



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

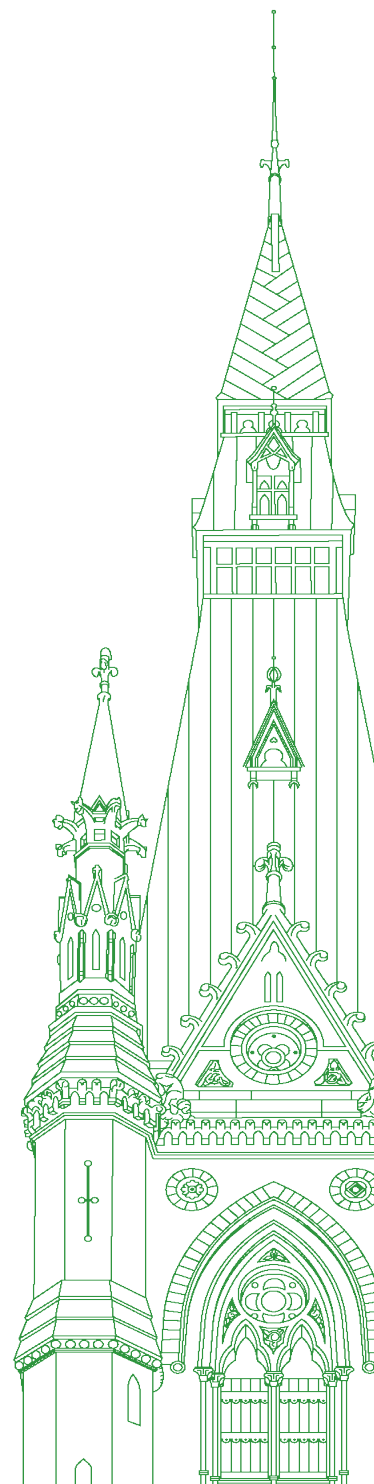
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

House of Commons Debates

Official Report
(Hansard)

Volume 151 No. 021
Tuesday, February 1, 2022

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 1, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[Translation]

DEPARTMENTAL RESULTS REPORTS 2020-21

Hon. Mona Fortier (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, on behalf of the 88 departments and agencies, the departmental results reports for 2020-21.

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following two reports of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. The first report is entitled “From Mineral Exploration to Advanced Manufacturing: Developing Value Chains for Critical Minerals in Canada”, and the second report is entitled “Economic Recovery in Canada's Forestry Sector: Green and Inclusive”.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to each of these reports.

* * *

PETITIONS

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise virtually today to present a petition.

The petitioners cite the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and they bring its principles to bear on the ongoing conflict on Wet'suwet'en territory, specifically that the hereditary leadership, recognized as legitimate leadership by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Delgamuukw decision, has not acceded to the ongoing building of a pipeline for fracked gas through

their territories. They continue to object and they continue to be oppressed by police actions.

The petitioners ask for the government to recognize UNDRIP, and act to protect Wet'suwet'en territory and the integrity of its sovereignty.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling two petitions.

The first petition relates to the U.S. Department of State's 20th Trafficking in Persons Report, which indicates that Canada meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. It also indicates that governments at all levels have failed to collaborate on a solution.

My constituents are calling on the federal government, as the report urges, to increase proactive law enforcement and training for prosecutors and judges, and to partner with private organizations to combat human trafficking.

• (1005)

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I am presenting today relates to Afghanistan.

On the day the Prime Minister called a federal election, Afghanistan's capital city fell to the Taliban. In the chaos of the evacuation, many of our brave Afghan allies were left behind.

My constituents call upon the Government of Canada to partner with the Veterans Transition Network and others to launch more evacuation efforts to make sure that our remaining allies in Afghanistan find a new and safe home in Canada.

OPIOIDS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour today to table a petition regarding the overdose crisis and the preventable opioid overdoses resulting from fentanyl-poisoned drugs. It is timely, as we lost people in my community over the weekend to a poisoned drug supply.

Privilege

The petitioners from Port Alberni are calling on the government to declare that the current overdose crisis and fentanyl poisoning crisis is a national public health emergency under the Emergencies Act in order to properly manage and resource it with the aim to reduce and eliminate preventable deaths. The petitioners want to reform drug policy to decriminalize personal possession and create, with urgency and immediacy, a system to provide safe, unadulterated access to substances so that people who use substances experimentally, recreationally or chronically are not at imminent risk of overdose because of a contaminated source.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED PREMATURE DISCLOSURE OF BILL C-10

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in today's debate.

However, I want to raise a very serious concern about what we call a question of privilege.

[English]

I am rising on a question of privilege regarding the premature disclosure of the content of Bill C-10, an act respecting certain measures related to COVID-19, by the Prime Minister himself while it was on notice and before it was introduced and tabled in the House of Commons. On Saturday, a special Order Paper was published that contained the notice for Bill C-10.

[Translation]

As members know, according to our Standing Orders, notices of bills must be very succinct. In this case, the notice was. It gave the title of the bill and the number, Bill C-10.

Yesterday at noon, the Prime Minister held a press conference in front of his house. Incidentally, we were able to see that, despite the fact that he and his two children have COVID-19, he is doing well. That is good.

However, he said a lot more about Bill C-10 than what was written in the notice.

[English]

In fact, CTV, in a publication following the press conference, noted that the Prime Minister provided a bit more detail about the bill's contents beyond its title. Those details provided by the Prime Minister were as follows: "We'll be introducing legislation to ensure we continue providing as many rapid tests as possible to the provinces and territories."

[Translation]

Yesterday, after question period and the Prime Minister's press conference, Bill C-10 was introduced during Routine Proceedings. At that very moment, it became clear to us and to all Canadians that what the Prime Minister had said was exactly what was in the bill.

[English]

The bill authorizes the Minister of Health to make payments of up to \$2.5 billion out of the consolidated revenue fund in relation to the coronavirus disease 2019, well known as COVID-19, tests. It also authorizes the Minister of Health to transfer COVID-19 tests and instruments used in relation to those tests to the provinces and territories and to the bodies and persons in Canada.

● (1010)

[Translation]

The Prime Minister talked about Bill C-10 in detail at the press conference before the bill was introduced. In our view, that is a breach of trust under the rules that govern us.

[English]

The Prime Minister's disrespect for Parliament goes beyond just the premature disclosure of a bill. The Prime Minister, having wasted so much time with a prorogation, followed by an expensive and unnecessary election, is trying to play catch-up by leaning on the opposition to co-operate and fast-track his bill.

In an attempt to show some goodwill, his House leader provided embargoed copies to the House leaders of the opposition. For our part, and for the part of all opposition parties, we did respect the fact that we cannot make any comment publicly about the bill. That is the way to do it. Unfortunately, yesterday the Prime Minister did not respect that situation.

[Translation]

On March 10, 2020, you commented on the premature disclosure of Bill C-7 on medical assistance in dying. You said the following:

...based on a reading of the Canadian Press article on Bill C-7 on medical assistance in dying, and in the absence of any explanation to the contrary, I must conclude that the anonymous sources mentioned were well aware of our customs and practices and chose to ignore them. It seems clear to me that the content of the bill was disclosed prematurely while it was on notice and before it was introduced in the House.

...

The rule on the confidentiality of bills on notice exists to ensure that members, in their role as legislators, are the first to know their content when they are introduced. Although it is completely legitimate to carry out consultations when developing a bill or to announce one's intention to introduce a bill by referring to its public title available on the Notice Paper and Order Paper, it is forbidden to reveal specific measures contained in a bill at the time it is put on notice.

On April 19, 2016, the Speaker found there was a *prima facie* question of privilege regarding a similar bill, namely Bill C-14, an act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other acts, respecting medical assistance in dying. He said the following:

As honourable members know, one of my most important responsibilities as Speaker is to safeguard the rights and privileges of members, individually and collectively. Central to the matter before us today is the fact that, due to its pre-eminent role in the legislative process, the House cannot allow precise legislative information to be distributed to others before it has been made accessible to all members. Previous Speakers have regularly upheld not only this fundamental right, but also expectation, of the House.

[English]

Another question of privilege was raised on March 19, 2001, regarding the media being briefed on a bill before members of Parliament. In that ruling, Speaker Milliken said, at page 1840 of the House of Commons Debates:

In preparing legislation, the government may wish to hold extensive consultations and such consultations may be held entirely at the government's discretion. However, with respect to material to be placed before parliament, the House must take precedence. Once a bill has been placed on notice, whether it has been presented in a different form to a different session of parliament has no bearing and the bill is considered a new matter. The convention of the confidentiality of bills on notice is necessary, not only so that members themselves may be well informed, but also because of the pre-eminent rule which the House plays and must play in the legislative affairs of the nation.

The Speaker at that time found another case of contempt on October 15, 2001, again involving the media being briefed on the contents of a bill prior to the legislation being introduced in the House. The precedents are very clear in these matters. The Prime Minister is in contempt of the House for disclosing the content of Bill C-10 while it was on notice and prior to being introduced in the House.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that this issue of COVID tests was part of the opening round of questions during the first question period my leader attended in September 2020 after becoming the leader of the official opposition. This issue is a really serious one and we care about this situation. It may have taken the Prime Minister a while to get it and I understand he now needs help to hurry things along, but he does himself no favours by thumbing his nose at the privileges of this House and the goodwill of the opposition parties by playing by his own rules.

This practice has gotten him into trouble before. On more than one occasion, he ran into difficulty with the Ethics Commissioner. The commissioner found in 2019 that he breached ethics rules. The Prime Minister had tried in 2018 to undermine a decision by federal prosecutors allowing a construction company, the SNC-Lavalin Group, to face a corrupt trial. The Ethics Commissioner also sanctioned him in December 2017, ruling that he broke conflict of interest rules when he accepted a vacation on the Aga Khan's private island in 2016.

I could go on and on, but to quickly get to the point and pursue a resolution to this matter, I ask, Madam Speaker, that you find a *prima facie* case of privilege. I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

• (1015)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam

Privilege

Speaker, we will review the matter the member has mentioned and report back to the House in a timely fashion.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to mention that the Bloc Québécois wishes to invoke our right of reply to the question of privilege raised by my worthy colleague, the House leader of the official opposition.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent. In this minority Parliament, the practice of distributing bills under embargo has greatly helped the House in its work. At the same time, it must be said that the Conservative House leader is absolutely right.

Every opposition party has fully respected the embargo on the documents received. Reading a bill before it is introduced is a way of doing our work and doing it well. We have strictly adhered to our practice of never disclosing anything. What applies to the opposition parties also applies to the governing party. The government must follow the same rules that the opposition parties have to follow.

I will look at the press conference. We reserve the right to come back to this later. It is an important and fundamental point. The government should not disclose what the opposition parties cannot disclose either, and, in any case, Parliament must be respected.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Does the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands wish to speak on the question of privilege?

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Green Party of Canada, I completely agree with the points that have been made, particularly just now by the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby. We do benefit, particularly under the innovative flexible approach we have had to take in the pandemic.

Access to bills on an embargoed basis has been quite essential, and it has been different from other times when bills are shared on an embargoed basis, certainly before first reading. Going back to March, 2020, a bill was put forward by the then finance minister that included provisions that I believe were offensive even to members of the Liberal Party. There was a quick rewrite, and before first reading we achieved a substantial change in the bill.

It is important that we be able to honour the traditions of respecting embargoes while also sharing legislation in ways that have been really creative, helpful and positive in moving us all forward. The government does not have the right to ignore those embargoes.

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I do not know that I will want to make any further points, but as this issue develops and as I go back and look at the press conference remarks from the Prime Minister, we may have further remarks to add. It certainly is an important principle that has been raised by the Conservative House leader.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): As per tradition, we will take it under advisement and get back to the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent as soon as possible.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

● (1020)

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from January 31 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my friend, the hon. member for Surrey Centre.

I am thrilled to be back in our nation's capital to address the Speech from the Throne.

Canadians have shown great resilience and ingenuity over these last two years. Our government has worked rapidly and diligently to provide the tools and resources required by families, businesses and other levels of government. We deployed unprecedented assistance across all sectors of our economy, with the federal government accounting for \$8 out of every \$10 spent on pandemic response. This was the right thing to do, as we were able to use our AAA credit rating to take on the cost of the pandemic with significantly lower borrowing costs than those incurred by other levels of government, by households or by enterprises.

These programs have worked. Our focus on keeping Canadians healthy has led to a job recovery of 108% of prepandemic employment, compared with just 84% in the United States. Canadians have increased their savings rates, and there are more businesses in Canada today than there were before the pandemic started.

It is no wonder, then, that finishing the fight against COVID is such a priority. It accounted for the majority of new spending in the economic statement alongside targeted investments for indigenous reconciliation and for repairing the flood damage in British Columbia.

Our economic, social and environmental future depends on us getting this right. I am dedicated to finishing the fight alongside all members of the House, with a focus on building a better future for our children and our grandchildren.

Every step of the way, our focus on health has saved lives and has been the core of our recovery. Our approach has led to a significant growth in GDP, and our trade surplus has just recently hit 13-year highs.

However, it is impossible to talk about growing our economy without addressing our plan to fight climate change. The devastating floods and fires in British Columbia are a stark warning that climate change is real and imposes real hardship and real cost.

Canada must be a global leader in taking on this fight, and we will need to take even bolder action going forward. Our ambitious climate plan, entitled "A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy", is an articulate, world-leading plan that sustainably grows our economy while exceeding our climate change targets.

We will end fossil fuel subsidies while investing in the future of the green economy. We have already committed more than \$100 billion to date, we have put a price on carbon and we have invested in a national electric transportation framework that for the first time has enabled Canadians to drive from Vancouver Island to Prince Edward Island in an electric vehicle.

Canadians are expecting us to do more and move faster. The foundation of any strong economy is built on the health of its citizens, which depends on having healthy air, soil and water. We must protect and restore our biodiversity while eliminating plastic waste from our oceans and restoring iconic species such as our treasured Pacific wild salmon.

I can comfortably say our government has been the most aggressive government in Canadian history on the environmental file, and I invite everyone who is interested to read my full environment and climate change report on terrybeechmp.ca/reports to get more information.

After spending so much time addressing climate change and the environment, I think it is also important to highlight to Canadians and to members of the House the urgency with which we need to prioritize the health of our oceans and our marine ecosystems.

We launched an oceans protection plan that saw new resources deployed on the B.C. coast. Massive swaths of ocean that were previously left unmonitored and unprotected now have resources in place. On marine protected areas, a space in which B.C. is a leader, we increased our protected areas from less than 1% in 2015 to more than 14% today. We will ensure that 30% of all marine and terrestrial areas are protected by 2030.

In addition, we invested record funding in protecting biodiversity and revising the Oceans Act and Fisheries Act to provide modern protections in legislation from coast to coast to coast. We invested \$647 million in our strategy to conserve and restore wild Pacific salmon populations and their habitats. This is the largest investment in any species in Canadian history, and it is necessary to ensure we restore our wild salmon fishery for the benefit of future generations.

Quite frankly, the status quo has been unacceptable. Left unabated, there would be more plastic in the ocean than biomass within a single generation. We must build a circular economy that prevents plastic pollution from entering our marine ecosystems in the first place, and remove the plastic that is already there.

I say let us do more. Let us be bolder, let us move faster and let us develop the economy of the future today. Anything less is shortchanging ourselves and is shortchanging future generations.

• (1025)

While I am addressing the issue of taking actions today to benefit future generations, I cannot help but turn to the topic of housing. Affordable housing is the elephant in the room for every conversation about the economy or quality of life in Metro Vancouver. In addressing this problem, it is important to understand that the federal government had been substantially absent from housing in Canada for almost 30 years until our government took office in 2015. Since then, we have developed a \$72-billion national housing strategy and have moved to invest in affordable housing, while also providing the tools to help with housing affordability.

We have also invested in transit infrastructure, which is a critical tool in enabling municipalities to increase supply in our communities. This has also facilitated the acceleration of future transit projects, such as the proposed rapid transit line that would connect at the SeaBus in North Vancouver, run across the Second Narrows Bridge to the corner of Hastings and Willingdon, and then south on Willingdon to Metrotown. This is a project and route that I have championed for many years, and it is now supported by provincial MLAs, local governments and first nations.

In the last election, we committed to dozens more initiatives in regard to housing that fall into three primary categories. The first, of course, is to build more supply. The second is to taper demand through disincentivizing the use of housing as an investment asset and instead focus primarily on utilizing housing as a place to live. The third is to build more pathways to home ownership and enable renters to more easily live where they work.

This is not just about building housing. It is about building communities. These investments give us more flexibility to create more regional centres and utilize housing dollars more effectively. While the \$72-billion housing strategy is a good start, the additional investments in new buses, SkyTrains and even a new SeaBus are part of the housing solution as well.

We cannot talk about building more livable communities without talking about the need for affordable child care. Even if a family in Burnaby or North Vancouver is lucky enough to find a space, the cost is quite often prohibitive. Economists agree that if we want to

The Address

accelerate the economic recovery from COVID-19, we need to invest in families, and in women in particular.

I raised this issue with a group of North Burnaby moms on Facebook, and hundreds of parents relayed incredibly useful information that the minister incorporated into the design of our program. British Columbia then became the first province to sign on to our national framework, which will create tens of thousands of new spaces while lowering the cost of child care to 50% in less than a year. Within five years, the cost will drop further until it reaches \$10 a day.

This program is a great addition to the Canada child benefit, which helped lift 300,000 children out of poverty and helped decrease our country's poverty rate to all-time lows. This affordable, inclusive and high-quality program will ensure that families will be able to make predictable decisions about child care and have the option to re-enter the workforce as they see fit.

In addition, we will create new opportunities and brighter futures for a new generation of Canadian children who will be better prepared to add significant value to our economy while creating better lives for themselves and their future families. The Deputy Prime Minister referred to creating a generation of Canadian super kids, and I could not agree more.

I will remind members in the House that before the pandemic, we lowered our debt servicing costs while lowering poverty rates to all-time lows in Canadian history since we started measuring them, all while growing the economy, investing in housing and fighting climate change. We need to finish the fight against COVID and focus on the things that have helped Canada establish one of the highest standards of living in the entire world.

Despite the challenges our world has faced over the last two years, and will continue to face in the years to come, I am sincerely optimistic about Canada's place in the world and our ability to create an economy and a society that is full of opportunity for future generations. I look forward to working with members from all parties, and with Canadians from all regions of this great country, to create this positive future.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I recently saw it reported that in terms of countries that have the most debt, Canada is right behind Greece.

What are the government's plans to address the huge debt that this country has and the inflation we are now seeing?

Mr. Terry Beech: Madam Speaker, the member was my first critic when we were first both elected in 2015. We got to know each other quite well.

The Address

Our government has focused on lowering the debt-to-GDP ratio every single year that we have been in government. That put us in a position where we were able to take on the extraordinary costs that were incurred by the pandemic, which was the right thing to do. It is because of our AAA credit rating and our fiscal prudence that we were able to take on these costs at much lower borrowing costs than families and small businesses could have. It was even at less of a cost than the provinces could have had. I am happy to report that with this investment, jobs have returned at 108% of prepandemic levels and we have retained our AAA credit rating.

• (1030)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, when we want to move forward as a society, it is important to take stock of what we have and where we want to go. The Speech from the Throne goes some way toward that, which is a good thing.

However, there are major gaps. Take seniors, for example. They are currently getting an increase of \$7 a month. Over the past 10 years, they have received just \$89, which is about \$9 a year.

When will seniors be a priority? We all care about their health.

[English]

Mr. Terry Beech: Madam Speaker, I agree with the member opposite that seniors are a priority and must be a priority. In fact, seniors have been a priority of this government since we took office.

I will remind the member that during COVID there was a \$500 one-time payment to make sure the most vulnerable seniors had the resources they needed when they needed them. We are also the government that increased the OAS by more than 10%. I would also remind the member that we are the government that lowered the qualifying age from 67 years to 65 years, which meant thousands of dollars in the pockets of seniors right across this country just when they were on the verge of retirement.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague talked about the government's world-class oceans protection plan. Members are well aware there was a marine debris spill off the west coast in October. That debris is landing on our shores, and the government has basically left it up to the contractor and the company to deal with the cleanup. Meanwhile, the stuff is showing up on the shore, polluting our ecosystem, and the company is nowhere to be found. It has been left on the backs of indigenous communities and local cleanup organizations.

When is the government going to fix this loophole? Is it going to establish an ecosystem service fee on the transshipment of cargo units so that there are funds in place for local communities to address this issue, instead of waiting for the polluter to fix it? Clearly, it is not taking enough action to fix this huge problem on the west coast.

Mr. Terry Beech: Madam Speaker, I used to work with the member for Courtenay—Alberni on the fisheries committee, and we have a lot of shared interests, especially around oceans and marine ecosystems.

Our government believes in the polluter-pay system. We have been changing our laws to make sure that is reflected. We changed the Oceans Act. We changed the Fisheries Act. In fact, I worked with this member to do just that. We have also invested in expanding our Coast Guard. A lot of that was provided through the historic oceans protection plan. We have actually enabled indigenous communities to help join the fight with the Coast Guard with organizations like the indigenous-led coast guard services that are unique on the west coast of British Columbia.

I would also hate to stand up in the House of Commons and address this member without talking about the \$647 million that has been invested in wild salmon, because I visited his riding specifically to talk about salmon. I am glad to see that investment was made and I am sure he is as well.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member was elected on a pledge to stop the Trans Mountain pipeline. It continues to be constructed and at this point is completely inconsistent with achieving the Paris goal of ensuring the global average temperature does not exceed 1.5°C. I would ask the hon. member how he can sit on those government benches while the pipeline continues to be built.

Mr. Terry Beech: Madam Speaker, more than almost any member in this House, I have been very clear about my work on the Trans Mountain pipeline. I have also been very clear about the historic work this government has done to fight climate change. We are a leader in the world. We have one of the most articulate and world-leading plans to fight and address climate change. Canada needs to continue to be a leader, and it is going to be this government that will make that happen.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, friends and colleagues, I am very happy to be here in the House of Commons to reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Canadians have faced a great deal of hardship over the last two years as a result of the unprecedented times we are living in. I continue to be in awe of the resilience, compassion and sheer tenacity that has been shown. Even though for much of the last two years we in the House have been working virtually from our communities, we have been able to accomplish a great deal of very important work on behalf of Canadians.

I look forward to continuing our work together as we resume our work on behalf of Canadians. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Right Honourable Mary May Simon on her appointment as Canada's 30th Governor General and long-awaited first indigenous Governor General of Canada. I congratulate her on the delivery of her first Speech from the Throne.

Now to our purpose for being here today, I am very proud of the government's record over the last six years. We have tackled many big issues that have been left unresolved by previous governments such as housing, child care and more. We continue to work towards creating a more equal Canada by addressing the systemic discrimination and racism embedded in our institutions. On top of that, we are nearly two years into a global pandemic, and with this new mandate, Canadians gave the government a clear direction to continue to work towards putting COVID-19 behind us and to continue working to resolve the challenges that face Canadians in their everyday lives.

Our government will continue to be on the right side of history on these and many more issues as we work towards finishing the fight against COVID, take strong action against climate change, make life more affordable, walk the shared path of reconciliation, put home ownership back in reach, create jobs and grow the middle class. Canadians expect us, as their representatives in Ottawa, to focus on the big things that matter and to work together to deliver results that create meaningful change.

I will speak today about a few of the themes from the Speech from the Throne, including housing, child care, safer communities and mental health and addiction, issues that are particularly important in my riding of Surrey Centre and in many other communities across the country.

The government is committed to ensuring that Canadians have a safe place to call home. In fast-growing communities like Surrey Centre, we struggle to create enough homes to keep up with our growing population. In fact, in the last five years, an additional 74,000 people have called Surrey home.

Since 2015, the government has increased the amount of affordable housing in Surrey and across the country. This includes 44 new affordable units in partnership with Atira Women's Resource Society, an important organization in our community that helps vulnerable women. Through a \$16.4-million investment in the rapid housing initiative, a total of 105 new affordable units will support individuals experiencing homelessness and those struggling with substance abuse, mental health and spiritual wellness.

Just last week, the government announced that there will now be more than 10,000 new affordable rapid housing units across Canada, made possible by our government's additional investments in the second round of the rapid housing initiative. This \$2.5-billion investment is an excellent example of what can be accomplished through collaboration across all levels of government, provincial, territorial, municipal and indigenous governing bodies, that identify priorities in each community.

The Liberal government has also been working to make housing and home ownership more accessible to more Canadians. This is through the creation of Canada's first-ever national housing strategy. We created a number of programs, like a more flexible first-time homebuyer incentive and CMHC's residential construction financing initiative. We will also be creating a rent-to-own program and will be reducing closing costs for first-time buyers.

My province of British Columbia was the first in our country to step up for its residents and sign a deal with the federal government

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to provide \$10-a-day child care. This is a \$3.2-billion investment that will not only support accessible early learning and child care in Surrey, but also pandemic recovery to allow more parents to return to the workforce and contribute to our growing economy. In fact, it has already started, reducing the cost of child care by half for every parent in British Columbia.

● (1035)

As a parent of three children, I was fortunate to have my mother and in-laws help us. However, that is not the case for many. Many have to choose between working or child care, a choice no one should have to make due to costs.

No matter where people live across the country, they deserve a safe community. Many communities across the country like Surrey deal with gun violence and the challenges in preventing it. Surrey has the largest youth population in British Columbia, but with it also comes challenges of youth violence, guns, gangs, drugs and addictions. The government has taken strong action, in part by banning more than 1,500 types of assault weapons. This includes building on our progress in implementing a mandatory buyback of assault-style weapons and working with the provinces and territories that want to ban handguns.

We are also moving forward with a 10-year national action plan on gender-based violence and will continue to support organizations providing critical services. The Province of British Columbia is receiving more than \$30 million of federal funding to ensure that law enforcement is equipped with the necessary resources to better detect and prevent crimes before they happen, while having the resources to hold offenders accountable for any blatant disregard for the law.

We also announced in the fall economic statement that the government will be providing an additional \$250 million to municipalities and indigenous communities to support community-based programs aimed at prevention and wraparound services. We know that addressing social and economic issues such as housing and employment to create opportunities for young Canadians plays an important role in addressing violence and creating safe communities.

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Our government understands that we cannot simply arrest ourselves out of this problem. We support local community groups who have knowledge of the particular challenges in their communities and provide exit strategies for youth already involved in gang activities, programs like the Surrey anti-gang family empowerment program. My community is so fortunate to have access to a program working to address and prevent gang violence in our communities. The \$7.5-million SAFE program, which is funded by Public Safety Canada and led by the City of Surrey, works to build positive life skills and increasing connections with families, schools and communities to keep children and youth out of gangs. This program delivers 11 individual programs through 10 partner organizations designed to disrupt the negative pathways to gang violence for Surrey's population and children. The program is on track to help over 4,500 at-risk youth and their families get the support and services they need to stay safe.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the challenges that Canadians face in supporting their mental health. With increased feelings of stress, loneliness and sadness, it has been a rough few years. Annually, 20% of Canadians experience a mental illness or addiction problem. Throughout the pandemic we have seen those numbers grow with nearly half of Canadians reporting that their mental health worsened during the pandemic, including seven out of 10 health care workers.

Our government understands that mental health is health. We are working to help end the stigma around mental health and seeking support when people need it. We made the Wellness Together portal available to Canadians across the country and most recently the PocketWell app, which provides access to mental health tools and resources.

Pandemic-related investments in mental health include \$500 million in support during the pandemic for Canadians experiencing mental health challenges, homelessness and substance use; \$100 million for mental health interventions for LGBTQ+, youth and seniors affected by COVID-19, and \$50 million to support those at risk of COVID-19-related trauma or post-traumatic stress disorders.

Prior to the pandemic, since forming government in 2015, we have been making investments in mental health, including \$5 billion to provinces and territories to increase the availability of mental health care; \$600 million for a distinctions-based mental health and wellness strategy for indigenous services; \$140 million to support veterans dealing with PTSD; \$45 million for national mental health care standards and \$600 million to address the opioid crisis. In many communities, the COVID-19 pandemic is compounding the ongoing health crisis of opioid overdose and health. Through these new measures, vulnerable people will be better able to get the support they need while respecting public health.

It is very good to be back with all members here in person and virtually. I look forward to continuing our work together on behalf of Canadians in bringing our government's vision from the Speech from the Throne to reality.

• (1040)

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure to be in the House today. I thank my hon. colleague from across the aisle, the member for Sur-

rey Centre, for his remarks today and for the collaboration we have had over the last few months as we dealt with the devastation impacting British Columbians.

As the member knows, my riding is the heartland of agriculture in British Columbia. Right now, blueberry farmers are having a very difficult time getting the support they need, both from the provincial government and the federal government. While many are appreciative of the \$5 billion that came in emergency funds, which was a big accomplishment, does the member recognize that we need to do more for our blueberry farmers to do what the disaster financial assistance programs and business risk management programs do and help make farmers whole again so that they can cultivate the fruit that we all need to live healthy lives?

• (1045)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, I want to assure my colleague opposite that I grew up on a blueberry farm, and every summer my maternal grandparents and uncles are still blueberry farmers. They have faced struggles and they know the struggles that many of their colleagues have faced during this time, specifically in Abbotsford, as well as in Mission and Matsqui. I can assure him that this government is going to be working hard to make sure that they are whole and that they are safe for future flooding and for damages in the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to see you again. You are just as radiant in 2022 as you were in 2021.

I just want to tell my colleague that the oddest thing I saw in the throne speech was the creation of a department of mental health. That is just as odd as establishing a department of national defence in Quebec City.

Health is a provincial jurisdiction. If my colleague wants to address the health file, I could discuss the fiscal imbalance with him. Year after year, Ottawa generally has more money than expenditures; it is the opposite for the provinces.

What I would advise my colleague to do is review all requests from all the provinces to increase the health transfers up to the much-talked-about 35% threshold, a tidy sum of \$28 billion that would bring transfers to \$60 billion a year.

Is my colleague aware of that?

[English]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, I too want to commend your ravishing presence, as the translator alluded to and as I forgot to say earlier.

In response to my colleague across the aisle, I would like to say that sometimes we want to have our cake and eat it too. I know the provinces want the health transfers, but if we actually implement any programs or encourage programming, they are critical of it.

I can say that in my province we could probably say that we gave over \$700 million in the last accord, particularly for mental health, and it has been much regarded and is giving services to those who are in need and will continue to do so.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Before I get started, I want to wish my oldest daughter a happy 22nd birthday: Happy birthday, Maddie.

Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's talking about mental health and addictions. People who are struggling, and it is getting worse for them, especially through the pandemic. The people who have the most complex issues and who require complex care certainly need a place to live to start with. He talked about the rapid housing initiative. We had a good application in my riding from non-profits, women's organizations, indigenous support and local government support, but we have people who are living on the street with complex issues. It is costing them, costing lives and costing taxpayers.

It takes a lot of money to respond to that need. At the pace the government is going, it is going to take 45 years to house the homeless population in our country. Will the member lobby his own cabinet to increase investments into housing for people who are the hardest to house and also to increase investments into non-market housing? I urge the member to work with us. We would like to see a wealth tax on those who can afford to contribute.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, I first want to wish Maddie a happy birthday also. Hopefully she has a great birthday today.

Madam Speaker, I cannot comment on an individual application in my colleague's riding, but I can say that when I became the representative for Surrey Centre, we had 160 people on the street in a tent city on the strip, as they call it, in Surrey Centre. One hundred and sixty people were housed immediately through modular shelters. They were transitioned to 250 in-place housing units. I can probably say that on top of the 250 permanent housing units, we have built another 144 in the rapid housing initiative. That problem is going away in Surrey, and I hope it does in my colleagues' ridings as well.

• (1050)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay.

As always, it is a great honour to stand here as the representative of the people of Timmins—James Bay. This is the day that the old Irish Catholics would tell us is St. Brigid's Day. Why is St. Brigid's Day worth recognizing? This is the day that is halfway between the darkest day of the year and the spring equinox. I would like to think

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we are past the dark days, but I do not think we are. January was a very hard month, and we are looking at a time in our nation when there are many forces of darkness confronting us: forces of disinformation, a breakdown in civil society and a breakdown in our ability to talk to one another.

As such, it is essential that Parliament—the people's House, the House of Commons, the House of the common people—is open for us to come and debate. There is so much we need to address at this time. Today marks not just the halfway point to the equinox; today marks 27 years that the people of Neskantaga First Nation have gone without clean water. For 27 years, generations have grown up with contaminated water in a community in Canada.

Just over from Neskantaga, at Marten Falls First Nation, the community marks the 111th day that the children of Marten Falls have been unable to go to school because of the chronic underfunding, the poverty and the overcrowding in Marten Falls and Neskantaga.

These are the issues that we should be debating. In our society in Canada, indigenous people are expected to live in degrading circumstances. The thing that is fascinating about Neskantaga and Marten Falls is that they are located in a place that many Canadians have heard of, the Ring of Fire. We hear about the great riches of the Ring of Fire. Doug Ford said he was going to drive a bulldozer to the Ring of Fire. The nation of Canada's focus has always been on getting the resources out of the ground, yet we have children who cannot go to school because of chronic underfunding.

It was very moving in the slowdown and the crisis with omicron during January to hear parents talk about the mental health of their children; the mental health of children in cities, suburbs and small towns; and how we had to be there for our children. We never heard any national conversation about the mental health of the children in a community like Marten Falls, who are denied a universal human right, the right to quality education. They are being denied that.

No, I do not think we are halfway between the darkness and the light. We are still very much in the darkness.

I think of January and the thousand people who died from omicron in Ontario alone. It is a thousand people so far. I think of their families. I think of the frontline medical and health teams that struggle on their shifts to try to keep people alive. I think of the people who are facing delayed surgeries because our ICUs are overrun.

Today, this morning, in North Bay in northern Ontario, there is a gang of thugs outside the health unit in North Bay threatening people. What kind of nation have we become when the notion of freedom is that someone can go and target vaccine clinics? They bragged this weekend that they were shutting down vaccination clinics in Ottawa. What kind of so-called freedom is it to target doctors, nurses and health workers?

