelihoods, their jobs, their freedom, their time with loved ones and their family businesses, and from us, their members of Parliament, they expect and deserve leadership.

I was in this House during the last two sittings, and I was so honoured to do that work, because we were here and we were putting forward emergency legislation that was meant to help millions of Canadians impacted by COVID-19. Although it is not entirely what I and my NDP colleagues know would fully help as many people as we should, we passed the CERB and the wage subsidy benefits. I was proud, because New Democrats pushed hard to make these benefits available to more Canadians.

Is it enough? Simply put, no. The CERB should be universal. We have said that many times and will continue to say it until it is. All parents should also receive an additional \$250 per child per month, and we also need to address all the holes and cracks that people are falling through, people who are living on a fixed income, seniors and persons with disabilities who find their grocery bills and prescription drug dispensing fees soaring. The government has decided that those people have received enough and that it does not need to provide additional assistance. Interestingly, my constituents disagree.

New Democrats will continue to push for a truly universal income security program, which would allow the government to immediately issue payments to Canadians who filed their taxes last year without the need for time-consuming application processes. The government could take the time it needs to then design a way to reclaim those payments through the tax system from people who did not need them. The approach the government has selected requires a lot of upfront administration at a time when every day matters.

Daily, I hear from my constituents about how they are not eligible for help. The government has left them behind, and they are turning to me for assistance. What am I supposed to tell someone who is \$50 short of the \$5,000 CERB criterion? It was literally \$50.

I also hear from countless business owners who cannot meet the minimum payroll requirements for the wage subsidy. What should I tell people who have put everything they have into their business venture and see it slipping away because the government will not help them as well, because it has put a limit on those supports?

I am proud to stand in this House to fight for people in London—Fanshawe and across the country for a meaningful outcome. I am relieved to see that our plan for the one in-person sitting and the two additional virtual question sessions was passed today. The back-and-forth style of questions and answers has worked well, and I think it has brought a lot of answers for Canadians. It is really important that MPs from across Canada be able to bring their concerns and questions to their constituents from the government. We need to continue to bring the stories of Canadians who need help, however, because there are too many holes in the system.

Many seniors, persons with disabilities, people living on fixed incomes, veterans, students, small business owners and employees and their family members all continue to reach out to me in my office. They are facing increased costs for food and medications. They are unable to pay their rent. They are literally sitting at their dining room tables, looking at bills and expenses and trying to figure out which ones they can pay this month. That is a reality for people in my riding and across this country. It is our duty to help them.

So many Canadians are sacrificing so much by staying at home, keeping their businesses closed or still going to work, ensuring that our supply chains are maintained and that our food, prescriptions and basic needs are available, that our garbage is collected, that our airports, train stations and methods of transportation are open, that our emergency services are available and our hospital and long-term care facilities stay open and are fully staffed. We must work responsibly to keep this virus from spreading. We need to abide by

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public health recommendations. We need to physically distance. We can do this together.

We can do it better. We have to do it better, and we can do it together.

• (1945)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we know how we can fight this virus, because we have seen places like Taiwan and South Korea do it effectively. Their approach has emphasized high levels of testing and very effective tracing. People have compared the fight against this virus to a war, and we cannot fight a war unless we know where the enemy is. Knowing where the enemy is means having effective testing and tracing, and it seems to me that we are not going to get on top of this crisis until we put the systems in place to do that. We have not seen nearly enough progress from the government, in terms of putting the systems in place that we need for effective testing and tracing.

I wonder if the member could speak to the proposal that we need to move forward dramatically, learning from what has been done in South Korea and Taiwan, to have these systems in place that allow us to know where the enemy is and therefore fight the enemy effectively.

**Ms. Lindsay Mathysen:** Mr. Speaker, absolutely, we can always do better. We know the government did not learn everything it should have learned when SARS was an issue. We have heard horrible stories about a lot of PPE being thrown away, because it did not have those systems in place. Absolutely, we can always do better. I was just talking about how we can do a lot better regarding the benefits and supports people need across this country as well.

