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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, July 8, 2020

The House met at 12 p.m.

Prayer

• (1205)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Colleagues, before we begin our proceedings, I would like to say a few words regarding the special measures in place today.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to an order made Tuesday, May 26, the application of Standing Order 17 will be suspended for the current sitting to allow members to practise physical distancing. Members desiring to speak and address the Chair may do so from any seat in the House.

[*English*]

Additionally, as members know, this will be a hybrid sitting of the House. Some members will be participating via video conference and some will be participating in person.

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

[*Translation*]

Lastly, I ask all members who are tabling a document or moving a motion to sign the document and bring it to the Table themselves.

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is rising on a point of order.

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, during the debate on Government Business No. 8 later this day, a member of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party may speak to the motion for not more than 20 minutes, followed by 10 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conclusion of the time provided for debate pursuant to this order, the committee shall rise, the motion shall be deemed withdrawn and the House shall adjourn until Wednesday, July 22, 2020, pursuant to the order adopted on Tuesday, May 26, 2020.

The Speaker: Normally when there is a request for unanimous consent, the Chair asks in the affirmative whether members agree.

[*Translation*]

Since this is a hybrid sitting of the House, if the Chair proceeds in this manner and there are any dissenting voices, especially from members participating by video conference, they might not be heard.

[*English*]

Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I will only ask for those who are opposed to the request to express their disagreement. In this way, the Chair will hear clearly if there are any dissenting voices, and I will accordingly be able to declare whether or not there is unanimous consent to proceed.

All those opposed to the hon. minister's moving the motion will please say nay.

I am hearing no voices, so it is agreed.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

There being no dissenting voice, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to an order made Tuesday, May 26, the House shall now resolve itself into a committee of the whole to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND OTHER MATTERS

(House in committee of the whole to consider matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters, Mr. Anthony Rota in the chair)

The Speaker: The committee will begin its proceeding with the questioning of ministers on matters relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and other matters for a period not exceeding 95 minutes.

Government Orders

[Translation]

The Chair will 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 meetings of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic.

• (1210)

[English]

Each member will be recognized for not more than five minutes, which may be used for posing questions to a minister of the Crown. Members are permitted to split their time with one or more members by so indicating to the Chair.

[Translation]

Please note that we will briefly suspend this part of the sitting partway through to allow employees who provide support for the sitting to replace each other safely.

[English]

We will now begin.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[Translation]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is under investigation for granting a \$900-million contract to an organization to which he has personal ties.

Did the Prime Minister officially recuse himself from the decision-making process to give a contract to a friend, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no.

The non-partisan public service clearly indicated that this was the only organization able to provide this service in the timeline needed. Obviously, the way this unfolded was not as intended, and that is why this charity is no longer administering the project.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister was under investigation for the SNC-Lavalin scandal, he refused to give the Ethics Commissioner all the evidence that was asked for. He also prevented nine people from providing their full testimony.

I have a simple yes-or-no question. Will the Prime Minister commit today to waiving all privileges and confidences so that the Ethics Commissioner can do a full and proper investigation?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite has laid out is simply not the case. We will always co-operate fully with officers of Parliament, including the Ethics Commissioner.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Actually, Mr. Speaker, it is the Prime Minister who said something that was not true. When he was under investigation the last time, he refused to waive full and complete privileges and confidences, preventing not only the former attorney general but also people within the PMO from being able to fully participate in the investigation. That is his modus operandi when it

comes to a scandal investigation: He does everything he can to prevent the full truth from coming out.

I have a simple yes-or-no question. Will he waive all cabinet confidences and privileges this time?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, once again, in the last situation, we did the unprecedented step of waiving cabinet confidentiality and of waiving solicitor-client confidentiality in the situation so that the Ethics Commissioner could fully investigate the matter at hand. It was an unprecedented step we took because we deeply believe in transparency and accountability. That is what we did, and we will continue to work with all officers of Parliament.

• (1215)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, it was an unprecedented step because it was an unprecedented thing that the Prime Minister did. No other prime minister has tried to personally intervene in a criminal court proceeding, so pardon me for not giving him a gold star for handing over some documents to the Ethics Commissioner. We know that he will not waive full cabinet confidences and privileges, as he has refused to do so.

The Prime Minister claims that several organizations were considered to manage the grant program that WE Charity eventually got. Could the Prime Minister name the other organizations that were considered?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the non-partisan public service made a clear recommendation that this was the only organization able to provide this service in the timeline needed. Obviously, the way this unfolded was not as intended, and that is why this charity is no longer administering the project.

We will work with the Ethics Commissioner and answer any questions the Ethics Commissioner may have, as we always do.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, this charity has received many sole-source contracts from the Prime Minister, some for millions of dollars. In the last few years, the real estate holdings that WE has accumulated have gone from \$11.9 million to \$43.7 million. That is 43 million dollars' worth of real estate holdings.

Could the Prime Minister inform the House whether any of the money that was allocated to this charity went to purchase real estate holdings?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, youth organizations in this country have done an exceptional job over the past years, and governments of all stripes have supported various youth organizations.

I can highlight, indeed, that the previous Conservative government provided half a million dollars in funding to WE over the period of 2012, 2013 and 2014. We believe in investing in young people, particularly during a time of pandemic, when they want to be involved and can be involved.

Government Orders

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, who in the Prime Minister's Office discussed the grants program with WE?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the non-partisan public service made the recommendation to move forward with this organization, as it was the only organization capable of delivering what we needed in the time necessary.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I express my concern with all due respect, given the very good relationship we have with the Chair.

The Bloc Québécois legitimately represents a significant proportion of Quebec and does so, in many instances, in conjunction with the Quebec National Assembly and the Premier of Quebec. I am concerned that there is no appropriate penalty for a verbal aggression, for a significant harm, for an injury. Those are dangerous precedents that should not be set because things can be said without thinking. I think that the Prime Minister will understand what I am saying because he himself got a dose of the same medicine this morning. I will not say anything more about it, and I want to put all my trust in the Chair as to the future of this issue, but we have a duty to be extremely vigilant.

Today, the government is going to provide more details about a deficit the likes of which this country has never seen. A huge deficit can be justified depending on what is being done with the money. The Deputy Prime Minister made a very clear promise to adapt the Canada emergency response benefit. I may not be the Conservative Party's biggest fan, but I appreciate its members' support for using a modified CERB as a way to get people back to work. However, when the government fails to consider the unique needs of seasonal industries and artists, when its \$14-billion transfer to the provinces and territories comes with strings attached, and when its fixed-rate program fails spectacularly, that means it did not always do as well as it could have with the money it borrowed to dole out during the crisis.

Another glaring example is all the money Air Canada got. Air Canada got some \$800 million and access to the emergency wage benefit despite atrocious use of French in its service delivery, flooding the market in the Quebec regions to bring prices down and kill the competition, and, now, major service cutbacks across Canada, including a lot in the Quebec regions.

Does the Prime Minister agree that Air Canada has not served the Quebec regions well at all?

• (1220)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the hon. member's question. I would point out that his preamble was a bit long, so I will try to condense his comments and reply the best I can. I will start with Air Canada.

This is not the first time the members of the Bloc Québécois have suggested that we should not be helping the workers of certain organizations or certain companies because the Bloc disagrees with their objective or their behaviour.

In the early days of the pandemic, the government made the decision to help Canadian families who needed it. We were not going to

worry too much about what company they worked for, because workers who have jobs need that income to pay for groceries, support their families and pay their rent. We therefore made the decision to invest in and support families across the country, whether they work for Air Canada or a small business at the end of their street.

That is the choice we made, because if we did not invest in helping these families or spend money on helping the workers, they would have been forced to borrow money on their credit card, add to their mortgage and get further in debt. The federal government has the best interest rates, and it costs us less to borrow money. That is why what we were able to do is manageable. We were able to help Canadians during this crisis, first, so that we could control the spread of this pandemic and, second, to get the economy going again as soon as possible.

That is the choice we made as a government, as a party. Obviously, our opponents may have wanted us to do a bit less. That would have meant asking Canadians to go further into debt. That was unacceptable to us because that would have put the population at risk and undermined our economic recovery.

That was the choice we made, and it was the right choice.

[*English*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that our country is in a difficult situation and that will require making some difficult choices.

Will the Prime Minister choose to stop the help for Canadians who are desperately in need, or will he choose to ask the wealthiest Canadians, those who are at the very top, to finally start paying their fair share?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our choice as a government was very clear. We chose to help Canadians. We chose to send the help that was needed to families right across the country.

Over 11 million Canadians benefited from the Canada emergency response benefit and the wage subsidy, and we will continue to help those families in need. That is the choice we made and that will allow us to both control the spread of the virus and assure that our economy comes back strong.

We will continue to stand up for the most vulnerable and for all Canadians who need it.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I will take that as a no then.

I will ask more directly. Will the Prime Minister commit to ending the use of offshore tax havens, which cost our economy billions of dollars?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, everyone must pay his or her fair share of taxes. That is why, when we took office over five years ago, we invested over \$1 billion in the Canada Revenue Agency to be able to crack down further on tax avoidance and tax evasion. We have taken many measures since.

Government Orders

We will continue to work extremely hard to ensure the integrity of—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby South.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I guess I will take that again as a no. The Prime Minister is not willing to take on offshore tax havens.

How about this? Will the Prime Minister put in place a wealth tax on those who have fortunes of over \$20 million so that those richest Canadians are actually paying their fair share instead of putting the burden on working families?

• (1225)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the very first thing we did when we came into office as a government five years ago was raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% and lower them for the middle class and, if I could remind everyone, the NDP voted against that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, to be clear, is the Prime Minister prepared to bring an end to tax havens, to loopholes, and ensure that the wealthiest Canadians pay their fair share?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of this pandemic we have been focused on providing help to Canadians who need it. We invested in community organizations, charities and in direct assistance for families who needed it across the country. That remains our priority.

[*English*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, let us look at the decisions that the government has made. The Prime Minister moved very quickly to give nearly \$1 billion to his friends at WE, but, to date, Canadians living with disabilities have not received any support.

When will all Canadians living with disabilities finally get the help they need?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, we have done a lot for Canadians right across the board, including Canadians with disabilities, but we know we need to do more. That is why we put forward a proposal to do more for Canadians with disabilities, but unfortunately political games in the House prevented us from being able to move forward on it.

We continue to work on delivering for Canadians with disabilities despite the opposition of the Conservatives.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, we have seen some serious concerns across the country with the use of wellness checks by police. In some cases, we have seen wellness checks by police result in the death of the person who was supposed to be checked.

Will the Prime Minister commit to a review of the use of wellness checks and the way they are conducted, and ensure that health care providers and health care professionals are responding instead of the police?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, Canada has a problem with systemic racism. This is something that has gone on for far too long. I want to thank all Canadians who are speaking up now and lending their voice to moving forward on this cause.

We have just had two days of cabinet retreats in which various ministers have been tasked with specific responsibilities to move forward on things like policing, on justice reform and on a broad range of issues that will counter the systemic discrimination that exists in the country.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, did anyone in the Prime Minister's office discuss the \$900 million contract with WE with anybody in the WE organization?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to remind everyone that the Canada student service grant was an opportunity for students to connect with not-for-profits and be able to participate in their communities to help.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, did anyone in the Prime Minister's office discuss this \$900 million contract with anyone at WE?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the independent non-partisan public service actually referred and suggested that we use WE Charity. We accepted its recommendation.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, did anyone in the PMO talk with anyone at WE about this contract?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the public service made a recommendation that we should use this charity. We accepted its recommendation and proceeded.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, yes, our government is always here to support Canadians, because we know it is an unprecedented and challenging time. We will be there—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, so the minister confirmed that the PMO did talk with WE.

Did the Prime Minister or any member of his family talk directly with WE about this contract before it was awarded, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, it is really important that the member correct the record, because the member should not be putting words in my mouth.

What I have said clearly is that the public service made a recommendation. We accepted its recommendation.

Government Orders

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I asked a yes or no question and I finally got a yes. It was merciful that we finally got an answer. If the minister wants to correct herself, then I will allow her to do that, as the House will welcome that clarification.

Again, yes or no, did anyone in the PMO talk with anyone at WE about this contract before it was awarded?

• (1230)

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as has clearly been stated, the public service made a recommendation for WE Charity to advance this program. We accepted its recommendation.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, so we have gone from yes to maybe.

I have a different question now. Will the government table the list of all other organizations that were considered as potentially able to deliver this \$900 million student volunteer program?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows very well, yesterday at the finance committee, members of all parties passed a motion to have us appear and this information be made available.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, how many different organizations were considered before the \$900 million was granted to WE?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, once again for clarification, a third party was recommended by the public service to advance this program. When it comes to the suite of programs we put forward for students, it is a suite of programs of \$9 billion to ensure—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, how many other organizations were considered?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, the public service made a recommendation for WE Charity to deliver the Canada student service grant. We accepted its recommendation.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, one last time, how many other organizations were considered?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, one last time, the public service made a recommendation for this organization to deliver the Canada student service grant. We accepted its recommendation.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, is that the big “WE” or small “we”? That is my question.

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, we do appreciate the opportunity to have a conversation about how we support all Canadians during this time. We know that students have also been impacted and that is why the suite of programs has been made available.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, it looks like we have a hard time getting answers.

Would the government be prepared to table today a full list of all other organizations that were considered to deliver this \$900 million grant?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that our focus is on delivering programs for Canadians, including students. This information is being requested by the finance committee. All

members of all parties have been able to advance that motion and we will make sure it is available.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be here with you today. It has been a while since we last saw one another. Many things have happened in Canada since then, but, unfortunately, they have been very bad things.

In just 15 days, under the current Prime Minister, Canada suffered a loss at the UN and saw its credit rating lowered, and the Ethics Commissioner began another investigation of the Prime Minister. The Liberal government has scored a hat trick in the mismanagement of public funds.

How can the Prime Minister accept such a disaster and explain it to Canadians?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to see you again and to see our colleagues and friends here.

On the contrary, during the past few weeks the government has worked to continue to support Canadians who have lost their jobs and who need a helping hand, to address public health issues and to help small and medium-sized businesses. The Government of Canada will continue to do its job for all Canadians.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, this government is so proud of its pathetic hat trick that it struggled to find someone to respond. He did not answer the question, though, because all three of the Prime Minister's goals were on Canada's own net. In reality, this government scored three big failures in 15 days.

That is not all. The Prime Minister got one more hat trick: For the third time, he is under investigation by the Ethics Commissioner.

How can a government minister defend his Prime Minister?

• (1235)

[*English*]

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the non-partisan public service made a clear recommendation that this was the organization that would be able to satisfy and provide this service in the timeline needed.

When it comes to the Ethics Commissioner, what has been always clear is that we will always work with officers of Parliament, including the Ethics Commissioner.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, it is tragic that Canada suffered three failures in 15 days and that this government seems unable to find someone to answer basic questions about the Prime Minister's ethics, the credit-rating drop and the government's failure at the UN.

There is more. Today, we learned that Canada has the worst unemployment rate in the G7, at 13.7%. However, some businesses in my riding, such as Groupe PolyAlto, are looking for employees.

On the one hand, we have the worst record on unemployment, and on the other hand we have a labour crisis. Why? It is because the Liberals' policies are neither properly administered nor tailored to present needs.

Why is the government sticking to positions and policies that discourage people from going to work?

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the start of the pandemic, the government has been taking concrete measures to support Canadians, workers and businesses. We have helped people get through this pandemic, and we are going to keep doing that. The important thing is to make sure that health and safety remain Canadians' number one priority.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, we agreed that the government's first measures needed to be implemented, because we were in crisis mode. Now we are in recovery mode. However, the policies that were appropriate to respond to the crisis are not appropriate to manage the recovery.

What do the Liberals have to say to Groupe PolyAlto, a company in my riding that has 80 employees and room for many more but that is struggling to hire new staff because people are choosing the CERB over work?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of this crisis, our government has been taking concrete, decisive action. We supported workers with the wage subsidy, and we supported families with the Canadian emergency response benefit. If we had not done these things, we would be worse off economically. We will therefore continue to support Canadians throughout this crisis.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Let me repeat, Mr. Speaker. The policies that were appropriate to respond to the crisis are not appropriate to manage the economic recovery. The Canada emergency response benefit and the Canada emergency student benefit are harming the Canadian economy and business owners who want to get the economy moving again.

Why is the government maintaining policies that are not adapted to today's reality?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we are adapting to today's reality. We are in the midst of a pandemic and we want to support Canadians, workers and businesses. We have taken measures to support businesses and to get through this difficult time. We will support Canadians and make their health and safety a priority.

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

It is hard not to feel disappointed in one's government when every day there is a new scandal. Does the Prime Minister believe it was ethical to award a near \$1-billion exclusive contract to his friends at WE Charity, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the non-partisan public service made a clear recommendation that this was the organization able to provide the service in the timeline needed. We accepted its recommendation.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Speaker, given the ongoing ethics investigation, will the Prime Minister and his family be stepping back from their involvement with the WE Charity until the investigation is concluded, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, once again, at the recommendation of the public service, we accepted the recommendation. It is well known that the Prime Minister and his wife have spoken at WE Charity events, and we will work with the Ethics Commissioner to answer any questions that he may have.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Speaker, I think it would be inappropriate to continue involvement with an investigation ongoing by the Ethics Commissioner, but at the very least, will the Prime Minister confirm he will not invoke cabinet confidence on this matter, commit to full transparency and allow the Ethics Commissioner to complete his investigation free from interference, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the parliamentary finance committee passed a motion, supported by all parties, requesting answers. That information will be provided and people will get those answers.

It should also be noted that when it comes to WE charities, there are multiple parties in the House that have interaction with them, including the member for Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, who was at WE Day. Prime Minister Harper hosted WE Day—

● (1240)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister see a conflict of interest in taking part in the cabinet decision to award this \$900-million sole-sourced contract to his friends at the WE Charity?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the non-partisan public service made the clear recommendation that this was the organization able to provide this service in the timeline needed. We accepted its recommendation.

Government Orders

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, one of the charity's co-founders made a donation to the Prime Minister's electoral campaign. Does the Prime Minister see the conflict of interest in taking part in the decision to award this sole-sourced contract worth \$900 million to his donors?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, first of all, our focus is going to be on delivering for Canadians, including those most vulnerable and impacted disproportionately, which includes students. Yesterday, the parliamentary finance committee passed a motion, supported by all parties, for this information to be made available. We will work to ensure that information is available.

When it comes to the recommendation of WE, it was made by the public service. We accepted the recommendation of the public service. When it comes to the ethics investigation—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, during the last Ethic Commissioner's investigation into the Prime Minister, bearing his name with the number "II" beside it due to there having been multiple ethics investigations into the Prime Minister, the commissioner found that nine individuals identified themselves as having information that would further the investigation. They were not able to testify as witnesses because they were shielded when the Prime Minister invoked cabinet confidence.

Will he commit to the House that he will not invoke cabinet confidence during the third investigation into his failure to follow the act?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as we have always done since taking office, we work with independent officers of Parliament. When it comes to the Ethics Commissioner, we have always complied and made ourselves available. That was a clear difference between our government and the previous government under Stephen Harper. It continuously undermined independent officers of Parliament. Clearly, that is taking place now.

We will work with the Ethics Commissioner to ensure the information is available and we will continue to ensure that we are here to support Canadians. That is our priority and remains our focus.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, the minister's statement is not true. I will quote the report, which states, "During this examination, nine witnesses informed our Office that they had information they believed to be relevant, but that could not be disclosed because, according to them, this information would reveal a confidence of the Queen's Privy Council".

Will the Liberals waive the confidence in this case, unlike the last time?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, once again, it should be noted that when it comes to what the member is referring to, the Prime Minister actually waived solicitor-client privilege for the period in question, including cabinet confidence. This has never taken place, and surely would not have happened under the Conservatives. It surely would not have happened under Stephen Harper.

We will always work with our independent officers. That is what we do on this side of the House.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

The CCP, Chinese Communist Party, has bought up most of the cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo in its quest to dominate the lithium battery industry. UNICEF estimates that 40,000 children are labourers in the DRC. What measures has the government taken to protect the human rights of the children who are forced to extract this cobalt?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member and the House well know, human rights are a core pillar of our foreign policy. Everywhere around the world, where we can stand up and speak up for people who have been victims of human rights violations, we will stand up and we will speak up for them.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, on two previous occasions, I have questioned the government in regard to human rights violations by the Chinese Communist Party in China and Hong Kong, and I have only received expressions of varying degrees of concern.