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I know we are tired. Omicron hit us like a baseball bat. We had all thought we had gotten through it. We thought we got through it while we did not bother to ensure the rest of the world had access to vaccines. Then what came out of the rest of the world was omicron, and we do not know what is coming next.

However, what concerns me most is not so much that we are tired or not so much that we are stressed, but this fundamental breakdown as a nation that we have to confront. When I talk to people about the pandemic, I know the vast majority are tired. They are doing their part and going along, but when I see people dancing on and desecrating the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, never in my life as a Canadian could I have imagined that someone would be so ignorant.

• (1055)

What concerns me much more is the number of people who came on my Facebook page to say that it never happened, that it is not true, that it is made up. The disinformation about the situation that we are facing is the real crisis in this country. Here in Parliament, we are not talking about how we find our way through a pandemic but about whether or not we can work together as parliamentarians to try and raise our nation up to find a way through this together, yet some may find that it is politically advantageous. There is one very crafty Conservative MP who came up with the term “vaccine vendetta”, but I actually think it is more of a vendetta against his own leader. What has happened in our country when vaccinations, a solution, medical science and our frontline researchers become targets and the Conservatives can talk about vaccination as a vendetta?

Of course, they are all wrapping themselves in the Canadian flag, walking around with the flag upside down or walking around with the flag desecrated with the swastika, and everyone I have ever heard from this so-called “Freedom Group” tells me that their great-grandfather, grandfather or uncle fought in the war. Well, welcome to Canada; everybody's relatives fought in the war, but they fought for a freedom that is not an individual right to harass and intimidate. They fought for a collective belief that together as a nation, we are different and we are better.

Rather than talk about our veteran grandfathers, I am going to talk about my grandmother, Lola Jane Lindsay MacNeil, from the Ottawa Valley, who worked 12-hour shifts as a nurse. My grandmother was a hard woman with me because she remembered polio, which disappeared just before I was born. I thought my grandmother was raging and angry, but she had been on the wards of the polio children and she understood the importance of vaccinations, so when someone comes on my page and says, “Oh, on the polio vaccine, all they needed was vitamin C”, no, that is false, and we have to call that out.

I urge my colleagues from all parties to rise above this disinformation campaign that is out there and the idea that this is somehow a vendetta or that this is somehow cooked up by the Prime Minister to make everybody's life hard. Yes, it is hard. Suck it up. Grow up. It has been hard for all of us, but it has been really hard for our frontline medical workers, who deserve better than to see a mob trying to harass them at health units today.

This brings me back to this principle of so-called liberty and freedom. I welcome the protesters on Parliament Hill. That is why Parliament is here. I love the fact that an open Parliament Hill is a place where people can demonstrate for whatever reason they want. If the City of Ottawa decides that Wellington Street is now going to be part of a permanent demonstration, I do not have a problem with that; I just hope the city will allow it when indigenous protesters come. However, what I do have a problem with is the harassment of small businesses on our residential streets and the harassment of people off Parliament Hill. That is not about freedom; that is about intimidation, and we are better than that as Canadians. We are so much better than that, but it means that in Parliament we have to stand up.

In closing, I have been reading Camus again and again. I hear people talk about their right to do this and their right to do that. In *The Plague*, Camus says that what happens is that there is no more individual destiny; there is only a collective destiny made up of the plague and the emotions shared by us all. Yes, we are frustrated, and yes, we are angry, and yes, omicron has caused massive emotional damage to all of us, but we cannot exploit that. We have to find a way as parliamentarians. I know there are people of goodwill in every part of this chamber who understand that as a nation, as Canada, we have to be that light. We have to say that there is a better way to be. That is the discussion that I am hoping we can have, with respect and support and the love for our people who have suffered so much through this pandemic.

• (1100)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate many of the comments that the member has put on the record with regard to the protest that we have been witnessing over the last number of days. No one questions the value in a democracy of having peaceful demonstrations, but I think this continuing demonstration is having a very strong negative impact on the community of Ottawa, particularly in the downtown area.

Could the member provide his thoughts on how this demonstration has affected those who live downtown and call it home or have a small business there, as well as the importance of having streets clear for traffic?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, a lot of people are calling and telling me not to go to the Hill and asking if I am okay. I am a politician. Being abused is part of the job. This is what we do. I walk on Wellington Street, and it is fine. It is like a big, crazy parade. I do not have a problem with that.

However, I have been very concerned with what I have seen. Outside of Farm Boy, a group of guys were shouting at locals while they were trying to shop because they were wearing masks. I saw three big thuggish guys wearing Canadian flags as Batman capes going into small shops without masks and demanding service. What kind of people think their freedom is about intimidating others?

I thank the Ottawa police. They have been trying to be respectful, but I would encourage them to start dealing with that when it is off of Parliament Hill and in the residential neighbourhoods, where people are being harassed. People can stay on the Hill. That is fine, but not in the residential neighbourhoods where there are senior citizens, who I have spoken to, and young people.

A young woman told me she did not want to be out on the street at night in her own neighbourhood because she was afraid. We are better than that, and we have to protect people. This is a residential city as well as a place of political work.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, as the member opposite would know, I am one who has always stood up for rights and freedoms. I have always called out violence, desecration of property and intimidation of people as wrong, but I think we are at the stage in this pandemic where we can see that the level of frustration in people is rising.

We are seeing other countries around the world opening up, and we need to come up with a plan to exit this pandemic and restore our economy. I wonder if the member has ideas on how we ought to go forward.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I was hoping that was what we would do in Parliament. The fact is that the pandemic does not care if we are tired. It does not care, so we have to deal with medical science first. That is the issue before us. Every cheesy politician in this country said it was going to be the best summer ever and ignored science, and we keep getting back into this, so we have to see that as a fundamental issue.

We have to find a way to open up. We have to also deal with our ICUs being absolutely overwhelmed and people still dying. Let us talk about that. Let us not pretend it is not happening. Let us not pretend it is just the flu. A guy went on my page and said those thousands of people did not die and that the medical community is making things up. As parliamentarians, we have to say, “No, this is serious.”

We need to sit down as parliamentarians and discuss support for small business and support for the medical community. If we get out of omicron, and I am hoping we are finished with it and we can get back to normal, we have to have a plan for if another wave hits. It seems we just keep hoping we are going to get out of this without having a bigger vision.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to see you for the first time in 2022.

I thank my colleague for his speech. He spoke a lot about health, but does he realize that the problem is not about creating standards or federal interference in jurisdictions belonging to Quebec, the provinces and the territories?

What is crucial, as we emerge from this health crisis, is that the federal government increase health transfers up to 35%. Quebec, the provinces and the territories are responsible for health and need the funding to manage this area of jurisdiction.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her good question.

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Health care in Canada falls under provincial jurisdiction, which leads me to ask why the truckers are here in Ottawa when the pandemic protection mandates were issued by Quebec City or Toronto.

The government must increase health care funding, but the provinces also have to implement standards to ensure that funding goes towards nursing care.

• (1105)

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are wrapping up the debate on the Speech from the Throne today. That, of course, reminds us that there was an election last summer. I would like to thank the people of South Okanagan—West Kootenay for re-electing me as their representative in Ottawa. I send my deepest thanks.

I always say that I represent the most beautiful riding in Canada. I miss travelling around the riding because so many events are not happening. I miss those face-to-face meetings. Everyone in Canada is impacted by this pandemic, and we are living in difficult times.

My colleague from Timmins—James Bay just spoke much more eloquently than I could about what is really facing this country. People are angry, and we are all wondering when life is going to get back to the way it was. People have lost loved ones. People have lost their jobs or lost their businesses. They cannot visit their friends or relatives.

We have seen a lot of concern and anger on the streets of Ottawa the past few days, but we have to remember that the common enemy here is COVID. It is not the lockdowns. It is not the vaccine mandates. It is not science. It is not the government. The enemy is the pandemic.

Science has brought us most of the way back with really miraculous vaccines that really work. They will get us through this pandemic. That is how we will exit this pandemic and get back to normal life. We just have to make sure that we do not give COVID another chance, or a fifth or sixth chance to take us back into it.

If any group feels fed up with COVID, it is health workers. I have talked to nurses and doctors over the past months and they have had it, so I really want to give my sincere thanks to all health workers for their dedication over the past two years and for keeping our health care system functioning in the face of overwhelming demand. We have to rise above this anger and frustration and concentrate on the task at hand, which is the task of overcoming COVID here in Canada and around the world.

The Address

Getting back to the Speech from the Throne, as I said, last summer we had a general election in the middle of this pandemic. It was an election we did not need. We should have been concentrating on tackling difficult issues, not just the pandemic, but also the long list of other issues that are affecting our country.

We should have been working on these issues starting last September. The NDP would have happily supported any initiatives that were focused on helping all Canadians. We gave the government a lot of suggestions of what was really needed. Instead, it is now February, tomorrow is Groundhog Day, and we have lost six months of work time, not just the six weeks that the election took.

What are some of the issues we could have been tackling? The list is long: reconciliation; climate change; housing; the opioid crisis; helping businesses and workers during the pandemic; and the obscene income gap, which is growing, between the few very wealthy Canadians and the millions of Canadians who are struggling just to get by.

One of the most gut-wrenching moments of the past year was the announcement from the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc that they had discovered the unmarked graves of over 500 children on the grounds of the Kamloops Residential School. That was followed by a discovery of hundreds of other graves at similar sites across the country, including a similar announcement last week from Williams Lake.

We had known that many children had died in residential schools. That information was clearly laid out in the reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but the discoveries of the unmarked graves of children meant that millions of Canadians felt that tragedy and loss in their hearts. I have never heard such an outpouring of grief and anger through phone calls, emails and letters to my office than I did around that issue. That information brought on a truly remarkable outpouring from many, many Canadians.

• (1110)

The government must act on all the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and I am heartened to hear some of the documents around the history of those institutions will be made public. We need to keep investigating what truly happened, so we can make sure it will never happen again.

On climate change, it was truly a terrible year for weather across Canada. In British Columbia, a June heat dome killed over 500 people in the Lower Mainland in Vancouver. The town of Lytton burned. People lost their lives, their homes and their livelihoods. Fires continued across the southern interior of British Columbia all summer, including in my hometown of Penticton. While campaigning in August for this election, I had to keep all my precious belongings in my car because there was a wildfire burning a kilometre from my house just on the hills west of Penticton.

The summer was followed by a series of unprecedented rain events in the fall. We have learned to call them atmospheric rivers, but we used to call them “the pineapple express”. One event in November flooded the towns of Merritt and Princeton and destroyed the five highways that connect Vancouver with the rest of the country.

The Prairies had one of their worst droughts ever. There were tornados in Ontario and more serious flooding in Cape Breton and western Newfoundland. We are living the effects of climate change. These changes are here to stay. We have to work hard to ensure they do not get any worse.

One of my roles in the NDP is the party critic for emergency preparedness and climate resilience. I have called for the government to up its game both on its reaction to disasters and in preventing them. In 2018, the town of Grand Forks in my riding was flooded. It was a very difficult experience for the town, not just the physical flooding and the process of rebuilding but also the difficult decisions the mayor and council of the town of Grand Forks had to make trying to figure how they could rebuild the community so flooding would not happen again.

There are the interface fires that have destroyed homes across the country. We have to up the game in funding, not only for the fight against climate change, which is very important, but also for these responses to climate change, the adaptation. We need to ensure the government provides much more funding to communities to help them rebuild their infrastructure to prevent these disasters from happening in the first place. This includes FireSmarting communities, building new flood prevention infrastructure and building better highway and railway infrastructure for the coming weather disasters, which will be much more common and stronger than before.

We need to also up the game on climate mitigation to bring down our emissions so these weather disasters do not get worse and worse. One of the first private members' bills I tabled as a member of Parliament some years ago was a call on the government to bring in the home retrofit program again. I am happy the government has done that with the greener homes grant, but we really need to increase our efforts in that area.

Efficiency Canada has put out a pre-budget document that spells out how we can do this. We need to significantly scale up the number of buildings that are retrofitted, and we need to ensure people who live in energy poverty can have these programs for their homes. We need to build 500,000 units of affordable housing, not just housing, but affordable housing, to catch up to where we should have been. We need to cut the growing gap between the super wealthy and the rest of Canada with a wealth tax, which would make them pay their fair share while supporting the rest of us who have been struggling to get by.

I would like to finish with the opioid crisis and Gord Johns's bill, Bill C-216. We need to do something different in that crisis.

• (1115)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I will remind the hon. member that we do not use colleagues' names.

We will now go to questions and comments. The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

*The Address**[Translation]*

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, there is, of course, much more to be said about the pandemic, but I thought that the throne speech was intended to get us out of the pandemic and provide some certainty, even if it did not achieve that goal.

I only heard the word “workers” once in the member's speech. What ways of supporting our workers, who are still being mistreated, does the member think the government should prioritize?

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, it is workers who have really struggled in many ways through this pandemic, especially frontline workers, whether they are in the health care system, in grocery stores or in restaurants. Many in the restaurant industry have been laid off, rehired, laid off and rehired again. Many have given up and moved on to other things. Those in grocery stores have had to put up with abuse, as my colleague from Timmins—James Bay just mentioned, in trying to enforce the public health orders. Many have lost their jobs and many small businesses are struggling.

The government came out with supports for workers and businesses, but it let many of those people fall through the cracks. For the last two years, we have been pushing the government to fill those cracks and make sure workers like independent travel advisers who have not received anything—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We need to give an opportunity for other questions.

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his speech. He is always very thoughtful in his comments.

There are a lot of seniors in my riding. The cost of everything is going up and the pandemic is going on and on. Some mistakes have been made, and some seniors who were working collected CERB and are now having their GIS cut back. The government has really not acted on fixing these things so that seniors can afford to live, and it has been quite a long time.

Does the member agree that the government should be doing more to help seniors who are struggling?

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, I would really like to thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for bringing up that important issue. The NDP has been calling on the government to change its decision. Some of the most heartbreaking messages, emails and phone calls I have been getting in my offices are from seniors who were advised to collect CERB because they were told they qualified, but who then found out after CERB was abruptly cut off that their GIS vanished. They now cannot afford their rent and some of them have lost their homes.

We have been pressing the government to do the right thing, reinstitute that and give them the retroactive pay they need. It is not that they deserve it; they need it. In Canada, we have to take care of our seniors, and low-income seniors are some of the most vulnerable people in our country. Let us do the—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, on that same theme, I would be remiss if I did not mention that yesterday in question period, when the Conservatives had the opportunity to pick their priority issues, one thing they got up on was increases to the Canada pension plan and contributions to the Canada pension plan, which are all about ensuring that the seniors of tomorrow have an adequate pension. The Conservatives do not call it a pension; they call it a payroll tax. However, the fact of the matter is that if we want seniors to have a decent pension, we need to be paying into a well-funded Canada pension plan that actually ensures there is a decent benefit on the other side of it.

I am glad the Conservatives want to say they are standing up for seniors. I think that is great. I think it shows how important seniors are to this country when members of a political party that never misses a chance to denigrate the Canada pension plan when people are actually trying to do something for it still feel the need to bring it up with the other side of their mouths when they think they can score political points with it.

I wonder if the member wants to talk about the importance of a strong public pension plan and what it means to invest in that for the future, instead of calling it down at every chance they get and tearing it up when they are in government. I am talking about the Conservatives here.

● (1120)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, I agree with the member totally. We need strong pensions. We also need to have legislation to protect pension theft when companies go out of business and use the pension money that workers have put in there. These are deferred wages, and they are going to banks right now. We have to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will have to leave it at that.

Resuming debate, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to address the very important issue of the government's throne speech, a plan to take Canadians in all regions of our vast land through the pandemic—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): If I may interrupt, we have a point of order.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, I am seeking the guidance of the Chair. My understanding of Bosc and Gagnon is that a member may only speak to a motion once. My understanding is that the member has spoken three times now to the same motion. I am seeking clarity from the Chair on whether or not this is an oversight, or whether there are so few Liberals willing to defend their record that the member has to get up for a third time on the Speech from the Throne. I am just seeking clarity.

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): A member has the opportunity to speak to the main motion, the amendment and the subamendment. The hon. parliamentary secretary has not addressed the main motion.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I hope this will not be taken from my time and we will reset the clock. It does not surprise me that my Conservative friends do not necessarily want to hear what I have to say, but I will tell members that they should listen closely, because if they listen closely, they might get a better sense of the type of direction they want to consider taking.

The member for Sarnia—Lambton asked where we go next in a question she put earlier today. That is a very important question. From the beginning, through the throne speeches, remarks from the Prime Minister and budgetary and legislative initiatives, we have been very clear about what the Government of Canada's priority has been as of 19 or 20 months ago: dealing with the pandemic. We are at a point in time where we are hoping to see strong leadership from all sides of the House to get us through the pandemic. To indirectly answer the question the member from the Conservative Party asked, one of the best things we can do is encourage the public and our constituents to get fully vaccinated.

Sitting on the government benches, I am observing how the Conservative members have been approaching this issue. There is an interesting story, and I would like to quote from it. It is significant because it is from the former leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, former prime minister Brian Mulroney, when he was interviewed on CTV. Former prime minister Brian Mulroney told CTV's *Question Period* a few Sundays back that the leader of the Conservative Party, at least for now, should go further and show any unvaccinated MPs the door, removing them from his caucus. He said, "That's leadership." That is a direct quote from the former Progressive Conservative prime minister.

He goes on to say, "Who am I to argue with tens of thousands of brilliant scientists and doctors who urge the population desperately to get vaccinated?" He also said, "Look, you're not the leader to follow, you are the leader to lead, and if you think this is in the national interest, Canada's interest, you get your members of Parliament in line, and they have to support what you're doing."

If we listen to what the former prime minister said and we understand and appreciate, as he indicated, the science and the health experts, we have an appreciation of just how important it is for people to be fully vaccinated. A vast majority, 86% or more, are fully vaccinated, not to mention those over the age of 12 who have received one shot. However, we still have Conservatives within the official opposition questioning this and adding fuel to those who believe they do not have to get vaccinated, sending mixed messages to the public. I think that is at a great cost. On the one hand the Conservatives say that it is time we move on, yet if we follow them, whether their behaviour inside the House or the statements they make on Twitter, they send very confusing messages.

• (1125)

From the beginning, we have been very consistent. Our number one issue 19 or 20 months ago was the pandemic and working with willing partners, including provincial governments, indigenous leaders, non-profit organizations, private companies and people in

general from all regions of the country, to take a team approach and build a national consensus on the types of things that we needed to do as a government in order to take on the pandemic. Through that consultation and those efforts that engaged so many Canadians, we are where we are today.

A great deal of thanks and appreciation can be expressed to all Canadians who understood their responsibilities through this very trying time. Whether they were health care workers, taxi drivers, people who work in manufacturing plants or long-haul truck drivers, people stepped up and did what was necessary, whether providing services or staying at home in isolation, but at all times listening to what public health officials were saying and understanding the science of what was taking place in our communities. As a direct result, Canada is in an excellent position.

Looking at the third quarter reports, we see that our GDP grew by 5.4%. That is better than the United States, Japan, the U.K. and Australia. That is, in good part, because Canadians did what they needed to do in order to position Canada well when we had the opportunity to get out of the pandemic.

We have now seen 108% of the jobs that were lost due to the pandemic return. I compare that to the United States, our dearest friend to the south, where it is approximately 84%. For years, when I was in opposition, I used to be critical of the then Harper government talking about trade deficits. We would get trade deficit after trade deficit, year on year. In fact, when Stephen Harper assumed office, there was a trade surplus. When he left office there was a trade deficit. I understand that today we have a trade surplus that is at a 13-year high. These things are happening because governments of all levels and Canadians understood what we needed to do by coming together to make a difference. Those jobs matter. They are very important.

Just the other day, I had the opportunity to get a better overall understanding of the pork industry once again in the province of Manitoba. Maple Leaf Foods is an excellent example of doing what is necessary to ensure there is a high element of food security in our country. It contributed by continuing to operate, even during the pandemic, by taking the necessary measures to protect the industry.

• (1130)

Maple Leaf today is actually growing in the province of Manitoba. The best bacon in the world can be found right in Manitoba, and we are selling it throughout the world, not only because of an outstanding company that has demonstrated its ability to meet and get to market, but also because of the workforce that it employs and their responsible attitude in ensuring that those jobs would continue and ultimately grow because of the quality of work that they provide.

This year we are going to see an additional 350 jobs at that one company. That will bring up the total employment just in Winnipeg to 1,900 jobs. That is not to mention the around 1,500-plus jobs in the community of Brandon, Maple Leaf jobs. The hog industry is doing quite well in the province of Manitoba. If we go to Neepawa, HyLife is another shining example of a successful company that is exporting Manitoba world-class product.

Those are direct jobs in those industries. It does not speak to the indirect jobs that are created by these companies. In the parking lots there are hundreds of vehicles and those vehicles have to be purchased from someplace. The employees live in houses, condos and apartments in communities that require furniture. They require food and restaurants, and that feeds the economy, not to mention our farming communities.

Our agricultural community continues to grow and in many ways prosper. In good part, that is one of the reasons we are able to continue to grow our economy. Relatively speaking to the countries that I have already referenced, we are doing quite well, but there are areas that do need to get special attention, for example, the issue of health care. The greatest challenge in health care today, and yesterday when I used to be the health care critic, is not just money. It is how we manage the changes that are necessary to provide the quality health care services that Canadians expect, and they want the federal government to play a role in that.

We in the Liberal Party understand, for example, long-term health care facilities. The opposition members say it is all provincial jurisdiction. They can make that statement, but there are Liberal members of Parliament who are responding to what Canadians want. They want to see some form of national health care standards for long-term care for our seniors. That is something we believe in. On this side of the House, Liberals also believe in the need to invest in mental health. Apparently, the Conservatives do not. There is an expectation that governments will work together. We saw that through the pandemic. When governments work together, we can accomplish so much more.

• (1135)

This is a Prime Minister who has been committed to doing that, even though what one sees constantly coming from opposition benches on the floor of the House of Commons is character assassination, a focus from opposition to try to tear down the personalities of members who make up the caucus, as opposed to contributing to the overall positive debate. Constructive criticism, too, I must suggest, is a valid thing. I was in opposition. I like to think we contributed to that too.

However, no matter how cynical and negative the Conservative Party has been, we have remained focused on ensuring we are developing and bringing forward the programs that are going to make a difference in the lives of Canadians through a very difficult time.

As a result, we experienced some programs that have ultimately led to the survival of some of our industries. There are actually more businesses today than there were prepandemic. I like to think that has a lot to do with what the government came up with in terms of programs. During this difficult time, people needed a lifeline, and most often we will find that the lifeline came from the federal

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government, a government that believed in supporting businesses both small and big.

We did that through programs such as the wage subsidy, the rent subsidy and the loan support programs, all catered to support our small businesses and workers in Canada. We brought that out early in the game when the pandemic hit, because we recognized how important it was, in many ways, to keep these businesses viable and to prevent them from going bankrupt.

In the throne speech and back in October, the Prime Minister and the minister made reference to the need to carry on some of these programs, to have a lockdown program. That is why, shortly after the election, not only did we talk about it but we brought in legislation. In fact, that was the first piece of legislation we brought in, Bill C-2. That was to ensure the benefits for small businesses. On the one hand, we have those in the opposition who talk about the importance of small businesses, but when it came time to support small businesses, at least back in December, what did they do? They voted against Bill C-2.

Not only did they vote against that legislation, but during part of the debate they brought in motions to try to filibuster the legislation to prevent it from passing, yet they like to say they are friends of small business. Think of the millions of dollars, hundreds of millions, that the Government of Canada has provided to small businesses over the last 19 months or a year and a half. That is one of the reasons we are in the position we are in today. Relatively speaking, compared to other countries, we are doing exceptionally well.

That is because of the resilience of our small businesses, entrepreneurs and Canadians in general who have responded so well to the need to address the pandemic and to play the role we all needed to play, so that, at the end of the day, we were in a position to continue to grow the economy, support our middle class and allow things to get better quicker.

• (1140)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member opposite mentioned health care capacity, and that is the crisis. The government has been forcing the provinces to do more with less since it was first elected, but funding is not the only issue. People go to the hospital because they do not have family doctors, and there are not enough licensed doctors to go around. There are hundreds of qualified new Canadians and specialists who come to Canada, but they cannot practise because of the jurisdictional rules and because the federal government has not found a way to streamline them into jobs, so they are stocking shelves at Staples or working as PSWs instead of doing what they were trained to do and what they came to Canada to do.

How does the member propose that the federal government home in on the real problem and help Canadians get over being locked down and locked in because of restrictions?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I wish I had another 20 minutes to answer that question. It is truly amazing. We have to realize that is from a Conservative Party perspective, and we need to look at what we have done in the last five years.

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Historic amounts of transfers are going to the provinces for health care. We have identified areas and tagged money to support that. The recognition of immigrants' credentials is a very serious issue, and we constantly raise that with provincial stakeholders that are ultimately responsible, but maybe there are other things. We have a very progressive Minister of Immigration who is looking at ways to ensure that we can take advantage of getting more people who could contribute to our health care system. That is also an important aspect. The federal government, in the last number of years, has been very proactive on the health care file.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, to listen to my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, one would think that everything is fine and that the Liberal government is doing a perfect job. In fact, things seem to be going so well that I have to wonder why the Nobel Foundation has not yet considered awarding all of this year's Nobel prizes to the Liberal government in power.

Earlier, I heard my colleague talk about how well businesses are doing in Manitoba, and I am very happy to hear that. It is encouraging.

In Quebec, on the other hand, we are experiencing a horrendous labour shortage and having a hard time finding workers. In addition, businesses are facing enormous hurdles when they go to hire foreign workers to fill positions. The backlogs keep piling up, and these businesses are being penalized by this government's neglect and complacency, especially when it comes to immigration.

I also heard my colleague mention consensus. The Quebec and provincial premiers have reached a consensus on health transfers. They are all calling for an increase in transfers to cover up to 35% of expenditures. The current issue that health care systems are facing is a lack of funding. The federal government is not paying its fair share and instead wants to interfere with health care management, which is a provincial jurisdiction.

When will the government realize that? I look forward to hearing what my colleague has to say about that.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I would refer the member to the Canada Health Act in terms of the federal government's role and suggest that he listen to what residents in good part, including residents in his own riding, have to say regarding some of the valuable contributions the federal government can make with respect to health care. Further, he should recognize that historic amounts of money are flowing to the provinces from Ottawa to support health care. This government was also able to continue signing health care accords with individual provinces, which is something that Stephen Harper was not able to do. We were able to accomplish that.

Manitoba and Quebec have a lot of things in common. I look at the aerospace industry and the issue of supply and demand. These are very important industries and communities that get a great deal of support from Ottawa, and I see that as a positive thing. However, they also have another thing in common, and that is the need for

workers. As I said, we have a very proactive Minister of Immigration. I suspect we might now even have record numbers of international workers coming to Canada to fill those jobs. If we fail to meet the demand for those jobs, it takes away from our economy and that is one of the reasons—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, I have listened to this member a lot, and he tries to defend what his government has done to reduce the spread of COVID-19. He just spoke a long time about the recovery of the Canadian economy. I certainly agree with him, in that we know the way through this is by ensuring that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Can I ask the hon. member to turn her screen on, please?

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, I am trying, but it is locked, I think.

I am not sure what is going on. I keep pushing the button.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I apologize, but I do not think we can proceed without the screen on, so I will have to give the question to another member.

The hon. member for Calgary Skyview.

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Winnipeg North for talking about many important issues, such as the response of our government to the COVID-19 crisis in supporting workers and businesses during this difficult time.

I remember during the financial crisis the lack of support from the previous Conservative government. We saw, unfortunately, the loss of many businesses. In the housing crisis, many people lost their homes during that difficult time. I think it is more important to support workers and diversify our economy while supporting a strong plan for housing in Canada.

Would the member elaborate on the government's support of affordable housing and the national housing program?

• (1150)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, one thing my prairie colleague and I share is a very strong passion for economic growth in our Prairies. We work quite closely together to ensure that takes place as much as possible.

Housing is a very important initiative. This is a government that brought forward a national housing strategy a number of years ago. It was the first of its kind. We have seen a number of programs put into place to ensure that we can speed up some of that housing, especially during the pandemic.

I am encouraged by some of the other things we are starting to see, whether it is the rapid housing initiative or the first-time home-buyer incentive. The Minister of Housing wants to work with Canadians to have a study done on how we can ensure there is more housing accessible to all Canadians, and I look forward to that particular report.

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Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member spent much of his time disparaging the official opposition. Yes, this is politics, and I understand that, but what was most offensive about his remarks were the suggestions that the opposition does not care about mental health and that the previous government did nothing about mental health. In fact, it was one of our Conservative members of Parliament, the member for Cariboo—Prince George, who brought forward a proposal to establish a national suicide hotline. It passed unanimously in the House over a year ago, yet the government has failed to implement that very worthwhile proposal.

When can Canadians expect that suicide hotline to be in place?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I know that Health Canada, and in particular the Minister of Health, are very keen on that idea, as the motion itself passed with unanimous support. I think all members of the House support the idea of a national suicide line, and I believe it is just a question of time. Whether it is with the CRTC, things have to be done to put something of that nature into place. It is ironic that both questions from the Conservative Party have been on health care, when that is the party that seems to want to say that Ottawa should have nothing to do with health care.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I find it amazing that this member is now up for the third time on the reply to the Speech from the Throne, given there are over 100 members on that bench who have not spoken on it.

I am going to follow up with my friend, the member for Abbotsford, who just asked about the three-digit hotline. This member says the government is keen on it, but that is not good enough. The House voted unanimously to support moving toward a three-digit hotline to support people living with mental health issues. It is not about being keen.

Is his government committed to following through with the motion that was passed unanimously in the House of Commons? It is going to save lives. Right now, we have a suicide crisis. It is the second leading killer for young people under the age of 34.

Will the government respond and follow through with the direction of the House of Commons?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I am somewhat surprised that both the Conservatives and the NDP are a little upset that I am speaking. One member of the NDP has spoken for 14 hours on a budget matter, and the Conservatives did likewise. I respect that. At the end of the day—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Edmonton Riverbend.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will not be ceding any time back to that member.

It is an honour to stand in this place. I do not believe I have to split my time, but perhaps somebody could confirm that. I will continue on. It is an honour to speak to the Speech from the Throne and to also spend some time sharing the election, sharing the number of volunteer hours and taking that opportunity to thank so many.

I will just read a few names into the record. We had a very active core team, many of whom have been with me through five elections. I regret that I have not been able to mention a lot of their names in this place until today. They are Andrew Marklund, Bruce Foy, Bruce McLaughlin, Bryan Kim and his whole team, Deanna and Jason Bischoff, Elizabeth Hughes, Erin Allin and her wonderful partner Connor, Ivonne Martinez, James and Amanda Kadavil and their two lovely boys, John Whitmore, Karamveer Lalh, who is our EDA president, Mazhar Butt, who did a tremendous job of handling our CFO duties, Michelle Chen, Nancy Bishay, and Bieri Beretti, Norman Lorrain who did our signs, Pat Maru who sat at the front desk, Sami Alam, Scott Reith, Shaina and Bill Anderson, Sia Saffa, my good buddy Sohail Quadri, Varun Chandrasekar, and of course Vera Fedor, whom we could not have run the election without. She consistently shows up at our front office again and again, and it means the world to me to have a friend like her. Those are the volunteers.

From a family perspective, none of us is able to be in this place without our family. I was able to celebrate my 13-year-old little girl. She turned into a teenager right before my eyes. I have been doing this for 10 years now. I feel she has grown up with me, either on the campaign trail or at public events. Lily Jeneroux means the world to me. I was happy to be home to see her, even briefly, before she became a teenager to join her other sister in the teen years. I have two girls in their teen years, and that is all I have to say about that. Molly Jeneroux is 14. I am hearing that I am a brave guy from the other side of the House. I will leave the comments at that.

For them to put in these 10 years with me makes me think about how much this job impacts them in their lives, in their school and with their friends. With everything we have had to do to get me to Ottawa, and then often leaving on Sundays and not coming back until later in the week, I miss a lot of opportunities at home to see them. It is certainly something that we all have to weigh every time we run in an election. To me, they are the real motivation for continuing to do this job: It is to make this country a better place for them.

If having two teenage daughters was not enough, I also have a two-year-old son. Actually, this Saturday he will be entering his terrible twos. I am not sure how I planned having teenage daughters and a two-year-old son, but he has really been through some of the darkest days of COVID. He has really been able to shine a light in our home. I see so much hope in little baby Hugh, who is not so much a baby anymore. I am fascinated by just watching him carry on about his day, playing with his cars and trucks. It is really neat to revisit fatherhood in a different form, all over again.

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Then, of course, there is my amazing spouse, Elizabeth Clement. She is a surgeon. She spends a lot of time in the hospital and on call. Our lives often diverge, but when we are able to we coordinate our schedules. I find she is busier than I am in a lot of ways. She is certainly someone I admire. I am so lucky to be able to spend my life with her. Sometimes I think she forgets I am a member of Parliament, because she is so busy saving lives on her end. I think she often looks at me and wonders, “How many lives did you save today?” I like to think I have saved lives, but she is truly the one who is great in our family.

● (1155)

Those thanks aside, I want to talk about three things that I think are important and have been working on and, having been elected for just over six years now, want to continue to advocate. As members know, we are inundated with many ideas and many people bring up many different things that they think we should be working on, so to really dive into those things that we think are important takes a lot of focus and concentration.

The first thing is the Father's Day on Parliament Hill event that we do for men's mental health every year. The NDP member for Courtenay—Alberni has been a real champion with me on that, as well as the member for Richmond Hill from the government side. Between the three of us, we have found a unique friendship in being able to address this issue that I think connects with so many Canadians and make it a non-partisan issue. We were able to raise awareness for the many men who are suffering from suicidal thoughts and those who have been impacted by postpartum depression after the birth of a baby. Every time we do the event in June on Father's Day, my inbox gets filled with mail from people who are sharing their stories about what our event has meant to them.