We can learn globally from the countries the member talked about. We can learn globally from what the previous speaker talked about regarding tax loopholes. There are countries doing amazing things. We can learn from them and we can do better.

I hope our government continues to learn and do better.

*Government Orders*

● (1950)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in this exceptional crisis that we are all going through together, I think all the parties have had a role to play to varying degrees. We in the NDP have always said we are not just a party that opposes; we are also a party that proposes. Obviously, we are never totally satisfied. There are still so many people who are suffering and not getting assistance. However, we made a few proposals that were heard, including the \$2,000 monthly benefit, the 75% wage subsidy and making the wage subsidy available to community groups and NPOs, as well. We made a few similar proposals that have meant we are helping more and more people. We proposed that self-employed workers and part-time workers should be able to access this universal benefit, even if they still have a little bit of income. That was not the case at first, but a change was made.

I would like to draw the government's attention to two minor proposals that could make a real difference for many people. I know the Minister of Canadian Heritage has announced some targeted investments for the cultural sector and for artists. I would simply like to take this opportunity to ask him to not forget all the groups and artists who have been making investments for months or years thinking they would go on tour, make an album or create an exhibition, or because they were preparing for a festival. Obviously, most of the festivals planned for this summer have been cancelled, and perhaps this fall's festivals, too. All those activities are a write-off. I think we should be taking losses related to those investments into account and coming up with a plan to help the cultural sector. I just wanted to propose that.

As for community groups, they are eligible for the 75% wage subsidy, which is good, but it can be hard for them to prove a loss of revenue, given that they do not operate the same way as an SME. Furthermore, in a crisis, they receive more donations and government grants than usual. Under such circumstances, their needs are immense, but they may not qualify for the wage subsidy, because demonstrating a loss of revenue is not as easy for them as it is for a private company. This issue is worthy of attention, because groups in our communities have been delivering outstanding services lately. I am thinking in particular of food banks and services delivering food to people who are elderly or isolated. Those are two small things, but they can make a big difference for many people in our communities.

I know I do not have much time left, but there is one more point I would like to raise. It is the impact of successive cuts, year after year, to provincial health transfers. As a result of these cuts, our public health system is underfunded, which has put a colossal burden on the provinces, and this has contributed to the tendency to privatize services and take shortcuts. For instance, orderlies are asked to cover two floors instead of one, and nurses are forced to work overtime. Our public health care system has been weakened and diminished. Today, as our health care system is put to the test, that fact has become all too plain.

I would like to set the record straight right now. Federal transfers to the provinces went up by 6% per year for a 10-year period while there was an agreement with the provinces. The previous Conserva-

tive government made cuts. The calculation is a bit complicated, but transfer payments now go up by about 3% per year. That is a net loss for the provinces, and it means they have to shoulder much of the burden. According to our calculations, that means the provinces will have \$36 billion less with which to provide good health care services to people over a period of 10 years. Unfortunately, the Liberal government stuck with the Conservative government's decision.

I think one of the lessons to be learned from this crisis is that we cannot allow the provinces to bear the burden of the entire health care system by themselves. The federal government needs to give them a hand. Health care funding used to be shared fifty-fifty within Canada. That balance is no more. We need to listen to the provinces and increase health care transfers.

● (1955)

[*English*]

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member spoke about funding for health care. Of course, ideally, we would always like to see more money go to these things. There is also a question of how the money is used.

We had a case under the Liberal government of a vast stockpile of PPE being destroyed and not replaced. We had a case that was reported of the Public Health Agency of Canada, which was supposed to be responsible for pandemic preparedness, using money to fund climate change programs. We would normally think of that as falling under the umbrella of Environment Canada, but climate change programs were funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada, and yet the health minister has admitted that we were not prepared for this situation.

Would the member agree that we should also be having a discussion about how the federal government could be planning ahead and using the resources we have effectively? For example, it should use money intended for public health purposes and it should not destroy vital PPE.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I am just not sure that I would describe the health care system as “these things”. It is much more important than that.