I am thankful that the government actually rescinded the extradition treaty with Hong Kong. Could the government tell us what other steps it is taking to assist the 300,000 Canadians in Hong Kong and open the door to Hong Kong refugees?

• (1245)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, not only did we suspend the extradition treaty, but we stopped the export of sensitive items to Hong Kong. We updated our travel advisory, and tonight I will have a call with Five Eyes colleagues to explore with colleagues in the international community the additional steps we can take.

The Prime Minister has been clear that we will be looking at other measures, including immigration, and we will come back to the House in due course.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I am sure that those who are refugees would like that exploration to be done expeditiously.

What measures are being taken to reassess our relationship with the People's Republic of China, given new evidence from the Associated Press of forceful population limitations being imposed on Uighurs by the CCP, especially given that these kinds of acts are indicators of genocide?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, to go back to the member's previous question, I can point to Chris Patten, the former governor of Hong Kong, who has expressed support for the measures taken by Canada, and the leadership by Canada when it comes to Hong Kong.

When it comes to the Uighur question, we are deeply disturbed. We should all be disturbed in the House by these allegations and the reports that we have seen. We will continue to work with the international community—

Government Orders

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am also deeply disturbed, but we should be clear that our thoughts and our prayers are not enough.

Is the government prepared to recognize that Muslims in China are facing an ongoing genocide?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would say that we went well beyond words. We took action, and the world noticed.

When it came to Taiwan, when it comes to Hong Kong, Canada not only spoke up, but was front and centre in taking action to stand up and speak—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, regarding Uighurs specifically, is the government prepared to recognize that Uighur Muslims in China face an ongoing genocide?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear with Canadians and the House. We are deeply disturbed by the reports that we have seen. We are consulting with the international community. Canada will continue, as it always has, to speak up and stand up for human rights around the world, and that will be the case when it comes to the Uighurs. I have raised this issue, both privately and in public, with the Chinese authorities.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, if the minister is not prepared to use the word “genocide”, will he recognize that what we are reading about constitutes crimes against humanity under international law?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, let me be clear again. I will answer very clearly for the member.

As I said, we are deeply disturbed by the reports, as everyone in the House should be. We are consulting with the international community. We will speak up. We will stand up for human rights with the Uighurs and with all the ethnic minorities in China, which are—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, we all feel those feelings, but feeling disturbed is not enough. I asked about genocide. I asked about crimes against humanity. Let me ask one more important question.

Yes or no, Minister: Is the government prepared to impose Magnitsky sanctions on those involved in gross violations of human rights in Xinjiang, in Hong Kong or elsewhere in the Republic of China?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple. Yes, we are considering all the options when it comes to standing up for human rights. As I said to the member many times, and I welcome him, we should speak with one voice. This is not a political issue. This is about fundamental values and principles that Canadians who are watching from home share with us. There are no politics in that. Canada will stand up and speak up for human rights around the world.

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

Will the fiscal snapshot include specific funds for the energy and resource sector, yes or no?

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today's snapshot will present the investments that our government has made since the beginning of the pandemic.

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, will the fiscal snapshot include what funds will be allocated for businesses that use personal chequing accounts and want to apply for the CEBA program?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, today's snapshot will present the investments we have made with the economic response plan. We will present the numbers, the amounts for CEBA, the CERB and the different investments that—

• (1250)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, will the fiscal snapshot indicate if the wage subsidy program can be extended within the budget allotment?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning, our government has acted promptly and decisively to make sure we are supporting Canadians, workers, businesses, non-profit organizations and vulnerable—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, what percentage of the trillion dollars' worth of debt is termed out over two years?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, our government acted decisively and promptly to make sure we supported Canadians, workers and businesses. We will present—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, my province has announced a recovery plan. On what date can we expect a recovery plan from the government, including a comprehensive fiscal update?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, while the situation continues to be very volatile, our government is committed to continuing to be transparent with Canadians about what we know and what we do not know.

Mr. James Cumming: Mr. Speaker, we are all here today, and the government claims accountability.

Why on earth would the finance minister schedule the fiscal snapshot for after question period?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, I invite the hon. member to stay this afternoon, as the Minister of Finance will be presenting the economic snapshot.

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Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only explanation for doing it after and not before is to avoid actually taking questions on the update.

Maybe this minister can tell us how much interest Canadians are going to have to pay to service the debt, which is expected to hit a trillion dollars before the end of the year.

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, going into the global pandemic, Canada was in a great position to deploy its fiscal firepower to protect Canadians, and we have. A worst-case scenario for Canadians and the economy would have been to not act.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, that is not true. Before COVID hit, the government's track record of mismanagement compromised our ability and fiscal capacity to deal with the crisis. The government inherited a balanced budget, a near-full-employment economy and a AAA credit rating, and has squandered all of it.

Will this minister tell us what the cost is to service Canada's debt?

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of the pandemic, Canada was well positioned to use its financial power to protect Canadians, and that is what we did. Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan involves giving workers and Canadians the financial support they need to get through this crisis.

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, how much will the downgrade of Canada's credit rating add to our cost to service debt?

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the crisis, we have been clear and transparent with Canadians. We will continue to be and we will support Canadians during the crisis.

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, what about a further downgrade?

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, Canada's sound fiscal position means that we can continue to support Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General tabled only three reports. Typically in a session they would table seven or eight.

When will the government fully fund the Auditor General so the Auditor General can do her job?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is unfortunately not enough time to commend the work of the Auditor General and to say how much work we need to do. We look forward to working with her.

The Speaker: We will now break for a short time so that our staff can safely change position and continue to provide the great service that they have been providing over the last little while.

• (1255)

[Translation]

The Deputy Chair: We are now ready to resume the sitting.

The hon. member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Manicouagan.

After Air Canada ruthlessly announced that it was cutting service to all of the regions of Quebec, many carriers came forward and said that they would be prepared to take over. However, they are afraid of losing everything if Air Canada decides to barge back in because they have all too often been the victims of Air Canada's anti-competitive practices.

Can the Minister of Transport guarantee that no further assistance will be provided to Air Canada? Can he reassure us in that regard?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Chair, Air Canada's decision to cancel about 30 of its regional flights was unfortunate. That is disappointing for all those affected. At the same time, we can certainly understand the situation that Air Canada is in. It is operating its aircraft at near-empty and losing a lot of money right now. We are closely monitoring the situation.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Madam Chair, service in the regions is an essential service for airlines. Air Canada has received \$800 million from the federal government, on top of the emergency wage subsidy. Air Canada benefits not only from its monopoly, but also from frequent protection by the federal government.

What will the government do to ensure that the regions keep this essential service? Small carriers want to offer this service, but they want Air Canada to stay out of their territory because they know that Air Canada engages in anti-competitive practices.

Will the minister stand up for them?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Madam Chair, we are well aware of the situation. It is very disappointing for the affected regions. People rely on air transportation. We are monitoring the situation very closely.

At the same time, we need to recognize that Air Canada is currently flying planes that are often far from full, and the company loses money every time it does that. We are currently looking into the situation.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Madam Chair, I have a simple question.

Does the minister work for Air Canada or for Quebec's regions? The regions need this service.

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Hon. Marc Garneau: Madam Chair, I work for all Canadians and I am proud to do so.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Chair, in eastern Quebec, across Quebec, in Val-d'Or, Mont-Joli, Baie-Comeau and Gaspé, people are going through very hard times. Air Canada has cut back services, closed counters and eliminated connections. People tell us that is very disappointing, but I think it is more than that.

I am thinking of people in my riding, such as Megan Henley, who are going after Air Canada because it is refusing to refund their tickets. Air Canada counters are now closing. People cannot even reach Air Canada, and the company is not refunding their money.

I am thinking of elected representatives and reeves all over eastern Quebec and Abitibi who are talking about finding made-in-Quebec solutions. I am also thinking of my colleagues from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia and Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, who are working with people and who are here to advocate for this initiative.

I would like to know what the Minister of National Revenue has to say about all this. She does not seem to have much to say about it. I would like to know if she supports our regions too.

• (1300)

Hon. Marc Garneau: Madam Chair, I do not want to repeat myself, but I understand what this means for the affected regions. Much of the time, the planes flying there were nowhere near full. Air Canada was losing money. We are taking a close look at the situation. I discussed the matter with Minister Bonnardel last week, so I am very aware of the situation and people's concerns across the country.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Chair, I am not going to repeat myself.

What I would say to the hon. Minister of Transport is that passenger numbers were up 30% in eastern Quebec. I think it was in Mont-Joli. Those were the most recent numbers, so his reading of the situation is not quite correct. I did hear the Minister of Transport repeat himself. Rather than make him repeat himself again, I will direct my question to the Minister of National Revenue. This issue significantly affects her riding, including both Gaspésie and the Magdalen Islands, yet I have not heard her reaction.

Will she support a Quebec initiative and refuse to bail out Air Canada?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, the Minister of National Revenue fights for her constituents and her region every day. She has spoken out publicly on this issue. She has also spoken with the Quebec government and the Minister of Transport. She is very actively involved in this issue and does not need to take lessons from the Bloc Québécois.

[English]

Ms. Emmanuela Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

For the last few months, our government has been doing its best to protect Canadians against the COVID-19 pandemic. We followed the advice of our public health officials and allowed science to guide us down the right path. While the number of cases in Canada has gone down significantly and continues to do so, we know that a second, more deadly wave of the virus may be around the corner. With provinces reopening their economies and loosening travel restrictions, many seem to have forgotten that this virus is still a threat, and others remain worried and scared about the second wave that is coming.

[Translation]

Given that a second wave of COVID-19 is within sight both here and around the world, and that our neighbours to the south have not yet managed to contain their first wave, it is all the more essential that we stay cautious in how we relax our travel restrictions and open our borders to the rest of the world.

[English]

Worried constituents have reached out to me to ask why we are allowing Canadians to travel abroad this summer if travel is what brought the virus to Canada in the first place. While I do trust that we are prepared and are enforcing safety measures to prevent those who choose to travel from spreading the virus, I would like to ask the Minister of Health what specifically our government is doing to protect the health and well-being of Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically with regard to travel regulations.

[Translation]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for Saint-Laurent for the question.

[English]

We are continuing to encourage Canadians to avoid all non-essential travel. The member is absolutely right. As we flatten the curve here in Canada, and we are making great progress in that regard, the cases around the world are rising, in fact at astronomical rates in some countries. We continue to provide the travel advice to Canadians that it is best to stay home. We will continue to evolve our advice based on the evolution of the pandemic and how it evolves in other countries.

It is important for Canadians to remember that if they can avoid travel, they should do so. Also, it is really important that if people are pursuing essential travel, they stay home if they are sick. Nobody needs to travel who is unwell or concerned about his or her health. When people are travelling, if they are pursuing travel as Canadians, it is very important to monitor their health closely and report to local public health as soon as possible should they develop any symptoms, so that they can be properly assessed—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

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Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Chair, communities across British Columbia have been looking for signs of economic recovery during the global pandemic. Public infrastructure projects are a key driver of economic stability and renewal, and they also serve to make sure all British Columbians have access to the services and cultural networks they need to build resilient communities.

That is why I was really pleased to see the federal government's commitment of more than \$44.5 million last week for 21 projects across the Lower Mainland under the investing in Canada plan. The announcement included the Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House redevelopment project. This is an amazing project that will allow the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of B.C. to provide better services to metro Vancouver's vulnerable population. It will include spaces for child care, supportive seniors services, a commercial kitchen, community gatherings and a space for an outdoor garden.

Can the President of the Treasury Board tell the House what the government is doing to improve community outcomes and create jobs in my home province?

• (1305)

Hon. Jean-Yves Ducloux (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells for his support for his community.

Our government's investments in community, recreation and cultural infrastructure are promoting the health and well-being of British Columbians and building strong, dynamic communities. I would like to note that more than \$19 million of the federal and provincial funding we announced just last week is going to nine projects in indigenous communities.

I am also happy to say that a second intake for projects in B.C. was announced on June 25. It will examine a new round of investments under the community and recreation funding stream and under the rural and northern funding stream. These new projects would be eligible for a total of up to \$159 million in federal investments.

I can also assure this House that many more infrastructure projects are coming in the next few months. Canada and British Columbia are working very well together to support jobs, improve our communities and safely and sustainability restore economic growth.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

The government encouraged people to apply for the CERB and deal with complications after, and that is exactly what has occurred: complications. In Manitoba, the Pallister government has decided to treat the \$2,000 CERB as an excuse to cut provincial supports. EIA recipients who got CERB are now ineligible for future support.

Instead of making sure provinces do not claw back federal help, why has the government chosen to callously go after people who applied in good faith as “fraudulent applicants”? People in my riding who have their EIA paid out to landlords will no longer have

their rent paid and they are at risk of homelessness. This is a nightmare.

Will the government respect Make Poverty History Manitoba's request and not require EIA recipients to pay back the CERB, forcing individuals deeper into poverty, yes or no?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Chair, I can assure everyone in this House that we are going after people who prey on the vulnerable, not the vulnerable, and I do not make any apologies for that.

I can also assure everyone that I have worked extremely hard to get provinces to understand the importance of not clawing back the CERB in these times. People have earned money; they are no longer earning money, and they deserve the income replacement. Some provinces have chosen to take that up and not claw back the CERB; others have not, and I continue to put both private, personal pressure but also public pressure on those provinces. It is unfair to people with disabilities that their supports are being clawed back, and I continue to advocate for that not to happen.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Chair, small businesses are the heart and soul of Winnipeg Centre, yet the government has made their ability to survive questionable. Paul Taylor, who owns the Brickhouse Gym in Winnipeg Centre, said, “These rent assistance programs are not a one-size-fits-all issue. Businesses have suffered from COVID-19. Programs need to be scalable to help Canadian small businesses survive. On top of the failure of the rent program that relies on landlords to sign on, the wage subsidy arbitrarily requires businesses to have their own CRA business number since before the pandemic, but a lot of small businesses do not, including many in the gig economy, in arts, film—”

The Deputy Chair: Unfortunately, I am going to have to allow the minister to respond within the time frame. There are only 18 seconds left.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, together with the provinces and territories, our government acted promptly and decisively by putting up front the Canada emergency commercial rent assistance in order to reduce rent by 75% for hard-hit small businesses. Our government is extending the program by a month, which will go on through July. This program is helping thousands of small businesses across the country. We will continue to monitor this program to ensure we support Canadian businesses.

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Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Chair, after years of cuts to health care in Manitoba, the Conservative government here is now preparing to spend millions of dollars on private clinics to make up for surgery backlogs. That is money that could be invested in the public system in order to restore needed capacity, and we know that public delivery of services is the best way to realize the spirit and the promise of the Canada Health Act. Therefore, I am wondering what the government is going to do to promote the public delivery of services.

• (1310)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, this is critically important to all Canadians, regardless of which province they live in. Our government will always fiercely stand up for access to health care that is afforded to every Canadian through the Canada Health Act, and I will work with the member personally to make sure that we understand the full nature of the proposed intent of the province.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Chair, one of the reasons I think the government's answer to this is very important, and it is something that we have learned during the pandemic, or that has been publicized and many already knew, is that the state of long-term care in Canada has not been good. It has not been serving a lot of Canadians well.

We know from the evidence that for-profit delivery of long-term care results, on average, in lower health outcomes for Canadians. We know that a lot of federal money will be required in order to get long-term care up to where it needs to be in Canada. We want the federal government to be convening meetings with the provinces now on how to do that, and we want the government to be a champion at that table for getting for-profit delivery services out of long-term care.

Is the government committed to doing everything it can to get for-profit delivery of long-term care off the table in Canada?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, as the Prime Minister and I have said, we will stand with the provinces and territories to make sure that every senior has the ability to live with dignity and safety regardless of where they live.

As the member knows, we have actually invested well over \$4 billion in home care in provinces and territories, because we know the best solution is to be able to stay in one's home for as long as possible. We are going to continue to work in that vein with the provinces and territories, but also, as we committed to earlier in the pandemic, to be with provinces and territories—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Provencher.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Chair, I am going to be splitting my time with the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam.

We are pleased to see that Canada is beginning to reopen. However, that means that Canadians need access to government services beyond COVID. Many constituents have expressed to me their concern and frustration that they are not able to access these important services. For example, my province of Manitoba has seen very few COVID cases and, yet, the CRA tax centre in Winnipeg remains closed indefinitely, severely impacting both employers and taxpayers.

What is the Liberal government's plan to safely restore CRA services?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Chair, the Canada Revenue Agency is also intent on protecting the health and safety of its employees. We are currently working on a return-to-work plan with a continued emphasis, as I was saying, on the health and safety of employees.

It is very important to us to be able to provide quality services to the public.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Chair, during the past few months Canadian front-line and essential workers such as truck drivers, bus drivers, manufacturers, farmers, restaurant workers, store clerks, gas station attendants, construction workers, bankers, mechanics and even the media have found ways to work safely.

Can the Prime Minister or the minister explain why so many Canadian workers have found ways to do their jobs safely and the Liberal government cannot figure out a way to restore the public service to Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Madam Chair, I would like to point out to my colleague that 94% of our employees are working from home.

I tip my hat to the employees of the Canada Revenue Agency who have been able to respond to Canadians. Canadians have been able to receive the CERB and the CESB.

Among these 94% of employees working for Canadians, 60% are women. Looking at everything that happened from one end of the country to the other, when everything was closed in terms of child care, I can only congratulate the employees of the Canada Revenue Agency on their excellent work.

• (1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Falk: Madam Chair, that was not an answer.

The Auditor General has revealed a troubling failure of the public safety minister in her latest report. Under the Liberal government, tens of thousands of individuals who are subject to removal orders are in Canada, including some with criminal ties. This unacceptable failure risks further undermining the integrity of our immigration system and public safety.

Instead of wasting his time attacking law-abiding firearm owners with legislation and regulations, could the public safety minister do his job and enforce removal orders?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Chair, this is an excellent example of the exceptional work done by the Auditor General. I will take this opportunity to thank him for his report. I will also point out to the member that we significantly increased the resources of CBSA to effect those removals because we know how important they are to a well-managed immigration system. We are making investments in something that a previous Conservative government cut to restore that capacity. We thank the Auditor General for his recommendations and we will be implementing all of them.

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Madam Chair, the restriction on chinook fishing is threatening the livelihoods of British Columbians. I have a constituent who now fears potential bankruptcy because the Liberals choose to punish fishers for their own failure to restore salmon stocks.

When will the Liberals stop scapegoating British Columbians and start dealing with the real threats to chinook salmon such as undertreated sewage, and illegal and unreported fishing in the Fraser River?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Chair, the chinook salmon are in serious decline. We are taking measures to make sure that we are going to protect the stocks. It is a critically important piece of the work that we are doing. Fisheries management issues are something that are always difficult when people are impacted, but it is something that we know we have to do, along with habitat restoration and addressing climate change. All of these things are impacting the stocks. We are going to make sure we do everything we can to protect the chinook salmon.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Madam Chair, the Liberals announced \$45 million in funding for free and weekly periodicals. This includes ethnic media, but that funding will be divided among approximately 2,500 outlets, including English publications. The National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada said that this will barely scratch the surface and it will not counter the pending collapse that awaits ethnic media.

If the Liberals truly believe diversity is Canada's strength, will they stop treating ethnic media like an afterthought?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Chair, our government has been there for Canadian media and we have been for years. We have invested more than \$650 million to help media across the country. I find it quite ironic that I would be asked what our government has been doing to help the media when I have heard that the platform for the member for Durham would actually cut back the \$600 million in support that we have provided for the media.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Madam Chair, as Canada reopens, the demand for PPE masks continues to grow, but the government is delaying the awarding of contracts to Canadian manufacturers. On June 18, the minister said contracts were given to 25 Canadian companies and hundreds across the world. Will the government protect domestic production and give priority to made-in-Canada companies and Canadian supply chains?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Chair, the member's question is somewhat misguided in the sense that we have placed an incredible priority on

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domestic manufacturing. Over half of the face shields received in Canada already have been produced domestically, and we are well on our way to becoming self-sufficient, which we intend to do to address future waves of this pandemic.