We are now going into our fifth year. I have not connected with the member for Courtenay—Alberni about it and may be shocking him in the House now, but obviously we will do the event again. I would love it to be in person as we have done in the past, as we have done the last two as virtual events. Going into the fifth year of doing this with our partners in the Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Movember Foundation, we have been able to move the needle to stamp out the stigma for men to talk about suicide, because 80% of men die by suicide, and we are seeing those high numbers in really young men, men under the age of 40 in a lot of cases. The importance of this event makes it something that I will continue to work on in this Parliament. I hope to continue to stamp out that stigma and allow men to continue to talk about their feelings, to be that modern man in a lot of ways and not be afraid to address the suicidal thoughts in their lives.

The second thing I would love to address is that a really good friend of mine, Jakob Guziak, a little boy I have come to know quite well, was diagnosed with SCID, which is severe combined immunodeficiency, just 10 days after his birth. SCID causes an inability to fight off most types of infections, including bacterial, viral and fungal infections. Jacob needs some gene therapy support, and there is a gene therapy out there that could significantly impact Jakob's life, but it costs \$2 million. His mother Andrea and father Kamil have been absolutely dedicated to getting him that help. Again, every chance I get, I will support them and fight alongside

them to push for that therapy so that he can get the support he needs.

Lastly, we had a very historic moment in the last Parliament when we passed a bill for compassionate bereavement leave, thanks to a lot of members' help from the other side and the NDP. We had some champions for this legislation, which was great, but we need one more step. We need the provinces to adopt the legislation so that bereavement leave is consistent across the provinces and not just for federal agencies and commissions. I will commit to continue to work to get the provinces on board so that everybody can receive compassionate bereavement leave if they so desire.

On that note, it is a privilege to stand in this place and an honour to share this place with so many hon. members. I know it gets heated from time to time, but I find that there are a lot of friendships to be made across the aisle if we take the opportunity to reach out and talk to some of our colleagues.

● (1200)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I consider the member one of my friends across the aisle, and we work well together on the Canada-U.K. committee. As a person who has been here for 24 years, I would say to him that my youngest daughter was seven years old when I started. She is now 31. It does get better.

An hon. member: Speak for yourself.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I hear some dissent on the other side.

I want to pick up on a central contradiction in the positioning of some of the opposition parties here with respect to what I would argue are worthwhile initiatives. Whether it is the suicide number referenced by the member for Abbotsford, long-term care initiatives that have been proposed or mental health initiatives that have been proposed, all of which are national in scope, the Bloc's answer to all of those questions is, “Do not mess in our jurisdiction. Give us the money and go away. We do not want national standards for anything.”

I would be curious to hear how the member responds to that central contradiction from our friends in the Bloc.

● (1205)

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, I could probably use a few tips from the member as I embark on this. The member has become a good friend. In the Canada-U.K. committee, he glossed over it, but under his leadership as the chair, we have actually been able to do some pretty neat things and have been able to bring a lot of us together to push for certain initiatives. He should take credit for a lot of that work.

To the member's point, I was elected provincially before I came here, and it seems more and more of that cross-jurisdictional conversation is happening, whether it is municipal, provincial or federal, about the federal government's role in housing, mental health and long-term care. There seems to be a desire from the general public to have that conversation at this national level. It is something I welcome. I think there is opportunity to show leadership, whether one is in the official opposition or in government, on a lot of those conversations. Mental health is a very key conversation, because it is not jurisdictionally bound. It is a conversation we should all be having.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always a delight to get up and talk about a speech from my colleague, because he does such important work, whether in bereavement or in work around suicide prevention. I have joined him every year on Father's Day to talk about men's mental health and suicide among men, because men are three times more likely to die by suicide than women are. It is important that we stand united, and he has my assurance that I will absolutely be joining him this year. I do wish his daughter a happy birthday as well.

I just met with the National Collaborative for Suicide Prevention. It is still waiting for a motion introduced by my friend and colleague from Timmins—James Bay that was passed unanimously in this House and that we all supported. Here we are three years later, at the height of a mental health crisis as a result of COVID-19 and many other factors, and we still do not have a national suicide prevention action plan.

Does my colleague agree that the government needs to move quickly, that we are in a crisis when it comes to mental health and death by suicide, and that the government needs to respond or we will lose more lives? This is urgent.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Speaker, I was hoping that the hon. member would be joining me once again. I am looking forward to getting other members to also address it in the House and I am glad he will be supporting our event again this year.

The member is right. This is something he is incredibly passionate about, and it is an honour to be able to call him a friend. We have been able to bridge a lot of those conversations, as they do not need to be partisan. We can get some really good work done, and I think we saw that during the vote for the national hotline in the motion by the member for Timmins—James Bay. Ultimately, if we can work together in Parliament on things like mental health, there is nothing we cannot do in this Parliament.

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind everybody to keep their questions and answers concise. We only got two questions in there during that one. There were great answers as well as some great questions.

[Translation]

I want to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to ask questions and make comments on what is happening in this debate.

[English]

Continuing debate, the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

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Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an absolute pleasure to rise today in the House of Commons representing constituents of Cumberland—Colchester.

As my colleague did, I would like to thank some people from my campaign team: George Laird, Chris Guinan, Paula Henderson, Joe Nicholson, Ray Cameron, Kevin Mantin, Nick Gear and Tom Macdonald. I also thank my family, who continue to support me through this journey, which is certainly new for me. I thank all of them and a multitude of others as well.

Cumberland—Colchester is an area of Nova Scotia nestled between, on one side, the Bay of Fundy, with the highest tides in the world, and the Northumberland Strait, with the warmest waters north of the Carolinas on the other. It is an ideal place to raise a family, invest in a business, retire or go on vacation. Realistically, anything one could possibly imagine doing can be done here in Cumberland—Colchester. We have recreational activities all year long, as well as captivating natural beauty, first-rate educational institutions, business opportunities and people with a kind and welcoming spirit, such as the Smith brothers, whom I mentioned yesterday.

With all these great things in Cumberland—Colchester, why was there almost no mention of the entire province of Nova Scotia in the Speech from the Throne? The answer is very clear: There is a failure of leadership as it pertains to the current Liberal government. Let me also be clear that the office of the Prime Minister of Canada deserves to be respected. I wonder, then, how it is possible that the Prime Minister could believe that the Liberals are only there to represent those who voted for them and are able and willing to make disparaging comments about those with differing points of view.

As we all know, we in this House are asked to debate topics that are potentially very difficult and could affect the lives of millions of people. This is meant to be done vigorously and vociferously but without vitriol. Good leadership in a democratic society should not leave citizens fearful of criticizing those in the decision-making seats. They should not be disparaged for not following the party line, and our great nation should not be divided by a leader who has been tasked to be a leader for all. Good leadership calls us to be courageous yet kind, fearless yet forthcoming, visionary yet lacking venom, and highly principled, yet without hatefulness.

Sadly, this purposeful division of Canadians has only increased over the last two years for our citizens. In our great country, this has led to blaming, malevolence, hostility and demonstrations. This is not the Canada that I imagined living in as I age.

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The division has been the excuse for a government that has planned poorly during a global pandemic that has been predicted for years. In the early days of the pandemic, if not for the Conservative plea for vaccines, none would have been procured, and certainly, very sadly, two years into this pandemic, none have been produced domestically in our own very capable and innovative nation. Further, our cries for rapid testing were dismissed as unnecessary and unhelpful. Now the Liberals have tabled a bill asking for \$2.5 billion to procure rapid tests. This should have been a priority 18 months ago, when Canada's Conservatives recommended this course of action. Everyone in the world knows the value of rapid testing, and the government's continued failure to produce any significant number of rapid tests domestically in a reasonable time continues to illustrate its inability to plan or to execute a plan. Also, the procurement of antivirals has been slow compared to other nations, and perhaps so slow that they will be useless against the current wave of omicron.

Let me be clear: Too slow, not enough and not at the right time should be the planning model of the current government.

Therefore, colleagues, where has this left us? We are two years into a pandemic without federal leadership and without enough tools at the right time, which leaves our provincial counterparts with only the tools of lockdowns and restrictions. We are also well aware, as my colleague mentioned earlier, that the underfunding and poor planning with regard to our health care system has left us without any surge capacity at all, with 92% of acute care beds being full the majority of the time.

Once again, this allows the Liberal government to have Canadians locked down and restricted, to have businesses fail and to have a national debt that grows by more than seventeen and a half million dollars every hour: tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock. It now tops \$1.2 trillion.

• (1210)

Fewer dollars chasing fewer goods has led Canada to a 30-year high level of inflation and a housing bubble that has hit every corner of our nation. Last month I spoke to Alison. She volunteers at a local housing board in Cumberland. Recent estimates suggest there are 100 people without adequate housing and no prospect of finding a place any time soon. In Springhill, a town of less than 1,500 people, a one-bedroom apartment, if it were available, would be \$950 a month. As we have heard again and again, Canadians are being priced out of their own lives. We begin to see a trend here with respect to planning: too slow, not enough, too late.

Over many years, the government was also warned of the terrible disaster that happened in the Sumas Prairie of British Columbia. As the government is a purported champion of climate change, Canadians expect more. That disaster was preventable and now that area of Canada will be recovering from it for years to come.

I wish I could stand here and tell members that catastrophe was unique, that it will never happen anywhere again in Canada and, if the government did know about such a looming disaster, that of course it would create a plan and do something about it. Once again, it is with a very heavy heart that I report to the House of Commons that in my own riding on the border with New Brunswick, such a disaster is ready to happen.

The land that connects the rest of Canada to Nova Scotia is called the Chignecto Isthmus. As far back as the 17th century, Acadian settlers realized that this low-lying area was subject to flooding on its flanks and, therefore, diked the area. This allowed for farming of the rich soil with protection from flooding. Indeed, there has been some maintenance that has been carried out at great expense. Unfortunately, the government has seen it appropriate to study this problem once again. For those of us who stood at the top of the dikes at high tide, it is clear this problem is real. It is an awesomely frightening experience to realize that, on an inauspicious day in December, the Bay of Fundy, with the highest tides in the world, literally laps at the top of the aforementioned dikes.

For those of us who believe in planning and the old adage of “failing to plan is planning to fail”, we see the folly of another study. We know that there is a time for action and the time is now. To add insult to injury, this new study, which arrived almost a year late, is not available for my review. It was commissioned by the federal government and the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. However, for reasons which are beyond comprehension, I cannot get a copy of this study even though, as I mentioned, this looming disaster is in my riding.

In fact, I reached out to the Minister of Transport specifically requesting a copy of the study. The response, jaw dropping and astonishing as it may be, was that I should seek a copy of this publicly and federally funded study from the Province of New Brunswick. To me and to the residents of Colchester, this is a slap in the face. Indeed, it is an affront to all Nova Scotians as the Trans-Canada Highway, CN Rail, telecommunications infrastructure and \$50 million of trade pass daily through the isthmus. When the dikes are breached and there is no plan, the aftermath will be horrific and the remediation beyond expensive.

I stand here as a rookie member of Parliament, proud to represent the great people of Cumberland—Colchester, but with a very heavy heart. Canada is in a crisis of division, despair, deception, decay, decline, defamation, degeneration, disappointment, doubt and dread. I place this unbelievably unpleasant state of affairs firmly at the feet of my Liberal colleagues, who continuously fan the flames of the social media ether world for political gain, while the destruction of our country due to ineptitude continues. Who is playing the fiddle?

Canadians deserve and demand better. Conservatives stand ready to get Canada back to its rightful place nationally and internationally.

• (1215)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was listening carefully to my colleague and, in the introduction to his speech, he talked about divisions in Canada. I agree with him that in a pandemic, what we probably need to avoid most are divisions.

He referred to many things, such as the rapid tests that have been slow in coming. I have a simple question for my colleague. In the last few days, they have seemed to offer tacit support to the protesters that we see outside. The question that springs to mind is this: Does he think that horns are more effective than vaccines at getting us through the pandemic?

• (1220)

[English]

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member does not know that I am a physician. I have been vaccinated three times. We know that vaccines are the most important way out of this pandemic. I am not entirely sure how horns and vaccines go together. That being said, I would suggest, as the studies would say and the Canadian Trucking Alliance would say, that almost 90% of truckers are fully vaccinated.

What we do support here, as Canada's Conservatives, is the ability for people to go out and protest in a peaceful and respectful manner, and that is important to the portrayal of democracy here in Canada.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his focus on health in his comments on the Speech from the Throne. It is obviously not just the pandemic but other aspects of health that are really of concern to most Canadians. In my province of British Columbia, we have certainly seen 2021 become the year with the most deaths from overdose in history. We are running about 150 a month.

I wonder whether the member would express his support or opposition to the ideas of creating a safe supply of drugs and decriminalizing the personal possession of small amounts of drugs, as a way of attacking this severe opioid crisis that is affecting so many families in my province.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, what we do understand is that the focus on the pandemic has left many health questions unanswered and unaddressed in Canada, suicides being one of them. I know multiple colleagues have addressed the issue of the three-digit suicide prevention hotline. Certainly that is an exceedingly important thing.

Again, we know that when all we do is focus on one thing and use subject matter experts and we have failed leadership of government, then it makes it very difficult to attack all those other very important issues that exist for a government. Therefore, we implore the government to look at the end of this pandemic and how we are going to live in an endemic world where COVID exists.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the fact that my colleague referenced the historic floods that took place in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. The devastation is unprecedented. It is my riding. These are my farmers, my businesses and my residents who are struggling to recover from this.

He also mentioned New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and I am glad he did because the problem of climate change-related weather events is critical. We are going to need very significant investments in the many billions of dollars across Canada to protect Canadians against these weather events.

The Address

I would invite the member to comment on the investments that will be required to be made, especially in his neck of the woods, and why it is important that we make these investments now and not wait for another disaster to happen before we take note of what is happening around us.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Abbotsford and send my condolences to his constituents. I understand the remediation that now needs to take effect.

What is, as I said, jaw-droppingly astonishing to me is that there is a study that exists in my neck of the woods that I cannot get and that the government, as I previously mentioned, tells me to get from the government of New Brunswick, even though we as a federal government funded part of that study. Why does the government continue to study things to death and have no action?

I also find it absolutely fascinating that no one from the government side has any comments or questions about this kind of action that we see all too much of: too little, too late, no action.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the debate on the Speech from the Throne so many months from when it was delivered.

I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Kitchener Centre. What a pleasure it is to work with him in the House, and I wish I could be there in person. I will be soon, I hope.

I was in the House the day the Speech from the Throne was delivered, back on November 23. It was a wonderful thing that our Governor General delivered, for the first time, a throne speech not only in our two official languages but also in Inuktitut. I had the great honour of knowing Her Excellency from many of her previous incarnations, including when we once served on the board of the International Institute for Sustainable Development together. She will be a fantastic Governor General, and I was very pleased to be here in Ottawa to hear her Speech from the Throne.

As the Governor General noted at the time, on November 23, we were still in the throes of the devastating events that hit British Columbia. The hon. member for Abbotsford was just speaking of the devastation from the flooding and the landslides in the Fraser Valley. This extended into my own riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands, but the most devastating and catastrophic impacts were clearly more in Abbotsford and up through the Fraser Valley. Every land route to reach the Lower Mainland was cut off by these extreme weather events.

When the Speech from the Throne was delivered, we were only 10 days from the end of COP26, the global climate negotiations, which were not a dismal failure but they certainly failed to succeed. COP26 did not do what was required in this desperately pressing moment.

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When I read the Speech from the Throne now, as two months have passed, I am struck by how the words are wonderful, but the actions promised are inadequate to meet the spirit behind the words. I will address several elements, and my other colleague from the Green Party, the member for Kitchener Centre, will address other critical issues we are very concerned about.

I want to address the reconciliation theme within the Speech from the Throne, the vaccination questions and of course the climate crisis. In no area have the promised actions lived up to the strong words that speak to the multiple crises that face us.

Let us start with the challenge of reconciliation. Many members in this place have quite appropriately mentioned that we are still in the throes of the discovery of the missing children. These are children taken forcibly from their homes and their families over a period of more than 150 years and forced into situations that were unimaginably horrible for those little children, many of whom did not return home. We have to face this. We have to continue to support first nations communities in a national program, which was required of us by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission years ago, to find out what happened to every single indigenous child taken from their home who did not return, to find out what happened, how they died and where they are. Every family needs to get a report, and that continues to be a priority.

With the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry, we were told very clearly that many things must be done to protect indigenous women, who are at greater risk of being murdered. We have not done those things. One ties in very closely to the climate crisis and to many other aspects of the things this modern, industrialized country fails to do well, and that is ground transportation. The missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry stated that people are more vulnerable when they are low income and there is no public transit where they live. Their choices are basically to hitchhike, which is not a choice. We need to restore Via Rail and bus service across this country.

We also need to ensure the settlement announced in January between the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and the wonderful, heroic Cindy Blackstock be real, be made real and to stay on top on that. We applaud the \$40 billion set aside, but as Cindy Blackstock has said, it needs to be monitored closely to really deliver.

● (1225)

On international vaccines, I want to again raise, as I have before in the House, that we understand now from this pandemic that we will not end it. We know what comes after omicron. Someone mentioned what comes after omicron. It is pi. That is the next letter in the Greek alphabet. That is the next variant we are going to get. We must vaccinate everyone on the planet, make this place our home as a human family and stop being a living petri dish to see how many new variants we can get. We should be vaccinating around the world, but Canada has avoided and not answered the question: Will we support South Africa and India in asking for an exemption from the patent protection of the World Trade Organization? Under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, or TRIPS, we can get an exemption so that vaccines are more available around the world.

Turning to climate, one would think that a person in the Green Party could not be unhappy with a Speech from the Throne that says, "Our Earth is in danger" and "This is the moment for bolder climate action." Again, they are great words, but in the pages devoted to talking about the climate crisis, there is no mention of what our Paris commitment is, nor that we should hold global average temperature as far below 2°C as possible and attempt to hold to 1.5°C.

These numbers in themselves I think cause people's eyes to glaze over: 1.5°C does not feel like a real number; it sounds small. I want to remind members that in this last year, nearly 600 British Columbians died, according to the science, in the heat dome in four days. My own stepdaughter nearly died and she is in her early thirties. She nearly died because the temperature in Ashcroft hit 50°C. These are killer extreme weather events.

As I said, 600 people died in British Columbia in four days. This was an extreme event, and the same day that the temperature kept going higher and higher, in Lytton the town centre virtually burnt to the ground in minutes. The fire truck did not even get out of the fire station. That town, by the way, has still not been helped and is still not being rebuilt. We know that wildfires have spread over hundreds of thousands of hectares in British Columbia. Then, of course, in November we had atmospheric rivers that knocked out much of our infrastructure, again killing people and hundreds of thousands of livestock and animals. The heat dome in late June and early July was estimated to have killed one billion sea creatures along our shorelines.

● (1230)

These events happened at a 1.1°C global average temperature above what it was before the industrial revolution, so 1.5°C is not some safe place that only dreamers can hope we hold to. It is where we need to be to hope human civilization hangs on. We are on track after COP26 to be much closer to 3°C than 1.5°C. Canada's target remains the weakest in the industrialized world, and we seem to have substituted what we need to do and what we must do to ensure our children have a livable world, which is 1.5°C to stay alive, with net zero by 2050. That creates the false impression that getting to net zero by 2050 holds to 1.5°C. It does not. It only holds to 1.5°C if the pathway to net zero by 2050 goes through 2030 with emission cuts that go down dramatically. They must go down. Canada's target range of a 40% to 45% cut is completely inadequate to meet the global demands on us to pull our fair share of the weight to reduce emissions to hold to a livable planet.

Likewise, in the Speech from the Throne, there is no mention of banning the export of thermal coal. There is no mention of the just transition act. There is no mention of the right to a healthy environment, nor of bringing back the Canadian Environmental Protection Act amendments that were in Bill C-28, which died on the Order Paper when the unnecessary election was called.

With the 30 seconds I have remaining, I say to all members in this place that I cannot vote for the Speech from the Throne for all of its wonderful words if the future of my grandchildren is not protected. We have to say it loudly. We have to be honest. We have to be clear. Maybe we have to tell everyone to just look up because we do not have much time. We must ensure the current government takes heroic action to save this planet and all humanity.

• (1235)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be interested in the member's thoughts with respect to the greener homes program, an initiative allowing residents in her community, in mine and throughout Canada to apply for a grant of up to \$5,000 to make their homes more energy efficient. One would argue it is good for the environment and good for job creation and improving our housing stock. I would ask her to share her thoughts on that specific program.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I cheered for that program when it was first announced by Stéphane Dion, the former environment minister, in 2005. Former finance minister Ralph Goodale had it in his budget. It is great to see it back and it is great to see it expanded to include such things as putting on solar panels, but it is far too small. We really need to be restoring housing stock and municipal, institutional and commercial buildings as well. Every building in this country needs a retrofit and needs it as fast as possible, so the program needs to be expanded dramatically.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her continued passion on climate change.

One of the things I have noticed, though, is that—

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, it seems to me that there is an imbalance in the way you are recognizing members in the House versus those who are participating virtually.

I have raised my hand several times now, and I do not know if we are in your blind spot or what, but I would like to be treated fairly. All MPs are equal. Nobody wants this situation. We would all like to be there in person, but now other parties are getting an advantage because they have far more members present in person than we do.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his intervention, and I can assure him that I do see all the members. I am trying my best to involve all members who are online or here in the House, and to ensure that all political parties are well represented.

The Address

Some of the Bloc Québécois members in the House sometimes get up at the same time, so I do my best. The member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles will be next in line to ask a question.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I thank the member for her passion. She is calling for us to accelerate our efforts to address climate change, but I would say that the government has not even met its existing 2030 targets. It is not on track. I do not know how many of the billions of trees it has started to plant, but it seems there is nothing but rhetoric coming from the other side. Would the member agree?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, this is a tough one. I cannot agree that the government has done nothing. It is putting in place programs and measures that at least should get the direction right. We often say, and this is true, that the Government of Canada, regardless of which political party is in power, has never hit a target it set. However, it is worse than that: It has never gotten the direction right. So far, no matter how many commitments are made to reduce emissions, they continue to go up.

I think we are going to begin to see emissions coming down, but that is not nearly good enough because the measure of our success is not whether we have fooled enough people to win another election. The measure of our success is whether we have met what the science demands of us to hold within a carbon budget. The window is rapidly closing on holding on to a livable world, and that is why I will give the government credit for doing something. However, I cannot claim it is doing nearly enough.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am always happy to listen to the Green Party member talk about climate change and other files, and climate change is what her speech was mainly about.

I know she is a compassionate and intelligent woman, and I would like to hear what she thinks about increasing health transfers so that they cover 35% of expenditures. All of the provinces in this country are calling for that. They need that increase in order to cope with the current situation. Along with the environment, health is at the top of the agenda.

• (1240)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Bloc Québécois member for his kind and generous words and for his question.

I think we also need to talk about the health threats resulting from climate change. I mentioned the people who died as a result of the heat waves. I agree with the Bloc Québécois that the federal government and the provinces need to collaborate more to protect our public health care systems.

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Our provincial public health care systems have been under increasing stress since the pandemic began two years ago, and the crisis continues to grow.

[English]

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak with respect to some reflections on the Speech from the Throne. I would like to focus on our priorities where there is the opportunity to work constructively with the governing party and, in fact, with all parliamentarians to make progress. These are the priorities the government has put forward in the Speech from the Throne and those I have heard about time and time again from folks in my community in Kitchener.

I would like to start with housing. In the Speech from the Throne, the governing party speaks about being committed to working with partners to get real results. I want to start with what that looks like in my community.

In the last year, we did a study on the number of unsheltered folks, which has now risen to over 1,000 people living rough and unsheltered, which is three times as many as in the last point-in-time count study.

When we look at those who are hoping to purchase a home, we find that back in 2005, the cost of purchasing a home in Kitchener was three times higher than the median annual income. In 2021, that rose to 8.6 times higher.

The possibility of purchasing a home, and I know this is the case for so many across the country, is increasingly becoming completely out of reach. For those on the wait-list for affordable dignified housing, that wait-list is now upward of almost eight years. Can members imagine waiting eight years to get access to housing?

I spoke with a woman this past summer who said she was lucky to get access to affordable housing, but there is mould in her unit, and she knows her landlord has no incentive to do anything about it. We need to be addressing not just the affordability but also the quality of dignified housing.

Homes should be for people to live in, as opposed to commodities for investors to trade. To do that, we will need to address the rules of the game. For example, we need to get back to investing in non-market, subsidized, public and co-op housing. Back in the early eighties, for example, 8% of new rental units constructed were co-op housing. I lived in a co-op myself over many years and had the experience of what quality and dignified housing co-ops can be. If we look at 2020, we see that fewer than 1% of rental units constructed were co-op housing.

We could look at taxation. For example, there are investors who are merely purchasing a property to speculate and take many years to eventually flip a home. We could put in place a graduated tax on those house flippers and use the revenue to reinvest in more affordable housing. We could be looking at what BMO has also called for, which is putting an end to the blind bidding process.

I look forward to working with the government to make progress, meaningful progress, on addressing the cost of housing.

In the throne speech, there was also talk of addressing the cost of living, which made reference to the Canada child benefit and to addressing child care. While I celebrate those initiatives, we also need to recognize a group of Canadians who are disproportionately living in poverty. They are Canadians living with disabilities.

In fact, the word “disability” was not in the throne speech once at all. We know the governing party had previously introduced legislation and introduced the Canada disability benefit. This benefit would uplift up to 1.5 million Canadians who are currently living in poverty. We know Canadians across the country support it, as 89% of Canadians already support the Canada disability benefit.

Back in Kitchener, for folks with disabilities who have access to the Ontario disability support program, the shelter allowance they are receiving is \$497 a month. How many apartments could someone afford in Kitchener on \$497 a month? The answer is none whatsoever. This is why we need to be focused on a moral imperative to lift up Canadians living with disabilities and ensure they have access to a dignified life across the country.

With respect to mental health in the throne speech, there is talk of focusing on mental health in the same way we focus on physical well-being because they are inseparable.

I could not agree more. We are in the midst of a shadow pandemic with respect to mental health and that is why we need to see increased commitments to mental health funding while recognizing the overdose crisis we are also in the midst of as a result of a poisoned drug supply.

● (1245)

In Kitchener, we had 99 preventable deaths across the Waterloo region last year alone, which is the second-highest number we have had. There are groups, including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, who are making clear calls for decriminalizing simple possession while also working towards a safer supply. These are the policies that were not mentioned in the throne speech that I would encourage the governing party to consider, recognizing the shared interest in making progress on mental health and addictions, and saving lives across the country.

This brings me to the final point. To echo comments heard earlier from the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands with respect to addressing the climate crisis, we have to simply follow the science. We are past the time for talking about whether one plan is better than another party's plan. The fact is that does not matter. All that matters is whether we choose to hold on to the possibility of keeping within the maximum of a 1.5°C increase in global temperatures.

This is true for people across my community, young and old, who are together saying that enough is enough. We have a moral imperative to ensure we provide a safe climate future for our kids, our nieces, our nephews and our grandkids.

In the words of Greta Thunberg, “Either we do that or we don’t.... Either we prevent 1.5 degree of warming or we don’t.... Either we choose to go on as a civilisation or we don’t.”

We have that opportunity today. We could be saying that maybe this is not the right time to be investing \$18 billion in subsidies to fossil fuels or purchasing and expanding a pipeline to further export more emissions around the world. Instead, we could be using those same funds, such as the funds that were announced just last month for an emissions reduction fund that actually increased oil production. We could also use this new tax credit for carbon capture and storage.

Each of these is just another subsidy to fossil fuel interests that we could be repurposing to make the choice to invest in a just transition for workers on the front lines. We could be using these, in respect to comments earlier, to build on the Canada green homes grant. The \$5,000 a month is a great start. Let us retrofit every building in the country and create millions of jobs as we do it.

Let us take the kind of action we all know is required if we are going to be honest about the science and follow through. My aspiration is to continue to work with all parliamentarians in this place and recognize that we have that shared interest in listening to the folks in our communities who are calling out to rise past the partisanship and whatever one party has called for versus another, and simply be honest about what scientists, young people and indigenous leaders have been calling out for. Whether that relates to the cost of housing, the mental health crisis, lifting folks out of poverty or addressing the climate crisis, we have to not just do some good, but go at the pace scientists tell us is required.

● (1250)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on something my colleague talked about at the beginning of his speech, namely social housing. There is a desperate shortage of housing that is not only affordable, but also economically viable for most families.

We talk about affordability meaning 10% less. I am not sure whether it is the same in his riding as it is in mine, but corporations, sometimes foreign, are building condos that go for \$2,500 a month for a two-bedroom unit. Even with an affordability framework and 10% off, is that viable? The answer is no.

What solutions would my colleague propose to ensure that our fellow citizens have access to sustainable and truly affordable housing?

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Beauport—Limoilou for her important question.

[English]

I will switch to English so that I get the words just right. It is so important that we talk about not only the investments but also the policies required for not just affordable housing, but dignified and quality housing. I look forward to a longer conversation with her and other colleagues to talk not only about the investment but also the policies required. I mentioned some on taxation, for example. I also mentioned co-op housing and other options around public and

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subsidized housing to ensure that they are truly affordable, as well as dignified.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Kitchener Centre for his focus on climate and housing in his speech.

I am certainly hearing from folks in Elmwood—Transcona who are struggling to access housing that is within their budget. I am also hearing not just from people who are struggling at the poverty line who cannot find housing, but also from folks who in their time had good middle-class jobs and were able to afford a home for their family. They are now unable to imagine how their children will be able to afford a home. I wonder if the member can speak a little to some of the actions that the government could take to try and cool the housing market. Some actions were even in the Liberals' own platform, but we have not seen them moving on that with a sense of urgency so far in this Parliament.

Also, it is clear that we need a massive investment in not just affordable housing, as the definition of which too often puts housing still out of reach for people, but also in rent-geared-to-income housing. I wonder how we could use a major capital campaign to build those units, and do it in a way that is responsive to the climate crisis, ensuring that it is done in a way that creates the most possible housing within reach for the people who need it in a way that creates the least possible emissions.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona for the question and for his advocacy in this place, particularly for seniors.

To the questions the member asked around housing, and I did not have a chance to mention this in my speech, but seniors across the country, who are often living below the poverty line, are looking at the rising cost of housing with anxiety. They are wondering whether they will be able to continue to afford the housing they live in.

The member asked about policies the government could take. One example, which the government has talked about, is a vacancy tax. We could put in place a meaningful tax on homes that are purchased by investors who have no interest in anyone ever living in them. While the government has talked about a 1% tax on non-resident, non-Canadians, we have examples across the country, in Vancouver, for example, where it is far broader.

With these kinds of measures, we could use those funds to reinvest and, to the point around climate and other opportunities, provide no-interest loans and ensure that low-income Canadians have access to the funding required for energy upgrades to reduce the energy poverty across the country as well.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for covering so many great topics in his speech.

The Address

I want to talk about affordable housing because in Sarnia we have an affordable housing crisis. Because of the lack of action on the part of the Liberals, we are now seeing an increase in homelessness. I wonder if the member could comment on what that is like in his riding. Is he seeing the same thing?

• (1255)

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, it is devastating. In my community in the Waterloo region, the number of people who are living rough, living unsheltered, has tripled. There are a variety of ways they are impacted, not only with respect to housing but also when it comes to mental health as well. I look forward to working with the hon. member to address the reality of Canadians living across the country without access to safe and quality housing.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Nickel Belt.

I would like to thank the people of Nepean for electing me for the third time to this chamber. I promise to continue to work hard in delivering services with the help of my staff, and will continue to represent them here in this august chamber.

I would also like to use this opportunity to thank my family. First is my wife Sangeetha. I have been married to her for 31 years and knew her four years before that. For 35 years, she has been a friend and equal partner in everything I have done. She is a solid rock for me. I would also like to thank and recognize my son, our only son, Siddanth, who is a chartered accountant. He is a sounding board for many of the ideas and thoughts I have in my work as a member of Parliament. Many times he is a partner in very in-depth intellectual discussions, whether related to the crypto economy, to MMT, modern monetary theory, or to historical accords and linking historical facts to current geopolitical events. I thank my family, who have been with me throughout these years.

I would also like to thank the great group of volunteers who helped me win this election, the third one in a row. One distinguishing feature of this campaign with this group of volunteers is that 80% of them were students. These young Canadians worked hard and helped me get elected. It is these young Canadians, our children and grandchildren, who were the focus when I first entered politics.

I entered politics with three main objectives, one of which was that I wanted to ensure Canadian society and the economy remained robust and competitive in the global knowledge-based economy, thus securing prosperity for our children and grandchildren. Today, we are rich. Canada is prosperous because of the natural advantage we have from our natural resources. With our oil, gas, minerals, metals and forestry products, combined with the hard work done by several generations of Canadians, we enjoy prosperity and a high standard of living today. However, five or 10 years down the road these natural advantages will not be sufficient to ensure our continued prosperity. The global economy is going toward a knowledge-based economy, and I want to work hard so that Canada is at the forefront of this knowledge-based economy.

Let me quickly go through some of the technologies that dominate this knowledge-based economy. They include artificial intelligence, energy storage, quantum computing, robotics, genome sequencing and blockchain technologies. These technologies in the

knowledge-based economy do not just affect the businesses, the corporate sector and the economy. They have a big impact on the entire Canadian society and our way of life. It is therefore very important for us to recognize this now and take action so that we continue to be at the front end of these technologies.

In this knowledge-based economy, the natural advantages we have will not ensure prosperity because there is a flat world out there. Our children and Canadians today have to compete with students from different parts of the world, whether from Sydney, Australia; Tokyo, Japan; Shanghai, China; Frankfurt, Germany; or Mumbai, India. Everywhere there is competition in this knowledge-based economy because everybody has a level playing field. We therefore need to empower our children to be quite competitive in that world.

• (1300)

Let me quickly go through some of the specific examples and how they affect us.

On artificial intelligence, three of the world's most accomplished and deep thinkers, former Google executive Eric Schmidt, Henry Kissinger and Daniel Huttenlocher, have recently written a book on artificial intelligence, the way it is transforming human society and what this technology means for all of us. Today, artificial intelligence has learned to win chess by making moves that human grandmasters had never conceived. Another AI discovered a new antibiotic analyzing molecular properties that human scientists did not understand. Now, artificial intelligence-powered jets are defeating experienced human pilots in simulated dogfights. Artificial intelligence is coming online in searching, streaming, medicine, education and many other fields, and in doing so, it is transforming how humans are experiencing reality.