[*Translation*]

My colleague did raise an important question, however. Compared to many other countries, such as South Korea, it seems that Canada did not really learn anything from SARS. After the 2003 epidemic, an advisory committee recommended a control fund, but the fund was never fully funded. I would like to point out that my colleague's party did not fund it either, even though it was in power for eight years, including at that time.

*Government Orders*

In addition, I think we need to do more to make our medical equipment here and make enough of it to keep health workers safe. There will be a reckoning soon enough, but it is already clear to me that not enough was done in terms of preparation over the past few years.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian emergency response benefit alleviated financial hardship for many Canadians, but unfortunately, too many are still without emergency relief. I have a long list of constituents and businesses that are currently missed by all of the relief programs that have been announced.

I have a constituent in my riding who is working part time and taking care of an elderly parent at home. In December, her father was hospitalized with congenital heart failure. When he came back home, she quit her job to care for him full time. By March, her father's condition had improved enough that she was able to start looking for part-time work again. Then the pandemic hit. She is viewed simply as someone who quit her job, and therefore, she is not eligible for help and is now struggling to pay her bills.

I have another constituent who was working two jobs. She lost the income from her main job and since her secondary job brings in slightly more than \$1,000 per month, she is ineligible for assistance.

I have been contacted by students, some in the middle of their studies and some about to graduate. Students in the middle of their programs rely on summer jobs to pay their living expenses and to save for the school year ahead. Without those jobs, they do not know how they are going to pay their rent and grocery bills for the coming months. Some are uncertain if they will be able to go back to school in the fall and continue their studies. Graduating students are in a very tough spot as well. They are coming out of years of school, and they are looking forward to entering the workplace. Instead, they are facing a bleak reality and have nowhere to turn for help.

I have heard from seniors and people with disabilities. These Canadians are surviving on fixed incomes without any buffer for increased costs related to the pandemic. They are experiencing stress, anxiety and insecurity over being unable to cover their basic needs.

With each passing day, too many Canadians are getting closer to losing their businesses, their homes and their dreams. The stress and sense of hopelessness is taking a serious toll on mental health. Individuals, communities, cities, regions and our national economy will all be severely negatively affected if we allow these people and businesses to fall through the cracks.

What our current crisis has revealed more clearly and urgently than ever is that Canada needs a guaranteed livable income. A GLI is not a radical idea. It is an idea whose time has come. Imagine a safety net that captures everyone. For both social and financial reasons, Greens have been advocating for a GLI for years, and the Green Party caucus has been working to advance the national conversation on a guaranteed livable income.

My hon. colleague from Fredericton spoke about the need for a GLI in her speech in the House of Commons during the emergency session a month ago. My hon. colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands brought it up again in the House a week and a half ago. A guaranteed livable income is an idea that the Green Party has been promoting since long before any Greens achieved the honour of taking a seat in this place. It is an idea that has gained support across the political spectrum, because it is a sound and sensible thing to do.

A guaranteed livable income is a fair system that alleviates financial hardship and rewards work. It would replace our patchwork of federal and provincial programs with a single, universal, unconditional cash benefit. The principle is to establish an income floor below which no Canadian could fall. The amount would be based on the cost of living in each region the same way a living wage is calculated. The benefit would be progressively taxed back according to income. Allowing low-income workers to retain the full benefit would be a strong incentive to continue working. There would be no big clawbacks that create disincentives.

The GLI would eliminate extreme poverty and free up our social services to focus on our mental health crisis and addiction crisis. An emergency guaranteed livable income could be set up to automatically make a payment to every Canadian with a social insurance number. Those who did not need the payment would have it taxed back by the CRA in the next tax season.

● (2000)

A guaranteed livable income in normal times would replace federal transfers for social assistance, disability supports, the old age supplement, the guaranteed income supplement for the elderly, the Canada child benefit for parents with children and the Canada workers benefit for the poor, all of which are very guaranteed livable income-like programs.

Because it is a benefit all Canadians would receive, a guaranteed livable income would eliminate the social stigma associated with needing income assistance. We would no longer have to pick apart people's lives to ensure they are eligible.

A GLI would make it possible for more people to upgrade their education and skills, increasing employability and wage-earning capacity.