The Deputy Chair: Before we continue, I want to remind members who are participating virtually to ensure that their cameras are on and not obstructed so that we can have a good functioning of Parliament.

The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Chair, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Oshtemo.

Can the President of the Treasury Board tell us how many public servants are currently working for the government?

• (1320)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am very pleased to say that all Government of Canada employees have been working since the start of the pandemic to help Canadians overcome the difficult situations in which they find themselves.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Chair, I am going to help the minister out. Approximately 285,000 public servants work for Her Majesty.

Does the Prime Minister believe that public servants are competent people?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Madam Chair, I am pleased to say that Canada is fortunate to have an extraordinary public service and I believe that my colleague thinks so as well.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Chair, I agree with the President of the Treasury Board. That is why I am asking which minister authorized the awarding of a \$900-million contract to WE Charity to manage this program.

[*English*]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Chair, of course our priority will always be to support Canadian companies. I would like to acknowledge the fact that 40% of the production right now of personal protective equipment that we have purchased has been allocated to Canadian companies because we have been able to mobilize industry and support companies. This is a proud moment for all Canadians, particularly those Canadian companies that have stepped—

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[Translation]

The Deputy Chair: Before giving the floor to the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, I would like to remind members that there can be no points of order during the time for questions addressed to ministers.

The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Chair, I have a very simple question. Which cabinet member, including the Prime Minister, authorized an untendered contract, when we know that 285,000 public servants could very well have done the job? The government nevertheless gave it to an outside organization.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Madam Chair, the non-partisan public service clearly indicated that this was the only organization able to provide this service in the timeline needed. It made a recommendation and we took it.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Madam Chair, once a recommendation is received, is there someone running this country? Who decided to award this contract? Who signed it? Which minister signed the contract? Public servants do not sign contracts; ministers do.

Who is running the country right now?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Madam Chair, as I said, the non-partisan public service made a clear recommendation. We accepted this recommendation because our priority will always be to ensure that Canadians have the services they need during this pandemic.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Chair, on April 29 the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness promised, “steps have been taken to make it possible for victims to participate in those parole hearings virtually by phone or video conference.”

However, following his response, Lisa Freeman, who is a constituent of mine and whose father was murdered in Oshawa, was told by the Parole Board that it will no longer be implementing video conferencing. Why did the minister mislead Lisa Freeman? When will he stand up for victims of crime and give them the opportunity to again fully participate at parole hearings?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Chair, the issue of victims and their families being able to attend at parole hearings is an—

The Deputy Chair: I need to interrupt for a second. I am just wondering if the minister is having problems with his camera.

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, Madam Chair, unfortunately, although it is on, it is not getting my image. I look as good as I usually do, so I apologize for not being—

The Deputy Chair: We will continue. Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Chair, I would like to answer the question. I will provide a more fulsome description of myself later, if members would like.

It is a very important issue that the member raises. We have been working with the Parole Board to implement teleconferencing op-

tions across the country to allow people to safely participate in these circumstances. I am not familiar with the precise circumstances of the case the member raises, but if he shares that with me I will make particular inquiries, because we know the attendance of victims at these hearings is important to them and we want to make sure that they have that ability.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Chair, I want to thank the minister, but I did ask him on April 29. That is what he promised, and that is not what the Parole Board delivered to victims of crime. The government has to start taking these issues seriously.

Nadim and his mom in Oshawa are struggling to get people back to work at their hair salon. Employees either want to make under \$1,000 per month or wait until September to return. Why has the government not adopted our plan so that Canadians are incentivized to return to work?

• (1325)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Chair, I can assure everyone in this House that the eight-week extension of CERB is absolutely reorienting toward incentivizing work, requiring people to look for and find work if they can. However, the reality is that people still need support and we are going to be there for them.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Chair, I would actually like to ask the minister about it, but the government is not giving its economic selfie until after question period.

Tracy from Oshawa, and thousands of travel agents, have suffered greatly due to the restrictions of COVID-19. What is the government's recovery strategy to support this industry?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Chair, of course we are always there for all our business owners and entrepreneurs to make sure they can make ends meet. We know they are facing very difficult times during this pandemic and economic crisis. If my colleague has a specific case in mind, he can please come to see me. We will be able to find options together.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Chair, Canada's unemployment rate is the highest in the G7.

What is Canada's unemployment rate?

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, currently we are supporting Canadian workers and making sure that our businesses are supported during this very difficult time.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, in May the unemployment rate in Canada was 13.7%.

What is Alberta's unemployment rate?

Government Orders

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, again, we have been putting in every effort to make sure that we are supporting Canadians during these very difficult times. If they have lost their jobs or cannot work at this time, we have provided the Canada emergency response benefit.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, Alberta's unemployment rate is at 15.5%.

How many days has it been since Alberta's energy workers have been promised help?

Hon. Mona Fortier: Madam Chair, I can give the members today very high-level information about what we have been doing for Canadians, and this afternoon we will be giving a clearer picture and a snapshot of our economic and fiscal agenda.

The Deputy Chair: Is the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock also sharing his time? I just wanted to double-check.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, I am sharing my time with my good friend, the hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South.

How many years has it been since Alberta has received net equalization?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, all Albertans should be proud of the contribution that Alberta and Albertans make to Canada's economy. We know that Alberta and the energy sector are an essential part of the strength of our country.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, it has been 45 years.

What is the amount Alberta is shortchanged because of the cap on fiscal stabilization?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, the question of fiscal stabilization and whether it is something that should be updated and modernized is a very good one. Bev Dahlby has done some excellent academic research on that, and it is something that we are looking into.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Chair, will the government remove the cap on the fiscal stabilization program, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Chair, as I said, Bev Dahlby has done some great work on this. We are looking carefully into it.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Chair, two weeks ago the Prime Minister went on a campaign-style tour of Ottawa small businesses and stopped at the Big Rig Brewery. On that very same day, they applied for and received a licence to produce hand sanitizer.

What is the average delay for a hand sanitizer licence at Health Canada?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, I just want to thank the hard-working officials at Health Canada, who have managed to accelerate approvals for products that Canadians are making to help with COVID-19, including hand sanitizer and many other products.

The average time for approval now is between one and seven days.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, what I'm saying is that the average is much longer than the same-day delivery service they received at Big Rig.

Does the Minister believe that a PM's photo op is a good reason to prefer one business owner over another?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, I reject the implicit allegation in that question. In fact, there is a very strong wall between the regulators at Health Canada and politicians for a very important reason. As members know, I have been asked in the House numerous times why things are taking too long, or why they are happening too quickly in this case. Neither is subject to any influence by me, as the Minister of Health. In fact, they are solely within the control of Health Canada regulators, and that is important—

• (1330)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, did anyone from the PMO discuss the licence application with the brewery?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, not to my knowledge. As I said, the regulators act independently of politics.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, did anyone from the PMO talk to Health Canada about the application?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, to the best of my knowledge, this decision was made independently, as they have all been, by the regulators at Health Canada. It is an important wall that exists for an important reason.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Chair, was there any direction, implicit or explicit, direct or indirect, from the government, the PMO or the minister's office, to Health Canada to expedite this licence?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Madam Chair, Health Canada regulators act independently. The regulators and assessors determine their decisions based on the safety of Canadians, and that is it.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Essex.

In my riding of South Surrey—White Rock, the BNSF and VIA Rail tracks remain a decades-long environmental and safety hazard. The trains run frequently. They reach unsafe speeds. They often carry dangerous goods and thermal coal and are subject to frequent landslides. With increased access to the beaches and foreshores, people are trying to cross the tracks more than ever. There are two viable, safer, alternate routes that would actually reduce the transport time by 30 minutes.

Government Orders

What are the ministers of transport and the environment doing to provide safer routes for the environment and residents?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Chair, as you know, rail safety is my number one priority. I am very proud of the fact that we conduct over 33,000 inspections and audits of our railways throughout a typical year. We will continue to do so to ensure the highest level of safety possible.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, I am asking specifically about South Surrey—White Rock.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Madam Chair, it applies to South Surrey—White Rock just like any other part of the railway system in Canada.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Madam Chair, residents of my riding suffer from rare diseases, as other Canadians do across the country. There are life-saving medications and hopeful therapies that can extend the health and life of those with ALS, cystic fibrosis, epilepsy and more. Health Canada should work co-operatively with the FDA and health authorities in other countries to streamline Canada's approval process. For those in life or death situations especially, what is the Minister of Health doing to assist in bringing new disease-modifying medications such as Radicava and Trikafta to Canada?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am extremely proud of a government that is focused on the affordability of and access to medications. In that vein, as the member knows, we have been taking steps that have not been taken before in this country to ensure that people have access to the medications they need.

On the issue of Trikafta and other life-saving drugs that are not available in Canada, we are standing by and are ready to work with the manufacturer. We urge it to apply to market that drug in Canada. I urge the member to encourage her constituents, and in fact all constituents across Canada, to work with the company to encourage it to apply—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Essex.

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Madam Chair, at the onset of COVID-19, the Prime Minister promised that no individual or business would be left behind. My hometown of Kingsville in my riding of Essex and our neighbours in Leamington were the last two municipalities in all of Canada to remain in stage one, but as of yesterday, they finally opened under phase two. Canadians are compassionate people. They understand that when others struggle, the rest of Canada comes to their rescue. The very businesses that step up when community groups ask for their support need our help today.

Will the Prime Minister commit to immediate targeted help for the hard-hit businesses in Kingsville and Leamington?

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Chair, from the beginning of this crisis, we have taken action in the interest of all Canadians and all regions of the country.

We created customized programs to make sure we get through this crisis, and we will keep delivering that for small businesses, workers and Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Lewis: Madam Chair, businesses in Kingsville and Leamington are weeks behind the rest of the country. They need a financial lifeline now. They need help.

Here is what the government can do: It should immediately institute our back-to-work bonus to help reopen our businesses and get people back to work, refund the GST to all businesses that have remitted it this year and stop collecting it for the rest of the year.

Will the Prime Minister commit to these measures so that these businesses can get back on their feet immediately?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Chair, here is what the government is doing for businesses in Essex and Leamington: the wage subsidy, the rent relief program, the CEBA account, and also support through the FedDev agency.

If my colleague has specific issues with businesses in Essex and Leamington, please come and let us have a conversation, because FedDev is there to help.

Mr. Chris Lewis: Madam Chair, I will keep it brief.

I really want to thank the member opposite. I will be calling your office. Thank you so very much, and I look forward to those conversations. We are starting to get somewhere for Leamington, Kingsville and Essex. Thank you, minister.

The Deputy Chair: I would remind the member to address the questions directly to the Chair.

Is there a brief response from the minister?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Madam Chair, I thank the member for the thank you.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Chair, I want to begin by expressing my relief that the attack on Rideau Hall where both our Governor General and the Prime Minister and his family live ended non-violently and that Corey Hurren was taken into custody.

I would like to ask the hon. minister and the Prime Minister about the following names: Chantel Moore, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, D'Andre Campbell, Ejaz Ahmed Choudry and Rodney Levi, who, not meaning any harm to anyone, were killed during the process of a wellness check. They are dead. They were all indigenous, black or racialized Canadians who are now dead.

Government Orders

Is it not time to have a federal inquiry into the use of wellness checks to ensure that the people who are being cared for do not end up in the morgue?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank the member for a very important question. This is an issue of grave concern to the government and all Canadians.

It is important to acknowledge that over 100,000 times each year, the police respond to calls for service for people in crisis, and the overwhelming majority of those matters are resolved peacefully. There has been an enormous amount of work done to find alternative forums of response, from medical crisis intervention teams that pair police and health care workers together, to other community interventions and enhanced training for de-escalation.

I am in complete agreement with the member that we need to do much more, and that is why we will be working with the provinces and territories and indigenous leadership to, first of all, develop national standards for the use of force and de-escalation training, and also to explore and invest in alternative methods of response to these very difficult situations in order to keep people safe.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, earlier today in question period, there were a number of questions about waiving cabinet privilege in matters that require investigation.

According to *The Globe and Mail*, as recently as March 2020, the RCMP were still investigating the SNC-Lavalin matter and whether obstruction of justice took place.

I wonder if the minister could answer the question of whether the Prime Minister is, at this point, prepared to waive cabinet privilege in the matter of SNC-Lavalin.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, we have always supported the work of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, and we have complete faith in all of the independent officers of Parliament, including the commissioner.

Our government has always co-operated in every way and will continue to do so.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, I have an opportunity to ask a different question.

Earlier in question period, there was some heckling, friendly banter one might say, asking the Liberal government if it were not time to reconvene Parliament. I do not happen to think it is. We are in a pandemic and we have to protect ourselves and our communities from the travel back and forth to this place potentially spreading COVID-19.

My question for the Liberals is this. When will we accept what the British Columbia legislature is already doing and allow voting from our constituencies so that legislation can be passed in this place?

• (1340)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Chair, that is an excellent question that should be asked of the Conservatives, because we all agree in this place that we should be able to vote electronically. It is extremely important. That way, we could have people here and people in their ridings who do not have to travel here, and all members would be able to vote.

Now, let us ask the Conservatives why they do not support that.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, I would be very happy to ask the Conservatives that, but I am afraid questions go to the government members.

My question now for the government members is this. We are having a lot of concern, particularly in areas such as Saanich—Gulf Islands near the U.S. border, about what is being called the Texas loophole. I do not think we actually meant to put in place something called a Texas loophole. I spoke with the Minister of Public Safety.

What we are going to do to ensure that the Canada Border Services Agency does not let tourists into Canada for less than essential purposes, potentially spreading COVID-19?

Hon. Bill Blair: Madam Chair, in response to the ongoing COVID pandemic, we have agreed with the United States to restrict all non-essential travel for activities such as tourism and recreation right across the border. Should travellers be admitted, they are provided with information that indicates they are not to make any unnecessary stops. We know there have been a number of cases. The RCMP and the police of jurisdiction have begun to determine whether there are violations, and enforcement has begun on these matters.

We want to discourage people from entering our country, crossing that border, for non-essential purposes while these restrictions remain in place.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Hamilton Mountain.

As the economy starts to reopen and many child care providers must reduce their capacity due to physical distancing measures, investments in child care are more crucial now than ever. Since women make up half of Canada's workforce, there will be no recovery without women, and they cannot recover without child care.

Will the government commit to establishing universal, high-quality child care?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, we are committed to helping parents access safe, affordable, accessible and quality child care. Since 2015, we have put into place over 40,000 affordable child care spaces for families in need. We are committed to creating an additional 250,000 before- and after-school programs.

Government Orders

We are committed to this sector because we recognize that early learning and child care is crucial for our economic recovery.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Madam Chair, there is not a national standard across the board.

Today in committee, the Minister for Women and Gender Equality agreed to establish an act for child care like the Canada Health Act to ensure that children and parents would have equal access no matter where they lived in Canada to high-quality and affordable early learning and child care.

How long will Canadians have to wait for this act and how will the government back it up with the necessary funding?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Madam Chair, we have dedicated funding in the amount of \$7.5 billion over the next 11 years. Those investments are continuing. We have also managed to continue to work on the renewal of the agreements we have with provinces and territories. I indicated to the member that we have, as a Liberal government, been responsible for the creation of over 40,000 affordable child care spaces. We are committed to creating over a quarter of a million before- and after-school child care spaces.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Madam Chair, access to child care and onward to post-secondary education continues to be out of reach for most Canadians. That is why the failed rollout of the Canada student service grant is incredibly troubling and needs an immediate fix. The Liberal government continues to prioritize its friends, who are richer, over the needs of other Canadians and many students.

Will the Liberal government either cancel this program and transfer the funds to Canada summer jobs or give grants directly to the volunteer sector?

• (1345)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Madam Chair, since the beginning of this pandemic, our focus has been on Canadians. We recognize that all Canadians have been impacted by COVID-19 and that there are communities that have been disproportionately impacted. Our focus will remain to support students during this very challenging and unprecedented time. That is why there is a suite of programs, \$9 billion worth of programs to help students right now, because we know they need also need hand-up. We will continue to be here for Canadians.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Madam Chair, the government has expressed many times in the House that it has the backs of workers. However, thousands of Canadian workers and their families could be put at risk in the coming months because they will be ineligible for benefits under the wage earner protection program if the company they work for claims bankruptcy in a foreign country like the United States.

In 2018, Parliament passed legislation to fix this program, but the Liberals have not bothered to do the order in council that would bring it into force. Why are they putting Canadian workers at risk and when will they fix the problem?

Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Madam Chair, I want to assure the member and all Canadians that we have been working very hard to protect workers, things like the wage

subsidy and the emergency response benefit. All these measures are implemented in order to protect workers.

With respect to the wage earner protection program, yes, we have extended it and enhanced the benefits from four weeks to seven weeks. Therefore, the entitlement has increased, which means more money in the pockets of workers.

We will continue to work hard to ensure workers are protected.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Madam Chair, but it is not in force. The problem is that many people have already been ineligible because the government has been dragging its feet on when it is going to put the order in council.

However, this is not the only time the Liberals have let Canadians down. In last year's budget act, the government included amendments to four different acts that it said would enhance retirement security. The labour minister likes to refer to this as proof of her government's commitment to workers, but nearly half of these amendments are not even in force. Again, the Liberals dragged their feet and failed to do the necessary orders in council.

Why does the government keep turning its back on Canadian workers and instead help corporations?

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Madam Chair, with all due respect, I have to completely disagree with the member's statement and assertion. We have been working hard for workers from the time we were elected. Right off the bat, we had the implementation of Bill C-4, repealing Bill C-525 and Bill C-377, which were anti-union pieces of legislation.

Let us look at some standards and enhancements that we have implemented: stronger labour standards, enhanced leaves, new leaves and flexible work hours. We have and we will continue to work hard for our workers in Canada.

Mr. Scott Duvall: Madam Chair, I was hoping that the Minister of Labour was listening. They are not in force. It is on your website. It has been done by parliament legislation. Tell us when you are going to put it into force. Quit with the pretty words and put it into action.

The Deputy Chair: I remind the member that he is to address all questions and comments to the Chair.

A brief answer from the minister.

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Madam Chair, we have been working so hard for workers. We are proud of our record and we are going to continue to build on that record. We have implemented many measures that have helped strengthen worker protection and we look forward to the work ahead.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

The quantity and quality of transportation services in eastern Quebec and my region in particular, the Lower St. Lawrence, have been deteriorating for decades now. Whether on the ground or in the air, we have had limited and poor service for quite some time. VIA Rail has reduced service to the Lower St. Lawrence by half since the 2010s and has sold off a dozen or so of its train stations in my region.

Last week, and just as brazenly, Air Canada suspended flights in our greater regional area. That company's customers came to expect service that was often chaotic, with no regard for passenger inconvenience. There is absolutely no guarantee that Air Canada will bother to resume those flights in the fall, or ever. Workers, business people and the general public were left high and dry, and it happened overnight.

Will the Minister of Transport promise that Ottawa will stop giving in to Air Canada's blackmail and stop providing it with financial support, since it has received too much already?

• (1350)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Chair, we understand that people are disappointed—

The Deputy Chair: The sound has been cut off.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Madam Chair, I understand the frustration of the people who had regional flights in Quebec and in Canada. Members will understand that right now, Air Canada flights are not profitable because so few people are flying. This is an unfortunate situation, one which we are working on with the airlines.

As for VIA Rail, it is a Crown corporation and chooses its own routes based on the profitability of these routes.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair, I would like to inform the Minister of Transport that between January 2019 and January 2020 there was a 30% increase in Air Canada flights at the Mont-Joli airport. He should check the facts before making any further claims.

History has shown that public money for Air Canada has not encouraged it to provide better service to its passengers. Instead, public money has subsidized unfair competition between Air Canada and small regional airlines.

Will the Minister of Transport commit to putting an end to this vicious circle and listen to the regions, which have all had enough of Air Canada?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Madam Chair, we always encourage competition across Canada. If there are options other than Air Canada I encourage the other airlines to provide services if they decide it is cost-effective. In the meantime, as far as the Mont-Joli airport is concerned, I would remind my hon. colleague that for a flight to be cost-effective, in general, 75% to 80% of the seats have to be filled.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Chair, as my colleagues keep saying, Air Canada is shamelessly abandoning the regions in Quebec, regions like mine, the Gaspé, the Lower St. Lawrence and the North Shore, regions that are struggling to recover from this crisis. Air Canada is heavily subsidized by the government. These people, who pay the same taxes as those in large centres, are entitled to the same services. People back home are resilient. They are quick to roll up their sleeves, and we are already seeing new initiatives. They need some help.