The second quick point is on genomics. To sequence the first whole human genome in 2000, the human genome project cost over \$3.7 billion and took 13 years of computing power. Today, the same thing costs less than \$1,000 and takes a few hours.

Third, the trillion-dollar transportation sector is actually changing dramatically today. Battery-powered vehicles are a reality. This may not be true so much in Canada, but it is a big reality in China, some parts of Europe and the United States. We have to invest to make it possible. We need to be at the forefront of those technologies.

On the issue of the batteries, Canada has the natural advantage of having the rare minerals that are required in the manufacture of battery cells. What we need is a comprehensive plan to develop the mines, process the minerals, manufacture the batteries, pack the battery cells and obviously get into vehicle production. We need to do that, and we are still very far away from it.

For the knowledge-based economy, we have made significant investments in the last budget: about \$440 million for the pan-Canadian artificial intelligence strategy, \$360 million to launch a national quantum strategy, \$90 million for the Canadian Photonics Fabrication Centre and \$400 million in support of a pan-Canadian geonomics strategy. We have made these investments. Also, for a clean and green future for a transition from internal combustion engines to battery-operated electric vehicles, we have established the critical battery minerals centre of excellence.

I have called for the immediate establishment of a task force to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for the development of mines and technology for battery manufacturing in Canada. We need a team Canada approach to understand the impact of these new technologies on the new knowledge-based economies, and the impact they are having not just on the economic sector, but also in Canadian society in our day-to-day lives. We must be ready for that. We need to keep Canada at the forefront of these new technologies in the knowledge-based economy to ensure that we continue to remain prosperous and that the standard of living we enjoy today is available to our children and grandchildren too.

• (1305)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for a fulsome explanation of how we should be using our natural resources and technology.

In a recent example, the government felt that it was not necessary to keep control of a lithium hydroxide mine because we do not have the capacity to do anything with it. The member opposite talked about batteries, but the future we are looking forward to includes an energy source from nuclear fusion. While the Chrétien government, way back when, decided that Canada would not be a part of it, we are closer to the realization of being able to use it. Lithium is one of the components we use in producing the plasma that is concentrated with energy so that more energy comes out, as opposed to going in. That is how we will be powering our vehicles of the future.

When we look at clean energy and the opportunity that nuclear fusion affords, what does the member opposite see in the technology and the AI that Canada has that will give us a piece of that so that our country can enjoy an aspect of this clean, smog-free, efficient fuel that is coming in the future?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, on the question of lithium and the other minerals that are required for the manufacturing of batteries for the next generation of technologies, I am glad to state that Canada and the U.S. are working hand in hand. They are developing a comprehensive strategy for the development of mines, for the development of processing units and for the battery manufacturers themselves.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member was talking about the development of technology and the next generation. Of course, this is also about the next generation of incredible intellectuals, minds and workers in the fields he was talking about. They will be trying to expand that economy and knowledge base. However, the government is not doing a good job of ensuring that students have the ability to get the education they need. There are incredible barriers in their way.

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The government has put forward some temporary supports for students, but when will the government permanently take away its collection of interest on student loans? When will it follow the NDP's lead on ensuring that students do not have to deal with financial barriers so they can actually compete and fully give to this incredible next generation and our economy?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, students are very important, as I mentioned in my speech. We have to make Canada competitive so that Canada can be at the forefront of these technologies, for the sake of our children and grandchildren. We need to make sure that our students are trained in STEM, in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. These are the building blocks of the new knowledge-based economy.

When I go to schools, I ask the students what they want to do. If somebody wants to become a carpenter, doctor or lawyer, I say that is good. For the students who say that they do not know what they want to do, I always suggest that they study math and physics. We need to invest. All levels of government need to invest in education, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned at the beginning of his very thoughtful speech the issue of cryptocurrency. Like him, I too have a son, and we have conversations about cryptocurrency, which I barely understand. However, my son, and I dare say his son, actually do understand.

I would be interested in his thoughts about what the Government of Canada's role, particularly the Department of Finance's role, should be in the regulation and taxation of exchanges in cryptocurrency.

• (1310)

Mr. Chandra Arya: Mr. Speaker, the crypto economy is new. It is just starting. As my colleague emphasized, it is very important that we bring in regulations to have an orderly market. Right now, it is the wild west in the crypto economy around the world, so the governments of different countries need to sit together and make uniform rules and regulations to manage this.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to represent the people of Nickel Belt for a third time. I am also honoured to speak today on the Speech from the Throne.

The Address

[English]

The parliamentary session resumed yesterday. I am grateful to be in Ottawa to represent the residents of Nickel Belt, and will continue to advocate for their priorities and strive to deliver solutions. Although these uncertain times have created challenges, there are so many opportunities afoot to move forward in a progressive and positive way. I am looking forward to the debates in the House and also in my riding.

The actions over the last few days and the weekend by some of the protesters in our nation's capital raise serious public safety concerns and undermine our right to a safe democratic process. There is no place for symbols of hate, for disrespectful actions on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, for defacing public property or for intimidating residents, business owners or parliamentary staff.

Truckers have always been important to our country's economic prosperity. They have stepped up throughout the pandemic and remain essential. The safety of truckers continues to be our government's priority, which is why Transport Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency have been working closely with the industry throughout this process to ensure that companies and drivers are prepared. To reiterate, both the governments of Canada and the United States have made being vaccinated a requirement to cross the border.

Our path forward post-pandemic and beyond needs to be built on a foundation of respect and on mitigating the spread of misinformation. Social media reporting of some of the events emboldens extreme behaviours and leaves little room for positive, impactful and real action. We must denounce further division based on fear. I encourage all of us here, and all of our constituents, to connect with members of the community on how to truly advance change. One way to do that is to be deeply engaged in the democratic process, which means showing up to vote, consuming credible information and holding our elected officials accountable at election time and during campaigns.

MPs are the people's voice, and I am as committed as ever to each of my residents in Nickel Belt. I have kept a grassroots approach when engaging with Nickel Belt residents, and I will continue to meet with individuals who have varying opinions on topics while seeking to preserve the safety and development of the region. The right to protest is fundamental, but when we see a movement propped up with hate, racism and intimidation, which happened to my home and family, we have to ask ourselves what we are truly supporting. I wish my colleagues, the residents of Ottawa and all involved parties a safe and peaceful resolution to this convoy initiative happening today. Disagreements should not incite violence and threats. We are Canadian.

• (1315)

[Translation]

Let us get back to today's debate and my desire to build a resilient economy and a cleaner, healthier future for our children. That is my top priority for people of Nickel Belt. After 19 months of dealing with the kind of pandemic that only comes along once every 100 years, Canadians made a choice in September to continue with our Liberal plan. They gave us a clear mandate to put

COVID-19 behind us and find real solutions to build a better future for Canadians.

Today we laid out our Liberal plan, which will finish our fight against COVID-19, take tough action on climate change, make life more affordable, move forward together on the path to reconciliation, help Canadians become homeowners, and create jobs while growing the middle class.

The people of Nickel Belt expect all parliamentarians to focus on the important issues that matter and work together to deliver results.

If we want to build a better future, we must first get the pandemic under control and continue our vaccination efforts. That is why I want to congratulate Nickel Belt residents for their high vaccination rates. We will continue to encourage eligible Canadians to get vaccinated against COVID-19.

We will take steps to address surgical delays brought on by COVID-19, improve long-term care, and provide easier access to mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Now, Parliament must come together to move forward on what matters most to the people in our ridings.

[English]

We must put the pandemic behind us. We will truly rebuild an economy for everyone while tackling the rising cost of living, housing affordability and child care. We have signed agreements with the provinces for hundreds of thousands of new spaces across the country in the early learning and child care system.

[Translation]

As we strive to build a resilient economy, create jobs and grow the middle class, it is also important to cap and cut our emissions, invest in public transit and mandate the sale of zero-emission vehicles. I am proud of the work that Nickel Belt residents are doing to create a green economy and green jobs.

Together, we need to go further, faster on implementing climate action, not only to protect our environment, but also to grow our economy by getting all workers involved.

Northern Ontario has experience in creating a green economy and green jobs in the mining and forestry industries. It is important to continue to build on that work.

[English]

We have to move faster on the path of reconciliation. Canadians were horrified by the discovery of unmarked graves and burial sites located near former residential schools. As a country and as a government, we must continue to tell the truths of these tragedies. We will continue to support indigenous peoples and their communities by investing in distinctions-based mental health and wellness strategies, and we will ensure fair and equitable compensation for those harmed by the first nations child and family services program.

I want to thank the three first nations communities in Nickel Belt: Atikameksheng Anishinawbek, Wahnapiatae and Mattagami first nations play a proactive role in each other's communities.

[Translation]

We have a Liberal team that will continue to work to keep all Canadians safe and help them get ahead, regardless of their gender, who they love, or their background, language, faith or skin colour. We will also stand up for the LGBTQ+ community by banning conversion therapy.

As the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Official Languages, I am also looking forward to the tabling of a bill on our two official languages. We will continue to promote French across Canada, particularly in northern Ontario.

The Official Languages Act is very important to me and my constituents in Nickel Belt. I will continue to work closely with them to find solutions to grow our economy and create jobs in northern Ontario.

• (1320)

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, because he shared his reflections on the disturbing demonstrations we have seen over the few days coming out of the nation's capital, I want to ask my colleague to share his views on how unacceptable it is that members of the Conservative Party, and the Conservative Leader himself, have shown support for these demonstrations.

They have provided caveats in the last 24 hours, but should we not, as leaders, be standing up unequivocally against the hateful, racist, discriminatory displays we have seen over the last few days? Should we not also be calling for leadership in the sense of asking these demonstrators to leave Ottawa, and finding ways to stand against hate in our communities and build safer, healthier communities for all?

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question.

It is important that we reach out to individual Canadians. They need to be heard and we need to find solutions, and all parties in the House of Commons need to do this. It is so important. Yes, we call out the hate and the violence, but more importantly, we need to find a solution together to make sure we understand why certain individuals are not getting vaccinated. We need to understand why there are threats and why there is misinformation. Together, we need to find a way to make sure that we support our health care workers, our nurses and doctors, because hospitalization rates are really

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high, and we have a lot that is being cancelled. We need to be there to listen to the protest, but we also need to get some resolution and move forward. The protesters have made their point. Now let us move forward.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when I read the throne speech, I did not see much in there that was new since the last Parliament. The main message I got, and this is something we hear a lot, was the word “continuity”. We continue on.

I am very happy that my constituents re-elected me, but the election cost \$620 million. If the government is just going to continue doing what it was doing, why spend that much money? Where should that money have been spent instead to serve our society?

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Since the start of the pandemic, the federal government has spent \$8 of every \$10 in aid to provinces, municipalities, individuals and businesses. We were there to support the provinces. We need to keep playing that role, but we also have to look at how we can stimulate economic recovery and make jobs greener.

The people exercised their democratic right last fall. Canadians have spoken. The people of my riding, Nickel Belt, tell me they want the Parliament of Canada and political parties here in Ottawa to work together and find solutions that will move us forward.

[English]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talked a lot about democracy, rights and freedoms in his speech. The Conservatives on this side of the aisle will always stand for the rights and freedoms of Canadians, and we will always call out bad and unacceptable behaviour like violence and desecration. When is the party on the other side of the aisle going to start standing up for the Charter of Rights that is being trampled right now? I think I would also agree with the former member who spoke who said that we should not have hate and racist comments, especially not from the Prime Minister.

Could the member opposite respond?

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I have sat on several committees together working to find common solutions, but the tone of her question is a bit disappointing.

Both the official opposition and the government are there to support the freedom and rights of individuals. We have to continue to do that. We have to respect the charter, but we also have to look at how we get out of this pandemic. It is a health crisis around the world, and we have to find ways to get people vaccinated and get the economy up and running again.

The Address

• (1325)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to say happy new year to all my colleagues and to just say how great it is to be physically back here in the House with everybody.

Last November's throne speech brought us the standard empty words with no real plan to solve any of the numerous problems Canadians are facing today: home affordability, inflation, rising home heating costs, a supply chain disaster and the labour shortage crisis that we see in this country. Everyday Canadians who do not have access to a trust fund like the Prime Minister does are hurting the most, yet the government would paint a happy picture and say, "Nothing to see here. All is good."

The people of Calgary Forest Lawn are some of the hardest hit by the out-of-touch Prime Minister's failing policies. He is out there virtue signalling and dividing Canadians, while my constituents live paycheque to paycheque. Some of them are worried about where their next meal will come from or how they will pay rent, let alone an even more expensive carbon tax. I really should not be shocked. This is the same Prime Minister who does not think about monetary policy or how his massive money-printing operation will affect Canadians. It is Justinflation.

Instead of focusing on growing the economy, empowering entrepreneurs and attracting investors, the Prime Minister sells Canadian companies to China without any national security review. He ignores the untapped potential of Alberta's oil and gas sector, and instead imports oil from countries like Russia, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. While he might be making the green left happy with his "leave it in the ground" mentality, Canadians suffer the most with his ridiculous policies. Our energy industry's environmental, social and governance standards are the highest in the world, and supporting this sector creates good-paying, Canadian jobs.

This mismanagement does not just stop with the economy. We have seen the government's failure to stand up for Canadian interests abroad. The Prime Minister and his cabinet would rather get close with the Communist Party of China than the people in Hong Kong who are standing up for democracy and freedom. Our global commitment to our allies is weak at best.

In Ukraine, the Canadian government would rather give a loan and some non-lethal equipment than the defensive weapons that Ukraine needs. Other NATO countries, like the U.S. and the U.K., are supplying Ukraine with weapons, and European countries have committed ships and fighter jets to the defence of our ally. After what we saw in Afghanistan, we cannot be surprised that the government would rather deliver flowery statements than roll up its sleeves and get to work defending our friends. Much like what happened in Afghanistan, this is a pure failure on the government's part.

Around 10,000 Afghan interpreters and their families remain stranded. Those people who served the Canadian government alongside our brave Canadian Armed Forces are now forgotten by the Liberal government. They are hunted by Taliban fighters looking for retribution while the government stands idly by. The Prime Minister pats himself on the back for a job well failed, while saying it is too hard to help the people on the ground.

My office has received dozens of emails from Afghan refugees stuck in Afghanistan. They have applied for the special immigration programs, but still IRCC has ignored them. The government only sends auto-replies or leaves people unread. The stories these refugees are sharing with my office are heartbreaking. Families have had their homes taken by the Taliban, parents and siblings shot and children left to starve. The humanitarian situation is so bad that parents are now selling their children and organs to try to earn money to feed starving family members.

• (1330)

Of the 40,000 promised Afghan refugees, there have been about 7,000 who have made it to Canada. Only 4,300 of those 7,000 were refugees who applied under the special immigration program for people who assisted the Government of Canada. Instead of working with veterans and NGOs to get the most vulnerable out of Afghanistan, or even the private sponsors willing to assist in resettling refugees in Canada, IRCC has shut everyone out.

To say the situation in Afghanistan is dire would be an understatement, yet IRCC, Global Affairs, National Defence and the Prime Minister continue to be uncoordinated. There is no plan, and there seems to be no hope for our allies left behind in Afghanistan. A lack of a plan seems to be standard with the Liberal government. At IRCC, things are worse, as thousands of immigrants remain stuck in the government's massive backlogs. Liberals say that they will continue increasing immigration levels while also reducing wait times, yet IRCC has not released a proper plan.

As of December, over 1.8 million immigration applications were stuck in the Liberal-made backlog, and it is growing. There are so many newcomers stuck, waiting months or years for applications to be processed. These are families who remain separated and businesses that are looking to fill jobs. This is hurting our economy and hurting families.

There are several ongoing cases in my office that have not moved since even before the pandemic. Earlier this month, I wrote a letter to the Minister of Immigration asking him to finally deliver a plan to clear the Liberal-made backlog. I have not received a response, and 1.8 million people are still waiting for theirs.

Newcomers to Canada deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. That honestly starts by developing a reliable, transparent and effective immigration system. Our country cannot afford to shut out hard-working immigrants, entrepreneurs and investors looking to come to Canada to live the Canadian dream. Temporary foreign workers and Canadian employers cannot wait years to get LMIA's processed and their applications approved. Our economy cannot handle the growing labour shortage crisis. The economic impact of this historic and increasing backlog has cost billions to our economy and cost Canadian businesses their future.

It seems Liberals are focused on immigration for political gain instead of helping people looking to come to Canada. As it stands now, children, spouses and grandparents are left separated from their loved ones. Parents have missed the birth of their children, first steps and even graduations. Families cannot say goodbye to their loved ones or attend funerals. This is all due to the Liberal-made backlog in immigration.

No one should be punished with family separation in this country simply because they want to start a new life here. The Liberals' mismanagement of the immigration system is absolutely unacceptable. Now is the time to have a real, concrete plan. The clock is ticking and immigrants and Canadians deserve to know how long it will take to clear this historic backlog. Now is not the time for more empty promises and flashy announcements that lead nowhere. There are so many people waiting for answers and hoping to call Canada home.

Canadians are tired of the division and arrogance shown by the government. As we begin a new session of Parliament, let us address the concerns of everyday Canadians. The government must clear the backlogs at IRCC and get our allies in Afghanistan out of harm's way. We must stand up to the regimes in China, Russia and Afghanistan. We must show the world that Canada still has the guts to be a peacekeeper, a defender of democracy and an advocate for freedom.

At home, the Liberal Prime Minister must reduce inflation and improve Canada's cost of living. As an Albertan, I will never stop fighting for Canada's energy industry, even when Ottawa gives in to special interests and foreign influences. My colleagues and I in the Conservative caucus will continue to give a voice to all Canadians, especially those left behind by the Liberal government.

Canada is at a crossroad, and choosing the status quo is a recipe for disaster.

• (1335)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have concerns right now. In the Speech from the Throne, it says the government is continuing to work on the reform of policing in Canada, yet we have not seen any action.

In fact, right now we are hearing from land defenders, from indigenous communities, who see a double standard happening in Canada. We have a protest right now that is keeping Ottawa under siege. Seniors and people living with disabilities cannot access medicine or food. In Alberta, the member's home province, those same types of protesters are keeping that border, not just an artery but the border, under siege right now. Goods and services are start-

ing to get destroyed because of the waiting, and workers cannot get access to medicine and food.

Does my colleague not agree there is a double standard, and what does he propose to unlock the seizure? Does he think this is acceptable behaviour?

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Coutts border, which is what I think my hon. colleague is talking about, the Premier of Alberta made it very clear that he has asked for it to be cleared up, but I want to talk about what the underlying message of these hard-working truckers is. They just want to be heard.

My colleague on the other side said that everyone needs to be listened to, yet the Prime Minister and the Liberal caucus refuse to listen to the real concerns of hard-working everyday Canadians. There is more division in this country than we have ever seen before, caused by the Prime Minister's name-calling and pitting one region against another, one industry against another and one group against another. Real leadership unites people. It brings people together. Even though we all have differing ideas and ideologies, true leadership brings people together.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night the Afghanistan committee started really digging deep into the situation in Afghanistan. We are hearing horrific stories of desperation, despair and an economy that is collapsing, and that there was lack of preparation on the part of the Canadian government to really be prepared for that crisis developing.

Based on what we are hearing so far and what the member has heard from his constituents, how much did the Canadian government let down not just the people of Afghanistan but Canadians who are in Afghanistan?

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Barrie—Innisfil for his great advocacy for the people in Afghanistan.

The failure in Afghanistan started well before the Prime Minister called a very selfish election, abandoning those who served Canada and putting \$650 million more debt onto Canadians. This started way before that, because there were refugees of Hazara, Sikh and Hindu faith that were stuck in Afghanistan for many years. I was personally honoured to sponsor a family from there in 2015, and what I saw through my own experience was that it took the Liberal government four years to bring a persecuted family to Canada, a family that was afraid its daughter would be kidnapped, forcefully married and raped while all she was doing was going to school every single day. It took the government that knew that four years to get that family here.

This epic failure in Afghanistan is a trend by the Liberal government. It needs to step up, take the recommendations seriously and defend and stand up for those who stood up for Canada in their time of need.

*The Address**[Translation]*

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Afghanistan is indeed alarming, and there have been many calls for assistance.

There is another, less dangerous immigration issue, namely, international students, that is causing economic problems in Quebec, in my riding and in each of the provinces. The problem particularly affects francophone students, whose applications are systematically rejected. I would like my colleague to comment on this situation and on the improvements that should be made to the immigration system.

• (1340)

[English]

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Speaker, I would inform my hon. colleague from Quebec that this is a study currently being done in the citizenship and immigration committee. The report that came out is very alarming regarding the systemic racism that has been taking place within the IRCC. It is not only discriminating against its own employees, but much like what my hon. colleague was talking about, there are reports of people from Africa being called “the dirty 30”. That is what Africa is being referred to. This is very concerning. I questioned the immigration minister about that the first chance I could in the last session. He was patting himself on the back for a job well failed. There is no action plan to address racism.

I will say it again. What can we expect from the Minister of Immigration to address racism, when he could not even stand up to the Prime Minister's racist blackface? Until that is addressed, I do not think we can have very much confidence that the Liberal government is serious about addressing racism in the IRCC.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a privilege to get up and speak in the House on behalf of the constituents of Saskatoon West.

Nearly six months ago we had an election call, and the Liberal Party leader said that this was the most important election since World War II. It has taken him months to swear in his cabinet and recall Parliament. It has been 69 days since the throne speech, and MPs are still here in the House debating that very first item of business on the government's agenda.

For some context, we had the election, and then Thanksgiving, Remembrance Day, Christmas and New Year's. Now it is February, and we are still talking about this. I would suggest that this government is tired. It is struggling to get anything done. Fair enough; it has been difficult with COVID for all of these months, but this is exactly when our leaders need to step up and provide that inspiring leadership. This is when we need to lead.

With this in mind, there are too many things that I want to discuss today, but one is the trucker convoy protest, and the second is the situation in Ukraine.

We cannot help but notice the protests that are going on outside today. If we listen to the Liberals, the NDP or the media, we would think that Ottawa was under attack by these protesters. The NDP leader said, “I am concerned by extremist elements that are spreading misinformation and attempting to turn the convoy into a Cana-

dian version of the terrorist attacks on the US Capitol.” I think the leader of the NDP needs to be concerned about his own spreading of misinformation.

The truth is that this was all started by our hard-working truckers, who are tired of COVID restrictions. If we spent any time among them, we would have seen tens of thousands of people of all races, colours, genders, sexual orientations and languages protesting vaccine mandates peacefully. We would see families, including young children who were either joining in the protest or giving encouragement.

Now, we also saw a few bad seeds joining in, and this is common for any public protest these days. Look at any Black Lives Matter event, and we will see a few troublemakers. In Canada, we have seen troublemakers knock the head off the Queen Victoria statue in Manitoba, tear down the Sir John A. statue in Montreal and put flags on the Terry Fox statue here, and we in this room condemn all of that. Of course, I condemn anyone promoting hate speech or hate symbols in this protest. However, I have also seen in this protest people picking up garbage, people cleaning up, people praying at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. These are stories that the media fail to report.

Listen, I am not saying that I agree with everything they are protesting about, not at all, but when such a large group of Canadians take time off work and spend their hard-earned money to come to Ottawa, we have to hear them out. We have to listen to what they are saying. I am calling on all of us politicians to meet with these folks and listen to what they have to say, even if we do not agree with them. They deserve to be heard. I am asking the Prime Minister to talk with these folks. Do not be afraid of them. Do not hide, but go and actually talk to them. We might be surprised with what they say. If we talk to them, we will find normal, hard-working people tired of COVID. They want an end to lockdowns, vaccine mandates and disruptions.

Now, regarding the vaccine mandate for truckers specifically, what they are asking for is very similar to what Conservatives have been saying since last summer. First, we have been encouraging people to get vaccinated. Next, we have been encouraging employers to make accommodations for those people who do not want to get vaccinated. Specifically for truckers, our leader has been calling for measures to accommodate truckers since before Christmas. However, there is something deeper here, and it is what is causing tens of thousands of Canadians to honk their horns in support of the truckers and is at the root of this whole thing: People are tired of lockdowns. On this, I believe the protesters share the feelings of a great many Canadians.

The question in a nutshell is this: How do we get back to normal? I have always supported and encouraged vaccinations, and a great many of these protesters are vaccinated. In fact, we know that about 90% of truckers in Canada are vaccinated, but Canadians are tired. The government actions so far have had undesired side effects. There is tremendous division in our country. Good luck to someone who is on a surgery waiting list right now. Loneliness and mental health have brought much despair to people, causing suicides to go up. In short, we are giving up on all the things that give us life, and it has been two years. We are into the umpteenth variant, and thankfully, they are getting less deadly as we move forward, but people just want to know where we are going from here.

On vaccinations, Canada's stated goal is to achieve 80% of adults vaccinated for diseases like the flu, and COVID is no different. Here is the good news: We are there. Canada has greater than 80% of our population vaccinated, which is among the highest percentages in the world. Last July, the Prime Minister said that the country should be aiming to get more than 80% of the eligible population vaccinated if we're going to be safe.

● (1345)

We are there. We have achieved our goal. Let us celebrate and start working to dismantle some of the restrictions.

Let us look at Saskatchewan. We have taken a “less lockdown” approach here. We have had no restrictions on restaurants and no gathering limits for the past few months. Rather than having government restrictions, we have empowered our people to do their own rapid tests and make their own decisions about whether to gather or not. The result of this is that the COVID situation in Saskatchewan is the same as or a bit better than everywhere else in Canada. In our experience, strict government regulations and restrictions are not a factor in the results. In fact, more loosening is coming to Saskatchewan very soon. The Premier said that Saskatchewan will be ending our proof of vaccination policy in the very near future. Why is that? It is because the policy has achieved the goal it set out to reach. We have been successful at getting people vaccinated.

To come back to the truckers' protest, they want to know when this is going to end. They want to know that all this sacrifice has been leading somewhere. Many scientists now agree that we need to learn to live with COVID. That is what the truckers are asking for, and most Canadians would agree. Let us find a way back to a new normal. Instead of creating a division, it is time for our leaders to step up and lead.

On Ukraine, Canada's overseas foreign relations are also looking very tired. Once a trusted ally and reliable partner, Canada has been reduced by the Liberals to being a bit player with little to offer our allies. Now we are facing something we have not seen since World War II. We are moving from peace to the prospect of war in Europe. Our allies in Ukraine are asking us for help, and we are offering hollow words, gestures and hashtags when our friends and allies are asking for much more.

There is a significant Ukrainian diaspora on Saskatchewan. Over 16% of Saskatoon's population is of Ukrainian origin. Canada has the third-largest ethnic Ukrainian population on the planet. I grew up in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, which has a very large Ukrainian

The Address

population, and community get-togethers as a kid always involved awesome food like borscht, perogies and cabbage rolls. Of course, in Saskatchewan we are very proud of Governor General Ray Hnatyshyn, who is of Ukrainian heritage.

Conservatives are fully supportive of Ukrainians throughout Canada and the democratically elected Government of Ukraine. We stand with Ukraine.

In my riding of Saskatoon West, the Ukrainian community has reached out to me. On Sunday, Martin Zip, president of the All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Brotherhood, wrote to me as follows:

I call on you to support:

1. Accelerating a NATO Membership Action Plan for Ukraine;
2. Increasing sanctions on Russia to deter further aggression against Ukraine;
3. Ensuring that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline never becomes operational;
4. Increasing the provision of military equipment and defensive weapons to Ukraine;
5. Extending and expanding Operation UNIFIER, Canada's military training mission in Ukraine.

After our pushing the issue, the Liberals finally agreed to extend the training mission, Operation Unifier, by three years, and they also provided a \$120-million loan, but this falls very short of what our friends actually asked for. What about the other requests?

The Conservatives are calling for providing lethal defensive weapons to Ukraine. Ukrainians are facing a much larger, much better equipped Russian army right on their doorstep. In their hour of need, they are begging their allies for support and equipment. Other nations have answered the call. The U.S., the U.K., Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, the Czech Republic are all there. Where is Canada? We are sending tweets.

We also need to restore the RADARSAT imaging that was previously provided when we were in government. It provides key world-class intelligence information. It is a very simple thing that we can do to help our friends in their hour of need.

What about their request for sanctions? Sanctions on American and European goods and services technology could do significant damage to the Russian economy. We could remove Russia from the SWIFT banking system. We could impose Magnitsky sanctions on the individuals holding the wealth of Putin and other Russian leaders. This would freeze their assets outside of Russia.

Our tired Liberal government needs to step up and help our friends in their time of need. I long for the days when Canada was a real leader on the world stage. I remember when Prime Minister Harper looked Putin in the eye and said, “Get out of Ukraine.”

The Address

Today Canada is missing in action. What do Ukraine across the planet and truckers here at home have in common? It is a tired Liberal-NDP government in Ottawa that has run out of ideas. The throne speech said, “Canada must stand up on the pressing challenges of our time”. With nearly six months of pressing challenges, including truckers, Ukraine, inflation and the housing crisis, there is very little engagement and very little action. This is a tired government, intent on creating division rather than on leading. It is time for us to step up and lead. It is time for the last and final chapter of the COVID era.

• (1350)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member asks when it will end, and I think that is a live question for all of us, truckers and non-truckers alike. When will it end? Does the member actually think there is an answer to when COVID will end? We have had three or four waves of COVID, and maybe tomorrow there will be another wave coming.

First, does the member actually think that this is an answerable question?

Second, why is it that the focus of the complaints by the truckers is here? The mandates for masks, for distancing, etc., in Ontario are largely made at Queen's Park, yet I do not see any protests there, which is where, as I understand it, the bulk of the complaints are coming from.

If the member could answer those questions, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Speaker, the protests we saw in Toronto were about denouncing Israel, and unfortunately we never saw anything about that on the news. Apparently that is not important to our media.

The real question is, will this end? Is it possible to make this end? I would submit that large problems require creative solutions. If we do nothing, then the member is exactly right: This will never end. We will remain in a cycle of a variant and a lockdown and a variant and a lockdown. That is what I am calling out.

That is what the truckers and all Canadians want. They want us as leaders to show some creativity, some different ways of attacking this problem. Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result is defined as insanity. We need to try different things.

Yes, I think we can conquer this. We can find a way to live with whatever COVID looks like going into the future, normalize it, get on with our lives and start to live again.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his speech, my colleague talked about the frustration being displayed on Parliament Hill since the weekend and as this session began. Many Canadians and Quebecers are equally frustrated with the public health measures, which are affecting our daily lives and our activities. I am well aware that many people are anxious for these measures to be lifted.

However, I would like to ask my colleague if he has visited a health care facility, hospital, long-term care home or medical facility

in general to check in on the staff and see how they are doing. There is a staffing shortage. These people are burning out. They are exhausted, and they are asking for the measures to be maintained to help them get through the pandemic crisis.

We are going to need our health care workers after the crisis. We need to take care of them now.

I would like to hear my colleague's comments on this.

[English]

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that our health care workers and our health care providers in this country deserve medals of honour. They have been working extremely hard. I think all of us in this House would salute them.

What it is really showing is that we have a deficiency in health care in our country. Our budgets need to get higher in this area, because we do not have enough resources. Our hospitals are over-taxed at the best of times and our care homes need help. All of these things have come to light because of COVID.

I believe we need to work harder. We need to thank our health care workers. We need more of them. We need more resources in the health care field.

• (1355)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must say I was disturbed by the remarks from the member for Saskatoon West.

I just want to cite some figures from yesterday. The total number of confirmed cases of COVID in British Columbia is 324,615, with 4,075 new cases yesterday, 2,616 total deaths, 1,048 hospitalized cases, and 138 in intensive care. The member acts as if COVID is gone and that we could simply give up following public health care advice and give in to the pressure group that represents a tiny minority of truckers.

Does the member really believe we could get out of this COVID pandemic without following public health measures?

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am not saying that we should not follow public health measures, but I am giving a perspective from Saskatchewan. We have taken a bit of a different approach. We have had fewer lockdowns and fewer restrictions, and the results have been similar, so there are ways that we could manage through this by using our creativity. We can do this.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say, first off, that I am splitting my time with the hon. member for Humber River—Black Creek. Whatever time I do have, I will leave for her.

This is my first opportunity to thank the people of Scarborough—Guildwood for my re-election. This will be my 24th year in the House of Commons, nine elections. Some may question the sanity of the citizens of Scarborough—Guildwood, but I am quite grateful.

I am also grateful to the small army of volunteers who have helped me over the years to be here and to represent the people of Scarborough—Guildwood. For some apparent reason they seem to think I continue to do a decent job, and I hope to continue to work for their faith.

I know it is always a dangerous thing to thank individuals, but I want to particularly recognize the work of Layla, Meena and Atik; Natasha and Mark; and Napas, all of whom worked 24-7 for the entire election period. Of course this was a pretty challenging election for all of us. We had to do things differently.

Finally, far from least, I want to thank my wife Carolyn, who has been at my side for the last 24 years, actually far more than these 24 years. She is an amazing woman with amazing accomplishments, and probably the most amazing thing of all is that she continues to love me and be married to me. I know we are all grateful for miracles.

I originally started to write out these thoughts in November, because that is when the reply to the Speech from the Throne started. Here we are six to eight weeks later. I looked over my notes the other day, and they are somewhat irrelevant at this point. In part this is because, if it is said that a week is a long time in politics, in truth two months is even longer, so I have had to do a rewrite. Indeed, the pandemic has changed everything. I want to just turn to the topic at hand and concentrate on the issues of the economy. I hope to add a little bit more light than heat, but that is not always true in this chamber.

I have noted a lot of discussion about inflation, something in the order of 4.8% last month. In the United States it is 7%. There is this endless conversation about whether we are better than the OECD average or poorer than the OECD average. The comparators become a little meaningless over time, but the reality is that this is a worldwide phenomenon. Canada, as a large trading nation where 40% of our GDP is dependent on trade, is particularly vulnerable to the economic currents outside of its borders. For the time being at least, inflation will be a reality and a preoccupation of this government and, indeed, any government.