Studies and pilot programs have shown that a guaranteed livable income or universal basic income improves the health outcomes of low-income people. They can afford nutritious food and a place to live, and long-term stress associated with poverty is decreased. These are just the broad strokes.

*Government Orders*

The benefits of a GLI are many, but right now, in the midst of an unprecedented public health crisis, there is one potential benefit that stands out. Delivering a single, universal, unconditional cash benefit to every Canadian would be simple. Because a GLI would replace our current patchwork of benefit programs, it would dramatically simplify the administration required and save money there as well.

Everyone would receive a monthly payment. Most of the time, most people would not really need it and the funds would flow back to the government through taxes. However, when circumstances change, whether it is one person who loses a job or millions, having a guaranteed livable income in place would help us weather the storms ahead.

There are other storms coming. We know we are in a climate crisis. Epidemiologists and scientists have told us that we can expect more pandemics, we can expect more emergencies, we can expect more situations where people will lose their jobs and lose their homes as we struggle to deal with this climate crisis.

A guaranteed livable income would allow us to navigate future challenges without the stress, anxiety and hopelessness that too many Canadians are enduring now.

• (2005)

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has often brought up the topic of a guaranteed livable wage, even long before the pandemic set in, so this is not necessarily talking about the pandemic.

Would he be willing to scrap EI, OAS and all of these other programs run by the government, in favour of this proposed guaranteed livable income?

**Mr. Paul Manly:** Mr. Speaker, that is the idea. Right now, we have a patchwork of different systems that people have to apply to, including welfare provincially or disability. There would be top-ups for people who have no ability to work, seniors or people with disabilities. That way, we would eliminate the bureaucracy of picking through people's lives to determine whether they are eligible for social assistance or a Canada emergency response benefit when we have another crisis.

Yes, it is an overarching program that would work with the provinces and the federal government, and we would need to negotiate it between the provinces and the federal government to make it work.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

I would like to know his party's position on the government's intention to support the oil industry with credit measures and the program to clean up orphaned wells.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Manly:** Mr. Speaker, it is really important to support the workers in the oil and gas industry. The oil and gas industry has been dining out on Canadian resources and skipping out on the bill, and leaving these orphan wells. It has been taking its profits and then declaring bankruptcy and leaving orphan wells. We have a

huge mess in the oil sands that is going to need to be cleaned up. This is work that needs to be done and there are oil and gas workers who can do that work.

There is also lots of potential with oil wells. About 10% of them are good for geothermal energy creation, and that has been studied and is something that can be done to actually create revenue from some of these orphan wells.

As the price of oil drops, we are also seeing these folks who have the expertise in drilling are going to be able to create geothermal wells as well. We are going to be able to start moving toward renewable because, let us face it, we are not going to be able to compete with Saudi Arabia when it decides it wants to drop the price of oil the way that it has. We are dealing with a geopolitical strife on the oil front.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member's speech highlights the privilege in this place and the fact he has been a part of the process all day long, and Canadians would not even have heard that if this day had not happened. He has appreciated it too, just as we are suggesting, that to be in this place is an important part of our democracy.

That said, I was part of the human resources committee. The basic income guarantee, or whatever it is called, is a great idea in theory, but there is a huge cost to it. It is not just the cost in terms of money but also in terms of all the other social aspects of it. We estimated it would cost \$100 billion per year to run the program.

I am glad the member is supporting oil and gas workers too. It is great to hear the Green Party actually supporting oil and gas workers. Workers in my neck of the woods who are in oil and gas in central British Columbia will appreciate his comments.

However, the big question I have for you is how are you going to pay for a \$100 billion program with such a decline in natural resource development, which your party helped cause?

• (2010)

**The Speaker:** I just want to remind the hon. members to place their questions through the Speaker and not directly across the aisle.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

**Mr. Paul Manly:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think I can take any credit for the drop in oil prices and what has happened in the oil field. I am sorry, but it would be great if I could.

I imagine a better world. I imagine a cleaner world and dealing with climate change and the climate crisis.