Will the government commit to funding a Quebec project that would ensure a reliable and lasting regional service and prevent us all from being stuck in the same loop where Air Canada is again given funding without being required to serve the regions?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Chair, service in Canada's regions depends on the airlines that decide to offer this service across the country. Air Canada is in an extremely difficult situation right now.

I would like to correct one thing that my colleague said. Air Canada is not heavily subsidized by the Government of Canada.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, Air Canada received far more financial assistance than many businesses in my riding and in several other ridings, which always fall through the cracks during this pandemic.

Will the Minister of Transport commit to supporting Quebec initiatives by taking concrete action, such as reducing administrative delays in obtaining the authorization for new airlines and providing access to the national network instead of continuing to subsidize companies such as Air Canada which, once again, is abandoning Quebec regions?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Madam Chair, once again, we encourage all airlines that think they can provide cost-effective service to these regions to make themselves available for these regional flights. We have been encouraging competition since 2015. It is a decision that the airlines themselves must make. In some cases, there are other options in Quebec and Canada. It is up to the airlines to decide whether they—

• (1355)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member has time to ask a brief question.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, when it's not Air Canada, it's Service Canada.

Non-essential businesses reopened in Quebec weeks ago, but people still do not have access to Service Canada. There was an announcement that offices in Montreal, Quebec City and Gatineau were reopening, but nothing has been said about the offices in Canada's regions.

When will the government give the regions the same services as everywhere else?

Government Orders

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, our government committed to ensuring that Canadians have access to the benefits they need through Service Canada. We are beginning a safe and gradual return to work in 90 centres across the country. Decisions regarding reopening are based on public health advice.

[English]

We will be there for Canadians as they attempt to seek access to services and benefits, which we have continued to make available. We have increased access to services by redeploying 3,000 staff and opening a call centre with 1,500 agents.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Centre.

The opioid crisis continues to spiral out of control, with 170 deaths in the month of May alone in British Columbia. That is about equal to how many people have died of COVID during the entire pandemic. Opioid use tears families apart, leads to homelessness and causes massive increases in street-level crime.

Residents and business owners in my riding are fed up and are looking for action and leadership. The government has had nearly five years to provide action and leadership, and instead the problem worsens.

How much worse does it need to get before words and virtue signalling are replaced by action, especially support for recovery?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for bringing forward an important question about the opioid crisis and overdoses.

As he knows, our government has been working over the last five years to undo a decade of damage to the work of substance use in this country, damage resulting from extremely restrictive Harper government policies. I was on the front lines in Thunder Bay at that time, watching people die of overdose time and again and pleading with the federal government to take action. It did not, but we have.

We will continue to work hard to ensure that we can prevent these deaths.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Mr. Speaker, a month ago, in this committee, I raised the issue of Canada summer job applicants who have been denied. The minister kindly asked for more information, which my office provided to her.

Six organizations, including Maple Ridge's downtown business association, are still without funds. When can they expect to receive their funding?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that I thought those challenges were addressed. I will follow up right after this committee.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Mr. Speaker, with the alarming rise in new COVID cases in the U.S., people in my riding, which is not far from the border, are worried about the abuse of border loopholes. Writing people tickets will not stop the spread of the virus.

What measures are in place to ensure that American travellers do indeed travel to Alaska swiftly? What consequences exist for those who violate our trust and put the health of Canadians at risk by engaging in non-essential activities like sightseeing?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I will repeat for the member that there are in fact strong measures in place. The CBSA clearly articulates our rules and ensures that people have a plan for moving quickly from the United States through Canada into Alaska. There are real consequences for people who do not follow those rules, and there have been cases in which local law enforcement and the RCMP have enforced those rules.

There are significant penalties for people who break them, and we are working very closely with officials and local law enforcement in our various jurisdictions to ensure that people do not put Canadians at risk as they transit through this country. There are also potential long-term consequences for those who choose to break the rules—

• (1400)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Marc Kielburger of WE Charity reported that the Prime Minister's Office called in April to offer his organization the contract to administer the Canada student service grant. Subsequently, Mr. Kielburger stated that he "misspoke" and that the call was with a senior official at Employment and Social Development Canada.

Could the Prime Minister confirm which official contacted Mr. Kielburger? Why did the Prime Minister not recuse himself from involvement in a \$19.5-million payment to his friend?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated, the non-partisan public service made a clear recommendation that this was the only organization that would be able to provide the service in the time-line needed. We accepted its recommendation.

I will state once again that yesterday the finance committee passed a motion, supported by all parties, requesting these answers. That information will be provided, and people will get answers.

We always work closely with independent officers of Parliament, and we will make sure the Ethics Commissioner receives the information.

Mr. Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago the Prime Minister said that WE Charity is the only organization in all of Canada that could administer the grant. Could the Prime Minister tell us which official misspoke to him on this matter that he so badly misrepresented to Canadians?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, once again, the non-partisan public service made a clear recommendation that this was the only organization able to provide this service in the timeline needed. We work with the public service to deliver programs for Canadians. It made a recommendation. We accepted its recommendation.

Mr. Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, PSAC National President Chris Aylward said, “[The Prime Minister’s] claim that WE Charity is the ‘only one’ that can administer the new grant program is not only factually wrong, it’s also insulting to our members.”

Charity Intelligence, which ranks charities across Canada, says that WE Charity’s financial filings are not current, and this contract alone is at least four times higher than its net administrative expenses from over the last number of years. It is also offside with its banking obligations.

Could the Prime Minister indicate to this committee today how he could have possibly been so badly misled by his officials as to grant this lucrative contract to his friend?

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, as I have stated, the non-partisan public service made a clear recommendation that this was the only organization able to provide the service in the timeline needed. Obviously the way this unfolded was not intended, and that is why the charity is no longer administering the project.

We will work with the Ethics Commissioner. We will also work to satisfy the motion that members of all parties passed at the finance committee yesterday to ensure that this information is received.

Our focus is on working for Canadians and ensuring that they have the services and supports they need during this unprecedented and challenging time. That will remain our focus. We will ensure that we work together to support Canadians right now. We will continue to strive to do better to ensure that supports are in place.

The Speaker: That is all the time we have for questions today.

We have a question of privilege from the Leader of the Opposition, and I see the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has a point of order.

We will start with the Leader of the Opposition.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

RESPONSE BY THE PRIME MINISTER

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege that arises out of the exchange from earlier today. This is the first opportunity I have had to raise it, since that period just ended.

I would like to draw your attention to the Prime Minister’s answer to my question about the Ethics Commissioner and the co-operation that his office will or will not be providing. His answer says, “in the last situation, we did the unprecedented step of waiving cabinet confidentiality and of waiving solicitor-client confidentiality in the situation so that the Ethics Commissioner could fully investigate the matter at hand.” This is in reference to the SNC-Lavalin scandal and the subject of the “Trudeau II Report”.

Privilege

Mr. Speaker, I draw your attention to the words “fully investigate the matter at hand” to show why I believe we have a case of the Prime Minister deliberately misleading the House. The Ethics Commissioner, in his report, mentioned three things I would like to read. I hope that you will find there is a prima facie case of an attempt to deliberately mislead the House.

The first quote is as follows:

In the present examination, I have gathered sufficient factual information to properly determine the matter on its merits. Because of my inability to access all Cabinet confidences related to the matter I must, however, report that I was unable to fully discharge the investigatory duties conferred upon me by the Act.

The second quote states:

Because of the decisions to deny our Office further access to Cabinet confidences, witnesses were constrained in their ability to provide all evidence. I was, therefore, prevented from looking over the entire body of evidence to determine its relevance to my examination. Decisions that affect my jurisdiction under the Act, by setting parameters on my ability to receive evidence, should be made transparently and democratically by Parliament, not by the very same public office holders who are subject to the regime I administer.

The third quote states:

During this examination, nine witnesses informed our Office that they had information they believed to be relevant, but that could not be disclosed because, according to them, this information would reveal a confidence of the Queen’s Privy Council and would fall outside the scope of Order in Council 2019-0105.

I believe this case speaks for itself. The Prime Minister earlier today said that in the last scandal he was involved with, he fully cooperated with the Ethics Commissioner. I have just read three quotes that are directly from the Ethics Commissioner himself that fully contradict that.

One of the tests that must be met in order for the Speaker to find there is a case of an attempt to deliberately mislead the House and a breach of privilege is that the member who makes the statement must know it to be false. This report is entitled “Trudeau II Report”. There is no doubt that the Prime Minister knows about its findings. It was the subject of multiple exchanges in question period before the last election.

I leave it to you, Mr. Speaker, to find a prima facie case of misleading the House.

• (1405)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member. I will take it under advisement and return to the House, should I see fit.

On a point of order, we have the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I want to briefly correct the record. In my earlier question, I referred erroneously to a Texas loophole. I was thinking of the people from Texas who claimed they were driving to Alaska. It is generally known as the Alaska loophole. I apologize and hope to correct the record.

The Speaker: I thank the member for that.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 8**

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 8, Mr. Anthony Rota in the chair)

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Tuesday, May 26, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time. The committee will now consider Motion No. 8 under government business.

[*Translation*]

Before we begin the debate, I would like to inform hon. members of how the proceedings will unfold.

[*English*]

Pursuant to orders made earlier today, the Chair will recognize a member of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party. Each member will be recognized for not more than 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments. Members may split their time with another member.

[*Translation*]

Members participating via video conference who want to ask a question or make a comment on one of the speeches, can let the Chair know by using the “Raise Hand” button on the video-conferencing platform.

Members who are present in the House can rise as they usually do.

[*English*]

We will now begin the debate.

● (1410)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That the House take note of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken by the government to respond to it.

The Speaker: Debate. The hon. finance minister.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since our government last provided an economic report, COVID-19 has spread swiftly across the globe. It brought a new disease to our headlines, our dinner-table conversations and eventually our shores.

From the beginning, we have followed the guidance of public health officials. Governments across Canada have put lockdown measures in place to slow the spread of the virus and ensure that our health care systems could deal with the scale of the challenge that we faced. Businesses closed. Schools closed. People stayed home. Our daily lives became unrecognizable.

Many of us stopped going to work. Many others had to face this new reality without a job, and with the endless worries that brings. Many others had to go to work on the front lines, where work took on new risks and new meaning.

We went months without seeing our friends and relatives in a time of great fear and concern. We looked for new ways to gather, to connect and to mark the milestones in our lives. We spent a lot of time on video calls. Most importantly, we took the time to take care of one another.

The nature of this crisis is completely unprecedented. It is a public health crisis and an economic crisis. Our collective decision as Canadians to put each other's health above all else has meant we have flattened the curve faster than many other countries. Our average daily new cases have declined by about 80% from their peak in late April. Canadians' efforts saved thousands of lives. However, Canadians also made great sacrifices to get here. Millions of Canadians lost their jobs, lost hours or lost wages. Businesses of all sizes are still facing uncertainty.

[*Translation*]

Through rapid and broad support, our government has been able to protect millions of jobs, provide emergency income support to families and help keep businesses afloat during the worst of the storm. This support is helping Canadians get back on their feet and has prevented serious long-term damage.

This pandemic is not over and we cannot let up on our commitment to one another. I want to take a moment to salute the work of the Department of Health and Dr. Tam during this crisis.

[*English*]

Today, our government is presenting an economic and fiscal snapshot. This document provides Canadians and parliamentarians with a picture of where our economy is right now. It is transparent about what we know and what we do not know. Forecasts are always uncertain, so with this snapshot we are providing our best prediction of the economic situation in Canada to the end of the current fiscal year: to March 31, 2021. Trying to predict further would be potentially misleading.

[*Translation*]

The possibility of further outbreaks looms on the horizon, and accurate long-term forecasting is impossible in such a volatile environment. I know Canadians understand how hard it is to make predictions right now.

I will tell the House what we know. We know that the unemployment rate went from historic lows in January to historic highs in May. We know that low-wage workers, young people and immigrants bore the brunt of employment losses in March and April and that, while some jobs returned in May, the sectors many women work in have been slower to rebound. We know that many women are shouldering the burden of unpaid care work at home, looking after children and providing care for sick relatives. The lack of child care services could delay women's return to work.

We also know that vulnerable groups have been hit harder by this pandemic and are continuing to face challenges. This crisis has exposed and amplified many inequalities in Canada. I am thinking about Canadians who work to get by on low income, the people who process and prepare our food, temporary foreign workers, our seniors in long-term care.

• (1415)

[English]

We know that energy workers faced a double hit after the shock to global commodity prices, and that employment in mining and oil and gas support services has fallen by over 15%. We know businesses are still facing challenges. The Canada emergency wage subsidy is helping impacted businesses protect jobs and remain poised to rebound. We encourage businesses to take advantage of the program and hire more workers.

We know the best economic policy continues to be containing the spread of the virus. If we can keep the transmission rate steadily declining, we can help ensure a stable and steady economic recovery. If we do not, the gains of our sacrifices these past four months will be lost. Around the world we have seen what happens when reopenings are rushed.

[Translation]

Our government has understood, from the moment this pandemic began, that it was our role to step in to support Canadians and stabilize the economy. The COVID-19 economic response plan is the most substantial peacetime investment in Canada's history, representing more than \$212 billion in direct support and nearly 14% of GDP in total support.

Let me share some numbers. About three million Canadian workers have had their jobs supported through the Canada emergency wage subsidy, and that number continues to grow. Over eight million Canadians were able to pay for groceries and rent because of the Canada emergency response benefit. Over 680,000 small businesses have received interest-free loans thanks to the Canada emergency business account. Fifteen million low- and modest-income Canadians have received a special GST credit top-up. This week, 6.7 million seniors who receive the old age security pension will receive a supplementary payment.

We have also invested in community organizations that provide services to the most vulnerable, including more than 500 women's shelters that address the immediate needs of women and children fleeing violence.

The Prime Minister's leadership has shown all of Canada that their government would put workers first and be there for our most vulnerable. If there is a resurgence, we are ready to do more.

[English]

Faced with the most profound downturn since the Great Depression, our government acted to support the economy. Every investment we made was in response to COVID-19 and was time-limited. From income support for Canadians to loans for Canadian businesses and non-profits of all sizes, we worked to make sure our programs left no one behind, and we did it fast. We were guided by

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three principles: speed, scale and simplicity. I think we delivered on all three.

Some will criticize us on the cost of action. They will point to the size of our deficit in 2021. It is a testament to the shock COVID-19 has had on our economy. However, our government knew that the cost of inaction would have been far greater. Those who would have us do less ignore that without government action millions of jobs would have been lost, putting the burden of debt onto families and jeopardizing Canada's resilience. At a time when Canadian workers and families are facing significant hardship, austerity and tightening one's belt is not the answer.

Our fiscal discipline in the years leading up to this, combined with Canadians' hard work and entrepreneurial spirit, meant that Canada was resilient and ready to face this challenge. With a crisis of this magnitude, someone was going to have to shoulder the costs. The federal government was uniquely placed to take on this responsibility.

Over the past quarter century, provincial debt has outpaced federal debt by \$225 billion. Household debt-to-disposable income has increased to over 175%, close to a record high. To date, nearly \$9 out of \$10 in COVID-19-related direct support delivered to Canadians and Canadian businesses is financed by the federal government.

We took on this role because it was the right thing to do. Thanks to our rapid and substantial investments, unemployment will be lower, consumer spending will be higher and our economy will recover sooner than it would have had we done nothing.

• (1420)

[Translation]

If we had not stepped in with the Canada emergency wage subsidy, millions of jobs could have been lost forever during the worst of the storm. Without the Canada emergency response benefit, Canadians would not have been able to cover their daily expenses.

Our investments have meant that Canadians and Canadian businesses, instead of drowning in debt and closing up shop, will be better positioned to get back at it.

We came into this crisis on strong footing, with a net debt-to-GDP ratio considerably lower than all of our G7 partners.

[English]

Even after our historic investments, Canada will continue to hold this low-debt advantage. This, combined with historically low interest rates, gave us the balance sheet to deploy our fiscal firepower to support Canadians.

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If we think back to the 1990s when Canada's debt needed to be reined in, interest rates were high and public debt was extremely expensive. At that time, our public debt charges were close to 6% of gross domestic product. Now, Canada's debt charges are only around 1% of GDP, and even after all the investments we have made to support Canadians, the cost of servicing our debt is expected to go lower this year. In fact, our total public debt charges for 2020 will actually be \$4 billion lower than forecast last fall.

However, we, collectively, will have to face up to our borrowing and ensure that it is sustainable for future generations. Canada's debt structure is prudent. It is spread out over the long term, and it compares well with our G7 peers. We will continue to make sure this is the case in the months and years to come as we move toward recovery, and as we deal with the aftermath of this unprecedented event.

[*Translation*]

Throughout this crisis, under the Prime Minister's leadership, we have been working in coordination with provincial and territorial governments to protect Canadians at a level we have never seen before.

Since March, the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister have hosted 15 first ministers meetings. I have personally taken part in 14 meetings with provincial finance ministers.

We have accomplished a lot together, procuring hundreds of millions of pieces of personal protective equipment, making sure that health care workers have a secure supply. We have helped give essential workers a well-deserved raise. It was clear to all of us that our collective actions were going to get us through this crisis.

Canadians want to get back to work, but they want to do it safely. That is why we are working with provinces and territories on a safe restart agreement worth more than \$14 billion.

We are proposing to invest in a safe, sufficient and adequate supply of child care, so that parents, especially mothers, do not have to choose between going to work and ensuring their children are taken care of. We also want to build capacity to test and trace and continue to provide world-class health care to Canadians.

These discussions will be critical to the well-being of Canadians.

[*English*]

The road to economic recovery will be long and uncertain. Going forward, anything we do must be about growth, resilience and creating opportunity for those who are most impacted by this crisis. We need to invest in an economy that is greener and more diverse: an economy that creates opportunity for young people, low-income Canadians, people with disabilities and women, and that supports our most vulnerable, including LGBTQ2 communities, indigenous peoples, black Canadians and other racialized people in our country.

This pandemic has identified clear gaps, and it is giving us a chance to reset. We witnessed the ways in which people were falling through the cracks, particularly those who live in long-term care. Many of them are our parents and our grandparents who built this country. We need to do better by them. In the coming months,

we will need to come to these problems with dedication, with compassion and with ingenuity.

• (1425)

Eighty years ago, Canada faced some of the worst days of the Second World War, and the government faced monumental and difficult choices. In this House, like today, there were those who criticized the government for not doing enough, and others who said it went too far. However, despite the criticisms of the debate, the resolve of Canadians to fearlessly face the emergency of their time never wavered.

Today, as we evaluate the details of our measures and the scale of their reach, I want to tell this House that we left no stone unturned, and every decision we made was guided by our belief that the well-being of Canadians had to come above all else. We have worked to lay out an economic response plan that is comprehensive, that is ambitious, and that serves those who need help the most. We have done so in the belief that Canadians would be able to fight the spread of this virus and come roaring back. We have done this to build a bridge to a safer place, from which we can build a stronger and more resilient future, just like in the Second World War.

I know that Canadians have what it takes to come together for the greater good. I have seen it in health care workers, 80% of them women and many of them immigrants, who day in and day out put their own health at risk to help others. I have seen it in the businesses that have retooled to build ventilators, masks, gowns and more. I have seen it in the women and men of the armed forces, who have served by caring for our most vulnerable in our long-term care homes. I have seen it in the millions of small donations, small acts of kindness, and the big and small sacrifices Canadians have made to fight this virus.

I want to take this moment to send a message to those who have lost loved ones during this time. All of Canada shares in their pain.

Canadians are resourceful. Canadians are resilient. Together, we will get through this and build a better, fairer and stronger Canada.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, so much of what the finance minister just said is not true. I do not have enough time to enumerate it all, because we only have a few minutes for questions and comments.