The second point I wanted to make, assuming I have a little bit of time, is on the issue of interest rates. Currently, rates are quite low, but I was gratified to hear the Bank of Canada's governor indicate that it is going to be addressed and he is on the way to addressing that. I personally would have preferred a little action a little bit sooner, because I too was consumed with the grocery aisle indicators of inflation.

I look forward to expanding on these profound thoughts. I know my hon. colleagues will wait in their seats to hear what I have to say after question period

• (1400)

The Deputy Speaker: I want to thank the member for Scarborough—Guildwood. He will have five minutes when we return after Routine Proceedings.

Statements by Members

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of my colleagues, staff, constituents in Richmond Centre, and Asian communities across Canada a happy lunar new year. Today is the first day of the lunar calendar and we are entering the Year of the Tiger, a symbol of strength and bravery.

Canadians have always demonstrated resilience and the ability to come together when needed the most. Although celebrations may continue to look different this year, I hope everyone has the opportunity to exchange warm wishes with friends, family and loved ones. With the courage of the tiger, let us reflect on the years we have had and remain strong as we finish this fight against COVID-19. Let us look forward to a brighter and better future. I wish everyone who is celebrating a joyful lunar new year filled with prosperity, success and, above all, good health.

Happy lunar new year. *Chúc mừng năm mới. Sun nien fai lok. Gong xi fa cai.*

CHARITIES

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past two years, Canadians have endured some of the most difficult times in a generation. While charities from across this great country have stepped up to help families in need by providing much-needed services, they too are struggling to provide the help that is so desperately needed. Charities have not been receiving the contributions that they need to do their work as their traditional donors simply cannot afford to support them the way they have in the past.

As members of the House, we can all work together to address this crucial issue through common sense and compassionate decision-making. The bottom line is that, when charities are hurting, people are hurting.

That is why I rise today, hoping to inspire all members to lend a helping hand to charities across Canada through thoughtful amendments to the Income Tax Act that incentivize charitable giving, so that these organizations can access the funding they desperately need in order to help protect our country's most vulnerable citizens.

*Statements by Members***GEORGE MCLEISH**

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past December, Senneville, a historic municipality on the western shores of the Island of Montreal, lost a true stalwart, a leader whose name was synonymous with the town's deep sense of civic engagement and commitment to quality of life.

George McLeish was Senneville's longest-serving mayor, occupying the office from 1995 to 2013, interrupted only when island suburbs were briefly merged into the City of Montreal. George was a dynamic political presence whose energy and love of his community were the defining qualities of his leadership. As a mayor, he focused on maintaining the town's character while favouring a practical approach to addressing change in the best interests of residents.

I ask members to join me in offering our sincerest condolences to George's wife Barbara and his children Kristin, D'Arcy and Adam.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

JEAN-PAUL BORDELEAU

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was saddened to learn that Abitibi has lost one of its most beloved citizens.

Jean-Paul Bordeleau, former member of the Quebec National Assembly, was first elected under the Parti Québécois banner in Abitibi-Est in 1976 and was re-elected in 1981. During his time as an MNA, Mr. Bordeleau served as parliamentary assistant to the minister of manpower and income security, and later to the minister of energy and resources. He was also chair of the committee on economics and labour in 1985.

After retiring from politics, Mr. Bordeleau managed to keep himself busy. He served as political assistant to the member for Abitibi-Est, André Pelletier, as well as president of the Association Québec-France for the Abitibi—Témiscamingue region and vice-president of the Société d'histoire et de généalogie de Val-d'Or.

On behalf of myself and my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I offer my sincere condolences to his wife, Suzanne Couture-Bordeleau, and their two children.

* * *

[English]

COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are frustrated and angry with the government's failed pandemic response. They have had enough government overreach, mandates and infringements on their rights and freedoms.

They are losing hope, have lost trust in the government and are tired of the Liberal refusal to provide a recovery plan. The truckers and the peaceful Freedom Convoy have given voice to millions of Canadians who want their country back, who want their lives back and who want their rights and freedoms preserved.

These truckers and those who support their message are the working-class Canadians who have kept our shelves stocked and the economy rolling. They, like all Canadians, deserve to be respected and treated fairly. They want to be heard.

However, according to the Prime Minister, anyone who opposes the loss of freedoms and rights is a hate group. I say, enough: enough of ineffective lockdowns, restrictions and mandates; enough smearing of alienated Canadians; enough of the ineffective policies and rules; and enough division.

The Prime Minister is on notice. He can stop the division, start listening to Canadians and find solutions, or find a new line of work.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I regularly check in with constituents across Whitby, I have heard time and time again that home ownership continues to be less attainable, and affordable housing is increasingly difficult to find. That is why I was encouraged to see the Prime Minister appoint Canada's first-ever Minister of Housing, whom I had the pleasure of joining just two weeks ago to announce \$10.3 million in funding for Durham region.

This investment is part of our government's rapid housing initiative. It will support the rapid creation of 42 new affordable housing units and, specifically, it will support the expansion of the Otter Creek housing co-operative in Whitby.

This will have a meaningful impact on lifting some of our most vulnerable citizens out of housing need, including seniors, individuals with developmental disabilities and those living with mental illness and addiction. Canadians deserve a safe and affordable place to call home, and I know that work is making an impact across Canada with investments like this in my community.

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[Translation]

DON HARLEY FILS-AIMÉ

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we enter February, this year, the Government of Canada has chosen the theme "February and Forever: Celebrating Black History today and every day". Celebrations will be being held across the country.

In the riding of Bourassa, which I represent, we are devoting it to the memory of Don Harley Fils-Aimé, who passed away on January 11. Don made a significant contribution as a teacher, musician and co-organizer of Black History Month. He used his talents in service of young people.

In June 2019, I had the honour of awarding him the Bourassa MP's medal to celebrate his contribution. Today, I pay tribute to this exceptional man and offer my deepest sympathies to his family and those mourning his loss in the riding of Bourassa.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, representing Richmond Hill has given me the privilege to learn about different cultures, join in their celebrations and, most notably, enjoy a lot of delicious foods.

I am delighted to rise today to acknowledge the beautiful celebration of lunar new year taking place today on February 1, as many Canadians with roots in a variety of Asian cultures, such as those with Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese and many more backgrounds, will mark the start of their calendar year.

My riding is home to many of these vibrant communities, the majority of whom will also be observing the beginning of the Year of the Tiger. This is a year that signals bravery, courage and confidence, the characteristics that many of us have to demonstrate as we cope with the pandemic.

Many celebrations may be virtual this year, but I will surely be attending a few online and enjoying some traditional dumplings in between.

Kung Hei Fat Choi. Gong xi fa cai. Xin nian kuai le. Happy lunar new year, everyone.

* * *

ROB WARMAN

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Rob Warman who passed away on January 15. Originally from Fredericton, New Brunswick, Rob joined the RCMP in 1951 out of high school and was posted to Newfoundland. Later, he would fondly share stories of chasing rum runners from St-Pierre and Miquelon. In 1954, Rob joined the RCAF service police, later the MP, beginning an association that would last over 60 years.

Never one to slow down, Rob joined the law and security program as a professor at Georgian College. He was a city builder, serving on Barrie city council for 21 years. He volunteered for many organizations, including the Royal Canadian Legion, and was instrumental in Barrie's becoming a twin city of Zweibrücken, Germany.

Rob returned to his air force roots, proudly serving as honorary colonel of 16 Wing at Base Borden from 2006 to 2010.

On behalf of everyone in Barrie—Innisfil who knew and loved Rob, I want to extend my sincere condolences to his wife of 60 years, Alice; his children, of whom he often said have not turned out half-bad; and five grandchildren.

Per ardua ad astra. Rest easy, our friend.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is National Suicide Prevention Week in Quebec.

[English]

My heart goes out to all the families and loved ones of those we have lost to suicide and to those who have struggled and have seen people struggle with suicidal thoughts.

[Translation]

I want all Canadians to know that if they are having a tough time or know someone who is struggling, they need to ask for help and talk about it. No one should feel ashamed about asking for help.

In fact, the purpose of this year's theme, "Talking about suicide saves lives", is to encourage people to use the digital sphere to open a dialogue on what they are thinking and feeling.

We all have an important role to play. Providing support or listening without judgment can make all the difference in saving lives.

* * *

[English]

CARMEN PURDY

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal recipient and long-time Kootenay resident Carmen Purdy passed away on November 24, 2021, at the age of 82. He will be missed.

Carmen was a fierce supporter of wildlife management and the Kootenay way of life. He founded and was co-chair of the Kootenay wildlife heritage fund, whose mission was to conserve wildlife through land acquisition and winter feeding. He also served on the board of The Nature Trust of British Columbia and the Agricultural Land Commission. His knowledge on the subject of wildlife was unparalleled, and Kootenay—Columbia is blessed to have been the beneficiary of his passion and commitment to this work. I am grateful for his many contributions, both to our communities and to the wildlife that surrounds them.

Today, we celebrate the life of Carmen Purdy. On behalf of the Government of Canada and the constituents of Kootenay—Columbia, I offer my sincere condolences to his wife Carol, their three children and his many friends.

* * *

COVID-19 MANDATES

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thousands of people have come to their Parliament and demanded to be heard. They have come in defence of their fellow Canadians, who are being denied their livelihoods by the Prime Minister. They have questions and concerns that have been mocked instead of addressed.

Statements by Members

Canadians have had enough of the fear, division, and wild and reckless spending by a government that just does not care. The country's IOU has gone from the billions to a trillion. The Prime Minister's arbitrary mandates are fanning the flames of inflation, so truckers and supporters are here on Parliament Hill to take a stand. All this misery, and the Prime Minister who donned blackface and groped a reporter called those who disagree with him racists and misogynists. He and the government must end their mandates and understand that a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian.

* * *

● (1415)

WORLD HIJAB DAY

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the 10th annual World Hijab Day, which is a day to encourage women of all religions and backgrounds to wear and experience the hijab for a day and learn more about it. Everyone's choice is different. I did not grow up wearing the hijab; I began wearing it after a battle with cancer. My personal reflections during that process brought me closer to my faith. The hijab does not change who I am or how I represent my constituents. A hijab does not change the way a doctor cares for her patients or the way a teacher cares for her students. It was my choice. I stand in solidarity with all who choose to wear it or choose not to.

I encourage my colleagues to wear a hijab for a day. Today, let us stand with all those who have had to face losing their jobs or have been subjected to Islamophobia because the hijab was their choice.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every February people from across Turtle Island participate in Black History Month. It is a time to recognize and honour the history and legacy of Black Canadians, but it is also a time for us to unite and recommit to fighting against anti-Black racism in this place and across Canada.

Black Canadians continue to face overt barriers and life-threatening discrimination, particularly by the police. Just recently, Moses Erhirhie, a Black Canadian, died following an interaction with York police on January 21, just weeks ago. Erhirhie's family says that since the shooting they have been left almost entirely in the dark. No one should have to lose their life to police without an answer. We remember Moses.

This Black History Month, let us recognize the great progress we have made, but also the tremendous work that remains.

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[Translation]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is the first day of Black History Month, and the theme, "Honor the past, inspire the future", is well chosen. The best way to honour the past is to raise awareness and salute Black communities for the indisputable contributions they have made to the history, culture, and

social, economic and political life of Quebec, Canada, North America and the world.

This is always a good opportunity to look to the future and reflect together on a society and a Quebec that are more egalitarian, more united and free from prejudice, but it is also an opportunity to celebrate. That is why I am inviting all Quebecers to check out the wealth of online programming on offer for Black History Month.

Talks and panel discussions will be happening all month, with the closing event, the Gala Dynastie, taking place on March 5. I also invite the public to look into local Black History Month events being held throughout Quebec, from Gatineau to the Lower St. Lawrence.

* * *

[English]

HOUSING

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bloomberg reports Canada has the second most inflated housing bubble in the world. Listen to this letter from a Peterborough—Kawartha constituent:

Dear MP Ferreri, my 26-year-old son and his partner put in an offer on a house today; a 40-year-old, 1,200-square-foot bungalow, no appliances, on a tiny lot and no air conditioning. It was listed for \$599,000. My son offered \$702,000 with no conditions. There were 18 offers and it sold for \$830,000. My son has been pre-approved for \$700,000 and it is not enough. He and his partner have great jobs and I have even cosigned. What is the incentive for our children to get educated and get a job, when their wages cannot meet the demand of society?

People are losing hope of ever having a home. This economic crisis is a mental health crisis. We need federal leadership, not "just inflation".

* * *

● (1420)

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February 1 marks the beginning of Black History Month in Canada, and as the first Black woman elected as the member of Parliament for the riding of London West, I rise today to encourage everyone to learn about, celebrate and acknowledge the contributions that Black communities in Canada have made and continue to make. I also want to highlight the London Black History Coordinating Committee, which works tirelessly every year to increase awareness of Black History Month in London. This year, as it marks its 20th anniversary, the theme of "respecting the past, embracing the present, impacting the future" speaks to so much progress made and all the work that remains.

As I rise in the House, I am always reminded that I stand on the shoulders of many giants, like the honourable Jean Augustine, who broke the glass ceiling so that many women who look like me can take a seat in the House and fight for racial equity and a better, fairer and more inclusive country.

This month, and every day, I urge the House to fight the racism and discrimination that Black Canadians continue to face and work to create a Canada where no one is left behind.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all Canadian families are struggling to keep up with the ever-increasing cost of living. Canadians have not seen 4.8% inflation in 30 years.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer does not hold back in his most recent report. He says that the government's plan to spend \$100 billion on economic stimulus is having the exact opposite effect. Not only will this spending not help the economy, but it will actually make inflation worse. Why is the government not listening to the Parliamentary Budget Officer?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to push a false narrative to talk down the Canadian economy. I want to use this opportunity to share good news.

Today, Statistics Canada published new data showing that our GDP increased by 0.6% in November. That means that by the time omicron emerged, our economy had completely recovered from the COVID-19 recession.

I congratulate Canadians and thank them for their—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after question period, I wonder if the Deputy Prime Minister would come with me to a mall or grocery store here in Gatineau and tell people who are paying 8% more for their groceries that the GDP has just gone up by 0.8% and everything is fine. Or will the Deputy Prime Minister speak directly to Canadians and tell them we are going to tackle inflation?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservatives continue to focus on their own partisan interests—it is easy to see why—and talk down the Canadian economy. The truth is, Canada's economic potential just keeps growing. In fact, the IMF recently projected that Canada would have the second-highest growth rate in the G7.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I would urge the Deputy Prime Minister to go to the IGA in Gatineau and tell Madame Tremblay not to worry because the IMF says all is well in Canada.

Oral Questions

Like all other Canadians across the country, Madame Tremblay is paying more for her groceries. That is what is having a direct impact on Canadians. Why is the Deputy Prime Minister looking down on Canadian families who are actually paying for Liberal inflation?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out to my esteemed hon. colleague that Madame Tremblay is not the only one grocery shopping. Ms. Freeland does it every week for her family too.

For us, for our government, facts and data are important. It is important to note that inflation in Canada is below the G7 average, the G20 average and the OECD average.

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister should know that gross domestic product is calculated including government expenditures.

The government has put so much debt onto Canadians, and what have we seen happen? The cost of living has increased. This cost-of-living increase is affecting regular Canadians. Certainly somebody with a \$270,000-a-year salary should not be trying to equivocate with somebody who cannot buy a \$60 bag of groceries.

Will the minister apologize for trying to make that comparison?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people who should be apologizing to Canadians are the Conservatives, because before Christmas, just as the omicron wave was rising, it was the Conservatives who voted against Bill C-2.

It is thanks to Bill C-2 and the lockdown provisions in Bill C-2 that we are, today, able to pay small businesses, grocery stores and restaurants that are suffering under lockdown restrictions and are able to support them. Thank goodness the Conservatives failed before Christmas.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two years into the pandemic, Canadians do not want to be hearing about lockdown provisions. They want a federal government that is taking a leadership role, fixing Canada's broken health care system, getting people back to work and getting their freedom back.

The Liberals are so out of touch with the average Canadian. People just want to work. They want to keep people safe. They want to keep people healthy, and dismissing their concerns with laughter across the way is not going to heal the divisions in this country. It is not going to make us stronger.

Will the minister apologize for her statements, take the temperature down and tell us how she is going to fix the rising cost of living in Canada?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if there is anyone in the House who needs to apologize to Canadians, it is the Conservatives who voted against Bill C-2 and those provisions that are supporting so many businesses and people.

When it comes to jobs, our government has understood from the very beginning that having a job is the foundation of the economic well-being of the vast majority of Canadians. That is why we focused on getting the jobs back, and that is why I am so pleased we have recovered 108% of the jobs lost to the COVID recession.

* * *

[Translation]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, allow me to belatedly wish you and all our colleagues a happy new year.

In the meantime, parts of Ottawa and Gatineau are paralyzed. It is okay to protest, but it is not okay to occupy the city.

It is important for people to know that the real trucking associations are in favour of vaccination. Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us whether the Prime Minister has considered making an appearance or at least meeting with the real industry spokespeople, those who are in favour of vaccination?

[English]

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad my hon. colleague agrees that vaccination is our best tool out of this pandemic. Our government has consistently been meeting with stakeholders, including representatives of the trucking industry. Yesterday, my colleagues and I held a national summit on the supply chain that included voices from the trucking industry.

We will continue to engage with our stakeholders. We will hear all points of view, including from those who disagree with us, because we want to do what is best for Canada and Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is quite interesting. It just has absolutely nothing to do with my question.

The leader of a country has a role to play. It is okay to condemn, but he has a responsibility to find solutions. We cannot allow a protest to become an occupation.

Can the Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister assure the House that the authorities will make it possible for Parliament Hill to open to traffic or are they all bark and no bite?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for his question and I also want to wish him a happy new year.

I was initially talking about Bill C-2. I also want to thank the Bloc MPs for supporting this bill, which has become so important for small and medium-sized businesses and individuals.

I totally agree with the leader of the Bloc that it is important for all of us to be able to do our work as members of the House. We must and will support the authorities—

● (1430)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby South.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of truckers who are stuck at the border between Montana and Alberta because of a convoy of anti-vaccine mandate protesters. I spoke with one of the truckers, Kuldeep Singh, who described the situation. There is no food, no water and no provision for washrooms. They are stuck and they want to get home.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to help these truckers get back home?

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been following the situation at the Coutts border crossing. We agree with my honourable colleague. There are truckers who are being prevented from doing their jobs, and from delivering goods for Canadians. We ask that this blockade end so those individuals, those truck drivers who are doing their jobs, are able to get home, deliver the goods for Canadians and continue their jobs.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a recent report highlighted something we already know: Things are getting harder and harder for young families. Things are so bad, there is no way they can buy a house.

What is the Prime Minister going to do to fix this situation so young families can buy a house in the community where they want their kids to grow up?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every Canadian deserves a safe, affordable place to call home.

[English]

We are investing more than ever in affordable housing, we are investing more than ever to eliminate chronic homelessness in Canada, and we are also enabling more Canadians than ever before to access their dream of home ownership through the first-time homebuyer incentive. We also seek to bring in enhancements to the first-time homebuyer incentive, and our new rent-to-own program will allow more Canadians who are renting homes to become homeowners.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been battling a global pandemic for almost two years now.

It has taken a toll on our health, our day-to-day lives and our wallets. The cost of living is skyrocketing. Everything has been costing more for the past year, and prices continue to climb, especially the price of food. Mothers and fathers are thinking hard about what they put in their carts so their credit cards do not get declined at the register. This is unacceptable.

Exactly how impoverished do Canadians need to become before the Liberals will finally do something?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that Canadians, unlike the Conservatives, understand that inflation is a global phenomenon.

Here are some numbers to back that up. The latest inflation rate in Canada was 4.8%; in the U.S., 7%; in Germany, 5.3%; in the U.K., 5.4%. The OECD average is 5.8%; the G7 average is 5.3%; the G20 average is 5.8%.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a single mother with two children who earns \$40,000 a year at a time when the annual inflation rate is 4.8% will pay about \$200 a week for groceries. That is \$10 more every week, which totals \$520 at the end of the year.

If we look at what she earns in a year, we see that she loses an entire paycheck to cover this additional cost.

Comparing our situation to that of any other countries does not give a single cent more to this mother, who is struggling to feed her children.

When will they stop making Canadians poorer?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is exactly why our government has acted, since we were elected in 2015, to bring forward the Canada child benefit, which helps nine out of 10 families. In fact, it has helped lift 435,000 children out of poverty. Let me remind the House that the Conservatives voted against this measure.

We know that we need to help families with the high cost of living. With the Canada child benefit and affordable day care, we are making important strides and we are going to keep doing that for families.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how can they honestly rise in the House and ignore the problems currently facing mothers and fathers, who are seeing a 30% increase in the price of gas, a 4.8% inflation rate and an 8% increase in the cost of groceries?

I was being generous earlier. I cut parents' bills in half. In real life, they have to pay 8% more for groceries every week. In the meantime, what are we hearing from the Liberals?

We hear them making comparisons with other countries. We hear them talking about measures that were implemented but are no longer working for parents. When will they stop making Canadians poorer?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how can they honestly rise in the House? That is a question that the Conservatives should be asking themselves.

Before Christmas, the Conservatives voted against Bill C-2. It is only thanks to Bill C-2 and the fact that our government looked ahead to the future that we can support small and medium-sized businesses and Canadians today.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians from coast to coast are feeling the pinch. For years, they have worked hard and made tough choices to save up, but they seem to find themselves falling further behind. They cannot afford to put nutritious food on the table, put gas in their cars or even heat their homes. Their hard work is not paying off under these Liberals, with skyrocketing inflation as a result of their out-of-control spending.

While these Liberals offer every excuse under the sun, what we are here today to find out from the Prime Minister and from his finance minister is this: Will they finally get their out-of-control spending under control so Canadians can afford to live again?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when people do not have facts to rely on, they lean on false narratives, and that is all we have been hearing today. Let me tell the truth about what is happening in the Canadian economy.

Our GDP in the third quarter was 5.4%, higher than that of the U.S., the U.K. and Japan, and the November numbers show we have now fully recovered the GDP to pre-COVID levels. Jobs are up 108%, ahead of where they were before COVID. Moody's and S&P have both reaffirmed Canada's AAA rating—

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, we will not let talking points get in the way of an answer from the minister because we know that inflation is at a 30-year high, we know that housing prices have gone up by 80% under the current government, we know that Canadians cannot afford the price at the pump, and we know they are taking less home every month with the payroll tax increase from this finance minister and these Liberals.

They again offer all kinds of excuses, and they want to talk about what things cost in other places, but from Victoria, B.C. to Victoria-by-the-Sea, Prince Edward Island, things are more expensive under these Liberals. Will they finally admit that it is “Justinflation”, apologize to Canadians, and stop the out-of-control spending?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, facts are facts. Facts are not a talking point. Let me underscore that the data released by Statistics Canada today shows that in November our GDP grew by 0.6%. That is the sixth consecutive month of growth. This is a real milestone because it shows that our GDP has now exceeded where it was before the pandemic, which caused the deepest recession since the Great Depression.

I would like to congratulate Canadians for their resilience.

● (1440)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the minister is handing out self-congratulations, I want to let her know, on behalf of Canadians, that they cannot afford the 80% increase in home prices and they cannot afford the 30-year increase in inflation that we have seen under the current government as a direct result of its policies. The Liberals are spending all this money, and they are still underfunding housing and homelessness supports in Ontario by almost half a billion dollars a year.

The finance minister is again offering all kinds of information. I am sure she will not even get up to answer the question herself, but will the Liberals finally just admit that they are overspending, and get their out-of-control spending under control for Canadians?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is really interesting today to hear the Conservatives criticizing government spending. It was just a few months ago when we were on the campaign trail, and they proposed spending in their platform. When they finally got around to releasing it this fiscal year, that amount was higher than what we proposed.

The Conservatives proposed a \$168-billion deficit, more than \$10 billion above ours. Will the party of flip-flops let Canadians know what they really stand for today?

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last year, 300,000 EI applications were not processed on time. Those 300,000 workers were denied their benefits by the federal government, in some cases, for more than three months. Cases continue to pile up every day.

Imagine having to go without income for three months. That is a betrayal of workers who have contributed to EI their whole lives, with the understanding that the federal government would support them in the event of misfortune.

What is the minister doing to eliminate the delays?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying that this is an issue we take very seriously.

We understand how important it is for everyone to get their benefits because EI is there to help Canadians when they need it.

We have hired more public servants to meet the increased demand and we will continue to adjust internal resources to ensure that everyone who applies will get their benefits.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister hired staff, but not to process backlogged employment insurance files.

She hired inspectors to detect potential fraud. That will help clear out 10,000 cases, but it will not affect all the other people who are waiting. Canada is a G7 country, but right now, we have workers who have had no income for three months and cannot put food on the table because of administrative screw-ups. Some workers even have to disclose that they are destitute in hopes of being prioritized.

When will they get their benefits?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising this important issue. I really appreciate it.

As I said, this is not just about public servants handling fraud cases, although that is important, of course. We are also talking about additional employees hired because of the growing number of claims due to omicron-related closures.

I will work with her and all members of the House to resolve this situation because addressing Canadians' needs is very important to our government.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, behind service standards are people; people who cannot pay their rent because their employment insurance is not coming in, people who are waiting without knowing when that will end and whether they will last long enough, people who have no bread to put on the table. These people are not too concerned about service standards statistics. They want the federal government to find a way to look after them.

When will the minister reduce the backlog to zero?

● (1445)

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I told my hon. colleague last week when we talked about this issue, I understand that each application represents one person, one family that needs help. That is why resolving this issue is one of my priorities.

We also need to understand that there is an increase in applications because of the omicron-related closures, but we are nevertheless putting more resources in place precisely to ensure that every Canadian who has applied—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Russians are about to invade Ukraine.

They have amassed 100,000 troops along the Ukrainian border. They have also moved blood supplies to their field hospitals, as they anticipate the possibility of considerable loss of life. Ukraine has been pleading with Canada to send defensive weapons, but the Prime Minister is refusing its request. As proof of the imminent danger, Canadian troops were moved into the territory.

Will the Prime Minister show some courage, stop playing games and finally come to the aid of Ukraine by sending defensive weapons?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

When it comes to ensuring that there is not another Russian invasion of Ukraine, of course we believe in diplomacy and deterrence. On the diplomatic front, just yesterday I spoke with officials in the Netherlands, Denmark and Latvia, and this morning I spoke with officials in Estonia. Basically, we are continuing to work with our allies to maintain the alliance's strong unity, and we also believe in Operation Unifier. My colleague is at NATO headquarters in Brussels as we speak.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ukraine will likely be the theatre of a major conventional land war.

We have been watching Russia's military buildup in Belarus, in Russia, in the Donbas region and in Crimea since the Russians held exercises in September. Russia has been threatening Ukraine for some time now, and this Liberal government has had months to prepare a military assistance plan for our friends in Ukraine.

Why does the Prime Minister not understand that Russia is not interested in diplomacy? When will we provide real help to our Ukrainian friends?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, NATO members are unanimous: We have to move forward through diplomatic channels. That is why there are three channels in place, whether it is the Americans talking with the Russians, NATO with Russia or even talks within the OSCE. That is how we ease tensions.

However, we agree that there needs to be deterrence. I hope that my colleague recognizes that the government is doing a great deal through operations Reassurance and Unifier, which we have just extended and expanded.

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[English]

PRIVACY

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 33 million Canadians had their mobility data secretly tracked by the Public Health Agency of Canada without their consent. This unprecedented level of surveillance on our citizens came to light when the Liberals admitted not only that they did it, but also that they planned to continue spying on Canadians for another five years.

Oral Questions

Protecting the privacy of Canadians is the foundation of our freedoms. Sadly, under these Liberals, the foundations of our democracy are crumbling when this type of massive overreach happens.

My question is a simple one: Who authorized the secret spying on Canadians?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague. He is right to emphasize the importance of protecting people's privacy. I assume he is also emphasizing the importance of protecting people's health and safety. We are doing that together.

We are working with the Privacy Commissioner of Canada to ensure that the methods employed, as we know, effectively rely on confidential, anonymized aggregate data to protect people's health and safety, as well as their privacy.

[English]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, instead of being focused on normalizing lockdowns, maybe the Liberals should have been focused on keeping our economy open. If someone were to connect the dots, they would see a pattern of massive overreach by the Liberals. They tried to seize control of Parliament at the beginning of the pandemic to completely control spending and taxing. They got caught secretly collecting banking data. They attempted to limit speech and what Canadians can see on the Internet, and now this.

This pattern of control is only seen in countries that many Canadians have fled from. How could anyone think that secretly gathering this data without the consent of Canadians was a good idea?

● (1450)

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I already answered the question. However, I thank my colleague for giving me another opportunity to say that we did things right in our country to maintain people's trust, reassure them and protect our economy. Canada's economy is far superior to the economies of other countries around the world who have also been grappling with COVID-19. What is more, we have based our work on science, and Canada has the lowest mortality rate of all the G7 countries, after Japan.

*Oral Questions**[English]***AIRLINE INDUSTRY**

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2020, when thousands of Canadians were out thousands of dollars for cancelled flights, the minister told us there was nothing he could do to get them refunds. He told us the Canadian Transportation Agency was an independent arm's-length body. Now we have documents showing the government was not just talking to the CTA, but actively convincing them to let airlines withhold refunds.

Why were senior government officials lobbying the CTA to protect airlines' bottom lines instead of standing up for Canadians?

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for reminding us, and reminding all Canadians, that our government was there to help Canadians with their refunds. Our government was there to help airlines struggling with COVID, to support them and to save jobs, to save the skills we need, and to save our economy.

I want to thank him for that reminder because our government will always be there helping Canadians.

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HEALTH

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that sounded to me like a reminder that the Liberals are here for big business, not for Canadians.

I can give another example. The Liberals keep saying that they understand that this pandemic will not be over in Canada until it is over everywhere, but they are dragging their feet on the TRIPS waiver and have refused to add COVID-19 medicines to Canada's access to medicines regime. Their promises to COVAX are useless.

Will the Prime Minister finally take the action necessary to ensure vaccine equity around the world?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government will always be and has always been a strong advocate for vaccine equity. Canada supports a multilateral approach on intellectual property, specifically for COVID-19 vaccines.

We have been working hard with our colleagues around the WTO table right from the very beginning. Through our leadership at the Ottawa group, we continue to convene these important conversations so we can ensure that everyone gets vaccinated around the world.

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COVID-19 ECONOMIC MEASURES

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the holidays, omicron had a serious impact on constituents and businesses in my riding of Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel. Thankfully, the House had passed Bill C-2 before we rose, ensuring that we had support for businesses and individuals still facing restrictions and lockdowns put in place by provinces in response to the new wave.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister remind the House of some of the measures in the bill and how they have been supporting Canadians?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question and for her hard work for her constituents. Thanks to Bill C-2, we now have the Canada worker lockdown benefit. This ensures that workers affected by new public health restrictions are receiving immediate financial support.

We also have the local lockdown program, which provides businesses faced with omicron lockdowns imposed by local jurisdictions with wage and rent subsidy support. Unfortunately, both the Conservatives and the NDP voted against these essential support measures, but I am glad we were able to put them in place to support Canadians.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while lithium is critical in the production of electric vehicles, last week we learned that the minister fast-tracked the sale of a Canadian lithium company to a state-owned enterprise from China without conducting a full, national security review. However, for three long years, the same minister has refused to say no to Huawei building Canada's 5G network.

Why is it so easy for him to say yes to risky takeovers of Canadian companies, yet so hard for him to say no to dubious foreign takeovers?

● (1455)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us bring some facts into this discussion. Last week I was clear to Canadians and to the committee that, when it comes to the Neo Lithium transaction, this transaction was subject to a full national security review involving all the relevant departments of the government and all the intelligence and security agencies.

In addition, it was subject to scrutiny in accordance with the guidelines I put into place in March. We should not mislead the House when it comes to issues of national security.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is not entitled to his own facts. He also refused to tell Canadians whether he consulted with our allies before making the hasty decision to allow Neo Lithium to be sold to China. We assume his answer is no and that he did not consult. Our American allies, and our other allies, banned Huawei from their 5G networks long ago and cannot understand why the Liberal government continues to dither and delay.

It has been three years. When will the minister stop appeasing the communist regime in Beijing and finally say no way to Huawei?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows how much I appreciate him. He is a great colleague.

However, I will say no to misleading Canadians when it comes to the issue of national security. I am very happy to hear him talk about our network, because Canadians at home understand that this decision will have an impact not only on this generation but also on future generations, so colleagues like him should understand that national security must come first when we make a decision like that. That is why we will make the right decision for Canadians.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada must say no to Huawei. The Washington Post recently reported how Huawei has developed voice and facial recognition technology that helps governments track and monitor political dissidents, manage re-education camps and help retailers track shoppers. This is appalling. While Canada's most trusted allies have banned Huawei from their networks, the Liberal government refuses to do so.

Again, I ask the minister when will he say no way to Huawei?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy that we are taking the time today in the House to talk about our infrastructure network because Canadians at home understand how important it will be for them and their futures. We know we are going to the data economy. We know what communication and networks will be important.

That is why Canadians, those who are watching at home, and I know they are watching today, understand that when we make a decision like that, we need national security to come first. That is exactly what we are going to do and make the best decision in the interest of all Canadians.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are going to the data economy, but not with China. Our own intelligence agencies have long warned the Prime Minister about allowing Huawei into our 5G networks. It turns out they were right. For years, Huawei denied that it was a tool of the communist regime in Beijing. However, now we have evidence that the company is deeply implicated in designing surveillance tools to keep track of millions if not billions of people all around the world.

When will the minister make a decision on Huawei, and when will he finally say no way to Huawei?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one thing is clear: A bit

of facts in the House sometimes helps for understanding. One thing I can—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am sorry, but I have to interrupt the hon. minister. I am trying to hear his answer, but I am having a hard time.

I will let the hon. minister continue.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I was about to say that we are not going to take any lessons from the Conservatives when it comes to national security, and I will tell members why. We review four times more transactions, plus twice as many transactions as the Conservatives did when they were in government.

Canadians know that we care when it comes to national security. We will take no compromise when it comes to national security, and we will make the best decision in the interests of all Canadians.