We already pay \$173 billion between the federal government and the provinces for the network of social programs that we use, so we would just re-tweak that money and get rid of the welfare programs and all of these additional little programs and create one large program that would work between the provinces and the federal government, and make it fair and have a system where people get taxed back when they do not need it. Then we would not have to worry about bailing people out.

**The Speaker:** It being 8:10 p.m., it is my duty to inform the House that the time provided for debate on the motion has ended today.

\* \* \*

### PRIVILEGE

#### SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC—SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised earlier today by the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith concerning sittings of the House during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the question raised by the hon. member deals with the manner in which the House will conduct business involving all members in the coming weeks, as the country continues to be confronted by a crisis which is without precedent in recent history, I thought it important to return to the House with a ruling quickly.

During his intervention, the member alleged that the rights and privileges of several members would be violated by any motion to proceed with the business of the House while the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing. According to the member, many of his colleagues are unable to physically be in Ottawa to participate in debate because of their obligation to follow quarantine orders when they return to their respective province. In response to the exceptional circumstances we are facing, the member requested that the Chair postpone the resumption of the House business to a later date, in accordance with public health guidelines.

[*Translation*]

It is important to recall that although the Speaker fully understands the sentiments expressed by the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, he is bound by the Standing Orders and decisions of the House in this matter. The house has the exclusive right to govern its internal affairs, schedule its work and establish the conduct of its proceedings. In this regard, during the sitting of Saturday, April 11, a decision was made to adjourn until today, and this order was respected. It is not within the Speaker's purview to question a decision of this nature made by the House.

[*English*]

I also wish to underscore that, both in the motions that the House has adopted in the past few weeks and again today, there has been a recognition of the very particular circumstances in which we find ourselves. For example, the House has recognized the need for members to respect physical distancing and has provided ways that members can participate in proceedings remotely. These are but two examples of how, with the co-operation of members from all sides, the House has shown flexibility in adjusting its rules and practices and demonstrated that our proceedings are quite adaptable. In addition, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House

### *Speaker's Ruling*

Affairs has been charged with evaluating other ways of managing business in the current circumstances and I am confident that it will be able to suggest an acceptable course of action for everyone.

[*Translation*]

The motion passed today is another example of this approach, which permits the House to decide how it wishes to conduct its affairs. A careful reading of the motion does not reveal anything that could in any way prevent members from travelling to Ottawa to participate in the proceedings of the House.

Instead, their movements would be limited upon returning to their community, as the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith explained. I know that all hon. members wish to follow the advice of our public health agencies, as the House Administration has been doing from the beginning of this crisis. I also recognize that for those members who travel to participate in the proceedings of the House, those instructions may have significant consequences for them and their families. However, the key question is to determine whether or not they can fulfill their parliamentary duties.

● (2015)

[*English*]

In my view, it is not for the Chair to dictate to members the manner and degree to which they will participate in the proceedings of the House; as the House has itself determined, the choice rests with them. For this reason, I cannot find there is a *prima facie* question of privilege in this case.

I thank members for their attention.

Before we return to our constituencies to resume our work there, I would like to take a moment to extend my thanks to all those who continue to provide support so the House of Commons can fulfill its responsibilities to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

I thank all the members who are here in the House. They are working under unusual conditions, and I appreciate it.

[*English*]

I would also like to thank our staff in Ottawa and in the members' constituencies for their unflagging support as members carry out their duties both here in the chamber and in the communities they represent.

[*Translation*]

The amazing House Administration, Library of Parliament and Parliamentary Protective Service teams also deserve our sincere appreciation. Their support made it possible for us to sit today confidently and safely. I thank them for showing Canadians that the House of Commons is hard at work despite the pandemic.

*Speaker's Ruling**[English]*

Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to the women and men who care for us, keep us safe and keep us fed. We are deeply grateful to all front-line and health workers who, under the most difficult circumstances, are making every effort to ensure we will get through this together stronger than ever.

*[Translation]*

Accordingly, pursuant to order made earlier this day, the House stands adjourned until Monday, May 25, at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:18 p.m.)

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