The government was wrong. It was wrong to leave our borders open for longer. It was wrong when it said it was going to have enhanced screening at airports, and it was slow to fix the gaps in its own programs. So many Canadians have been let down by the government. It has refused to fix the wage subsidy. It has refused to remove the back-to-work penalty for people who want to take available shifts, and it has refused to implement the back-to-work bonus that Conservatives have proposed to help people fill available shifts and help local businesses get back on their feet.

The government has also refused to fund the Auditor General so that she can keep track of this massive amount of new spending and historic levels of deficits and debt. All she wanted was about \$10 million to make sure she could go through the programs, but the minister did find \$15 million kicking around for the Deputy Prime Minister's political office.

Can the finance minister tell the House exactly what the \$15 million that he gave the Deputy Prime Minister will be going to?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, we have, during the course of the last number of months, taken as our very first order of business to support Canadians, to back them up, to create jobs and to help provide a bridge toward the future, but at no time during this period have we forgotten that governing our country is equally important. We have tried to make sure that we could continue to have the government work to make sure that we could actually deliver for Canadians.

One of the biggest challenges we have faced as we have done this is thinking about how we actually deliver to Canadians. When the history of this pandemic is written, I think that history will say that we delivered not only at scale, but at speed, and that is because we not only came up with the right policies, but we found a way to deliver them.

I will say that our government will continue to make sure that the resources to be able to create that policy and to be able to deliver those results to Canadians are there. I would say that the Deputy Prime Minister is one of those important people in our government who have helped us to make an enormous difference during this challenging time, and she will continue to do that as an important member of our government.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we were told that the government was spending all of the necessary funds during an unprecedented time. That is clear to everyone, obviously, since we have a \$243-billion deficit. We certainly feel it as well.

However, the thing people are forgetting is that Quebec and the provinces are the ones on the hot seat when it comes to health spending. The provinces and Quebec are the ones that had to respond to this pandemic and ensure that the health care system could adequately meet the needs that we had to address because of the situation.

At first, the Liberal government gave \$500 million to the provinces and Quebec. That is the equivalent of roughly \$100 million for Quebec. Recently, the Government of Quebec said that ad-

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ditional health spending as a result of the pandemic alone has exceeded the \$3-billion mark, and it is not over yet.

Health falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces and Quebec and it is written in the Canadian Constitution that the federal government must bear part of the burden of health spending. The federal government used to fund 50% of health spending. Then it reduced that amount to 25% and now it funds just 20% of health expenses.

Will this government make the necessary effort to provide money to the provinces and Quebec with no strings attached so that they can have a bit of breathing room in the sector that has been the hardest hit by the pandemic?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, I must first repeat that it is very important to us that we work with the provinces, including Quebec.

The numbers speak for themselves: The federal government invested \$9 out of every \$10 in direct support for Canadians. That totals \$212 billion to ensure an economic recovery that will put people to work after the pandemic. That is very important.

We will continue to work with the provinces, including Quebec, to ensure a safe recovery. That is why we need to have serious discussions and negotiations. We will absolutely continue to work with the provinces and to provide support to protect people across the country.

Today's update is clear: We gave the vast majority of our support to the people of our country in an extremely difficult situation.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the minister knows, I am a former teacher, so I would like to give him my grades on this economic and fiscal snapshot.

First, he gets an A for accessibility. There is no doubt that the finance minister, though he is working very hard, has been accessible to finance critics and to the finance committee every week. That is appreciated, and that collaboration is important.

Second, in terms of expenditures, I would give a passing note of perhaps a C+. That grade could be higher if supports are given to people with disabilities, the poorest of the poor in this country, who have not received a single cent throughout this pandemic, though the banking sector has received \$750 billion, three-quarters of a trillion dollars. People with disabilities should be coming before bankers, in my opinion. Supports for municipalities and supports to changes in the wage subsidy can also bring that grade up.

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However, the grade in terms of revenues is an F. The reality is that no action in this economic and fiscal snapshot addresses what is a porous and appallingly unfair tax system. There is no action on tax havens, though that costs us \$25 billion a year. There is no action on the wealth tax, though the PBO says that it could provide \$6 billion to \$9 billion a year, and the increase in concentration of wealth means this must be an imperative. There is no action on the web giants, who are getting away with not paying their fair share of taxes. There is nothing that actually addresses the revenue side so we can continue to provide services and enhance services to Canadians.

We cannot afford the free ride that so many profitable corporations in Canada have been receiving, and we cannot afford any more of this profoundly unfair tax system.

Why does the snapshot not take action on the revenue side? Why does it not take action on tax havens? Why does it not take action on a wealth tax? Why does it not take action on tax loopholes? This would give a higher grade overall to the finance minister.

● (1435)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, let me first just acknowledge that the finance critics from all parties of this House have tried to work constructively all the way through this. We have worked to listen to their commentary, just as we have worked to listen to the commentary from business groups and labour groups across the country.

The nature of this pandemic has meant that we have had to act with speed and with scale. It has also meant that we have needed to make changes as we have moved along in the delivery of the programs to make sure that they actually have the desired impact on Canadians. That will be our continued approach as we face these challenges.

The member opposite points out something that I think is important. We do believe that it is important for us to recognize there are some challenges that people with disabilities have faced over the course of the pandemic. That is something that he has brought up to me on numerous occasions and something that we are certainly trying to work toward.

We will continue to think about the ways we can address this pandemic. We will be focusing right now on the safe restart, working together, we hope, with Canadians across the country, with people in this House, so that we can safely and appropriately get back to work. That will allow us, we hope, to find a way to ensure that our system works, that we have the appropriate revenues and that we have a way to move back to an approach where we can invest in the long-term future of Canadians.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I echo the comments from my friend, the New Democratic Party finance critic. The minister has indeed been accessible.

I have a very specific question. This document is a snapshot. I know that if someone has a crystal ball, it is pretty murky right now. We cannot see very far ahead. However, I do wonder how it is that on page 20 of this document there is a reference to a payment for people with disabilities as though it has happened. We know that it has not.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, we are demonstrating with this document all of the policies that we have put forward and are working on actually delivering for Canadians. We recognize that there are things that we do not know.

There will be future actions that we will likely have to take, because this pandemic is dynamic, but we did recognize in this House the importance of dealing with people with disabilities. We certainly hope that we will find support in this House for moving forward with that policy.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Carleton, one of the great, hard-working finance shadow ministers who the minister referenced, who are doing so much good work to try to help fix the gaps in the government's programs.

The finance minister has just painted an extremely dire picture of Canada's finances, but what we did not hear was any kind of a plan to support the reopening of our economy and to get Canadians back to work.

Coming out of the pandemic, every single country on the planet will be desperately competing for the same opportunities and the same investments, so where is the Prime Minister's plan to set us apart? The United Kingdom has a plan. France, Germany, South Korea and Japan all have plans. In fact, every single country in the G7 has a plan.

[Translation]

The government is borrowing \$343 billion this year. However, the Prime Minister has no plan to help Canadians return to work. He has no plan to guide our economic recovery. He has no plan to stimulate growth or attract business investment to create the conditions for job growth.

[English]

The government is borrowing \$343 billion this year. This year, for the first time ever, the net federal debt will reach over one trillion dollars. In fact, it is borrowing so much money that the Bank of Canada has to create it out of thin air. The Bank of Canada is purchasing 5 billion dollars' worth of government debt every single week.

The Prime Minister has absolutely no plan to help Canadians return to work, no plan for our economic recovery and no plan to stimulate growth, attract business investment or create the conditions for job growth.

I know this might come as a shock to a Liberal prime minister, but spending billions of dollars does not create economic growth, and handing it out to Liberal insiders certainly will not restart our economy. More Liberal tax hikes and more red tape will not restart our economy.

● (1440)

[Translation]

If we want to be competitive, we must unlock the power of the private sector, help Canadians get back to work, support small businesses, lower taxes, eliminate red tape and put Canada back on the map as an attractive place to do business.

[*English*]

The biggest misconception right now about the economy is that if we simply lift the restrictions and provinces reopen, our economy will come roaring back to life. The reality is that it will take leadership, big ideas and a lot of hard work. However, the Prime Minister's track record proves that he cannot be trusted to lead Canada's recovery. His sky-high taxes, wasteful spending and massive deficits put Canada in an incredibly weak position before the pandemic began.

While a responsible government would have saved while times were good and paid down debt, as our previous Conservative government did, the Liberals added \$87 billion in new debt during its first four years of power. As a result, Canada is the only G7 country to have lost its AAA credit rating and has one of the highest debt levels in the AA category.

Before the pandemic, Canada's unemployment rate was higher than that of all other G7 countries except France and Italy, whose socialist policies the Prime Minister was trying to emulate. Now Canada has surpassed them and has the highest unemployment rate in the G7. In fact, we have among the highest unemployment rates in the OECD, falling fourth right behind Greece. This should be a major wake-up call for the government.

[*Translation*]

There is no doubt that Canadians are struggling. The last few months have been very difficult. Millions of people lost their jobs. More than 100,000 Canadians became ill. Thousands died. Businesses shut down and many will never reopen. Canadians are watching in horror as their savings disappear.

[*English*]

Despite all of this, as provinces gradually reopen, Canadians are hopeful and optimistic about their futures. They want to work. Businesses want to reopen to welcome back staff and customers. They are determined to rebuild and are coming up with innovative ways to offer services as provinces.

Now, I do not know why the Prime Minister always feels the need to talk down Canada. Canadians are an endlessly enterprising people. Perhaps it is a product of our immigrant society where people have left the familiarity of home for a shot at a better life on the other side of the world, and then work hard to achieve it. Perhaps it is the inspiration that we take from indigenous peoples, resilient men and women who built Canada's first communities in some of the harshest conditions imaginable. Perhaps it is our belief in freedom, limited government and the power of the free market. Regardless of the reason, Canadians have proven time and time again that through hard work, innovation and perseverance, we can accomplish anything.

Canada's economic recovery will be driven by Canadians. Governments do not create jobs, and we cannot borrow our way to prosperity. True success comes from investing in people, but the only people the Liberals are interested in investing in are the wealthy elites. While regular Canadians continue to struggle, the Prime Minister is passing buckets of money around the highest levels of corporate Canada. It started in the last Parliament when the Liberals developed their superclusters program, handing out bil-

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lions and billions of dollars to corporate entities and wealthy institutions. They gave \$50 million to Mastercard and \$12 million to Loblaws. They gave \$35 billion to the Canada Infrastructure Bank, which protects wealthy investors and puts all the risk on the backs of taxpayers. How many projects has that new Infrastructure Bank actually completed? Zero. The Bank of Canada, as I said earlier, is printing money.

Now, the finance minister just bragged about the low cost of servicing that debt. Well, there is a reason why. It is because the Bank of Canada is purchasing government debt on the secondary bond market. It is creating money out of thin air, and who gets that money first? It is the wealthy investors who have already purchased government debt in the past. This is the epitome of trickle-down economics. It's throwing money around at the highest levels of corporate Canada while raising taxes on hard-working Canadians. In the middle of a pandemic and all of the economic difficulties it has caused, they raised the carbon tax and are raising payroll taxes and excise taxes. Meanwhile, there is no help for energy workers. They have refused to fix their flawed programs.

The finance minister talked about the need for speed. Well, we all agreed back in March that the government had to act quickly, and we were told that if Parliament passed these measures, they would be fixed as time went on. I note the date, July 8, and that they have still not fixed the flaws in the wage subsidy, and there are still thousands and thousands of people who have lost their jobs because of the gaps in that program. They have refused to make any adjustments to the rental subsidies that require businesses to have lost 70% of their revenue before they qualify, and, of course, they have refused to take away the barrier to people returning back to work by adopting the back-to-work bonus the Conservatives have proposed. We cannot forget that in the middle of this pandemic, the Prime Minister has let so many Canadians fall behind.

• (1445)

[*Translation*]

The Conservatives have been proposing constructive solutions to help Canadians all along through this pandemic. Our goal is to help workers and local businesses get back up and running as quickly as possible.

It is very disappointing that the Prime Minister did not use today's fiscal snapshot to offer the back-to-work bonus. Our Conservative plan can make the Canada emergency response benefit more flexible and more generous, to allow workers to earn more as businesses gradually open.

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Helping Canadians transition back to work is vital to our recovery. A good job helps Canadians succeed. It helps their families succeed. It helps build our communities and ultimately makes our country strong.

Under the Prime Minister, Canada and Canadians are losing out. We are falling behind. We are falling behind every other nation in the G7. That is unacceptable. Canadians deserve a government that stands up for their interests. They deserve better than what they just got today.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, I see a totally different picture from the one the leader of the official opposition has just portrayed. I see a government that has been demonstrating caring and compassion, a government that has worked with other levels of government of all political stripes to make sure that Canadians in all regions of our great nation are being looked after. They are in fact the number one priority of this government, this cabinet, and this Prime Minister. That is what I have witnessed.

We have seen programs come from virtually nowhere, programs that previously did not exist, like the CERB, to serve millions of Canadians by providing them with the disposable income that is so critical for them to be able to buy the things that are necessary. I have seen businesses saved to the degree that millions of jobs have been saved as a direct result. I have seen opposition members come to the table in a positive way to contribute to making life better for all Canadians.

This is a government that truly cares and has the compassion to put Canadians first and foremost as its number one priority.

Would the member opposite not agree that it is time that we look at and focus on what is in the best interests of families in Canada and get behind programs like those that provide more support for Canadians with disabilities?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Chair, I am not surprised that the member has a selective memory when it comes to the last few months. It seems like he is stuck in March. He is stuck at about March 22, when everybody realized that we were in an unprecedented situation and we all agreed that we would come back to Parliament to give the government the tools it needed to help Canadians.

What did his party do with that opportunity? Before members of Parliament even gathered in the chamber, before we had even figured out how to stay two metres apart, the government wrote itself a massive power grab, trying to eliminate the role of Parliament. In the middle of a pandemic when people were losing their jobs and losing loved ones, the first thought of members of his party was how they could benefit politically from it. Then, when we pointed out time and again the gaps that people were falling through, in the wage subsidy, in the CERB and the penalty for going back to work, and in the rental subsidy, the Liberals have refused to make any of those changes, leaving thousands of Canadians behind.

That is the legacy the government will take into the next election and I have no doubt that Canadians will not reward the Liberals for their slowness, their poor decisions and their inaction.

• (1450)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Chair, on April 29, the Bloc Québécois proposed an amendment to the CERB whereby the more one works, the higher one's income will be, independently of the amount or number of hours worked. That makes total sense. We asked the government to make that happen, and the Deputy Prime Minister said she would consider it. She even promised to make it happen.

At the time, the Conservatives did not comment on the idea. Then a few weeks later, they were back on the scene talking about how adjusting the CERB was a good idea. Why is it a good idea? First of all, adjusting the CERB will encourage people to go back to work. That means it will spur growth, not slow it. Recovery will be easier if the CERB encourages people to go back to work. That is what the Government of Quebec keeps telling us.

Also, if people want to go back to work, obviously, it will cost us less in CERB payments, and everyone wins. That would mean an increase in government revenues because of stronger growth. On top of that, government spending goes down, precisely because people are getting back to work. Everyone is happy, because we end up with a situation where everyone is better off.

The Conservative Party has seen the light, I must admit. I would like to know whether the leader of the official opposition thinks that if we had adjusted the CERB from the beginning, when on April 29 our esteemed Deputy Prime Minister—

The Deputy Chair: I apologize, but we have only five minutes for questions and comments. We have to give members a chance to respond, and there should be at least three questions every five minutes.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Chair, first, the Conservatives support the idea of eliminating the barrier for people who want to return to work. The Bloc Québécois paid the Conservatives a nice compliment by stealing our idea. That does not bother me. It is a nice compliment. It was our party that proposed giving Canadians incentives to return to work. It was our finance critic who suggested it. It came about because of the hard work of our Conservative team, which put forward ideas to improve the Liberal government's disastrous programs.

If the Bloc Québécois has seen the light and supports our position, that is a good thing.

[English]

The Deputy Chair: Once again, I want to remind members that there are five minutes for questions and comments. We are going to try to get three questions in, but unfortunately there is not enough time. I remind members to keep their questions short so we can allow others to ask questions.

Government Orders

The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Chair, what we witnessed today was, for the first time in history, something a government called a “fiscal and economic snapshot”. A snapshot is defined in most dictionaries as a quick photograph, or in modern lingo we call it a selfie, an economic selfie.

The finance minister, in talking for about 15 minutes straight, could not bring himself to utter the size of the debt or the deficit. Now, I will be the first, apparently, to do so. I ask all members to ensure they are in their seats. Anyone out there listening to this speech while operating heavy equipment might want to turn the volume down.

The government has now smashed through the trillion-dollar debt mark. The size of Canada's national debt is \$1.06 trillion, with a deficit of \$343 billion. To put that into perspective, when the current government took office, the entire budget of the Government of Canada was about \$260 billion. In other words, the Liberals are borrowing more in one year than the Government of Canada used to spend in its entire budget not long ago.

The finance minister went to great lengths to brag about the low interest rates he is paying on the debt, as though he somehow set those interest rates himself, which raises questions about his perception of the Bank of Canada's independence. What he forgets is that those interest rates are temporary and only made possible by the cornucopia of cash that is coming out of the Bank of Canada, a bank that has created, through keystrokes on a computer, about \$400 billion of new currency for government spending in less than 100 days. In other words, that is almost equal to a full quarter of GDP printed, created out of thin air by our central bank.

The Prime Minister thinks he has discovered a new idea in creating currency in order to spend it. He had best look back to history to know that this method of financing state activity can only go on for so long.

I raise all of this not because the programs to support Canadians and replace the wages that governments have taken away from them are unnecessary. They are very necessary, of course, when government deprives people, through lockdowns and shutdowns, of their ability to earn an income. It is the government's job to compensate them for that, and such measures have been necessary and generally, with exception, supported by the official opposition.

That said, we know that no nation can go on consuming without producing. The only way for us to continue to exist economically is to once again unleash the full and incomparable power of Canada's 20-million-person workforce, to let free the more than one million entrepreneurs and businesses that employ those workers.

That should have been the purpose of today's address, instead of a temporary moment of self-congratulation combined with hypnotic phrases intended to make us feel comfortable with a trillion dollars of debt. We expected that the finance minister would arrive here today with a plan to bring our economy back to life.

Instead, what he did was brag that his plan is the most expensive plan in the G7. He said that because it consumes 10% of GDP, higher than any other G7 country and higher than the G20 average,

because it spends the most money, because it is the most costly, it must therefore be the best. Of course, it has simultaneously produced the worst results. Canada now has the highest unemployment in the G7. We went into the crisis with the highest save France and Italy, whose socialist policies the current government had long been trying to emulate, but now, only 100 days later, our economic position is even worse than theirs, even worse than Italy, which was among those that bore the hardest brunt of the COVID crisis.

• (1455)

Today, Canada has the worst job record and posture in all of the G7. In other words, the Liberals have spent the most to achieve the least. The only thing they have today for job creation is a new \$15 million fund to staff up the Deputy Prime Minister's office. I guess \$15 million are enough to create 150 six-figure jobs for political staffers working now for the Deputy Prime Minister.

It is funny that the Auditor General asked for \$11 million so she could do her job examining all this spending. Today, the Auditor General is doing about 14 audits a year. Ten years ago, the Auditor General's office did 28 audits a year, twice as many. Government spending today is over \$600 billion. Back then it was about \$250 billion. In other words, spending is up by more than double and the number of audits is down by half, which means we have a quarter of the accountability.

Today we would just assume that in this massive spending splurge the Liberals would find \$10 million or \$11 million for the Auditor General. Compared to the other spending they are doing, it is not very much. In fact, the government is now spending almost exactly \$1 million per minute. In the time I give my speech, the Liberals could have fully funded the Auditor General. However, they did not have money for the Auditor General; they had \$15 million for the Deputy Prime Minister.

I am sure that later today when I move a motion in the House of Commons that we shift that \$15 million from the Deputy Prime Minister to the Auditor General, we will have no problem getting unanimous consent. I am looking around and I see violent agreement from all sides of the House of Commons. I am sure that it will be a mere perfunctory matter of procedure to get it done when I move my motion later on.

However, it is interesting that the government's only job creation measure in today's presentation was in the Deputy Prime Minister's office.