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[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate in the House and I find myself wondering if I am in a bad dream.

Omicron is overwhelming our hospitals. Health care workers in Quebec are exhausted, and 63 Quebeckers died from COVID-19 today, but no one is talking about funding for health care.

No one is talking about how our health care system is in urgent need of reinforcements even though we all know that reinforcements have been needed since the beginning of the fifth wave.

When will the federal government understand that it needs to increase health transfers?

● (1500)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right.

It is important to talk about it, but action is just as important. We have been taking action since the onset of COVID-19 by investing \$63 billion in health and safety alone to help mitigate health care issues during the pandemic. In addition to that, the Canada health transfer will increase once again in a few weeks.

We are doing all of this because we know we must protect our health care system and keep people healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the elephant in the room is the fact that the federal government has not taken action.

Ninety per cent of Quebeckers are vaccinated, and yet they have been locked down again since Christmas. Why is that?

Oral Questions

It is because the health care system is fragile. This government has consistently refused to increase health transfers to 35%. What will it take for the government to see that the way out of this crisis is health care funding?

In Quebec, when we think “lack of funding”, we think “lock-down”. What does the minister have to say to that?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for saying the key word, because the enemy is not vaccination. The enemy is COVID-19.

Canadians, and all members of the House for that matter, know and understand that we need to get vaccinated to get through this crisis.

Two doses are good, but three are even better. Not only is that even better, but it is extremely vital for fighting off the omicron variant and protecting us from all sorts of other variants that could crop up in the future.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard over and over again here in the House that Canadians' salaries are simply not keeping up with inflation, making it harder to put food on the table and a roof over their heads. Never mind the EI premiums increasing to cover the current account deficit.

My colleagues have asked this before again and again, and I will ask it again: What is the government going to do to address the inflation crisis so that Canadians stop falling behind?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are smart, and that is why I know that Canadians, unlike the Conservatives, understand that inflation is a global phenomenon. Let me give some numbers to back that up. The latest inflation number in Canada was 4.8%. In the U.S. it was 7%; in Germany, 5.3%; and in the U.K., 5.4%. Our inflation is lower than the G7 average of 5.3%, the G20 average of 5.8% and the OECD average of 5.8%.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the percentage increases that Canadians care about are the percentage increases in their property assessments and their housing prices. The policies of the government have meant that young people cannot buy their first home, and older people and seniors are getting priced out of their homes. People are having trouble paying for food.

When will the government come to realize that Canadians are struggling because of its policies and admit that it is wrong, or is this “just inflation”?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a party that has abandoned housing investments. They downloaded investments in affordable housing to the provinces and municipalities. They did not mention affordable housing in their platform, nor in their opposition House motion. They have absolutely no credibility on this issue.

We are the party that introduced a national housing strategy. We introduced the first-time home buyer incentive. We want to move ahead with a rent-to-own program. They have absolutely no credibility on this issue and Canadians can see through their rhetoric.

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cost of living is getting worse by the day. Inflation has reached a 30-year high, grocery store shelves are empty and Canadians are understandably tired of the government's constantly moving goalposts. They are struggling to make ends meet, yet the Prime Minister decided this would be a good time to pick their pockets with a payroll tax.

Will the Prime Minister commit right now to cancelling his increase to EI and CPP payroll tax?

● (1505)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing over and over again today, and many other days, a false narrative from the Conservatives, who seem absolutely determined to talk down Canada and the Canadian economy. The reality is that Canadians have handled COVID and the COVID recession with remarkable strength and resilience. Thanks to that resilience, 108% of jobs have been recovered. Thanks to that resilience, back in November we exceeded pre-COVID GDP. This was the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression.

* * *

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Black History Month is a time to reflect on the many contributions the Black community has made throughout history to shape Canada into the nation we are today. We must empower Black voices and Black experiences to face the challenges that prevent them from contributing fully to a diverse, prosperous and inclusive Canada. This means taking action against systemic discrimination and anti-Black racism.

Could the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth update the House on the actions our government has taken to empower the Black community?

Hon. Marci Ien (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her presence as the longest-serving female parliamentarian in the House.

This month we take the time to honour and celebrate the Black community, and as a government we will continually work to remove systemic barriers for a more and equal society for everyone, whether that is through our commitment to Canada's anti-racism strategy, \$200 million to establish the new Black-led philanthropic endowment fund or the \$100-million top-up to the supporting Black Canadian communities initiative. No matter the month, every day is a day to celebrate Black excellence.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past several months, Russia has amassed thousands of troops and conducted provocative military activities close to Ukraine's border. As the international community continues to call on President Putin to de-escalate the situation, Canada must be crystal clear as to what specific action it will take to deter an invasion.

This is a very important question. Could the Prime Minister confirm right now that if Ukraine is invaded he will use all tools at his disposal, including Magnitsky sanctions?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for this very important question because on sanctions, we are really ready to impose severe economic sanctions should Russia further invade Ukraine. We are working closely with our allies: the U.S., the EU and of course the U.K. Sanctions are most effective when we all act in lockstep. Canada is ready.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to Canada's 2022 food price report, the overall food price increase is from 5% to 7%. It is the highest predicted increase in food prices in the last 20 years. This is becoming a concern for many constituents in my riding. The price of food in Alberta is expected to be higher than the national average in 2022.

When will the Liberal government finally admit that its policies have directly affected the two-decade high inflation rate?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have already pointed out, and as Canadians understand very well, inflation is a global phenomenon driven by global challenges, like congested supply chains and the fact that there have been very significant crop challenges around the world.

There are concrete things we can do to make life more affordable for Canadians, like building affordable housing and early learning and child care. That is why I am so astonished that the Conservative Party opposed our early learning and child care plan, which the Province of Alberta has now done a deal with us on.

* * *

SENIORS

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, seniors from across my riding have been expressing their

Oral Questions

worries about the government's disregard for their skyrocketing costs of living. With inflation being higher than ever before, those who live on fixed incomes through programs like CPP or old age security, many with no pensions, are finding it hard to make ends meet. The Liberal carbon tax only makes things worse.

In these stressful economic times, why does the Prime Minister insist on taking money from Canadians and seniors who are already struggling to pay their bills?

● (1510)

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it rather rich for the Conservatives to bring up seniors working past the age of retirement, because they raised the retirement age when they were in power. We reversed that and gave seniors back the benefits they are entitled to. We are gradually enhancing the CPP, including what the employers pay in, in partnership with the provinces and territories so that seniors now and into the future can have a strong, stable retirement.

Seniors know who has been and will be there for them and it is not the Conservatives.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past two weeks, we have stepped up the fight against COVID-19. As Canadians continue to receive their third dose of vaccine, we are starting to see delays in appointments for booster doses.

Could the Minister of Health please give the House an update on the progress that has been made with respect to booster doses and the additional measures the government is taking to ensure that all Canadians have access to a third dose?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Alfred-Pellan for his outstanding work on behalf of his constituents and for raising the issue of vaccination.

A total of 77 million doses have been administered. Almost 84% of Canadians of all ages have received a first dose, 79% have received two doses, 43% of eligible Canadians have already gotten a booster, and 53% of children aged 6 to 11 have received a first dose. We can be proud. We have been among the most vaccinated countries in the world for months. We are, of course, deeply grateful to all those who have made the right choice.

*Points of Order***IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP**

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, immigration processing times are long and have been long for quite some time. Families, workers and students have to put their lives on hold while waiting for an answer that never seems to come.

Too often, these people are asked to fill out a second application and pay the fees a second time because the Liberals are taking too long to get to their file. The system is broken and does not respect people.

Will the Liberals invest the necessary resources so that these people can start living with respect and dignity?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share that yesterday, in order to respond to the very serious pressures the pandemic has put on our immigration system, I announced there would be an \$85-million investment to improve processing times for work permits, study permits, temporary resident visas and proof of citizenship, and to eliminate the inventory of PR cards. At the same time, we made further announcements about new functionalities of the digital platform that we are going to be introducing that would allow more people to get information about their files in real time and improve efficiencies across 15 different lines of business by this summer.

There is no question this has been a challenging year for those seeking to come to Canada, but we are working to make life easier so they can call Canada home.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after the government abandoned people who risked their lives to help us, millions of Afghans, including children, are on the brink of starvation. We learned yesterday that Canadian organizations, like World Vision Canada, are unable to deliver food and aid to children suffering from malnutrition. They cannot help for fear of prosecution from Canada's anti-terrorism laws. The U.S. and the EU have made sure that humanitarian aid partners would not be prosecuted, but the Liberal government has not.

How many more Afghan children will have to die of starvation before an exemption is provided to Canadian organizations that want to help?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of International Development and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and we will be there to support the people of Afghanistan, not the Taliban. That is why I recently announced that Canada would provide \$56 million in humanitarian funding in response to the appeals from the United Nations and the international Red Cross. This funding will allow Canada's humanitarian partners to provide life-saving assistance to ensure that humanitarian goods are dispatched and that workers can

continue to be able to support the Afghan people. We will look to do more with our partners.

The Speaker: That is all the time we have for question period today. I want to thank all members. You were very civil. It was very nice to hear everyone actually having a debate today.

We have a number of points of order coming up. I will go through them one at a time. We will start with the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

* * *

● (1515)

POINTS OF ORDER**MYANMAR**

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions, and I think that you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That the House (a) recognize the one-year anniversary of the military coup in Myanmar that took place as a new session of Parliament was set to open; (b) take note of the impact of the deteriorating political and humanitarian situation on the most vulnerable; (c) condemn the oppression of the population through forced disappearances, torture, arrests, killings and intimidation; (d) urge the government and the international community to increase pressure on the military to engage in inclusive political dialogue to end the crisis; (e) support the use of sanctions against members of Myanmar's military who disregard the human rights of the people of Myanmar; (f) deplore the ongoing suffering of the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities; and (g) stand in solidarity with those in Myanmar who aspire for peace, democratic governance and the protection of human rights.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

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

Hearing no dissent, it is agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ANTI-SEMITIC SYMBOLS

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That the House deplore the use of Nazi and antisemitic symbols in demonstrations on Parliament Hill and denounce their use at all times.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

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

Hearing no dissent, it is agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ISLAMOPHOBIA

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That the House condemn the display of hateful and harmful Islamophobic rhetoric by protesters on the streets of Ottawa on the National Day of Remembrance of the Quebec City Mosque Attack and Action against Islamophobia, and urge all Canadians to join in putting an end to all hate.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

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

(Motion agreed to)

RACISM

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

[*Translation*]

That the House: (a) view the display of racist flags in Ottawa this weekend as shameful and a testament to the divisive and hateful rhetoric of the protest; (b) condemn these actions; and (c) continue to fight to eradicate anti-Black racism and all forms of hatred in Canada.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

I hear none. The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

HOMOPHOBIA

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I hope you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion. I move:

That the House affirm that there is nothing peaceful about harassing residents of Ottawa for displaying pride flags in their homes and in their neighbourhood; and agree that harassment, transphobia and all forms of homophobia seen this weekend are an insult to truth and our democracy.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

Hearing no dissent, it is agreed.

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

(Motion agreed to)

• (1520)

DECORUM

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order that relates to Standing Orders 16 and 18.

I rise on this occasion because I think the noise levels in the House and what those of us participating virtually experience must be different. I noted that you thanked participants in the House today for keeping things respectful, but I could not hear the Deputy Prime Minister when she was trying to answer questions because of the heckling in the background. I note that I remember sitting with her when she won a by-election in Toronto Centre back in 2013, and it seemed to me even then that Conservatives particularly heckled her more than others. I found that to be the case today, and I

Points of Order

could not hear her properly, so I wanted to bring that to your attention.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for that point of order, and I want to remind all members that we do have people watching from around the country trying to see what is going on in Parliament. In all fairness to them, even though it is in the chamber that we want people to hear us, we want to make sure the people who are watching hear the questions and the answers so that they understand what is being done here in Parliament.

I thank all the members for their co-operation, as today was a very good day, but there is always room for improvement.

The hon. member for Peace River—Westlock is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I hope you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: “That the House deplore the use of blackface and denounces its use at all times.”

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

An hon. member: Nay.

The Speaker: We do not have unanimous consent.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, from our perspective, we do not have a problem. I think the member was reflecting and saying no because we did not get any advance notice. Had we known about it, no one on this side would have said no to the motion.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, when somebody rises and says “Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it I believe”, it implies that discussions have actually happened. Discussions had not happened. What we are seeing here is a blatant attempt to try to throw people off and catch them off guard.

I did not even get to hear—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member can continue.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I did not even get to hear the entire motion because of the fact that—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, if you consult Hansard, you can verify that the member for Peace River—Westlock expressed in his intervention a hope. He said, “Mr. Speaker, I hope you will find unanimous consent for the following”.

The Address

The member for Kingston and the Islands said that the member for Peace River—Westlock had said that there had been consultations. All the member for Peace River—Westlock had asked for was the consideration of the House to condemn the wearing of blackface, and the member for Kingston and the Islands denied that and voted against that condemnation.

Some hon. members: Shame.

The Speaker: I am afraid there was no vote, and the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock did say “hope”. That is what I heard. We can check the blues and see what that was, just to make sure.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is rising.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes has actually misrepresented what happened.

What I voted against was entertaining a motion; it was not against a subject. We had not even introduced it. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that even the terminology of “I hope you will find unanimous consent”, by tradition of the House, implies that discussions have happened among the party leadership, and they had not.

The Speaker: I want to remind all members that normally for unanimous consent, out of courtesy, one checks with the other parties, but that is just a tradition we have adopted and have been using. It is not necessarily something that has to happen, but in any case, let us just call this one a day. The motion was turned down, and we will continue from here.

• (1525)

Mr. Chris Bittle: Put your mask on, Cheryl. Put your mask on.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I can't hear you.

The Speaker: I encourage the hon. member for St. Catharines and the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke to go in to the hallway if they want to have a conversation, and not do it across the chamber. We would like people to be able to hear what is going on.

We will now resume debate.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful that so many colleagues remained behind in order to hear my great thoughts on the Speech from the Throne. It is very kind of them. I appreciate that. I do take note that a few are heading for the exits.

The point that I was making prior to question period had to do with interest rates and that the Bank of Canada's governor had indi-

cated that there would be movement on the interest rates. Therefore, the ultralow rates that we have had and enjoyed, indeed, for the last number of months and years are likely to end, with significant consequences.

I also take note that the Government of Canada has locked in a lot of its debt in ultralow extensive securities, so that in and of itself will reduce the cost of interest.

The third point I want to make is that a significant number of the major support programs instituted by the House and by the government over the last year and months were terminated on October 23, and that is a significant reduction in the fiscal stimulus that was in the economy. There is no question. The debt to GDP has gone from 29% to 49% over the course of the pandemic, as the Government of Canada used its fiscal firepower to alleviate the genuine suffering of the people of Canada.

I would just like to point out in passing that eight out of every 10 pandemic dollars were spent by the federal government, in part because the fiscal situation of the federal government is arguably the strongest of any G7 nation. We used that fiscal firepower in order to alleviate the suffering of Canadians, largely supported in the House may I say, but it did contribute to the rise in debt. Provincial governments, on the other hand, had no significant rise in their debt to GDP, so the financial burden of the pandemic thus far has largely rested on the shoulders of the federal government.

The fifth point is the interesting contradiction with the low unemployment rate in Canada. I know this was subject to some discussion during question period. Members will recollect that, as the pandemic began, the rate shot up to, I think, 13%. It is now below 6% and in some jurisdictions even lower than that.

I know, Madam Speaker, that you and I and everyone else in the House are fairly fresh off asking people questions at the door and getting responses, but businesses are desperately looking for workers. Every time we talk to anybody who is an employer, we hear that their biggest problem is just getting qualified workers. In fact, all kinds of incentives and all kinds of training are needed just to get workers. Hence, that has led to a significantly low unemployment rate.

The seventh point has been this discussion about supply chains. There is no question that the supply chains have been disrupted. This is actually a pretty significant problem because the policy of all governments, all western nations, has been that they will go to the cheapest possible supply source. That, in turn, has led to vulnerabilities in our supply chain, and those vulnerabilities in turn have been shown to be very serious during a pandemic crisis. We will hear a lot of conversation about reshoring, shortening the supply chains, etc. I would encourage that.

While we are encouraging that, I would put in a plug for my private member's bill on modern-day slavery, and we will have the opportunity to eliminate slavery from our supply chain.

I see from your body language, Madam Speaker, that you seem to think that I should be finishing this speech. Because you are the Speaker and because I respect the traditions of the House, I will yield and I look forward to the members' questions.

• (1530)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member mentioned a concern that we have in Guelph as well, with employers having a lot of trouble finding employees, quite often in the lower-skilled or in the factory-type jobs versus the higher-skilled jobs, which we are also focusing on.

Could the hon. member maybe suggest some ways we can, through immigration or other ways, help fill the workforce?

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague will take note, as will members of the House, that the Minister of Immigration recently announced a significant increase in financial allocations in order to speed up the processing in the immigration system. I, like many members of the House, have a riding that is multi-ethnic, multireligious and multiracial, and is highly influenced by the speed of processing when it comes to immigration.

I am hoping that the announcement by the Minister of Immigration in the past day or two will really address that issue and that this part of the supply chain, at least, can be dealt with.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would simply ask the member if, in the spirit of non-partisanship on a very important issue, he would be interested in sharing more about the private member's bill regarding the elimination of modern-day slavery.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, in 2018 I introduced a bill that said, in effect, that all major companies in Canada, along with governments, had to examine their supply chains on an annual basis and certify to the Minister of Public Safety that those supply chains were free of the scourge of slavery and of child labour.

I am still pursuing that bill. I take some comfort in the fact that the House, through its foreign affairs committee, has told the Government of Canada to do something. I am also encouraged by the fact that four mandate letters have been issued to four separate ministers to initiate legislation. I am also encouraged by the fact the bill is actually being discussed in the Senate as we speak.

I appreciate the question and I look forward to some success with the House moving that initiative forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague opposite for his two-part speech. I was present for the first part, and we just heard the follow-up. I commend him for his patience and congratulate him on his speech in general.

Since the subject of slavery and forced labour came up, I would like to hear his thoughts on the Olympic Games set to begin in Beijing this weekend and on the fact that genocide is being committed against the Uighur community. We cannot ignore that; we cannot sweep it under the rug.

There were proposals to relocate, postpone or delay the games, not necessarily cancel them. However, given the forced labour issue

The Address

and the ongoing genocide in China, I would like to hear my colleague's opinion on the fact that the Olympic Games are being held in Beijing this year.

• (1535)

[English]

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, there is virtually no doubt from any source whatsoever that there is slavery, that the Uighur people are being enslaved, that products are being produced out of that part of China and that the Government of China, directly or indirectly, condones the production of those goods.

The problem for us is that this infects our own supply chains, whether they are food supply chains or high-end technology items. It is very disturbing.

The most significant supply chain that has been in the news lately has been PPE. We had to buy a lot of personal protective equipment early on in the pandemic, and it has been found to be an infected supply chain. To the great credit of the government, that contract was cancelled.

That is going—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate.

The hon. member for Humber River—Black Creek.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it's a great pleasure to speak following the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood. The hon. member and I have spent many years together arguing about various issues. I have tremendous respect for him on the issue of modernization and other issues that he has championed for a very long time, and I look forward to working with him until completion on some of the bills he wants to move forward.

Happy new year to all. It seems like we have not been here for forever and a day, yet this is just February 1. It is good to be back.

To begin my comments on the Speech from the Throne, I want to take a moment to acknowledge my former chief of staff, who has left the Hill for private practice. He got married, has a wonderful little boy named Charlie and is enjoying the private sector. I want to acknowledge Teddy Markey for the years he was in my office. I very much appreciated his work, and I wish him well with where he is now.

The Address

As we talk about the throne speech, which again seems an eternity ago, we had not yet heard of omicron. Many Canadians were looking forward to the future and a recovery from COVID-19. All of us were, actually. We thought we had turned the corner from what had been a terrible year for so many, with the loss of the lives of so many people in Canada and throughout the world. Fortunately, the government was able to see that and establish some protections, but many others did not. The government saw that we needed to prepare for the possibility that this was not over, so it put forward legislation to continue to protect Canadians in the event that we would face more lockdown situations and need to continue to support Canadians and Canadian businesses.

Those in opposition thought that was never going to be necessary and that we would not need those mechanisms. We did, and most Canadians are very grateful that the government put forward the extra support, which some Canadians are using as a lifeline as we go through this. The government was able to put mechanisms in place to support provincial and municipal health decisions, giving them the support that they very much needed, as we found ourselves in a semi-lockdown position yet again. The Liberal government has proven time and time again that we will support Canadians throughout this pandemic in a responsible manner. The Prime Minister indicated that we have Canadians' backs, and all parliamentarians want him to make sure that we have the backs of the Canadians who are struggling to get through this difficult time.

Our legislation for those supports went beyond just financial support, because we all learned about the kinds of abuse many nurses and doctors were having to endure. The legislation did more than just help Canadians financially. It made a point of putting protections in the legislation for nurses, hospitals, etc., from protests that impede their work and their safety. It also included the procurement of rapid tests and vaccinations. At this point, we have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world and the lowest mortality rate of any country in the world. If we look at both of them, Canada has done a very good job of balancing and dealing with difficult things.

All children five years and up can now access vaccinations and any boosters they need for free, and we will make sure that future boosters are available to Canadians as they continue to protect themselves against this pandemic. We are also working to support other countries in receiving doses of the vaccine, because we need to end this worldwide. We need to make sure we reach out and provide vaccines to other poorer countries around the world at a much faster pace, I would say, than we have in the past. We are never going to end this pandemic without those measures. To get through the current situation, we need to reach the point of getting past it and putting this behind us.

● (1540)

I will move on to some of the issues that were raised in the Speech from the Throne that I think are very important for the residents of Humber River—Black Creek and all Canadians. One of those issues we are currently dealing with is the issue of housing. We hear about it in the House all the time. We hear about it in committee, and we hear about it from Canadians.

As our population grows in size and our immigration levels grow, more homes are needed. It just makes sense. We have our

communities and our country is growing. People want to come to Canada, and they have a lot of skills to bring to our country, but they need to have a place to live when they get here, and that cannot be just in large urban centres. People want housing, and that means that even in small rural communities, there is a great need for affordable housing where people can have a different quality of life than what they could possibly have in an urban centre.

Whether it be via renting or buying, Canadians are feeling the pressure as costs rise, and these things feel more and more out of reach for those who have not been able to get a foothold in the market. This is why the government is taking measures to help those who want to own and who want to get their foot in the door of ownership.

As the cost of living continues to rise around the world, saving a 20% down payment while renting seems impossible to many. However, programs such as rent to own are exactly how my husband and I got our first house, and those are the kinds of programs that are going to help many Canadians get their foot in the door. Then there is the first-time home buyer incentive, which would make the dream a reality, and Canadians would literally use their rent to put toward the down payment of their home.

However, it is not just future homebuyers who are feeling the pressure. We have come to realize that the renters are in a similar situation. This pandemic has highlighted just how difficult renting is for Canadians. I would like to share a story about a family who is currently struggling along those lines.

This family was living in a house that went up for sale when the homeowner decided to take advantage of the high prices and the high value of his home. It took them three months, 14 applications and applying everywhere while they were looking for a rental home. There were many bidding wars and, yes, I said "bidding wars" over rental properties. I never would have believed that would happen, but it has clearly become a really big problem for people who are trying to keep a roof over their heads. Finally, this family got a plea from the realtor to the owners of their new home to help them find a place to live.

Now, the cost of rent is so high that it takes four adult low-income earners to pay the rent and the bills. Four adults and two children in a three-bedroom home with an unfinished basement is the best this family could do with a rent between \$2,500 and \$3,000 a month. It is very difficult, and it takes all of the money of the four adults to be able to pay the rent and put food on the table.

Sadly, there are far too many Canadians who find themselves in the exact same predicament, some even becoming temporarily homeless. It is situations like this that need to be stopped. This is why our government intends to help with creating more homes, specifically more affordable homes, so that families do not have to worry about which bill they are going to pay and whether or not they will have a roof over their heads next month.

Many are women who find themselves in these situations of low-income, marginalized groups. Women are more often than not the ones who end up having to be the main caregiver, whether single or not, and it is women who often take care of the children. This is why our Canada child care benefit is so important, along with our \$10-a-day child care, which is going to open the door for thousands of women to be able to go back to school, improve their education and, more importantly, have the opportunity to have a better life and a better future for themselves and their families.

● (1545)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her speech. I appreciate the emphasis on taking care of one another and on health care.

Unfortunately, for decades, the underfunding of health care by Liberals and Conservatives has been felt by the constituents in Nanaimo—Ladysmith. This is health care that people so desperately need and deserve. We have seen that COVID has amplified the impacts of our underfunded health care system, with health care workers burning out and family doctors' caseloads overflowing. Our health care needs to be funded appropriately now.

I am wondering if the member opposite can share when this government will fund the Canada health transfers so Canadians can have access to the health care they so desperately need and deserve.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Madam Speaker, on the whole issue of health care, and how we have managed to get through the pandemic, millions or probably billions of dollars has been spent protecting and improving health care through this pandemic. The Minister of Health has clearly indicated, as has the Prime Minister, that there will be many discussions in the future about how we can strengthen our health care system and our long-term care homes and bring in legislation that will better protect. This is to ensure there are certain levels of care in an area that is very much shared and the responsibility of the provinces. They are all areas that need additional time and energy put into them, and hopefully we will solve them at the end of the day.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I really appreciate everything that my colleague said, but I still have doubts about the issue of housing. Health is very important, but once a person is healthy, where are they going to live?

There is a dire need for social and affordable housing. The need was dire during the pandemic, and the situation has only gotten worse. Would your government be willing to convert certain unused federal buildings to social and affordable housing?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would like to remind the hon. member that he must address the

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Chair and not the member for Humber River—Black Creek, whom I recognize again.

[English]

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Madam Speaker, my colleague has made it very clear in the time he has been in the House that these are issues that he cares very much about.

I think together we will move forward to ensure there is housing that is affordable. Whatever name we want to put on it, we have to ensure that rental housing is being built that is affordable for all Canadians. As well, we need an avenue to give people the opportunity to get a foot in the door, as I like to refer to it, so they have a chance to start building some equity in their own home. Those are certainly the intentions of the programs we have through the national housing strategy. We have a Minister of Housing, so we have a lot of people in our government who are focusing on how we are going to make sure that housing is available and readily available.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my question has to do with what the member ended her speech on: the benefits of affordable child care. I have family members in Toronto who are paying \$2,600 a month for child care, just normal child care, and I think of what getting to \$10-a-day child care would mean as far as immediate assistance, so we could help people to be able to afford homes.

● (1550)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Madam Speaker, one of the most exciting things in the many years I have been in the House as a parliamentarian, and something I have wanted to see, is the issue of affordable child care for everyone. I cannot tell members the number of families, and single women in particular, I have met who did not want to stay home.

They want to be out in the workforce, but the child care costs more than the money they would end up netting, so I think that \$10-a-day child care will make a huge difference for all Canadians because everybody benefits. If the children are in a proper child care environment, they are getting the kind of exposure they need, and their moms can go to work knowing they are in a safe and caring environment.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the member for Yellowhead.

The government's foreign policy is not serving the country's interests nor its values, and the Speech from the Throne we are debating today does little to address this shortcoming. It does little to address Canada's decline on the world stage. The Speech from the Throne makes no mention of a foreign policy review.

We have not had a significant foreign policy review in this country for almost 20 years. Countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia have regular foreign policy reviews. These are anchored around white papers that set out the government's foreign policy, its defence policy and its foreign aid policy. They guide the whole of government in implementing the government's policies in those spheres of foreign affairs.

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The United States goes through a similar process through the state department in order to anchor American foreign policy to ensure consistency and clarity. It also provides the capacity to respond to changing circumstances, but we have not done this. In fact, the last time I can recall a significant foreign policy review was in 2004, under the previous government of then prime minister Paul Martin, when Jennifer Welsh was tasked with taking a look at the government's foreign policy. Since then we have had no significant policy review, and the results are showing.

We have had five foreign ministers in less than six years in the position of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We have had ministers propose a foreign policy based on responsible conviction, a policy that lasted for a mere year or so before it was replaced with the policy of Canada as an essential country, outlined in a speech given to this House, which was supposedly the government's anchor for its foreign policy, its white paper, which guided the whole government's foreign policy. As a result, Canada's position on the world stage has diminished. That is an incontrovertible fact.

In 2015, the Prime Minister came to office, telling the world that Canada is back. After the government made an attempt to secure a UN Security Council seat, the results came in, in June of 2020. Canada lost that bid for the UN Security Council seat, as it had done a decade earlier, and it lost with six fewer votes than it had won a decade earlier. That is six fewer countries that see Canada as a world leader on the international stage.

In foreign aid, the government came to office promising to do better to help the world's poorest, but in the first five years of being in office, foreign aid was cut by 10% based on the internationally accepted measure of overseas development assistance as a percentage of gross national income, the target number being 0.7% of GNI. Under the government, foreign aid was cut from 0.3% of GNI during the 10 years of the previous government, to 0.27% of GNI in the first five years that this government was in office.

On climate change, the government has failed to meet its climate change commitments. In fact, we have some of the highest per capita emissions in the world. Even south of the border emissions have declined over the last number of years, but in Canada, for each and every year the government has been in office, emissions have risen. In fact, in 2016, the first full year that the government was in office, emissions in Canada stood at 708 megatonnes. They have risen each and every year from that point.

In 2019, the last year for which Environment Canada has data, emissions rose to 730 megatonnes, an increase of 22 megatonnes. No doubt this year we will once again go to record high emission levels because the data that is coming in on oil and gas, and other fossil fuel consumption in this country is indicating that Canada is trending to record high levels of fossil fuel consumption. Again, on climate change, the government has failed to deliver.

• (1555)

The Liberal government came to office somewhat naively, promising to reopen Canada's embassy and re-establish diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, but it quickly realized once in office that it was not going to be able to do so.

On the major issue facing the world today, of the rise of authoritarian governments in places such as Russia and the People's Republic of China, the Liberal government has been either incoherent or naive. On China, the government's policies have been utterly and completely incomprehensible. Here are a couple of examples of what I am talking about. David Vigneault, the head of CSIS has been saying since December, 2018, that China presents a threat to Canada in national security and in intellectual property in five sensitive areas, such as 5G telecommunications, quantum computing and biotechnology.

It has identified Huawei as a threat to our national security and intellectual property, but the government has yet to act. It has yet to take action to restrict or ban Huawei from our telecommunications networks. In fact, it is unilaterally alone and isolated on the world stage in this regard. Four of our closest intelligence and security partners, New Zealand, Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, have already taken measures to restrict or ban Huawei from their telecommunications networks.

The Huawei issue highlights the incoherence of the government. In May, 2019, then public safety minister Ralph Goodale indicated that the government would make a decision on Huawei before the 2019 election. Several months later, in the summer of 2019, he reversed course and said that the government would not be making a decision before October 2019, and then that the decision would be after 2019.

Over two years have passed since that time, and still there is no decision on Huawei. In fact, last fall the Prime Minister was asked by Global News if a decision on Huawei was coming. The Prime Minister indicated at that time, in late September or early October, that a decision would be forthcoming in "several weeks." It is now several months since the Prime Minister indicated that, yet we have no decision on Huawei.

On a new framework on China, the government promised to come forward with something during the year 2020. Apparently that was kiboshed before it got to the federal cabinet for approval. Under the direction of the minister, two foreign ministers ago, we got the three Cs on China: to challenge, co-operate and compete. That then morphed into the four Cs, with the fourth C being co-exist.

That was replaced in the Speech from the Throne with an allusion to a new policy coming forward on the Indo-Pacific Region that would include China. This is apparently forthcoming. I am skeptical about the government delivering on a new policy and a new framework on China.

On Ukraine, the Liberal government has been naive. Ukraine has asked for lethal defensive weapons. The government has failed to deliver. Diplomacy not backed up by the threat of force, and in very limited and in very controlled circumstances, is simply empty talk and rhetoric that weakens our ability to stand up for our interests and values.

Russia has two tools of hard power: its military force, and its ability to cut off natural gas to western Europe. Russia supplies 40% of the gas to the European Union, and is using this as a weapon in order to get its way in Eastern Europe and to threaten Ukraine. This government is part of the discussions about how to ensure that global natural gas supplies are there for Europeans if the Russians decide to cut off natural gas.

For all of these reasons, the Liberal government's Speech from the Throne does nothing to address Canada's decline on the world stage and the need to come forward with a coherent foreign policy.

● (1600)

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was quite surprised to hear my colleague speak about the Liberals' greenhouse gas emissions. He sounded like he was complaining, even though we know that our Conservative friends are seen as an oil lobby across Canada. I was pleased to hear his comments.

The Liberals' efforts to fight climate change have been pathetic. Since coming to power, they have invested an average of \$14 billion a year in direct and indirect aid to the oil sector, they have built a pipeline, and greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase.

I am curious to know if my colleague could speak about the Conservative plan to fight greenhouse gas emissions.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, in the last election campaign, we presented a climate change plan that was supported by experts. Our plan adopted the government's plan for putting a price on carbon for industry, and we presented a plan for the consumer sector. We truly believe in the challenge of climate change. We understand that it is a global challenge and that Canada has to do its part.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a lot of respect for the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, and I truly believe that he believes in climate change and that we need to do something about it. However, I would suggest to him to be careful about using the term “we” when he refers to the belief in climate change, because a lot of Conservatives unfortunately do not believe that the climate is changing.

I take issue with his suggestion that the Conservatives came up with a credible plan to address climate change. Basically, they created an Air Miles version of carbon credits in which someone can purchase certain products, if they are wealthy enough to spend a lot of money, to build up a bank of points and buy stuff with those points.

The member must be able to provide some context as to how we can credibly do our part to drive down global emissions. I would encourage him to share some other thoughts perhaps outside of the jurisdiction of that Air Miles plan the Conservatives developed.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, that plan was not for all consumers in all 10 provinces. It was restricted to provinces that

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had refused to allow the federal government to put in place its own plan. Obviously with the Supreme Court's ruling, it is clear that the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario, where this was the case, will certainly be putting in their own plans at some future date to comply with the federal government's price on carbon.