What could we do as an alternative? We as Conservatives are proposing to transform the COVID programs into pro-growth, pro-job initiatives. Let us go through the list.

Government Orders

We support a generous wage subsidy in order to keep our workers active and contributing as much as possible during the shut-down and in the subsequent reopening. Unfortunately though, people have to be down 30% in order to qualify for that wage subsidy. That is forcing many businesses to artificially suppress their revenues in order to continue to qualify for the subsidy. That is because their extra revenue is not as big as the wage subsidy was itself. The government is arbitrarily forcing businesses to suppress their own revenues just to stay alive. A more perverse incentive could not have been invented. If there were such an incentive, it would be rent subsidy, which requires revenues to be down 70%. Again, the instant that business rises above that threshold, they lose the ability to pay their rent.

We as Conservatives, under the leadership of our small business critic from Edmonton, have proposed that businesses be able to gently phase out their need for assistance by increasing their revenues and slowly decreasing their wage subsidy at the same time.

Second, we have the Canada emergency response benefit, a necessary measure no doubt, but the government has imposed a back-to-work penalty. If people earn more than \$1,000, the Prime Minister will kick them from the CERB to the curb. We in the Conservative Party believe that we should reward work to allow people a back-to-work bonus that will ensure that every dollar they earn, every shift they take, will make them better off than they were before. Canadians believe in work and their government should always reward work. That is why the Conservatives have come forward with a pro-work, pro-growth agenda.

We call on the government to embrace growth and jobs, to once again unleash the ferocious power of our workers and our entrepreneurs to bring our economy back to life, our finances under control and our nation on solid footing.

• (1500)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, what we have seen over the last number of months is a government that has taken a different approach from the Conservatives, and that is a good thing. We have looked at many programs to which the member opposite just made reference, whether it is the CERB or the wage loss program. We have also been able to provide direct support to families through child care and to seniors, whether it is through the GIS or the OAS. Supporting Canadians through this difficult time of the pandemic ultimately allows us to be on a road to recovery in a much better form.

Would the member not agree, and hopefully we can get agreement on this, as a result of the way the government has invested during this time, we will be on a better path to recovery?

• (1505)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, I hear what my hon. colleague is saying, but the numbers do not add up. According to the statistics, we have the highest unemployment rate in the G7.

The Liberal government has spent more as a percentage of GDP than any other country. As a result, our unemployment rate is high-

er than that of other countries. This has not been a success, which is why we are proposing changes to rent, wages and personal income assistance programs to reward work and supplement incomes. We want to encourage growth rather than crippling it.

This is not just an economic issue for Canadians. It is a matter of values. We should always encourage and reward work, not punish it.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Chair, I would like to ask my colleague what he thinks about the cases of possible fraud involving the Canadian emergency response benefit that have been reported by the media. Apparently, some people have fraudulently exploited the programs. The government announced that it will be investigating and recovering that money.

Was my colleague expecting today's fiscal update to include the measures that the government intends to take?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

I agree with the sentiments he expressed. We both sit on the Standing Committee on Finance, which finally adopted a motion calling for the Auditor General to receive all the funding she needs to carry out audits.

We know that even in cases where officials noticed potential fraud, the government told them to send out the cheques anyway. We also know that some inmates got cheques. These are precisely the reasons why the Auditor General ought to receive all the funding she needs to audit this spending and make sure that a lot of this money did not go to fraudsters.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for Carleton for flagging some of the issues that have been very important to people in my riding of Edmonton Strathcona.

Seeing how accommodating and friendly the Conservatives and the Bloc are today and how happy they are to get along, my question is this. Instead of cutting services that Canadian families rely upon, would the Conservatives support the NDP's call for a wealth tax on the super-rich, which would raise \$6 billion a year, and crack down on the estimated \$25 billion in corporate taxes that we lose to tax havens each year?

Government Orders

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Chair, of course we support cracking down on tax havens. Everyone should pay what they owe and anyone who is breaking the law to avoid doing so should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. The New Democrats are fond of coming up with other schemes they claim will raise revenue. They never actually do, in practice.

We propose that if we want to stop handing money to the rich, we should stop the corporate welfare schemes that use taxpayer money to fill the pockets of wealthy and influential people. Let us cancel the \$35-billion Infrastructure Bank, which is nothing more than a backstop of profits for large construction and private equity firms. Let us cancel handouts to firms like Loblaws, Mastercard, Bombardier and others that—

The Deputy Chair: Unfortunately, the time is up.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Joliette.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair—

[*English*]

The Deputy Chair: The member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo is rising on a point of privilege.

* * *

• (1510)

PRIVILEGE

DISTRIBUTION OF FISCAL DOCUMENT

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Chair, I will make this quick. I did not mean to interrupt my Bloc colleague and I apologize.

I have noticed that many people in the chamber, in this committee, have a document. I would presume the document is a fiscal update that is allowing them to ask questions and see details that were not in the minister's statement, such as the deficit numbers. I looked at my emails, thinking that surely the government would care about the couple of hundred-plus of us who are not in the chamber and distribute that document to us so we could clearly see what was happening and be on an equal playing field with respect to our opportunity to ask questions. As a virtual committee member today, I truly feel my privileges have been violated by not having been provided that document.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, I rise to address the concern. The member raises a valid point. Everything was shared with all parties under embargo earlier today. From what I understand, that included electronic copies. Therefore, all members do have access to it. I am not 100% sure how the respective caucuses and independents received it, but I believe the information was made available.

The Deputy Chair: It is a question that was raised a bit earlier as well. As the parliamentary secretary mentioned, the document was shared with the party leaders and I would anticipate that the parties are distributing or have distributed it to their members. I know the document is public.

We will continue on. I will double-check to determine where the document is with the other parties at this point, and whether or not it has actually been distributed.

* * *

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 8

The House resumed consideration in committee of the whole of Government Business No. 8, Mrs. Carol Hughes in the chair.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Madam Chair, I believe if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

Whereas the fiscal snapshot identifies “increased capacity at the Privy Council Office”, this measure would increase the capacity of the Privy Council Office to ensure that it can continue to meet its mandate following the creation of the role of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and International Trade in the amount of \$7 million next year and \$15 million for each year after that, the House calls on the government to transfer this full sum from the Office of the Privy Council to the Office of the Auditor General.

The Deputy Chair: As was mentioned earlier today, we are doing things a bit differently because of the format we are in. Therefore, at this point I am going to ask all those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion to please say nay. Also, I would ask anybody who is saying no virtually to raise the hand on his or her virtual screen. That would be of assistance.

Some hon. members: Nay.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: Resuming debate. The hon. member for Joliette.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Chair, we have been asking for this fiscal update since May, as have the other opposition parties and the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Finally we have it.

Once again, the government chose to notify the finance community before informing the House. As everyone knows, the news was announced by Bloomberg.

To be honest, the Bloc Québécois did not have particularly high expectations concerning today's fiscal update. However, we were still disappointed by the economic portrait presented. Basically, the document lists the measures announced and their impact on finances. That is about it.

We made several requests concerning the fiscal update. First, we asked for an unconditional transfer of \$14 billion to the provinces and to Quebec. We did not get it. The \$14 billion is there, but so are the conditions.

Government Orders

We then asked that changes be made to the Canada emergency response benefit to encourage workers to return to work. We did not get that, either. We also asked for changes to the Canada emergency wage subsidy so that it would include seasonal industries such as tourism and culture. We did not get that, either.

From reading the economic snapshot, one would think we are still in April, but we are in July. Businesses have started reopening. The economic recovery is now under way. It is time to adjust the programs. Today's fiscal update was a golden opportunity to introduce these types of changes, but that is not what happened.

Take, for example, the Canada emergency response benefit. In my opinion, the CERB is a public health measure. We asked people to stay home and not go to work. In return, the government would pay them \$2,000 a month. However, as businesses begin to reopen and the economy starts picking up, the government needs to change its message. It is high time we amended the Canada emergency response benefit.

Right now, workers who earn one dollar more than the allowable \$1,000 are ineligible for the CERB. Right now, we are at the economic recovery stage, not the economic stimulus stage, and yet people who earn one dollar more are not entitled to the CERB. That makes no sense.

Here is the situation: The unemployment rate is around 12%, which is very high. If health measures were put in place, many people could go back to work. The chambers of commerce have told us that their members are having a hard time finding employees because the government still has not made any changes to the Canada emergency response benefit. Basically, the message the government is sending is that workers should still be staying home, as they were doing in April. It makes no sense.

We have been asking the government to make changes to the CERB since March. Earlier, the leader of the Conservative Party said that he was the one who first made that proposal. When an idea is good, it should be spread far and wide, regardless of who thought of it first.

The principle behind the CERB should be the same as the one behind employment insurance. In the progressive EI system, if a person earns more than \$1,000, that person does not lose everything. For example, Canadians could keep \$0.50 for every additional dollar earned.

It has been almost four months now that the government has been telling us that that is too complicated. This type of excuse can work for one or two weeks, maybe even three, but four months is much too long. That does not fly.

The same is true for the Canada emergency wage subsidy. The government needs to change it. If an employer is losing 30%, it is entitled to the wage benefit. However, if it is losing 29%, it is no longer entitled to it. It makes no sense.

We understand that, in the early days, we needed to establish certain criteria, given the urgency of the situation. We even changed the percentage to 15% for the first month. It has been this way for a number of months now, and it is time for a change. We need to enhance, improve the measures.

We also need to change the Canada emergency wage subsidy to give seasonal industries, such as tourism and culture, access to it. The solution is simple. In fact, the solution is so simple that the government itself proposed it a month ago, but still has not done anything about it. The solution was to pay out the wage subsidy based on last year's salaries rather than on those earned in February when seasonal industries were obviously not operating. That was part of Bill C-17, which was tabled in the House a month ago but still has not been passed.

Why was Bill C-17 not passed?

● (1515)

Bill C-17 was not passed simply because the government chose to sulk. The government wanted the House to pass the bill immediately as it was, word for word, or it would not introduce the bill. We did not have the right to amend it or even debate it. Nothing. Nada. We had to either take it or leave it. It had to be done. This minority government wants to play the dictator's apprentice. It is ridiculous. On a personal note, I want to say that, when a person is asked what country or regime he admires and he answers, "China", that may be a sign that person wants to play the dictator's apprentice. That is what we are seeing here.

We are still waiting impatiently for the government to make the changes to the wage subsidy, including the change needed for Airbus to have access to it, even though some of the money invested in that project comes from the public purse. We know that things are not going well for the aerospace industry. We need to change that.

While entire sectors of our economy do not have access to the wage subsidy, the Liberal Party has both hands in the cookie jar. In this case, I would have to say that the pandemic is being used as an excuse. It is a terrible ethical issue. While the Liberal Party is benefiting from the wage subsidy, it is dragging its feet. Things have been dragging on for a month for entire sectors of our economy. It is shameful and it needs to change.

What we see in the document is somewhat contradictory. The government still has not passed Bill C-17, but it has chosen to take today's economic update into account in its financial valuations. It is high time that we debate Bill C-17. Like my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands of the Green Party was saying earlier, on page 20 there is a list of assistance measures for people with disabilities. As we know, this is one of the population groups that have been most affected by the pandemic. The government acknowledges that in its document.

Since we have a duty and a right to study Bill C-17, when will the government submit it for debate so that we can make the necessary amendments and pass it? We have been waiting for a month.

Government Orders

Another subject keeps coming up: the overpayment of benefits. There have been cases of fraud, and the government said that it would be recovering those amounts. There is not one line about this in today's fiscal snapshot. There is a story I would like to tell. It is a powerful one, so I would advise members hang on to their hats. During the technical briefing the government gave to the opposition parties earlier today, I asked a question about this. I was met with silence, and someone exclaimed, "What the fudge!" That is what we got as an answer. Not the best answer ever, I dare say. This is not a joke. The Liberals wondered whether they had forgotten to address the issue. What happened? Another missed opportunity.

As we expected, the document confirms that we have an enormous debt. The deficit so far is \$343 billion. That is what it will be on March 31, 2021, if no further funds are voted, there is no second wave and no other measures are put in place between now and then. That is the minimum. That is where we are, and it is obviously troubling.

There is a shocking and interesting bit of information in this document. Servicing the debt, or the interest payments on the debt, goes down because the interest rates dropped as a result of the massive support from the Bank of Canada and all the central banks in the world that have done this with their economy. In the short term and in the long term as well we hope, we are talking about 10- to 30-year bonds that will help lower the interest payments.

Like the other G7 and G20 countries, the government went into serious debt to support the economy during the pandemic. As they say, it was the least bad solution.

● (1520)

That kind of deficit could be justified if we spend the money properly. That is what we are asking for: proper spending. Let me explain. I spoke about this earlier in my speech. An unconditional transfer of \$14 billion would be proper spending. Changing the Canada emergency response benefit to include an incentive to work would be proper spending. The government must do this as soon as possible. We were expecting to see that in today's document. Also, the Canada emergency wage subsidy should be extended to seasonal sectors such as tourism and culture.

Given our historic deficit, the government is offering a simple, perhaps even simplistic, solution: government bonds. As I said earlier, these are significant, long-term bonds, over 10 to 30 years. We are not talking about income growth.

In the document, the government says that it will not do anything more about tax evasion or tax avoidance or to make web giants GAFAM pay their share of taxes and fees. The government's message today is clear. Web giants, banks and multinationals that do not pay their share of taxes will not have to start doing so, and the record debt we are seeing will not change a thing. It is a serious issue and it needs to change. The Bloc can be counted on to continue bringing pressure to bear.

The government based its economic forecast on private sector forecasts and is telling us that there will be a 6.8% decrease in activity this year, offset by 5.5% growth in 2021. At the end of next year, when we compare these numbers, we still will not be where we were before the COVID-19 crisis. That is what economists call

the inverse square root. What does that mean? It goes down, it goes up, but then it stalls at a lower level than before. It is troubling. The government should have reduced uncertainty as much as possible by immediately announcing changes to its assistance programs, like we have been saying all day. Another important measure would have been to extend the assistance over a longer period for economic sectors we need to support and that will be in difficulty for a longer time, such as aerospace and culture. We need to reduce the uncertainty.

In its fiscal snapshot, the government acknowledges what businesses have been telling us. Its rent assistance program is not working. How many applications for rent assistance have been filed across the country? Only 29,000. When we compare this with the \$40,000 emergency loans, that is almost \$700,000. The rent assistance program is used almost 25 times less often. That sends a very clear message. The government published the numbers in its document. We need to review and enhance the program, since it does not make sense that it would be used 25 times less often.

Given the spike in health care costs, Quebec and the provinces will be hit with quite a bill. The \$14 billion announced will cover only some of the new costs. The conditions imposed in this situation have no other purpose than to further centralize power in our federation by undermining the provinces' jurisdictions.

The health care system was already underfinanced before the pandemic. The Parliamentary Budget Officer demonstrated that very clearly. As always, the power lies with the federal government, even if Quebec and the provinces are spending huge amounts. Since Lester B. Pearson in 1964, there has not been a single transfer of a single tax point from the federal government to the provinces, despite the fact that the most costly sectors, namely health, education and social services, are under provincial jurisdiction.

The federal government negotiates agreements piecemeal. It systematically infringes on provincial jurisdiction by imposing conditions. It has been reducing transfers while increasing conditions and its interference. This has to stop. It does not work and it has gone on long enough. We see it on the ground: Our public services are gasping for air, and the federal government is doing nothing to help.

● (1525)

Ottawa's handling of this crisis is amplifying centralization and it needs to stop. Again, we are calling on the government, as a gesture of good faith, to remove the conditions attached to the \$14 billion and to transfer the money as soon as possible. That would be a step in the right direction.

● (1530)

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to thank my colleague opposite for his speech.

Government Orders

To hear him tell it, one would think that the pandemic was pretty much over, that we could all get back to work and that the government could adjust all of the existing programs. My colleague is well aware that it would be very complicated for the government to adjust each one of the benefits in a crisis like this. We have adjusted each program week by week.

The message my colleague is sending his constituents is to stay home, not go back to work, and collect the \$2,000 a month. That is not what we are telling people in my riding. We are telling them to go out and work. People should not drop a job they have had for a year or two for just a month's worth of benefits.

Is my colleague opposite aware that it would have been more complicated to adjust the Canada emergency response benefit than to offer what we have offered over the past four months?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, adjusting the support measures is what we have been asking for for four months. Saying it would be too complicated is an excuse that works for the first couple of weeks. Today, it no longer passes muster.

I think my colleague from Argenteuil—La Petite Nation, which is a beautiful part of Quebec that is well worth a visit, did not quite understand my speech. What we are asking the government to do is adjust the measures in order to incentivize employees to go back to work. What we disapprove of is what the government is doing right now, namely providing a “disincentive” to work. This needs to change.

This pandemic is not over yet. There could even be a second wave. I find it appalling that the document tabled today includes half a page of concerns about a resurgence and a second wave. The government says it is very worried about that, but it offers no figures on that half page. When we look at all the budget measures it announced, we see no contingency fund for responding to a second wave.

Frankly, I think my colleague should go back and read his own party's document again.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Chair, it is fascinating to see the Bloc Québécois align closer to the Conservatives on economic issues. It is not a matter of who has proposed what in the past. This is about making suggestions to the government so that people can get back to work. I want to commend the members of the Bloc Québécois, who want to work on this with us to push Quebec's economy forward.

Everyone knows that we are definitely not through this pandemic yet. The \$343 billion announced today does not include a potential recovery plan. I would like to ask my colleague his thoughts on that.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his comments and question.

This \$343 billion is almost virtual, not because it will not have to be repaid, but because it is a minimum. I am willing to bet that on March 31 of next year it will be more than \$343 billion.

The announced \$343 billion seems to imply that between now and next March the government is not going to spend a nickel more

than what is set out in Bill C-17. What will happen if there is a second wave? Stimulus measures will be needed. We can think of all the important sectors of the economy and the green economy. Indeed, I am convinced that my colleague agrees that it is important to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels. It could be an investment in the economy of tomorrow. I see that my colleague is nodding.

It will be more than that, but, as they say, it is the lesser of two evils in the current situation. If this money stimulates the economy and creates a good foundation for building the economy of the future, let us move forward, but it has to be done right. We will be keeping an eye on them.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Chair, I really enjoy working with my colleague. He contributes a great deal to the Standing Committee on Finance. As the member knows, we have talked about that shortfall at several meetings. This government is not doing anything to address tax havens and tax loopholes and refuses to tax web giants. If those things were addressed, we would be able to invest more to help people.

Would my colleague agree that we need to tackle these income tax issues and create a fair tax system so that we can invest adequately to help people everywhere?

• (1535)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I agree with my colleague. Clearly, it is unacceptable that we have a tax system that allows the wealthiest, the biggest, the strongest, the richest people and companies to contribute less than the middle class. Come on. The government should be more like Robin Hood and less like the Sheriff of Nottingham. Let us change that. Since I was elected in 2015, I have been fighting for a fairer system, one that prohibits the use of tax havens. This practice is unacceptable and immoral, and yet it is still legal.

Government spending has skyrocketed because of the pandemic. The deficit has reached \$343 billion, and yet there are no plans to crack down on these big profiteers. That is unacceptable. Let us change that immediately.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Madam Chair, I know that my colleague from Joliette is very familiar with the living conditions of people with disabilities. Day after day, they have to adjust to life, and it is not easy.

The Bloc Québécois proposed that the government introduce just a part of Bill C-17 today to deal specifically with the benefit that could be given to people living with disabilities.

Does my colleague feel reassured after reading the economic snapshot presented here today?

Does he really think that the government will finally see the light and give benefits to all those living with a disability?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît for her question and for her particular concern for people living with disabilities.

Government Orders

I do not feel at all reassured because this bill should have been introduced, debated, amended as needed and then passed in the House a month ago. There was a broad consensus in the House to implement this benefit, but the government was sulking. It did not want any changes to be made to the bill. We had to take it or leave it. However, this is a minority government, and that is not how things work.

Today, the government had the chance to redeem itself by introducing that part of the bill. The government could have done that, but it did not. When will it do that? It is up to the government to decide but, even if it had done so today, it would have been too late.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for Joliette for his speech.

I would like to know what he thinks about the idea of having a guaranteed livable income program. As he said, under the Canada emergency response benefit people are not motivated to return to work. With a guaranteed livable income, there would no longer be any reason to avoid working more than the current program allows.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Madam Chair, a guaranteed livable income is an interesting idea that is worth debating. However, under this current federation model, I find that most of the support measures for social services are covered by Quebec and the provinces, even though Ottawa provides a portion of them.

This overlap means that such a measure would require an agreement between Ottawa and the provinces. As we see with health care, housing or infrastructure, as soon as Ottawa has to provide some of the funding, it takes years to reach an agreement. Ottawa imposes its conditions and is not satisfied.

We are still waiting for social housing transfers, even though the agreement was signed two years ago, if I am not mistaken. We were sure that this would be resolved before the election over a year ago. Unfortunately, in Quebec, the best way to get a guaranteed livable income would be to start by getting our independence.

* * *

• (1540)

[English]

PRIVILEGE

DISTRIBUTION OF FISCAL DOCUMENT

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Chair, on the point raised by the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, I have two things I would like to bring to your attention.

The first item is that an embargoed copy of the document was provided to the office of the leader of the official opposition. However, it is not the custom or the expectation that bootlegged copies are made of these documents and then distributed to members of recognized parties in the House.

The second item is that the custom is that the government distributes documents to members, that they do not seek them out or, again, seek those out from the offices of the recognized parties in this place. It is the government that is responsible to provide documents that are presented in the House to all members.

The privilege that members have is not given to them through parties or run through the parties. It is run through the House, and that is the point raised by that member. It is not a judgment to be made on the action or inaction of distribution by the offices of those leaders, but instead by the government's responsibility to provide that information to all members of this place whether they are participating virtually or in the House.

The Deputy Chair: I will try to answer this to the best of my ability. We are working in a very different format at this point in time and I think we are all learning from this as well.

I certainly agree that all members should be privy to any documentation provided by the government. However, on the declaration that was made today, I am struggling at this point with the format of it. The government has indicated that the document was provided to the House leaders and to the leader. Therefore, those documents should have been, at some point, distributed to make sure that all members received it. There is no doubt that every member should have been privy to the document.

On how that document was distributed, I think we will learn from this experience. I will raise this with the Speaker and I am sure that the Speaker will add to this in some form, whether directly to the parties or come back to the House to address that.

It was a different format than what is normally seen during budgets, so it was not actually a tabling of a budget. I will leave it to the Speaker to come back should he need to respond to that directly in the House or to the parties.

* * *

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 8

The House resumed consideration in committee of the whole of Government Business No. 8, Mrs. Carol Hughes in the chair.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the very hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Throughout this pandemic, we have been focused on people. We knew that the pandemic's impact on people would be that they would not be able to pay their bills and would struggle to put food on the table. Everything we have done during this pandemic has been to push the government to deliver more help to more people.

We knew in the beginning that EI would not cover enough Canadians. We knew that EI only applied to 40% of Canadians, so we needed to do more than that. We needed to push the government to do more than just expanding EI.

Therefore, we pushed the government to create CERB and have the amount set at \$2,000 per person. When the Prime Minister wanted to cut off CERB and leave families uncertain about their future, we fought back, and we won. However, we are not out of the pandemic yet. We still need to do more.

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• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Throughout the pandemic, people have been struggling to pay their bills. They are having a tough time putting food on the table and paying the rent. We are not yet out of this crisis, this pandemic. Families and our economy need support to keep going.

[*English*]

Come August, after our fighting and pushing for the extension of CERB, there are still going to be many families that cannot go back to work. There is no work for many people to go back to. Canadians, our families, the economy and Canada need that support to continue.

With today's fiscal snapshot, we are going to hear from Conservatives, who have already laid out an argument saying that help for Canadians must end. We know that the Liberals will also use the fiscal snapshot as an excuse to cut help to Canadians, to families that need the help.

This fiscal snapshot, though very serious, presents a very important opportunity for a choice. The choice is this. Any time there is difficulty, we see government after government, which in this case is a Liberal government, while in the past it was a Conservative government, quickly move to putting the pressure on working families and putting the brunt of the pain on everyday families. However, they have never moved to ask the wealthiest, those at the very top, to pay their fair share.

If the government needs to cut costs, it should cut the costs of billions of dollars in giveaways to the wealthiest Canadians. If the government needs to cut costs, and I think the government should, then it should cut the cost of allowing billions of dollars to be lost to offshore tax havens. If the government needs to increase revenue, which I believe we need to do in this difficult time, we know there are significant companies that have made massive profits during this pandemic, such as Netflix and Amazon, that pay almost no tax in Canada. We know that the wealthiest, those at the very top, continue to amass fortunes, so we ask the government to put in place a wealth tax on those who have fortunes of over \$20 million.

Let us ask the wealthiest to bear the brunt of the pandemic, not the families and the working people who are struggling to get by.

[*Translation*]

We are going to hear the Conservatives and Liberals use today's fiscal snapshot as an excuse to cut back on the support that people still depend on. Instead of looking for ways to cut support to those who need it most, the Prime Minister and his Liberal government should stop letting the ultra-rich avoid paying their fair share by giving them massive tax giveaways and turning a blind eye while they hide billions of dollars in tax havens. If the government needs to cut costs, it should cut the cost that tax havens represent to our economy. By making better choices, the Liberal government could get the wealthiest Canadians to pay their fair share.

[*English*]

Again, let us look at the choices.

In a difficult economic situation, it is time for difficult choices, but far too often the difficult choice seems to be to cut the programs and services that families depend on and that families desperately need. That seems to be the choice of Conservative governments, and often Liberal governments. They quickly go to cutting the services and programs that families in need are desperately relying on.

Instead of that choice, I put forward another choice. Instead of cutting the services and programs to families in need, the government can cut the massive giveaways to the wealthiest. We have just heard the parliamentary budget office talk about the \$27 billion or more hidden in offshore tax havens. We know that the wealthiest Canadians continue to enjoy more and more wealth. Let us do two things: end offshore tax havens, and ensure that the wealthiest Canadians, those with fortunes of over \$20 million, pay their fair share. Tax their fortunes of over \$20 million, and use that revenue to pay for programs instead of cutting the services that families need.

For New Democrats, the choice is clear. We will always be on the side of working people. We will always be on the side of people and will not side with powerful, large corporations or the super wealthy.

Throughout this pandemic, we have heard the Prime Minister and the Liberal government say some nice things. Even before that, we heard the Prime Minister and the Liberal government say some nice things, but when it comes down to it, those nice things that they said turned out to be just empty words. I want to frame these choices and how the words of the Prime Minister have been so empty.

We pushed the government to commit to helping Canadians who live with disabilities without delay. The Prime Minister then released a plan that did not help all Canadians, and it came months after the last thought was to help out Canadians with disabilities. The Liberals completely ignored them. Then, when they provided a plan, that plan would not help all people living with disabilities. In fact, it would not even help the majority of Canadians living with disabilities.

The Liberals had a choice. They could have included everyone who needed help. They had a choice to include all Canadians living with disabilities. The Liberal government had a choice, and had the time to develop a plan that would help everyone in need: people getting the CPP disability, veterans getting support, students and people receiving social assistance payments from provinces or territories.

The Liberal government chose to make Canadians living with disabilities wait for help. At the same time as it told Canadians living with disabilities that they had to wait and would not get the help they needed right away, it immediately moved to help large corporations with, effectively, no restrictions. It would not even restrict help to a company that was overtly cheating the system by not paying its fair share. Other countries have banned or would not provide any help to companies using offshore tax havens, but Canada failed to do that. The government helped big corporations instead of helping working people. It did not restrict help to companies by limiting the bonuses paid to CEOs to \$1 million, and it was willing to give money to help the largest corporations.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

When it comes to his well-connected friends, the Prime Minister will stop at nothing. People living with disabilities, however, are still waiting for the government to take action.

[*English*]

I will quickly talk about some comparisons.

Again, Canadians living with disabilities were told to wait while friends of the government in WE received \$1 billion in the blink of an eye. The government and the Prime Minister talk about being feminist, but we know that in this pandemic women have been disproportionately impacted. There is no recovery in this economy if we do not accept the gendered lens of the impact and put forward a plan that addresses that gendered impact, and that means there is no recovery without investment in child care—

The Deputy Chair: Sorry, the time is up. I am sure that the hon. member will be able to add, during the questions and comments, anything he might not have been able to put forward.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will say right at the beginning that it has been encouraging to be on the government side and to see a much higher sense of co-operation coming from the New Democratic Party in supporting many of the measures the government is proposing, in contrast to the official opposition, which opposes us no matter what we bring forward.

My question for the leader of the New Democratic Party is more one of acknowledgement, and that is to acknowledge, as most Canadians would, that the different levels of government, obviously including the federal government and the many programs we have put into place, all assist us in being in a better position to be on the road to a healthier recovery, while at the same time we are saving lives and providing a better situation in terms of preventing the loss of lives and providing supports for our front-line services.

I'm wondering if the leader of the NDP could provide his thoughts.

• (1555)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Chair, I think one of the things we have to highlight when it comes to the response of the government is that at every step of the way the Liberal government has tried to do as little as possible. It was only after we pushed and fought and demanded more for people that we were able to get more for people. It was not like the Liberal government was going to do it anyway and it was a matter of speed; it was a matter of just not understanding the severity of the problem.

Again, we see that with the lack of help for Canadians living with disabilities; that was a choice. Again, we see that with the lack of real commitments to helping women return to work. Knowing that women have been disproportionately impacted, we need to make sure that the recovery plan addresses that by ensuring that

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there is a real plan to give financing and support to child care, which has been devastated as a result of this pandemic.

Moving forward, we need to put forward real solutions that address the problems people are faced with, and we know the Liberal government will not do it unless we fight and push it to do so.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Chair, I want to thank the member for his speech. He is always interesting, and even if we disagree on nearly 90% of each and every issue, this is what democracy is all about.

We have seen the government spend billions of dollars in the last month, and the results of that.

[*Translation*]

Let us take a look at the situation right now. Unfortunately, Canada is worse off than all the other G7 countries. It has the highest unemployment rate, and it is the only G7 country to have had its credit rating downgraded from AAA to AA. Moreover, it does not have an economic recovery plan.

What is the NDP leader's perspective on the current government's failures in those three areas?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Chair, we have often said one thing regarding the economic recovery. A lot of people like to talk about things eventually going back to normal.

When I think about the economic recovery, I realize that things cannot return to business as usual. In the old normal, the most essential workers were the lowest paid, and seniors in long-term care facilities were the hardest hit by the pandemic.

What I want to see in the economic recovery is an effort to improve our social programs and our health care services. That is how we can move forward.

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Chair, I have heard much from my constituents about how disappointed they are that Parliament would be shut down. I cannot help but think that it is ironic whenever the leader of the fourth party in the House tweets that the government should be doing this, that or the other thing; maybe it would be able to, except the NDP voted to shut Parliament down.

My question is simple. Does the leader of the NDP regret partnering with the Liberals in shutting down Parliament?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Chair, I have two things.

First, I would just remind the member of where he is right now, while he is speaking. This would not have happened but for our ability to bring this forward. This is something we negotiated.

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Second, the member has to be very careful. The Conservatives talk a lot about the importance of Parliament, but if we look at their attendance record, it does not really show that they think it is as important. That is something that is somewhat problematic, when they raise a concern on the one hand and also draw criticism on the other. It does not look very good for the member or his party.

• (1600)

The Deputy Chair: Before I go to the point of order, I do want to remind members, including the member for Battle River—Crowfoot, that, when someone else has the floor, they should not be shouting out or heckling during that time. It is very disrespectful and every member needs to be listened to and heard, even though other members may not be in agreement with what is being said.

The hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot has a point of order.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Chair, your point is well taken and I do apologize that I get impassioned in debate.

My point of order is about referencing the attendance of members within the House. It was brought up a number of times during the previous COVID committee—

The Deputy Chair: I have to rule that as debate because the hon. member did not mention anybody in particular and, therefore, it is not a point of order.

The hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot has another point of order.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Chair, I would speak to that previous point of order that he is specifically referencing the proceedings of what he is calling movement within this House and—

The Deputy Chair: I would indicate that he did not identify anybody in particular and, therefore, the point of order is out of order.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Chair, any Canadian who wants to know the attendance figures can look on the House of Commons website. There they will see the respective parties and which party, which will remain nameless, had only 40% attendance during the course of the last month. The member who just spoke could perhaps defend that record at some point.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to speak today about the fiscal snapshot.

I would like to mention, as did the NDP leader earlier, that we cannot say that the strategy put in place covers everyone, because there are no measures to help people living with disabilities get through the pandemic. Close to \$750 billion has been invested to help bankers, but no money has been allocated for people with disabilities, even though three million Canadians are living with a serious disability. This measure must be changed. The government must take action.

I know that the NDP leader and his entire caucus continue to work on this file. We must provide support to all people living with disabilities in Canada.

[*English*]

I will not repeat the very eloquent words of the leader of the NDP, who talked about an economic snapshot and the reality that the government is not addressing, in any way, the revenue side that allows us to make the investments that will help people. He spoke very eloquently. I think his words stand.

What I would like to talk about is the moment we are in at this time in this country. The finance minister just stood in the House and said that all hands are on deck, that we are all in this together. Given the many neglected groups that we have been mentioning in the House, it is very clear that this is not yet the case, and it is not the case that Canada is responding the way it should to this pandemic.

To understand what we need to do now and what we need to do moving forward, we can look at the historical precedents of the great generation from the Second World War. In the 1920s, we had, as we do today, incredible inequalities. There was a concentration of wealth that has not been repeated until now. In 1929, it reached its zenith. Today, as we know, because the Parliamentary Budget Officer has told us, 1% of Canadians now possess as much wealth as 80% of Canadians. That was the case in 1929, and that was one of the reasons we had the Great Depression, the collapse of our economy. Then Canadians joined the fight against fascism and went overseas. Many left their lives. Many did not survive. Two members of my family are on the cenotaph in New Westminster in front of city hall. So many other families across this nation sacrificed.

The generation of that time said they were at a watershed moment. They did not want to go back to the old normal, the normal of inequalities, with the great economic meltdown that they saw. They wanted to build a better society.

I am not pretending that the great generation was perfect. Of course, they did not deal with the reality of colonialism and address reconciliation with first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. They did not address systemic racism. They did not address those realities, and the devastation is still felt today.

Despite the fact that this generation was not perfect, it did have a vision. That vision was based on public investments and making sure that, as far as possible, nobody was left behind, that we would build with public investment a better country. They set to work.

In my home in New Westminster, the house that my family and I reside in, built in 1948, was part of the 300,000 affordable housing units that were built across the length and breadth of our country after the Second World War by the people of that great society, who decided that they were not going to return to the old normal. They were going to build a better society, a more equitable and fair society. They built affordable housing. They built the network of hospitals and health care centres.

• (1605)

As we know, that great generation following the Second World War also, under the leadership of Tommy Douglas, in a minority Parliament much like this one, put in place our universal health care system that stands today as a pillar, as one of the things that Canadians are most proud of.

New Democrats built the system of education with colleges, universities and high schools. We built highways and public transit. We ensured that there were water systems in many places. We neglected first nations communities, there is no doubt, but there was a desire to build a new normal that was better than the old normal.

We are facing that same watershed moment today. As the leader of the NDP, the member for Burnaby South, has said so eloquently in this House, we have to build a better normal, a new normal. We have to be inspired by the great generation and how it responded to the Second World War.

What does that mean when we talk about a new normal? It means no longer accepting the idea that we are not going to, in a very real sense, end colonialism and put in place true, meaningful and lasting reconciliation with first nations and Métis people.

It means that we must fight. The member for Burnaby South is the foremost leader in the House of Commons on this issue. We must fight and eliminate systemic racism in all our institutions and in our society.

We must be inspired by the great generation in terms of public investments, ensuring that nobody is left behind, whether we are talking people with disabilities, first nations communities or single-parent families. We need to make those public investments so that our new normal is different and much better than the old normal.

There are sobering statistics of the last few decades, after the great generation had finished its work. Subsequent governments, and I criticize equally Liberals and Conservatives in this regard, cut into pieces all that had been built following the Second World War. They cut into pieces that public financing. They cut into pieces what was a fair tax system, where everybody, rich or poor, paid their fair share of taxes and profitable corporations were not able to take their money offshore. Instead, they invested it here in public investments. That was cut into pieces in subsequent decades.

Now we have this watershed moment of great sacrifice. We are seeing our front-line health care workers and first responders putting their lives on the line every day. We have seen the devastation in our long-term care facilities. We have seen how people have stepped up, but we have also seen the horrible results and consequences of the thousands of lives lost in Canada.

The lives lost must stand for something, and that means we need to step up during this pandemic to make sure that nobody is left behind. As the member for Burnaby South said eloquently just a few minutes ago, that starts with people with disabilities, who have received no supports during this pandemic.

It also means coming out in the rebuilding phase. We have to build that new normal to be much better than the old. That new normal will be one that addresses the needs of everybody in this country, that ensures meaningful national reconciliation with first na-

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tions, Métis and Inuit peoples, and that eliminates the systemic racism we have seen afflict our country, like so many others.

We have to make sure that we put in place all the investments that need to be put in place for the recovery, investments in things such as child care, access to post-secondary education and the kind of job creation that comes with moving to a clean energy economy, which the member for Burnaby South has also spoken very eloquently to.

We have a new normal to establish, and the NDP caucus is ready to work with all members of Parliament so that coming out of this pandemic we will have a much better country than we did going in.

• (1610)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Chair, within the Liberal caucus, members bring forward ideas virtually daily of what we could be doing to improve the programs we have brought in over the last few months to support Canadians. We have taken this seriously, not only from government members but also opposition members, recognizing that we need more co-operation in order to provide the services that Canadians need during the pandemic.

We have seen that through direct assistance: through CERB, the wage subsidy, direct support for seniors, child care, families, businesses and so much more. I agree with the member that we need to take this opportunity and continue to explore ways in which we can better the system. We could maybe even continue with some of the things we started when we first became government.

I wonder if my friend can provide his thoughts on continuing the momentum of many of the social policies we started in the last number of months—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Chair, I do not disagree with the member, but we have repeatedly raised issues in the House that have received the support of all members of Parliament. With respect to people with disabilities, it has now been three months since a motion passed unanimously through the House calling on the government to move immediately, without delay, to put supports in place for all people with disabilities in this country.

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It is now three months later. Those Canadians with disabilities are struggling to put food on the table and keep roofs over their heads. They have received no support at all, despite the collaboration of every single member of Parliament. The government needs to act. We know it can act quickly. When the banks came and did not consult Parliament, \$750 billion, or three-quarters of a trillion dollars, was handed out without batting an eye. It is time now for the government to act. People with disabilities—

The Deputy Chair: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Chair, on Monday I had an opportunity to visit Sunco and Shell facilities in my riding and see the incredible adaptations that are happening in the energy sector to allow people to continue to work. There were all kinds of innovations and safety protocols to ensure no spread of COVID-19. Really, that is what we need to do: adapt so that people can get back to work.

I hear the members of the NDP talking about using this opportunity to dramatically change aspects of our social system. We can obviously have those debates, but I hope the member agrees that our central goal needs to be giving people the greatest possible opportunity to work safely by supporting the deployment of adaptation. That will perhaps involve some changes and expansion of certain sectors.

I wonder if the member could comment on whether he supports the Conservative proposal for a back-to-work bonus to help ensure that it is always more profitable for people to be able to return to work.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Chair, as the member knows, I came out of the oil and gas industry as a former refinery worker at the Shellburn refinery in British Columbia. It is now closed, as are so many refineries, because we basically gutted the manufacturing and transformation part of that sector. I am a strong advocate for clean energy and believe in getting energy workers back to work in the energy sector.

When we look at climate change, the climate emergency is already costing us \$5 billion a year economically. That is only going to accelerate and will go to \$50 billion over the next two decades, so we have to act now. That means providing supports for that transition to clean energy.

The member also cites a transition in CERB. As he is well aware, we have been pushing for transitional measures within the wage subsidy so that it is open to all businesses and non-profits. We have not seen action from the government yet on that, but that is our priority for the moment.