In brief, the central point of the matter is this: The government came to office promising to do better on climate change. The fact is that emissions have risen every year that the government has been in office, and despite that the government's lofty promises keep getting more grandiose. The Liberals came to office promising to reduce emissions by 30% from 2005 levels by 2030. Just in the last year, they promised to reduce emissions by 45% from 2005 levels by 2030. It is an even more ambitious promise that flies in the face of the facts.

● (1605)

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his speech and for bringing up the need for real climate action. Despite the government's promises, it has failed to take meaningful action on the climate crisis.

The government promised to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, but they actually increase those subsidies each year. The environment commissioner, in a scathing report, described the government's policy incoherence. An example of this is the emissions reduction fund, which handed out money to oil and gas companies that admitted they were expanding production and increasing emissions.

Does the member agree that we need to stop handing out money to profitable oil and gas companies and invest that money in climate solutions instead?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I believe that the best way to achieve climate emission reductions is to ensure that there is a price on carbon that is equitable across all regions of the country, and equitable across all economic sectors of our economy. Reductions should be achieved through that mechanism. I also believe that an essential part of getting the job done is being honest with ourselves about our record on climate change, which is one of the worst in the industrialized world.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House as the member of Parliament for Yellowhead to speak at report stage on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. Before I comment, I want to remind everyone of what transpired leading up to the throne speech.

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On August 18, 2020, the Prime Minister asked then Governor General Julie Payette to prorogue Parliament until September 23, amid the WE Charity scandal. She agreed. The previous federal election was on October 21, 2019, and the 43rd Parliament lasted from December 5 to August 15, 2021. Is it not the intent of prorogation to signal the completion of the government's agenda, or was Parliament prorogued to cover up the Liberal scandal that was being brought to light?

On September 20, 2021, during the pandemic, Canadians were asked to go back to the polls. On November 23, Governor General Mary Simon presented the throne speech laying out the government's new priorities, but in my view, the speech did not do that. Instead, it repeated the Liberals' electoral promises. It was more of the same, with more deficits leading to higher taxes at a time when Canadians were, and still are, barely making ends meet.

In fact, inflation is now impacting families across Canada. Food is getting more expensive. Gas and home heating are costing more. The housing crisis continues to reach record high levels, yet there was no plan to fight inflation in the throne speech except to say the Liberals' solution to inflation was housing and child care.

In the throne speech it says:

Inflation is a challenge that countries around the world are facing.... [While] Canada's economic performance is better than many of our partners, we must keep tackling the rising cost of living.

If our economy is better than our partners', why are other countries launching ambitious plans focused on innovation, lowering taxes and cutting red tape to get their economies rolling again? We know that to build a better economic future we have to have objectives, such as removing interprovincial trade barriers, revamping the tax system, creating more jobs and much more.

There was no mention of what measures would be taken to address the cost of living, especially in my riding of Yellowhead, where people are struggling to make ends meet. Our seniors and those on fixed incomes are worried. Further, the speech touched on warning that the earth is in danger, but it did not come up with any major adjustments to make the climate plan functional. In fact, the Liberals made it worse by ignoring the plight of workers in the energy, auto and skilled industries.

There was no mention about helping Alberta. Instead, the document continued the Liberals' assault on energy workers. The only reference to energy workers was a promise to limit Canada's oil and gas emissions. As we all know, businesses are suffering, impacting our economy and our country. The throne speech did not mention the potential to create a plan for workers so that they could return to work.

Tourism is a very important industry in my riding, as are oil, gas and forestry. There was no mention of tourism and how it has been affected by the pandemic. Towns in my riding like Drayton Valley, Edson, Hinton and Rocky Mountain House are challenged to fill positions in local and small businesses. These small businesses are major contributors to our local employment, and they are hurting. Some businesses have even closed.

Millions of Canadians will continue to be left behind by the Liberal government. The throne speech only recycled many of the lofty

promises we heard six years ago. The document only outlined the initiatives that began in the last Parliament, saying the Liberals would continue to enact what they promised in their election platform. It was the same old, same old.

• (1610)

Again I ask, why did the Liberals prorogue Parliament and call for an election only to reiterate the same initiatives and promises in their throne speech? After all, the purpose of a throne speech is to introduce the government's direction and goals and to outline how it will work to achieve them. It should not repeat previous promises.

It is ironic that even though the throne speech is entitled "Building a resilient economy" and the word "economy" was repeated 11 times, nowhere in the document were the words "productivity", "investment" and "growth". Was the word "economy" only a reminder for the Liberals not to forget to add it to their to-do list? If that was the reason, then the word "economy" was only meant to mean unfinished business, not a new economic idea.

British Columbia and Alberta are two of the largest exporting provinces of softwood lumber and northern bleached softwood. Softwood lumber tariffs only damage our economy by affecting many Canadians looking for employment. Our partnership with the United States is also not helping. There was no mention of a plan to deal with lumber tariffs to protect Canadian jobs. The softwood lumber industry is a significant contributor to the Canadian economy, especially in my riding, where a number of mills are located. The lumber industry provides thousands of jobs in communities across the country, and generates numerous positive overflows to industry and services in every community. The price of softwood lumber skyrocketed following the start of the pandemic, and the pandemic-induced lumber shortage is driving up the cost of homes, making it difficult for Canadians to buy and build their homes. The price of housing under the Liberal government has been skyrocketing, and Canadians need a government that can help them afford their first home.

There was also no mention in this throne speech of making our communities safe. Rural crime continues to be at crisis levels in many parts of the country. The government has failed to take any meaningful action to help. Instead, it has actually made matters worse by reducing penalties for crime, making the revolving door of the justice system spin even more quickly.

There was no mention of how the government will deal with threats from China, nor as to why Canada designated lithium as a critical mineral and then allowed China to buy one of our lithium mines. The Liberals even went one step further and chose not to conduct a national security review following the announced takeover of Canadian lithium mining company Neo Lithium. Under the provisions of the Investment Canada Act, the foreign takeover was not immediately subject to a review and proper due diligence. Critical minerals such as lithium are essential to the future prosperity of Canada's economy and our strategic interests. These minerals are used in the production of products like electric vehicles and could play a major role in meeting our climate challenges. It is imperative that Canada takes seriously the issue of critical minerals and the domestic supply chains of these minerals.

Priorities announced by the Liberal government do nothing for Canadians who are worried about the economy, the cost of living, the increasing cost of everyday essentials, crippling businesses from supply-chain constraints, labour shortages, investment, national unity, tourism, oil and gas, forestry, housing, safety in rural communities, workers whose wages are stagnating, the inflation that is steadily increasing and much more. What the government should have done was outline a game plan and a glimmer of hope for how the government would kick-start and strengthen our recovery from the pandemic. Unfortunately, that was obviously too much to ask.

I look forward to questions.

● (1615)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, we definitely hear a lot from the Conservatives about the problem that the world is facing with inflation right now. However, what we do not tend to hear a lot about are solutions. The member brought up the fact that housing prices are going up and there is a housing shortage, but he has not suggested any solutions. Time and again, we never hear from the Conservatives what those solutions might be.

What does the member propose as a solution? Even in the last electoral campaign, there were no ideas coming forward from the Conservatives, so I would like to hear from the member what one of those solutions might be.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, to be honest, I am not surprised the member from across the way is asking for help, because the Liberals truly have no plan for how they are going to deal with the high cost of housing.

One of the biggest problems we have is foreign investment in our housing market. It is driving these prices up. There is no way the Liberals ever looked at trying to stifle that. Illegal people are using illegal money to launder money in Canada, and it is shameful that the Liberals have not taken a proper step in trying to address that.

To answer the member's question, absolutely we should chat afterward, and I will give him a proper plan on how to deal with the housing crisis.

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[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague talked a lot about things that were missing from the throne speech and things that were included in it. However, I want to ask him about the topics he avoided.

Will Canada be able to restore its international reputation on foreign policy? Canada has been known as a peacemaker and a deal broker. Now, it is irrelevant.

Could my colleague explain how he would restore Canada's reputation without turning the country into a virtual arms dealer?

[English]

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, it is very true. The easy solution is that we need to get rid of the Liberals and elect the Conservatives. When Stephen Harper was the prime minister of Canada, we had a great reputation right across the world, but unfortunately, since then it has been on a steady decline. Many countries now take advantage of Canada. They have already started looking at why we should not be a part of the Five Eyes anymore. The G7 and G20 are already questioning whether Canada should be a part of them too.

The member is absolutely right. We are in trouble around the world. They are not looking at us seriously. The Liberals are not trying to make sure that Canada is a voice on the world stage.

● (1620)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have some nice memories from when I worked in the private sector. I called on Edson and Hinton regularly and have been in a lot of their small businesses in my time.

I want to talk about salaries. Salaries must increase in Canada. I also want to talk about the importance of the care economy that has been highlighted during this pandemic, and the value of care work, which needs to be elevated and respected as much as society respects the resource economy.

I want to talk specifically about employment right now for people living with a disability. The employment rate for persons with a disability fell from 24.8% all the way down to 13% at one point during this pandemic. We need to protect the income of the most vulnerable workers.

Would the Conservatives support a guaranteed livable basic income for Canadians, starting with people with disabilities?

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question, and I would love to chat with my colleague later and talk about my riding and her work there as well.

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I think the biggest problem we are dealing with is the social system and how we help our people. The biggest problem I have seen over the years is that governments have always governed for four years and then planned for a total of eight. They govern for four, plan for four and operate for eight. Unfortunately, with our social program network, it takes at least 20 to 25 years before we actually see any outcomes, so short-term planning has always hurt everybody.

I think under the Liberal government we are no longer at four and four. I believe we are probably more at a year to two years, tops. One of the things we need to start looking at is our social issues and how we deal with them. I am sure Conservative people have always been concerned about that, and we will definitely take care of the Canadian public as best we can.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I note that I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Hamilton Mountain.

It is nice to be back in the House in this new year, and I wish my colleagues from all sides a belated happy new year and the best to them and their families this year.

It is a pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to speak again on behalf of the wonderful residents of my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge. These are residents who constantly engage me with their passionate and informed opinions, and for that I will always ensure that I continue to be their strong voice in this chamber and with our government.

I wish to send a quick hello back home to my family, especially to our little one of four months, Leia, who has brought so much joy to our family. She has truly captured our hearts and her smile brings light to my world at all times. I am very close to 50 years of age, and I never thought or dreamed that I would be blessed with a third child and now with three daughters. This divine intervention, as I refer to it with my friends, has humbled me and reminded me of the significance of the word “gratitude” and how much we are blessed with.

Coming back to our House of democracy here is always a privilege for all 338 parliamentarians. I will try not to repeat what many of my colleagues have commented regarding the protest we see outside, and I will say that the right to peaceful assembly and protest is sacred. However, what we saw and heard this weekend only makes me believe that we as parliamentarians, all 338, and 38 million Canadians must all redouble our efforts to pursue policies that ensure Canada is truly an inclusive country. We will always stand up for diversity and inclusion, and we will always condemn and push back on racism, hatred and discrimination in all its forms. That is who we are as a people. We are hard-working, we sacrifice and we are passionate. We do what is right for our collective good. I fervently applaud all Canadians who have received their vaccination. I wish to thank the residents of the region of York, 90% of whom are now double-vaccinated.

We are all tired of the pandemic, but things are getting better. Kids are in school. Thankfully, two of my kids are in school, and I am pretty sure my wife is happy too. Sports activities will recommence in Ontario this weekend. Our economy has rebounded and is getting stronger, and vaccines are fuelling that. They are working,

and with that we must be optimistic. I truly believe that brighter days are ahead for all Canadians. COVID has tested our mettle, but Canadians have risen to this challenge. We are resilient and, yes, we will exit stronger. The Speech from the Throne provides the pathway, and it is a moment in our nation's history that we must not lose sight of.

I do have some great news on the economy, and for those who know me after the six years I have been in the House, being elected three times, I am about the economy, I am about jobs and I am about creating better futures for young people and families from coast to coast to coast. It has been two years since our economy and the lives of all Canadians have been impacted by COVID-19. I am happy to report, via Statistics Canada this morning, on the Canadian economy as measured by employment levels, or jobs, and by output, or “gross domestic product”, the term used by economists. They are now both above their prepandemic levels. That speaks to the hard work, perseverance and grit, a word I love to use, of all our citizens. It also speaks to our government's unrelenting focus on having the backs of Canadian businesses, workers, families, seniors, students and all Canadians during the pandemic.

Our economy rebounded faster than many experts had predicted, and it did not happen by chance, coincidence or accident. Leadership was required, and the Prime Minister brought that leadership to Canadians, whether it was with the wage subsidy to ensure millions of workers remained attached to employers; the CEBA, which helped hundreds of thousands of businesses in every riding, all 338; the CERB; the benefits in place currently; or, of course, the procurement of vaccines that have saved lives and are allowing us to exit the pandemic. We were there for Canadians during the pandemic as they were there for their neighbours, friends and families.

I view the Speech from the Throne as continuing the work we began in the fall of 2015. With now three strong mandates from Canadians, we continue to build a strong middle class and support those working hard to join it.

• (1625)

With an economy that works for all Canadians through inclusive growth we have lifted hundreds of thousands of Canadians and hundreds of thousands of children all across this country out of poverty, created millions of jobs for Canadians and brought optimism to hard-working Canadian families that the future of our country is bright and remains bright. It is a throne speech that believes in and commits to a just and fair Canada, with not only a strong economy that attracts newcomers from all over the world, which we see on a daily basis, but one that strives to allow every single Canadian the opportunity to succeed.

My measure of success for our government is very simple. It is how we take care of our most vulnerable in our society, how we ensure they have an optimistic future for them and their families. We have an obligation as a blessed people, as God has truly blessed this country, and our government will remain centred on this obligation.

It is a throne speech that charts a path together on reconciliation and a solemn responsibility to respond to the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Only a whole-of-government approach and breaking down barriers will allow us to do the work that is necessary. We are making progress in this journey with first nations, and we know that it will be a long journey. I have read the throne speech several times and these words of the Governor General struck me as being very poignant and probably the most important in the throne speech itself.

She said, “There is hope in the every day. Reconciliation is not a single act, nor does it have an end date. It is a lifelong journey of healing, respect and understanding.” This journey will continue unabated.

As one of the 338 MPs elected to serve, the responsibility given to us is a special one, a unique one and one that carries for me a deep sense of responsibility. We are not surgeons. We are not carpenters. We are not labourers. My father was a roofer. I do not know how to build a roof, but I tried to help him sometimes. My mother was a fish filleter. My brother is a first responder, but we are parliamentarians. The responsibility we have is that each of us is a community leader. Each of us has been sent here by our communities to lead, debate the issues and ensure that the laws that we make for our country strive to make our country a more just, more inclusive and more equitable place.

We are Canadians and we need to ensure we leave a clean environment and a strong economy for all our children. We must confront the challenges that face not only our country but the world with optimism and a sense of purpose, much like the waves of newcomers who have come to Canada for generations and who helped build this country.

On climate change, the transition to a low-carbon economy and the opportunities economically will be and currently are enormous. Canada is there. We were there placing a price on pollution. We were there in bringing forth and passing the first-ever Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act, and we were there globally, whether at COP25 or COP26, with our partners. Our ongoing investments in a green economy are creating jobs, wealth for Canadians and ensuring a clean and healthy environment for all Canadians.

We are there investing in public transit. A \$3-billion fund will be in place annually for public transit for all municipalities, so that Canadians can get to work faster and get back home to see their kids after school. Why? It is because it is the right thing to do and that is how we build a truly inclusive country.

We will ensure that we cap and reduce oil and gas sector emissions through innovation and working together with industry. As an economist and someone who grew up on the west coast before I moved to Ontario, I truly know there are hundreds of thousands of Canadian workers connected to the energy industry and we must work with them. We must work with industry. It is a fact that we are prosperous because of the resources that have been in this country for hundreds of years, that we have utilized and that we continue to utilize, and we must continue to work with industry to transition.

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I visited the Alberta industrial heartland a few years ago in my first term. I was there by myself touring some of the plants. I covered much of the sector during my private sector years, and I see the tens of billions of dollars of new investments that have been announced for Alberta, all net zero, all not producing GHGs. That is transition. That is innovation. We must continue down that path. It was also great to see, in the last 24 hours, in the city of Vaughan, in Canada, that for the first time Volkswagen exported some of its new SUVs.

• (1630)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would just simply have this comment for the hon. member. There are many folks I have chatted with, some constituents who have travelled a long way to come to Ottawa. Some of them have never been to Ottawa and some have never been involved in a protest before. They are desperate to be heard. My simple request would be to listen to some of those who have, across the country, shared their frustrations with current government policies. I believe it is incumbent upon all of us to be willing to listen at a time when Canadians are very divided.

My question is specific to the energy sector. I know this member is, I think, quite aware of the realities that exist within our energy sector and the opportunity that is there. How can he reconcile that support with his government's and his Prime Minister's statements about how they plan to phase out the oil sands and phase out Canada's most prosperous industry?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Battle River—Crowfoot for his question. I do enjoy listening to his speeches and comments regarding his constituency. My mandate here is to work together with all members on both sides of the aisle and listen to all Canadians. We must bring Canadians together. Over 90% of Canadians are vaccinated. We must listen to all Canadians.

With regard to the energy sector, our government purchased a pipeline. We are building that pipeline. We are ensuring our exports diversify from the United States. We are obviously heavily dependent on them. We know we have resources that are wanted. We know we have resources that are being utilized and will be used for many years to come. It is a fact. We need to make sure we put in place policies that encourage innovation within that sector to lower GHGs.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, the government's only mention of climate change in the throne speech was a comment that Canada must move talk into action, which is a very vague commitment.

The government claims to want to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, but since it did not define these subsidies, it could ultimately conceal them in the form of funding to make oil and gas less carbon intensive. The Liberal government claims to be combatting climate change but will instead subsidize Canada's oil and gas industry.

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It is very clear to us. We must cap oil and gas production, not attempt to make fossil fuels less carbon intensive. There is no such thing as clean oil or coal.

• (1635)

[English]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I will say the answer to climate change is lowering our greenhouse gas emissions. Today, I read a report that in Norway almost 90% of vehicle sales this past month were electric. We need to get to that in Canada. We need to put in place those policies that will lower GHG emissions, but we must also understand there are literally hundreds of thousands of Canadian workers who work in the energy sector and there is going to be a transition. We want to make sure we are there for them and their families. They are hard-working and we will be there to support them as we go through this transition in the years ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, in my riding of Vancouver East, I have a great number of seniors who are absolutely desperate because their GIS is being cut or reduced. It is so confusing. One of my constituents has been referred by government agents to go to Service Canada to get a form to see if he could get his GIS restored, even though that process would not work for him. He is frustrated beyond measure and now he is faced with eviction.

The government has not addressed this issue, not with the fall economic statement, not at least until May. It does not help the problem. What suggestions does he have for seniors who are being evicted right now?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we will be there for seniors day in and day out. I suggest that any parliamentarian that needs to raise specific issues for specific constituents bring them forward to the pertinent PS and minister.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move that the House (a) acknowledge that the leader of the official opposition in the Senate expressed his strong concerns that a senator from the Conservative caucus was not appointed a member of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians; (b) regret the leader of the official opposition in the House proclaiming that members of the Conservative caucus would not sit on NSICOP; (c) recommend the appointment of Conservative Senator Fabian Manning to NSICOP; and (d) agree to work with the government to ensure that the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians Act is swiftly and solely amended to allow for an additional member of the Senate to participate in the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, that was an odd time to be putting forth a unanimous consent motion.

Was he just trying to distract from the fact that he was the only person in the House to disagree with condemning a vote on blackface?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry, but the time for presenting unanimous consent motions is not stipulated anywhere in the Standing Orders. Anybody can present them at any time.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to address this House in my introductory speech.

Today I am fiercely proud to speak to several elements in the Speech from the Throne that are particularly close to my heart: our government's plan to improve life for women and all Canadians by addressing the housing crisis and creating a national child care system, and our efforts to bolster our democracy and civic discourse by reforming the Broadcasting Act.

Before I discuss the throne speech, I would like to thank a few people who helped me get here. My son, Ty, has been with me every step of the journey, making the experience profoundly more meaningful. I could not have been here without him or my partner Michael, whose unwavering support made the campaign possible and made our family's transition to my new life as the member of Parliament for Hamilton Mountain as smooth as possible. My heartfelt thanks go to my campaign team and the many volunteers who showed up every day.

As the Governor General explained, we are here to honour the trust placed in us by our constituents by representing and serving them. I think the throne speech exemplifies this by its commitment to fairness for women and all Canadians.

The throne speech is good for women. It outlines our government's plan to take strong action to support Canadian women, and supporting women has always been a major priority for me. That is why I am delighted that our government has chosen to examine its policy and spending through a gender-based lens.

I have been volunteering with women-serving organizations since the early 1990s, starting with a year in Honduras in support of vulnerable women in Tegucigalpa and La Mosquitia and continuing in my years in Hamilton through community organizations like the YWCA. I have seen the life-changing impact of programs that support women, from helping women become financially independent to accessing services and supports to finding safe permanent housing for themselves and their children to finding affordable child care. These supports not only help women and their children; these supports also improve communities.

On the subject of women's safety and security, indigenous women have suffered much in Canada, so I am pleased that our government will accelerate work with indigenous partners to address the national tragedy of missing and murdered indigenous women.

Investments in women are important, because the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly difficult for us. We need a just recovery, one in which everyone has a chance to succeed and realize their potential. That means an inclusive and equitable recovery. The Speech from the Throne supports this by highlighting our government's two major priorities, housing and child care.

There is a housing crisis in Hamilton and across Canada. Far too many people have been forced out of their homes by dramatically rising rents and renovations. Many women who were trapped at home with their abusers during the pandemic fled their violent situations, and shelters are operating at full capacity or over their capacity. That is why our government is moving forward with a 10-year national action plan on gender-based violence and will continue to support organizations like YWCA Hamilton and Good Shepherd, which are providing women with critical supports.

Every Canadian deserves safe, stable housing and access to social and health services. Our government believes this. That is why we have a national housing strategy, working with community partners like Good Shepherd to ensure more Hamiltonians experience the safety and dignity of a home, and can keep that home thanks to wraparound support services. This government is delivering on that commitment, as shown by the recent announcement by the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion of more than a hundred new supportive homes for marginalized people in Hamilton.

The national child care program introduced by this government is another reason I was inspired to run for office. In Hamilton Mountain, our government's plan will save a typical family more than \$11,000 a year in the first year. By 2026, families with infants will be saving almost \$18,000 a year. Imagine the impact these savings will have on the quality of life for families in Hamilton and across Canada.

The early learning and child care plan will ease the financial burden on parents, create new jobs and allow parents, especially women, to re-enter the workforce. This plan will make life better for children, parents and ultimately our communities. Studies show that for every dollar invested in childhood education, the broader economy receives between \$1.50 and \$2.80 in return.

● (1640)

I had the chance to visit one of the non-profit Umbrella child care centres in my riding with the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and I have stayed in touch with executive director Darryl Hall. He says that hundreds of Hamilton families are on wait-lists for licensed, not-for-profit child care. Wait times range from two months to two years. He says that this wait absolutely affects a parent's ability to re-enter the workforce, and it also has a negative impact on child development. Darryl says, "Families are being forced into unlicensed and unregulated care for their children." He says the Conservative plan for child care tax credits does nothing to address the staffing and infrastructure challenges.

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This is especially important in Hamilton, where we have a larger percentage of children from marginalized communities compared to the rest of the province. In some parts of the city, more than 50% of kindergartners are considered vulnerable in terms of development or skills. A higher proportion of kids are from low-income families compared to the national average. Darryl says that these kids need access to a diverse and qualified system to support their unique needs. These kids cannot wait.

Our government has a plan for hundreds of thousands of new child care spaces that would ease that wait-list and a plan to increase the number of qualified staff, address low wages and stabilize the workforce.

● (1645)

[Translation]

As we move on to the recovery phase, our government will adapt support measures and programs to help small businesses keep their doors open.

Thanks to our emergency programs, employment levels have recovered and are now higher than they were before the pandemic. We will continue to ensure that Canadians have access to good jobs, that workers get decent wages, and that people can develop the skills they need to find and keep good jobs during the recovery, after the pandemic and beyond.

The government knows that the best way to grow our economy and make life more affordable is to end the threat of COVID-19. We procured enough vaccines for every adult in Canada two months ahead of schedule, and we now have enough supply to vaccinate our children and provide boosters to all those who are eligible.

[English]

Finally, I would like to address another government priority that is close to my heart: reform of the obsolete 1991 Broadcasting Act.

For more than two decades, I had the privilege of engaging with people in Hamilton Mountain through my work as a journalist, first with the Hamilton Spectator and then with CHCH TV News. People in Hamilton and across Canada depend on local news to keep them informed about their community. It is a crucial part of our democracy, and working in journalism afforded me the privilege of learning about and hearing from communities and people across Hamilton and beyond.

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Now I am here to give Hamilton Mountain a strong voice in this chamber and to be a steadfast voice for the value of local news in this country. As we heard in the throne speech, the government will ensure that web giants pay their fair share. We will level the playing field and protect Canadian culture and creativity.

This is the moment parliamentarians must work together to get big things done and shape a better future for coming generations. This is what I have heard from the people of Hamilton Mountain, and they are the reason I am here. This throne speech outlines our government's plan to support Canadians so that everyone can participate in shaping our better, fairer and more prosperous future.

Thank you.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canada's Ethics Commissioner, Mario Dion, found that this member's Prime Minister improperly influenced the then minister of justice and attorney general Jody Wilson-Raybould, disposed of her, then got rid of Dr. Philpott, and that is after he elbowed an opposition MP in the chest. We found out later that he groped a reporter.

As a defender of women, a promoter of women's rights, why was it that she joined that party with a Prime Minister notorious for his toxic masculinity?

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Madam Speaker, I am so proud to be part of this Liberal team. It has had a 50% gender-diverse cabinet since it started six years ago and has maintained that proportion. We have a female Deputy Prime Minister and finance minister. We have a woman who is the head of defence. We have women in key positions in cabinet. That says for itself that this is a feminist government, a government that believes in women, a government that believes in things that support women, such as child care.

• (1650)

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her remarkable maiden speech in the House. That is a milestone in the life of a member. I applaud her and also want to commend her on the quality of her French.

She spoke at length about women and housing. The two are interrelated. For example, every day a woman in Quebec knocks on the door of a shelter that helps women who are victims of domestic violence and is sent away because of a lack of resources.

Last week Scotiabank reported that Quebec was the worst country in the G7 for its average number of housing units per 1,000 inhabitants. We are at 424, and the average is 471. To get to 471, the G7 average, we would have to build 1.8 million housing units in Canada, which would be a huge job.

Will my colleague advocate within her party for massive investments in social housing in the coming years? We really need them.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Madam Speaker, I will try to answer in French, but please excuse any errors I may make.

I love Quebec and have spent a lot of time there. However, I think the problems my colleague mentioned exist across the country. For example, I talked about the risk of homelessness in Hamil-

ton. The minister recently promised \$26.7 million to build over 100 housing units for people in Hamilton who are at risk of homelessness—

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Another member has to have the opportunity to ask a question.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, a top concern in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith that has been brought forward over and over has been the skyrocketing delays through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Delays have been so bad. They were bad before the pandemic, but they have become so much worse since then. Families have been forced apart for years, and IRCC is still years away from meeting the service standards.

Families have been telling me that they have been at their breaking points, forced to struggle alone. Does the member opposite agree that it is time to take real action to address the backlogs and help reunify the hundreds of families desperately waiting for help in Nanaimo—Ladysmith?

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Madam Speaker, I did hear our minister responsible speaking to these issues today. He spoke about how much he has been able to accomplish in terms of the immigration system and how many immigrants we have been able to bring to Canada despite the pandemic. We have obviously more to do always, but I think we have done a fair job.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan, The Environment; the hon. member for Kenora, Regional Economic Development; the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable, Health.

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, I ran to be an MP because I love Canada. I love our country. My ancestors fled tyranny and war-torn eastern Europe over 130 years ago to come to the Canadian prairies for the freedom and opportunity it represented. Their hard work and sacrifice created a better life for all of those who followed, including me. I am motivated every day to honour them, to do right by them and my constituents, and to contribute to a united and prosperous Canada, glorious and free.

However, since I was elected over two years ago, I have grown increasingly concerned over the state of our national unity. Whether it has been the alarming rise of western alienation or Quebec separatism, or the increasing divide between urban versus rural, or the division on the COVID-19 pandemic, national unity seems to be at an all-time low. It is understandable in many ways, given the terrible two years it has been for all of us.

Thirty thousand Canadians have tragically died of COVID-19, and thousands continue to suffer from long COVID. Thousands more have suffered from delayed surgeries. Few families, including my own, have been left untouched by the cruelty of COVID-19. As a result, millions of Canadians, and I have heard this first-hand, are terrified of COVID.

They feel that it would be a death sentence to them or their loved ones. Many will never recover from this fear. I have spoken to them first-hand. Many constituents of mine have said that they will never take their masks off again in public or feel comfortable in large crowds, or even travel ever again.

Thankfully, with incredible human ingenuity, COVID vaccines were developed at warp speed and rolled out worldwide to billions of people in a matter of months, saving hundreds of thousands of lives. Thanks to the extraordinary health care workers, thousands of sick Canadians were supported throughout this pandemic.

However, I do believe we have reached a point where we must make serious investments in transformative change and take the best practices from around the world for our health care system so that we will all be better prepared for a future pandemic. Every expert is telling us that this will not be the last one. There are more to come. We will go through this again. It is just a matter of time.

The data tell us that during normal times, on average, our health care capacity operates at over 100%. Hallway medicine, eight-hour EI wait times, months for MRIs and critical surgeries for hip and knee replacements, and many other issues have been around longer than I have been alive. We know that our health care system experiences tremendous strain during flu season, let alone during the tsunami of sick people from COVID over the past two years. This is why governments say that they have needed to take extreme and extraordinary measures. It was because our health care system cannot handle everybody getting sick at one time.

We were told we are all in this together, and we all stayed home. We all remember “two weeks to bend the curve”, yet two years later, we continue to live extremely restricted lives. As a result, hundreds of thousands of businesses that depend on public gatherings have closed, representing countless family dreams and all the jobs they supported being completely wiped out.

Untold damage has been done to our mental health and the development of our children. The deadly impact of isolation on our elderly is immeasurable. There is increased alcohol and drug abuse, divorce, and depression. The list of the impacts of this goes on and on. As a representative of nearly 100,000 people, I have heard of these traumas first-hand. I have dealt with sobbing, threats, screaming and pleading, and their stories have haunted me. To describe the last two years in one word, I would say “trauma”. We have all ex-

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perienced trauma, and millions of Canadians are at the end of their rope. They cannot take this anymore.

The result of that is right outside this building. Honestly, from that perspective, I do not find all that is going on right now outside very surprising. It is like a pressure release valve has exploded after the last two years. I do want the truckers and all those who support the convoy to know that I hear them. I see them, and I care about them and all of our freedoms.

Watching the footage online of that convoy making its way across Canada, passing families of all cultural backgrounds along highways and overpasses, and the gatherings of tens of thousands of people on Parliament Hill, I have never seen so many Canadian flags waving in the wind. As a patriotic Canadian, I have to say it made me quite emotional. It makes me emotional now.

I acknowledge, though, and this is important, that some people are angry. I denounce the evil people who seized this opportunity to display their ignorance and their hatred, and I denounce them fully. However, many more, thousands more, are expressing their patriotism for their country. They are expressing hope for the future and the excitement for change, which is honestly giving them the will to keep going and persevere through this incredibly difficult time.

• (1655)

They just want to be heard by their government and have them look at other jurisdictions and what is happening in the U.K., the Netherlands, Ireland, Norway and many other advanced nations. They are opening up, moving past mandates and learning to live with this. We can do it, too. We have some of the highest vaccination rates, if not the highest vaccination rates, in the world. We have rapid tests. We have all put the work in. We have all the tools we need, and now is the time to move forward.

To be honest, I fear that we may never get back to normal, especially when I see the hatred that has developed between Canadians. Treating each other with dignity, compassion and respect seems to have been forgotten long ago. I have to say, on a personal level, I understand the frustrations of some vaccinated Canadians toward unvaccinated Canadians. I hear them, too. I see them and hear from them. I get it.

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However, I want to share a couple of stories with everyone. When I was door-knocking during the last election, I met a single woman about my age. She was on her front step and her young son was clinging to her leg as she shared her story with me. She was a social worker. She said last year she received a hero of the year award for going above and beyond as a social worker to help the most vulnerable in our community.

This is when she started to cry in front of me. She said that this year no one would talk to her. She said that she was going to be fired from her job. Do members want to know why? It is because she was too afraid to get the COVID vaccine. She was too afraid. She believed it in her bones and there was no convincing this woman otherwise.

When the Province of Manitoba brought forward its strong mandates, there were articles in the local paper about nursing staff suddenly seeing a lot of anger, rage and tears from new people coming in to get the jab. It seemed that some people in the public were surprised to learn this. Honestly, I did not find it very surprising that people who were forced against their will to get the vaccine, with their jobs hanging over their heads and who believed with every fibre of their being that it was not right for them for whatever reason, were angry and crying.

I have talked to these people. They have reached out to me. I have made the time. They are my constituents and I have heard them out. They described to me their experience of getting the jab, so to speak. It was as if it broke them. It ripped away part of who they were and of everything they believed this country is. It took away their agency and their bodily autonomy. That is what mandates do to people. That is the reality. Of course, there were tears and rage. These are human beings.

I will remind everyone that for the first year and a half of the pandemic, it was this Prime Minister who said there were vaccines for all those who wanted them. He must have said it a thousand times. With the drop of a hat he called the election, and within days of that he was yelling into a microphone at a Liberal rally, and saying that people had the right not to get vaccinated, but they did not have the right to sit next to someone who was. He said that. Shame on him for dehumanizing people that way.