• (1615)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Chair, I want to begin by acknowledging that we are on the territory of the Algonquin nation and once again express deep appreciation for their patience and generosity. *Meegwetch.*

Today, we look at the first ever economic snapshot tabled in the history of Canada by a minister of finance. We used to see full budgets and then have economic statements. However, I am not going to find fault with the fact that we have a snapshot at the moment

because it is hard to know what else we could have. More economic information is always helpful. More transparency is always helpful, and it is clear that the Minister of Finance has made himself available to all parties in this place on a very frequent basis as we chart uncharted waters.

Nothing has been perfect. Everything would have been better if delivered faster, but no one has ever gone through anything like this; no other government, no other generation has. I supposed we could look at Black Death, but we did not have access to Zoom meetings then and we did not have the ability to chart our course at all. Therefore, I would say that on balance we have been doing as well as, or in many cases better than, any government or any country around the world. That is saying something, but it is clearly a dismal economic forecast.

We now have over a trillion dollars in debt and we have a deficit this year of \$343 billion. It is not going to be easy to get out of this crisis, but it is very clear that our economic health is intrinsically tied to our personal health.

[*Translation*]

As is stated in the report, “the recovery path is uncertain and fundamentally linked to the equally uncertain health outcomes.” It is now clear that we are living in a pandemic.

[*English*]

These are not normal times. This is not normal spending. Nothing about this is normal, but it is not disastrous. We have a path out of the economic disaster that is completely dependent on our path out of the health nightmare in which we find ourselves.

[*Translation*]

It has never been clearer that the economy is taking a back seat to nature. Nature is the boss now.

[*English*]

We are living in a time that reminds humanity, if we needed reminding, that we are not in charge. We can have the best economic plans, we can have the best fiscal plans, we can have, as we had before this pandemic, the best debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. We had full employment; we now have significant unemployment.

None of this was foreseeable. A microscopic virus, a parasite, has attacked humanity. It leaves the animals alone, for once. It is focused on humanity. We spread it through our travel, we spread it through our communities. We have learned all these new phrases, and we have had to flatten the curve.

The spending, for the most part, that we find described in this document was spending agreed to by unanimous consent, which speaks so well of us as parliamentarians. We rolled out extraordinary measures. We now know their names, including the CERB, which we are used to now, our COVID emergency relief benefit, to millions of Canadians. We rolled out help to businesses in the CE-BA. We rolled out help in the wage subsidy. These things have prevented our economy from being worse off than it now is, holding the drop in GDP to probably about three percentage points less of a drop than it would have been. That is what the economic snapshot tells us. Our economy is doing better and our health is doing better, because our health and the economy are completely linked.

I want to make the other point, of course, that our economy is also not in charge of the climate emergency. We as human beings can no more rewrite the genetic code of the COVID-19 virus than we can rewrite atmospheric chemistry. We cannot rewrite the rules of physics that mean that the climate emergency is a larger threat to our long-term survival than COVID-19.

● (1620)

We can revisit and potentially rewrite some of our economic rules, because we made those up. Humanity invented those and we can revisit them. We could certainly, for instance, consider that now might be a good time for this. When we talk about unprecedented threats and unprecedented economic downturn, frequent reference has been made, including by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, to the fact that the comparisons of where we are now are not against where we were in 2008-09, but more reasonably the end of the Second World War and during the Second World War. Our spending matches more of what we saw then, and our recovery will also match more of what we saw then.

I mentioned in the House a few months ago, and I will mention it again, that Canada should step up in a lead role globally, or at least be a catalyst, and ask whether it is time to have something akin to the Bretton Woods Conference again. Do we not need to rethink the role of the World Bank? The Bretton Woods institutions were created then to help chart the global economy to recovery post-war. The International Monetary Fund used to set fixed currency rates. Since the Bretton Woods Conference, the IMF has been relieved of fixing currency rates. We rewrote those rules. Maybe we need to rewrite some other rules.

We are looking at a threat to life globally in a post-pandemic famine, a threat to hundreds of millions of people around the world. I know it is conventional wisdom for Canadians to say that we cannot ask people, when they are suffering in Canada, to think about the poorest of the poor, but we have to. We will emerge from this economic crisis and the COVID-19 crisis better off than almost any other country on earth. If hundreds of millions of people are dying from lack of food all around the world, that will not fail to reach our shores somehow, but we also have a role to play. We need to talk about forgiving all developing country debt from all around the world so the countries that are the poorest of the poor have a fighting chance, with additional help for food security to avoid the deaths of hundreds of millions of people, which are now predicted by United Nations relief and food agencies.

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We also need to rethink the fairness within Canada. This document makes it very clear that Finance Canada understands the need for child care as I have never seen any Finance Canada document understand the need for child care. It is clear that people who are looking at our economic health and recovery understand that parents cannot go back to work if schools are closed, or if schools are not safe, or if day cares are not open, or if they do not have a day care space.

It happens that there are a number of women MPs in the House at the moment, and men who understand it too. Mothers are the ones who are more likely to be staying home. This is a demographic threat, an economic threat the likes of which we have not seen since the 1960s, the idea that if things are bad and there is no child care, women will stay home. We know this is an economic blow we cannot risk, and we know this is a step back in women's rights that we will not accept. We need child care for every child, and we need to be really creative about how we get there.

This document points to what is called a “safe restart agreement”, which is \$14 billion not yet allocated, not yet spent by the federal government to assist provinces. However, \$14 billion will not cover the seven items on this list, such as child care, sick leave, health care capacity and specifically looking at long-term care homes.

I was recently talking to Sharleen Stewart, who is the head of a union that represents 60,000 workers, including long-term care workers across Canada. She told me that most of those workers are not yet back at work, because they do not think the long-term care homes are a safe place for them to work.

● (1625)

As long as long-term care homes are in the hands of for-profit enterprises, we cannot be sure that our seniors are going to be well cared for, nor that the workers who go in to take care of them, the front-line workers, are safe. That is not to mention what kind of food people are served when long-term care homes decide to cut corners every which way to make a profit.

We need to take a look at this federally. We need to figure out how to apply the Canada Health Act to create national standards for long-term care homes. There is not even enough money in this \$14 billion for what the municipalities need by themselves, and they are one item out of seven on the list. We need to do more. We need to be prepared to spend more.

Government Orders

With that, I am going to now focus on a point made earlier by my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby. Although money for people with disabilities is mentioned in here as though it is spent, we still have not done a single thing for them. The document we have in front of us was written as though the events on June 10 in this place had gone differently.

On June 10 in this place, the government agreed to split something out of its bill, a bill that was not acceptable because it involved clawbacks and criminal penalties related to the CERB, which was the main thing I found objectionable. It split out the one-time, tax-free payment for Canadians with a valid disability tax credit. To do that, we needed to make a legislative change in this place so that information could be shared from the CRA to allow the one-time benefit to go to people receiving the disability tax credit. Bear in mind that this is not the full range of people living with disabilities in Canada who need help, but at least it was a step.

I wanted to take that step, and when we asked for unanimous consent we did not get it. Shame on those who said no. We had that one step to take. The Liberal House leader put it before us for unanimous consent, and it should have gone through. We have to figure out how to get help to people with disabilities, and we have to do it quickly. There are a number of areas that remain unmet. There are needs that are unmet, and that is in the context of the immediate crisis. When we get past the immediacy of the crisis and build toward restarting our economy, we really need to think big.

I do not know how many members noticed the column by Brian Mulroney that appeared as a full-page ad in *The Globe and Mail*, on the back page of one day's paper a few weeks ago. I was pleased to see him call for a guaranteed livable income. My colleagues in the benches of the New Democratic Party all agree with this, as Greens do. We are firm in our desire to see the CERB transfer over time, and quickly, to a guaranteed livable income. In the other place, the leader of the independent Senate group asked the parliamentary budget office to look at this, and it found that doing so would be cheaper than the CERB. That is even without taking into account the savings that would accrue to our public health care system and our corrections system. We need to move to a guaranteed livable income as part of the next transformative step.

The member for New Westminster—Burnaby talked about what happened in the House in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Tommy Douglas, David Lewis and the government of the Right Hon. Lester B. Pearson put in place the fundamentals of our social safety net. We have not taken a significant transformative step since.

We need to bring in pharmacare. We need to bring in a guaranteed livable income. These are the steps we need when we reimagine our future, post-pandemic. We can build back to build back better. We can make sure we do not bounce back but bounce forward. There are many ways that these phrases are circulating these days in this very active and robust discussion. That discussion is not on the fringes when it is Brian Mulroney, our former prime minister, a Progressive Conservative, who is talking about what we need to do. We need to think big and be bold. I really loved his takeaway line: “Incrementalism builds increments.”

We are not in a place right now, dear friends, to build increments. We need to rebuild our economy, we need to restart our economy and we need to do it in a way that leaves no one behind, including the poorest of the poor, wherever they are around the world.

• (1630)

We need to step up and take a role that says “the climate agenda cannot wait”. The climate emergency does not wait. The climate negotiations for 2020 are postponed until 2021, but if we decide that climate action can also be postponed to 2021, we will certainly play a dangerous game of Russian roulette with our children's future.

We need to ensure that as we go forward, and yes we will need to continue spending, we invest in renewable energy and in energy efficiency for all our buildings and retrofits. We need to also look at things according to global studies on what stimulates the economy best, gets people back to work and makes a big difference, including things as simple as tree planting, and a lot of it.

As I look at this economic and fiscal snapshot, I find it encouraging. Very few people could look at a fiscal snapshot that says a \$343 billion deficit and find it encouraging, but we are facing it. In looking at the economic indicators and our own strength as a nation in being able to handle this, we can.

We are very fortunate that we went into this with the economic health and strength that we had. We have a lot of companies that are still struggling. We have to help avoid bankruptcies, we have to help small business, we have to ensure our municipalities receive the help they need and to do that, the federal government must continue to spend. To do otherwise, to be frightened by people who say “look at the red ink”, is to risk a deep depression.

We are going to have to continue to go down this road and the best way to do that is to look at modern monetary theory and ask ourselves why we would want to borrow from commercial banks when, as long as we are dealing with sovereign wealth and sovereign debt, we can borrow from ourselves, keep those funds within Canada and not be at the mercy of commercial banks or New York bond raiders. It is time to ask what we do as a sovereign nation. How do we embrace our future and do it without being like bean-counter, narrow-minded, lack-of-vision kinds of folks out there? We do it by being as positive about this as we can be. Let us be innovative.

Government Orders

When we look at the problem, for instance, for schools opening, we know that schools cannot open because there is not enough space to have physical distancing for the children. The schools are small compared to what is going to be needed. We have to stop thinking about jurisdictional barriers and be really creative. Where is there a lot of empty space for school children? I think of the convention centres that are going to stay empty. Can we not think past our own jurisdictional, constitutional boundaries for once and say that this is an emergency? If we want kids back at school, and we want teachers back to teach them, which is what teachers want, where do we have assets that can be mobilized quickly? It is now early July. Schools are supposed to open in September. Nobody really has a plan that I can see. Yes, we need child care; yes, we need our schools opening; and, yes, we need to work together federally, provincially, municipally, with indigenous governments, Métis, Inuit and first nations. Every set of smart, innovative, creative Canadians need to come to the table and when we come to the table, let us come not ready to bash each other down but to help bring each other up, because as Canadians, we know we are blessed.

We are not out of the woods yet, we know that, but we are smart enough to know to listen to the science. We have to listen to the science on COVID-19. We have to listen to the science on the climate emergency. We have to look to those who are the most innovative, the most creative throughout our economy.

I am thankful for the opportunity to share some thoughts about this snapshot, which I hope I have delivered back to everyone. We no longer have Kodak, full colour spectrum Kodachrome.

• (1635)

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to listen to my friend and colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands. I am on one coast of this country and she is on the other.

I have been in Ottawa the last couple of days with another colleague on FEWO, the status of women meetings. We heard very clearly the impact that COVID-19 has had on women from coast to coast: indigenous women, women of colour, women in the new work force and women in the old work force. We also heard the finance minister make mention today of the severe impact that COVID-19 is having on women in our country.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague, going forward as we look down the road to recovery, what advice she has for the Minister for Women and Gender Equality on how to get women back on a level playing field and how to get our economy going? We know that women will be a good part of it.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from Long Range Mountains.

This document is exceptional for the depth of gender-based analysis of a statement. I do not think I have ever seen something like annex one of this, for people watching this at home. It looks program by program, sector by sector, at how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected women, so the gender-based assessment is clear.

I would say the answer is three things: child care, child care, child care. Women right now are at risk of being put back in the

home because there is no one else to look after the kids, and we need child care.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate a couple of the attitudes that the hon. member mentioned in her speech. Those are the need for creativity and the need to be positive.

When it comes to the need for creativity, I wish there was more creativity in terms of making sure that Parliament could have sat over the last three months, so that we could have had fulsome and regular debates, including private members' business and whatnot over this past number of months as this country faced an unprecedented crisis.

Certainly, when it comes to the attendance of members, I know a number of members who are not listed in the minutes as some of our other colleagues have mentioned, because they had to watch it on CPAC because of technical challenges. I wish that creativity could have been exercised in this place.

Specifically, to my hon. friend across the way, I think that unleashing that positive entrepreneurial spirit is absolutely key to a good recovery. I know there are many examples specifically within the energy sector in my constituency, such as cutting-edge environmental science that is moving our world-class energy industry forward, but we need a plan to move forward. Unfortunately, the fiscal update today did not outline a plan to move forward. It was simply about looking back.

I wonder if the member agrees with me about this: Over the last number of months, the 700-plus staff in the Department of Finance could have been working on a budget that, certainly, I would have been happy to sit this summer and debate, so that we as Canadians and as members of Parliament could see the plan for this country going forward, as opposed to a fiscal selfie that simply talks about the \$350-some billion deeper in the red that we will be.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Battle River—Crowfoot for giving me the perfect opportunity to say I cannot imagine how we could be sitting physically in this place without being a threat to the health of the people in our communities at home, and to our own health.

I do not understand why the Conservatives persist in saying that we could be sitting here. All we need, and I am begging the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot to be the voice of reason within his caucus, is to be able to vote remotely. We are voting from home in British Columbia's legislature, which includes some very far-flung areas. We are voting remotely in British Columbia. Other countries are voting remotely.

Government Orders

If we could vote remotely, we could bring forward private members' bills. We could bring forward the bill that is languishing for reform to medical assistance in dying, which is desperately needed. We could be bringing forward the legislation we need for our climate accountability act. We are in this place, unable to pass something as simple as allowing the Government of Canada to have eyes on who receives the disability tax credit, because of a refusal to go with unanimous consent. We need to vote remotely in a pandemic. Not otherwise, but in a pandemic we need to function fully.

• (1640)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to comment and ask a few questions of the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. I was moved by the comments we heard from the member for Burnaby South, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby and the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands in terms of building back better and our opportunity to do this.

One of the things that I noticed is that what we have right now is a global pandemic that will require a global response. We understand that we cannot stop the pandemic if we try to be insular within Canada.

I really did appreciate the comments that the member made, but I wonder if she would agree with me that we would love to see a recommitment to sustainable development goals. It is the high-level political forum at the United Nations, taking place virtually of course.

Would she agree that we should be reconfirming our commitment to the sustainable development goals, and whether we could have 1% of our COVID spending, just 1% of it, going to help those around the world who are suffering so much at this time?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I also want to thank the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona for her leadership on the issues that relate to ending poverty globally.

I do wear this pin. For people who are wondering, the public health officer for the Province of Quebec wears it and people ask me if I got it from Quebec. These are the 17 sustainable development goals that Canada is committed to. We should recommit to them, and it is absolutely appropriate to say that our long-term goal should be to commit 0.7% of our GNI to overseas development assistance and that in this pandemic, 1% of COVID spending should and must go to meeting the sustainable development goals.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is an interesting statistic from the Surrey Board of Trade in British Columbia. Since the pandemic, B.C. has lost about 350,000 jobs, but of those, about 250,000 or about 72% represent people in precarious work.

I think we can do better as we go forward, and I would like the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands to comment on this. We can do better for them, not just for them individually but as people who represent a wasted resource in Canada. This is human energy that we are frittering away on work of relatively low value, and I am wondering what the member would see in the future that would lift these people up and lift all of Canada up along with them.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Fleetwood—Port Kells is absolutely right. We have talked about this before. What we accepted as normal in the past was not good enough. It was not good enough in terms of long-term care homes; it was not good enough in terms of people being left behind in our economy and falling through the cracks; and it was not good enough for people dealing with the opioid crisis.

Particularly for young people, who are now part of what is being called the gig economy, there is no job security and very precarious circumstances. One of the best ways to deal with this is guaranteed livable income. Everybody would then know they have enough for their bare maintenance needs in order to stay above the poverty line, and then they could earn income beyond that.

The world of work was going to change soon anyway because of artificial intelligence. The Canadian Labour Congress did a big study on this. We have to plan ahead for some rather large headwinds that we still have not faced. One of them is AI, the other is a climate emergency, and we continue to deal with the pandemic. That means that we need to create a social safety net that really would ensure that everybody is at least able to keep a roof over their heads and their kids fed. After that, they can keep working and figure out how to make money. Whether they are entrepreneurs, school teachers or front-line health care workers, they need to know that their situation is not so precarious that only one lost paycheque would mean that they would fall between the cracks.

• (1645)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague raised many issues. I want to pick up on long-term care, which is clearly an important issue as we think about how we can support people better. Sometimes we get caught in this dichotomy between private for-profit long-term care and the public provision of care, forgetting that a lot of services are delivered through private not-for-profits, which generally have so much more engagement in terms of volunteer hours and involvement in the community, which can produce very good outcomes.

However, we also have a problem, represented by the Delta Hospice, which is close to where the member maybe gets off the ferry going to Vancouver. The problem is that when there is a threat to the ability of institutions to exist according to their own values, to define the protection of their own conscience, that drives certain organizations out of participating in private not-for-profit care.

Would the member agree that we want to increase the involvement of private not-for-profits and that one way to do that is to ensure the protection of conscience for those who are volunteering their time and efforts in order to provide good long-term care for our seniors?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more about the role played by private not-for-profits. There are wonderful care homes in my riding operated not by government agencies, but by non-profit societies.

I do agree that we need to protect the rights of conscience of individual workers. At the institutional level, it becomes far more difficult, and I think we will part company on the questions relating to some of the tangential but perhaps core elements of why he asked the question.

I agree that we need to look at non-profit, privately run health care facilities and really celebrate the work of the volunteers in those facilities.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that proceedings on the motion have expired and the motion is deemed to have been withdrawn.

* * *

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

RESPONSE BY THE PRIME MINISTER

The Speaker: I have a statement on the question of privilege raised today by the Leader of the Opposition concerning remarks made in committee of the whole.

I would like to return to the question of privilege raised earlier today by the Leader of the Opposition concerning allegedly misleading responses to questions. Allegations of this nature have been raised in the House in the past. The Speaker has sometimes found a prima facie question of privilege and at other times has found it was a matter of a dispute as to facts.

Today, however, the situation is somewhat particular in that the question of privilege was raised in the committee of the whole and the procedure for dealing with it is quite different than it is in the House.

[*Translation*]

What complicates this matter even further is that the work of the committee of the whole today and the work scheduled this summer

Privilege

are strictly governed by an order of the House that limits these proceedings and dictates that the committee must now rise. However, according to the same motion, the committee of the whole will meet again in two weeks.

[*English*]

Accordingly, with the indulgence of the hon. members, I propose to look further into this issue and return to the committee at the next meeting. I thank all members for their attention.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the “Economic and Fiscal Snapshot 2020”.

● (1650)

The Speaker: Before the House adjourns, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the importance of today's sitting.

[*English*]

Though members may be accustomed to this hybrid format for the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic, this is the first hybrid sitting of the House of Commons. While it is still in a limited format today, it is impressive to witness how this institution has adapted to meet the challenges of these exceptional times while still maintaining our important traditions, procedures and practices.

[*Translation*]

I would like to express my sincere thanks to and appreciation for the hard-working employees of the House Administration, the Parliamentary Protective Service and the interpretation team, who all worked hard to set up this special sitting.

[*English*]

Accordingly, pursuant to order made Tuesday, May 26, the House stands adjourned until Wednesday, July 22, at noon.

(The House adjourned at 4:51 p.m.)

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