Canada is fracturing and the Prime Minister is winning votes on it. Whether it is the east versus west, urban versus rural, left versus right or now the pandemic, he has been dividing Canadians for six years. Uniting the country, leading freedom over fear, should be the number one priority of the Prime Minister. To be honest, I am beginning to doubt we can ever unite Canadians again, that we will ever get back to normal, and that people can make their own personal health choices and still be equal.

During a particularly low day recently, and I think we have all had those over the last two years, I heard a story that gave me some renewed hope and motivation. I will share it with everyone. It is about President John F. Kennedy. In 1961, JFK had a decision to make. He wanted to call a news conference and tell the world that the Americans were going to the moon. This was a very risky decision for his reputation, because technically there was no way forward. The technology did not exist and it had never been done before.

He needed to make a decision, so he went to the most brilliant aerospace engineer in America and asked him what it would take to go to the moon. The engineer responded with five words: The will to do it. The rest was history after that.

What is it going to take to heal the trauma and division? What is it going to take to bring Canadians together again? What is it going to take to unite this country? It will take the will to do it. It will take courage and conviction. The will to do it will deliver the glorious and free Canada that we all rightfully deserve. I, for one, will work day and night to deliver that to my constituents and all Canadians.

● (1700)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.):

Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her speech and for our ongoing wonderful working relationship in committee. The member spoke about the importance of vaccination and the value it has provided us in a path toward freedom, as she refers to it. She also expressed some other concerns.

Could the member share with the House how she reconciles the views that folks have right now about not getting vaccinated with the fact that we have mandatory vaccination for children in many provinces across the country in order for them to attend school?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, I have enjoyed working with the member. We are setting some really important issues right now.

Over the last two years, particularly since the Prime Minister called the unnecessary \$600-million election that further divided Canadians, I have been concerned, as I am sure he has been as well, about the hatred from all sides. There is not nearly enough communication. I think it was a recent poll that said 20% of Canadians think unvaccinated people should go to jail. We are pushing this so far. I am seeing it. I have been door knocking for years, and during the election I saw so much hate, so much division and lots of tears.

I appreciate the member's question, but I would say that we need to move forward and recognize we have done an astounding job. We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world and we need to move forward.

● (1705)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to talk again about the care economy and elevating the traditional work that belonged to women for many years.

If the needed investments in health care transfers had been increased instead of cut by the Conservatives and then not restored by the Liberals, we would have had a stronger health support system to support COVID alongside cancer and pediatric surgeries, which cannot be done right now. If we do not invest in the care economy in a way that increases health care transfers, as the premiers are asking for, we will not be able to weather any other health crises.

Do the Conservatives support greater health care transfers to the provinces?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member on her first election.

Absolutely, I do. As I mentioned in my speech, we need more investment in health care and we need transformative change. We need to be looking at best practices around the world. We are seeing other countries with far better surge capacity than we have in Canada.

As I said, this is not the last pandemic and this is not the last wave. We need to prepare our health care system to have that surge capacity so that we do not need to do what has been done to people for the last two years and so that governments can no longer default to telling people they have to stay home for two years because our health care system cannot work. I do not want to hear that excuse anymore.

I want to see transformative change so that we can usher in an era of health care that truly supports everyone. No more eight-hour ER wait times. No more waiting two years for a hip replacement. No more shutting down the economy because we cannot handle a surge. We need to build a robust health care system.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, right in the middle of a pandemic, the health care system was compromised in Quebec and all the other provinces.

In the 1970s, health transfers covered 50% of health care spending. They were cut back and now they cover 22%. Quebec and the Canadian provinces all agree that health transfers should be increased from 22% to 35%, and yet nothing is being done.

The health care system was already strained; with the pandemic, it will take years to recover.

Does my colleague not think it is time to increase health transfers?

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Madam Speaker, I certainly support investments in health care, and greater investments seem to be needed. However, there is one point I want to make. I believe I read that Canada has one of the most expensive health care systems per capita in the world. Why are we spending so much and getting so little? Why are people waiting eight, 10, 12 or 14 hours in an ER? Why are they waiting years, in normal times, to get a hip and knee replacement or an MRI?

We need to invest, look across the globe for best practices and transform our health care system to be more competitive and to better serve all Canadians.

The Address

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to respond to the government's Speech from the Throne.

As I stand here, I wonder why we are responding to yet another throne speech.

The Prime Minister decided to call an election for no reason during a global pandemic, when Canadians needed us to be here in the House to find solutions and bring us out of the pandemic.

I was disappointed again when I listened to the throne speech. It used so many words to say nothing. I was stunned to see how short on substance the last two throne speeches were. Still, I am here today because I believe I can make a difference in my riding, Beauce, whose residents trusted me to represent them by giving me a second term. I sincerely thank them.

● (1710)

As the House knows, the Beauce region is a hotbed of entrepreneurship. Our rural community is full of dynamic, ingenious people. We work together to strengthen our community, but we often feel forgotten by this government.

The government continues to ignore one of the worst problems of all: cellphone coverage. Technology is more advanced than ever in 2022, yet people in my riding have a hard time getting service in municipalities like Saint-Martin and many others. There is nothing in the throne speech about how the government intends to solve this problem. Moreover, now that the Prime Minister has finally released the ministerial mandate letters, I can confirm to the House that the minister in question has received no instructions to do anything about it.

When will this government understand that this is not only a matter of fairness, but also a matter of public safety? In the community of Saint-Victor, a resident was stung by a bee and went into anaphylactic shock. As he lay unconscious, a friend of his had to climb to the top of a hill to call 911. Once the ambulance arrived, it also had difficulty contacting the Saint-Georges hospital because the signal was so weak. In this case, this person was extremely lucky not to lose his life.

This should serve as a reminder to the government that it still has a lot of work to do on this issue. It may well say that cellphone bills must be reduced, but it is also necessary to have equitable basic service in all regions and not create two classes of citizens.

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I would now like to draw attention to another urgent issue that the government has not yet addressed in this speech. My constituency offices are inundated daily with calls from citizens pleading for help. These citizens are running out of patience as they wait for answers from Service Canada. Criminals have stolen their identities and are applying for benefits on behalf of other people. There have been so many cases of fraud since the government funding programs were created during the pandemic. I agree that these programs were necessary to get us through this pandemic, but when is the government going to show some real leadership and fix this problem?

My staff are getting calls from people in tears because their EI or GIS payments had been stopped after being targeted by fraudsters. These Canadians deserve to have their files processed quickly. They cannot wait months to get answers from an investigator when they are not able to pay rent or put food on the table. The government has done something in recent days by reassigning Service Canada employees to this issue, but pulling officials off other important files to address a major problem seems like a band-aid solution to me. Quebec is an epicentre of fraudulent activity, and this has been going on for months. The government's inaction in recent months is unacceptable.

The Department of Employment and Social Development and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration have the same problems as Service Canada. Officials are exhausted. Files are taking longer and longer to get processed. There is a chronic labour shortage in my riding, where the unemployment rate is below 4%. My riding is constantly looking for more workers in all sectors.

Businesses in my riding rely heavily on the temporary foreign worker program. The problem is that these businesses are unable to get the workers they need, workers they have already recruited. These businesses are drowning in paperwork, and when that is finally completed, they still face long wait times.

• (1715)

The effects of this labour shortage are felt every day. Take for example Olymel, a company in my riding. It is short roughly 200 workers right now. This major shortage is causing serious delays in hog slaughtering, which has repercussions on producers and on the land because producers have to keep the hogs much longer than planned and may even have to euthanize some of them if they cannot be slaughtered in a timely manner.

Businesses in my riding are always trying to grow their operations with new advances in automation and robotics, but government funding is simply not there to help businesses achieve their full potential.

Many businesses in my riding will have to close their doors if the labour shortage is not adequately resolved, and many others might ship their activities overseas.

The fact is that no matter the percentage changes in percentage or the policies the government puts in place for the programs, the problem is that the government is failing to address the unacceptable delays. We need real action from the government to get rid of the excessive red tape and to streamline the application process in every area.

As many of my colleagues know, I would love to be able to discuss agriculture and agri-food. Unfortunately, agriculture is not mentioned in the throne speech. I believe that is a huge mistake on the government's part.

These sectors have been and will continue to be significant economic drivers in our country. We should be promoting these sectors, not using them as a bargaining chip on the international stage.

I hear about these problems every day from my constituents. We have to do what is required for our citizens and solve these problems. These are not partisan issues. I have had these conversations with several ministers on different occasions, but nothing changes. This government needs to get its priorities straight.

I will continue to stand up for the people of Beauce every day and every time I have the opportunity to rise in the House. I will ask the hard questions and, above all, I will hold the government to account.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I first want to congratulate my esteemed colleague for his down-to-earth speech. When I listen to him, I understand why we often agree despite our fundamental differences of opinion, in particular about the future of Quebec.

My colleague spoke about several subjects that I would also like to address, but I will focus on cell tower coverage. He told us about an emergency where someone had to climb a tree to call 911. They were lucky.

In one area of my riding, in Saint-Édouard-de-Maskinongé, there was one unfortunate death that occurred because of the lack of cell service. There is also a problem in the Lac-Souris area. Even people in the Pointe-du-Lac area in Trois-Rivières have poor cell coverage. That is unacceptable.

I believe that we should create a specific program to address the issue of funding for cell towers once and for all so we can eliminate dead zones in cellular coverage.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that. Does he believe that we could work together to move this file forward?

• (1720)

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It is very germane.

I could have named off all 40 municipalities in my riding. I have visited them many times. There are issues with cell coverage in almost every rural municipality. Yes, there should be a program, but the government should also show that it is firmly resolved to send a clear message to the CRTC, the national organization that must ultimately regulate these companies, which are located in various parts of the country. Yes, we need programs to support them, but the minister to whom the CRTC reports also needs to send a clear signal so that we can resolve this issue once and for all. I asked the minister some questions earlier. People are saying that cellphone bills are too costly. I understand that urban centres are complaining about this issue, comparing themselves to other big cities in Canada and abroad, but I think we need to start with ensuring adequate coverage in all of our communities across Canada.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, health care is in crisis, and in my riding of Victoria, many of my constituents are struggling to access primary health care. There are 100,000 people in the capital regional district who do not have a family doctor, and we are losing multiple walk-in clinics as physicians retire or move on.

Decades of health transfer cuts have had devastating impacts on our province's capacity to address issues in our health care system. We have seen that acutely during this pandemic. Premiers across the country are asking the government for health transfer increases.

Does the member agree we need to increase health transfers now more than ever, and that the government needs to show leadership and work with the provinces and territories to tackle wait times, improve access to primary care, and ensure we recruit and train doctors and other health care professionals to identify the gaps in our health care system?

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that great question. During the election campaign, I think our party was clear about its commitment to increase health transfers unconditionally. I believe the government really needs to help all Canadian provinces so as to improve health care everywhere. I think that is worth emphasizing. There are problems in big cities, but there are problems in my riding and everywhere else too. It is hard to recruit doctors and maintain adequate services. The solution is financial support, so that is what the government should be doing.

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, representing a largely rural constituency, I have certainly heard about the challenges concerning the rural-urban divide. I am wondering if the member could comment further on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The problem seems to be getting worse over time. I think immediate intervention is crucial to minimizing the growing rural-urban divide. I have never had anything against urban communities and big cities, but I think our governments and the federal government

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in particular should pay special attention to supporting rural communities across Canada.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak to the Speech from the Throne today. I could definitely talk about the broad strokes and priorities of that speech, like moving faster on a path to reconciliation, taking bolder action on climate change, growing a more resilient economy and standing up for diversity and inclusion, among others. Each one of those priorities is certainly worthy of a fulsome speech itself, in my view. However, in light of recent events I would like to focus my remarks today on perhaps one of our most pressing challenges, which is finishing the fight against COVID-19.

Nearly two years have passed since the international community sounded the alarm for what would become one of the greatest public health crises that we have ever known. Certainly in my life, I have never seen anything like this and many of us can say that. I am sad to say that COVID-19 has claimed over 5.6 million lives worldwide and the pandemic is not over yet. I cannot help but reflect on the incredible loss and grief people have gone through, and my heart goes out to them and their families.

What we have seen from Canadians over the past two years is nothing short of remarkable. People across Canada have stepped up in every way possible, over and over again, to help each other out and do what is right to keep each other safe. We all know the many things we have done to help, and that includes getting vaccinated.

There have been countless sacrifices made by everyone, without exception. People, families, children, businesses, organizations, governments and communities have all had to adapt and adjust, and those changes have been really challenging and hard. I fully acknowledge that. Business owners, children, seniors, frontline workers and others have made huge contributions to our response to COVID-19 as a nation, and it has definitely made a difference. It has saved many lives.

Canada has 840 deaths per million people, which is much less than half of the EU, the U.K. and the U.S. In fact, it is one-third of the COVID deaths per million in the U.S., so we have saved many lives with all our efforts. Those efforts have not been futile.

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In fact, immeasurable hardships have been brought on by this pandemic. We are all tired, frustrated, fed up and even angry, and it is not over yet. Some of us feel like we are at a breaking point. We even want to shout and scream. We feel like there are whole dimensions of our lives that have been cut off. We miss our families. We want to take a vacation. We want to get together and celebrate again. We want to go back to the way things used to be. All of these feelings are completely understandable and even natural, given the circumstances and based on what we have all been going through together.

However, there are healthy ways to cope and constructive outlets for those feelings, and there are unhealthy, unhelpful and destructive ways. To Canadians, I say their government is not the enemy and vaccinations are not the enemy. The virus is the enemy. The Minister of Health said that this week in the media, and it really struck me. We must not give in to the temptation to give up or to aim all of this frustration at the government, when it should be rightly placed on the circumstances. We must not let ourselves be overcome with hate and anger or lash out.

I have to say that some of the activity we saw over the past weekend on display in our nation's capital was completely and utterly unacceptable, and there is no excuse or justification for it in this country. I never thought I would see this type of behaviour in our country, in our nation's capital, at the seat of our democracy on Parliament Hill. I am referring to symbols of hate and racism, including swastikas and Confederate flags being displayed. I am referring to disrespecting the memory of some of our national heroes like Terry Fox and the unknown soldier at the National War Memorial.

As if these acts were not despicable enough, we also saw videos of protesters harassing shop owners and refusing to wear masks, and we heard accounts of protesters harassing workers at a soup kitchen and stealing food meant to feed the homeless. We also saw that protesters and trucks have shut down the downtown core of Ottawa, causing businesses, schools and even vaccine clinics to be closed. Let us not pretend that the people of Ottawa have not been impacted by all of this. Businesses have lost income, kids are not able to go to school and people's ability to access vaccines and health care has been impeded. That is not healthy.

After the shockingly deplorable behaviour we witnessed in Ottawa this past weekend, we see the Conservatives trying to justify the fact that they supported this group by using the "just a few bad apples" excuse.

• (1725)

In reality, we know many of the Conservative MPs encouraged this. They amplified the rhetoric. They served coffee and came out to show their support. They jumped on the bandwagon for political gain, and when it came time to call out the abhorrent behaviour we all witnessed and stand unequivocally against hate, violence, racism and intolerance, they were not so quick.

I think we can agree the minimal amount of racism, hate and violence we must tolerate is exactly zero, and one cannot assist in fomenting anti-government sentiments and then not be guilty by association. I realize that many protesters were out expressing their points of view and assembling peacefully, which they have every

right to do, and I hear them about wanting our freedom back. All of us feel the same way, but let me remind them what they have accomplished. In their opposition to lockdowns, they have essentially locked down a city from the freedom they say has been taken away from them, adding to the strain on the people of Ottawa and causing extensive cost and hardship to many people.

I might add the people opposing lockdowns in the nation's capital is somewhat strange to me. It seems misplaced, because this is the seat of the federal government. Public health restrictions, lockdowns in particular, are imposed by provinces and territories. Perhaps what is most alarming is that opposition MPs lined up to support this movement, and the public was sold a bill of goods. First, it was that vaccine mandates at the border were supposedly going to disrupt the entire supply chain and lead to empty shelves, but we know that has not happened. In fact, the approximately 90% of truckers who are vaccinated have been delivering goods across our border and are keeping our shelves fully stocked. In fact, I am told there is no measurable impact on cross-border trucking traffic at this point. The United States, in fact, has the same vaccination requirement for truckers, so it is sort of a moot point at this point.

Let us also remember that the Canadian Trucking Alliance, which represents the industry, does not support this Freedom Convoy, because the CTA represents the majority of truckers, who are already vaccinated. To top it off, the organizers of the current rally on Parliament Hill apparently have a proposal to dissolve or overthrow the government. Let us get this straight. These individuals want to overthrow a democratically elected government that is following through on the publicly proclaimed campaign commitments it was elected by the people of Canada to fulfill. Why? It is because a loud minority in this country does not like it.

This is at a time when over 88% of eligible Canadians are vaccinated and just after vaccine mandates for federally regulated workplaces and cross-border travel by train, plane and ship have been implemented, which, as far as I know, last August had an over 80% approval rating in public opinion polls. It was clear that the majority of Canadians supported vaccine mandates and realized this was essential for defeating COVID-19. The public gave our government a clear mandate in the last election to follow through, and that is exactly what we are doing.

I hear the voices of this small minority of Canadians who do not want to get vaccinated and think it is government overreach to require them to do so. However, the reality is that people have the choice to get vaccinated or not. The anti-vaxxers who the Conservatives are courting just do not like the consequences that come with that choice, but as we have learned since we were all kids, choices come with consequences. I think we can all agree we are in extraordinary circumstances, and public health experts around the world say the best chance we have to get back to normal, protect against future infection, blunt future waves and avoid lockdowns is to get those vaccination rates up as high as possible. People who have dedicated their lives to science and to protecting people's health have provided evidence that vaccines work.

Allow me to summarize. People are fed up with their lives being turned upside down by a new virus that is highly transmissible, and a small number of them who refuse to get vaccinated, despite having every opportunity to do so, want everyone else to give them special treatment and accommodate them, instead of complying with the wishes of the majority. They want their rights and freedoms to be completely unlimited, and they want their decisions, no matter how harmful to others, to come with zero consequences. They also oppose lockdowns to the wrong level of government while simultaneously locking down a city in a province that is just about to reopen, all being organized by a group of people who say they want to overthrow a democratically elected government, which is busy fulfilling its promises for the majority of Canadians, because they claim to be the true patriots.

Ironically—

• (1730)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member has used up all his time. I tried to give him some signals, but I know he was quite into his speech. I am sure the hon. member will be able to address additional comments during questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Essex.

• (1735)

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, through you to the member for Whitby, the Speech from the Throne addressed the fact that the dairy industry would receive compensation as it was very much affected by the CUSMA deal.

Can the member update the House as to when our dairy industry can expect a fixed date from the government, along with the amount it can expect when the budget comes down?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Speaker, while I certainly appreciate the question, I do not know how it pertains to the speech I gave. However, it does pertain to the Speech from the Throne, so I will do my best to answer it.

I do not have a specific time and date, but I can say that our dairy industry is exceptionally important to our country, our food system and our supply chains. We are studying that at the agriculture committee, which I am very proud to be on and working with other members of other parties. I would certainly be willing to look into that and get back to the member.

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[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question about the survival of French in Quebec and Canada.

I have been in Parliament for two years now, and this issue is very close to my heart because the percentage of francophones in Quebec is less than 80%. In Montreal, the proportion of people whose first language is French is about to fall below 50%. This is unheard of.

I have heard a lot of rhetoric in Parliament over the past two years. We talk about how we are going to save the French language. Liberal members even voted to recognize Quebec as a nation with French as its only official language, but then the government turns around and appoints a Governor General who speaks only English.

We know that the CEO of Air Canada, which is subject to the Official Languages Act, does not speak French. We recently learned that the majority of CN's board of directors do not even speak French, even though the company is also subject to the Official Languages Act.

Yesterday the hon. Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship held a press conference in English only. This makes no sense for a department that is so critical to the survival of French in Quebec.

Does my colleague agree that it is time to add targeted measures in the next Official Languages Act to save the French language in Quebec?

[English]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Speaker, yes, what my hon. colleague brings up is exceptionally important to this country and all Canadians. It is important to promote bilingualism and to ensure there is no loss of the French language. I think we need to do our best to protect it.

I have been taking French lessons. I am not at a point where I feel confident enough to speak it yet, but I look forward to the moment when I begin to do that in the House.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to go back to the issue of seniors. I raised a question with the member's colleague, the member for Vaughan—Woodbridge, regarding the problems my constituents in Vancouver East are faced with. There are seniors who are facing eviction and getting the runaround from officials who are telling them to contact Service Canada to send in a form, which we all know will not help the situation. His response was to contact the parliamentary secretary. I did one better. I contacted the minister about these issues and so far there has been no resolution.

The reality is this. It seems the government is not going to bring in any measures to help seniors at least until May. In the meantime, seniors in my riding are getting evicted and are absolutely desperate. I am asking the member about advocacy for seniors in his own riding, as well as across the country. Will he ask his government to fix this problem now?

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Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Speaker, I would like to respond to the member by saying that seniors are exceptionally important to me and my riding. I spend a lot of my time listening to their concerns and many of the vulnerabilities they experience, which often relate to housing insecurity.

I definitely agree this is an area I am pursuing actively and have been doing so since I was elected in 2019. Certainly, there is more progress our government can make. I cannot speak to the specific issues in the member's riding or her constituents, but I certainly am working on all the ones that are relevant to my riding.

● (1740)

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House. As this is my first opportunity to present a full speech, please allow me a couple of minutes to thank the good people of Charlottetown for the honour of representing them here in the House of Commons for the fourth time. I was first elected in 2011; they saw fit to elect me once again, and for that I am grateful and humbled.

I am also extremely grateful to the army of volunteers it takes to run a successful campaign. I have been blessed to have a solid core of people who have supported me in those volunteer roles since my first election in 2011. At the risk of missing someone, I am only going to single out my campaign chairs, Emily MacDonald and Spencer Campbell. Spencer has been with me since the very first campaign, and I certainly would not be here but for their leadership and for the other lifers around the table who have supported me over the last 10 years in my campaigns.

I am thankful for the love and support of my parents and my partner Deirdre. Without them, there is absolutely no way it would be possible for me to get through the marathon we endure to get to this place or for me to be sitting here.

Part of my motivation for getting into politics 10 years ago was the treatment of my province and of the country by the then Conservative government, which was led by Stephen Harper. He cancelled plans for a third subsea cable that would assure energy security for Prince Edward Island. We fixed that. He increased the age of eligibility for old age security for seniors. We fixed that. He closed offices of the people who served veterans. He closed district offices and slashed hundreds of positions of people who served veterans, including those at the national headquarters in Charlottetown and right across the country. We fixed that. He tore up agreements that had been achieved under then minister Ken Dryden for a national child care program and replaced them with payments of \$100 a month to parents. We fixed that.

This throne speech indicates that we continue on the progress that has been made since 2015 on building a resilient economy and a cleaner and brighter future for our kids. Of the key themes in the throne speech that resonated in my riding during the campaign, there is probably none more prominent than housing. It is a major priority in Prince Edward Island; it is absolutely a major priority in Charlottetown.

Housing is a human right. Every Canadian deserves a safe, accessible and affordable place to call home. During the campaign, I heard from many constituents about the impact Canada's housing

crisis has had on them. Our government has a plan to increase housing affordability and make home ownership a reality for more Canadians. Since 2015, with the implementation of the national housing strategy, we have helped more than one million Canadians find a safe place to call home, but there is still so much to do.

Here in Prince Edward Island, there is an investment of \$40.7 million in the Canada-P.E.I. housing benefit that was announced to support low-income households. There are over 22,00 households in P.E.I. that will receive assistance for affordable housing under this benefit. Other examples that I am particularly proud of are three buildings that were financed under the retail construction financing initiative, with a \$19.2-million low-cost loan for residential buildings in Charlottetown. Investments like these are sometimes met with scorn from those who are extremely concerned about the plight of low-income Canadians and low-income islanders, because that particular program is designed for those who are at or above the median income, and that is the model.

● (1745)

What I will say about the rental construction financing initiative and the particular investment in my riding is that the minute those units were constructed, they were filled. The national housing strategy addresses needs at various socio-economic strata across the country and on the island. One in particular that was directed to low-income islanders was something called Martha's Place, which was finished in 2020. It is a real model of how the national co-investment fund is supposed to work.

Here is how Martha's Place came together. It is a development that has rent geared to income, so 25% of what someone makes is their rent. It came together because the Province of Prince Edward Island donated the land, the city of Charlottetown waived the property taxes, the Sisters of St. Martha contributed \$1 million and the federal government came in with a low-cost loan of \$11.5 million. Now there is a rent-geared-to-income project in the riding on a transit route. It is something that is absolutely critical and something, quite frankly, that we need to see more of. It is my hope that under the initiatives in the throne speech toward housing, we will soon be in a position to announce something under the rapid housing initiative as well as further projects under the national co-investment fund to promote partnerships like the one that I just described.

Something else that resonated significantly in the riding during the campaign was with respect to child care. Throughout the pandemic, many parents have struggled to re-enter the workforce due to limited access to affordable and flexible child care. The Speech from the Throne commits to building the first-ever Canada-wide early learning and child care system, after almost getting there on the eve of the arrival of the Harper government. Child care fees are expected to be cut in half by the end of 2022, which will save families thousands of dollars.

Here in Prince Edward Island, we have already seen the beginning of those reductions. The standard for government-run early childhood centres last year was \$34 a day. In Prince Edward Island, that has already been reduced to \$25 a day, and those reductions will continue through the life of the program. Here on P.E.I., within the next two years we are going to see 452 new early learning and child care spaces that offer high-quality, affordable programming. The child care agreements, as we know, have been signed by all provinces, except Ontario, and all three territories. It will certainly make life more affordable for Canadians, but it will also create new well-paying jobs and ensure that every child has a fair shot at success. Investments in child care will build on the success of the Canada child benefit, which, over the past five years, has provided tax-free support to over three million Canadian families and lifted 300,000 children out of poverty.

I have a quick anecdote with respect to the Canada child benefit. A major employer here on Prince Edward Island is the Department of Veterans Affairs. The payroll is in excess of \$100 million a year. It is widely seen as a major contributor to our economy. The Canada child benefit contributes that same \$100 million a year, but the difference between the payroll at the national headquarters of Veterans Affairs Canada and the Canada child care benefits that are put into the pockets of parents every single month is that the latter are not taxable. That is meaningful, progressive policy that will help us through the pandemic and into the 2020s.

• (1750)

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his discourse here today, and I have to say that I do miss him at the human resources committee.

The member talked a lot about some of the positive things that we have seen or that he has seen coming from the Liberal housing strategy, but Prince Edward Island, like most other regions of this country, has seen drastic increases in the cost of single-family homes and condos. What would the hon. member state in respect to his government's failure to account for the challenges that Canadians are facing in affording a market residence?

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure to see my colleague from Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon again, albeit virtually. I certainly enjoyed working with him on the human resources committee, and for a member of Parliament from British Columbia to be so knowledgeable about the situation on Prince Edward Island is appreciated.

To answer my hon. colleague, there is much more to do. Of that there is no doubt. There is a dramatic increase in housing prices

right across the country, and Prince Edward Island has not been immune to those increases.

We have a bit of a perfect storm here in P.E.I. We have done a great job of attracting and retaining immigrants, and before COVID our economy was absolutely booming, but we have a situation here of 1,000 unfilled construction jobs. That is a major bottleneck, so the member makes a fair point. There is much more to do, and in one sense, we have actually become victims of our own success. However, I certainly appreciate the question from him and the knowledge displayed in the way he posed it.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague on his speech.

He spoke a lot about social housing and the major housing crisis. We know significant investments are needed. However, there are delicate jurisdictional issues at play in these areas.

Would my colleague agree with the idea of transferring a large amount of money to the provinces and Quebec so that they can quickly start building a significant number of social housing units?

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I believe that our government has done a great job implementing the national housing strategy. There are some aspects in this strategy, no doubt, and I would be happy to support any measure that will help speed up the solutions to the problems in this country, including making transfers to the provinces.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his speech. One of the issues that I am hearing in Nanaimo—Ladysmith that I did not hear in the member's speech surrounds the inaction on the part of our current government.

Each year, unfortunately, despite flooding, droughts and a quickly approaching deadline to lower greenhouse gas emissions, Canada is giving 14 times more money to big polluters in oil and gas. Is the member opposite ready to support a real transition to address the climate emergency?

• (1755)

Mr. Sean Casey: Madam Speaker, yes.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Drummond.

Many people have said that the throne speech was a compilation of platitudes, a short collection of empty words designed to appeal to hard-core Liberal converts, the ones who will get behind anything. It has been said that say the throne speech contains commitments, promises. Let us be clear. The word “promise” comes from Latin. The prefix “pro-” means “forward” and the verb “mittere” means “send forward”. I do not think that is the case here.

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If we really think about it, the throne speech only contains three things: first, old news; second, silences; and third, repetitions.

With respect to the “old news”, the throne speech confirms that the Liberal government plans to continue interfering with areas under provincial jurisdiction, such as housing, police reform, mental health, natural resource management, and the prevention of violence against women.

Now, let us talk about the “silences”. There is a deafening silence when it comes to health transfers, the transition to green finance, EI reform, seniors, agriculture, and many other issues.

Now to the third point, the “repetitions”: unacceptable immigration delays, access to clean drinking water in indigenous communities, international aid, making web giants pay their fair share, and so on. I could go on because the list of recycled, unkept promises is infinite, but life is short, so I will stop there.

The throne speech talks about bilingualism and foreign policy. Since I have just 10 minutes, I am going to talk about two issues, both of which qualify as “old news” or “repetitions”: the French language, and the absence of a clear foreign policy direction.

With respect to the French language, the throne speech is a step backward. It creates the illusion of aspiring to equality for English and French, but all it really offers in return is institutional bilingualism. The proposed means are not commensurate with the stated ends. French and English can never be of equal importance. A mere eight million francophones are up against 400 million anglophones.

When it comes to the preservation of French, real equality for the two languages is just wishful thinking. It will take asymmetrical measures to restore equity. I want to make it clear that “equity” is not the same thing as “equality”. Equality means “everyone is the same” or “the same thing for everyone”, whereas equity means everyone gets their due. Equity means adjusting symmetry so that both languages can take on their rightful importance. That is not going to happen overnight.

As the Bloc Québécois critic for the international francophonie, I can assure my colleagues that French and the francophonie are doing well around the world. It is projected that French will be spoken by 700 million people around the world by 2050. If the Liberal government's current momentum is any indication, it will not have much to do with it.

In order to move things forward, I have proposed that the Jeux de la francophonie be held in my riding of Trois-Rivières. The games will bring delegations from 50 participating countries and nearly 5,000 participants and supporters to Trois-Rivières. These people will do more for the French language during the games than the half measures proposed in the throne speech.

Perhaps the Prime Minister has forgotten, but French is an identity, a culture, a way of life and a way of seeing things. This way of seeing things is an asset, and we must not squander it.

It would be better to protect the French language than to repeat yet another intention. Do my colleagues know what an intention is? It means being about to do something, but not having done it yet. Rather than intentions, we would like results. If the Liberal govern-

ment is unable to take real action on the French language, it should let Quebec do it for itself, by not opposing its initiatives.

● (1800)

Next, I want to talk about Canada's foreign policy or, I should say, its lack of foreign policy. When it comes to diplomacy and global affairs, time and consistency are key to building lasting ties that allow us to expand our influence and wield that soft power on the international stage. I get nostalgic thinking back to a time when Canada was seen as a key player, a country that would be called upon to settle disputes or provide unique perspectives or solutions. I remember when Canada had a foreign policy.

I will remind members of the Quebec Conference in 1943. That was a long time ago, but the conference brought together Churchill, President Roosevelt and his French counterpart in Quebec City. Some of the decisions made at that conference changed the course of history. Canada did change the course of history with the Iraq war, but since then there has been nothing. I remember when Canada did not choose new foreign affairs ministers based on polls or personal preferences. Diplomacy takes time; it requires consistency and perseverance. Diplomacy calls for long-term commitment and proven action, not just talk or a show of intentions. I may sound wistful, but I also remember a time when Canada made foreign policy decisions without first looking to the United States. I remember a time before Canada decided to simply copy the Americans instead of thinking for itself. I remember a time when Canadian prime ministers knew and understood that they could make their own decisions. I remember a time when Canada had a vision for its foreign policy and clear objectives.

Many challenges lie ahead in 2022, including China and Huawei, Ukraine, international immigration, humanitarian crises, American protectionism, and so on. The throne speech does not address any of those troubling issues, but maybe that is my fault. I expected too much of the throne speech, but I guess that was about nostalgia for a bygone era. In the Speech from the Throne, I would have liked to see the Liberal government outline a direction for its actions, a path to follow, a way forward; instead, it was just empty rhetoric.

I do not want to end on a sour note, so I will say this: I can only applaud the throne speech, but with no hands.

The Address

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his eloquent speech, which contained some very interesting facts, but I want to pick up on the official languages issue he talked about. Unlike the legislation introduced in 1988, the bill we will be introducing in the next few weeks will better reflect a bilingual Canada, French Canada and English Canada.

I also want to point out that holding the Jeux de la Francophonie in his riding, Trois-Rivières, could indeed be a great success story. I certainly agree that if it existed, it would help, but the difference between the bill introduced in 1988 and the one we are proposing today is that the departments can do or must do certain things.

A strong French Quebec means a strong French and English Canada as well. Along with Acadia, let us all work together for the French and English languages in Canada.

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I salute my Acadian colleague who is a fellow member of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. I can only agree; however, to be fair, I would say that, unfortunately, when it comes to official languages and French, the Liberals' intentions have always been verbs conjugated in the future tense. I would like the government to commit to doing what my colleague just said, because what he said is not bad at all. Nevertheless, it needs to differentiate between bilingualism and our two official languages. They are not one and the same.

• (1805)

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, this throne speech is really shallow. After an election that cost over \$600 million and a message to Canadians that a new mandate was needed, it seemed to be missing a lot. It missed getting pharmacare to communities and Canadians. It does little to address labour shortages, equity for persons with disabilities and equity for first nations, Métis and Inuit people.

I share with the member who gave the speech tonight his feelings on five-dollar day care. Both of us benefited from it with our children. I am sure both of us agree on day care, but we certainly agree that this speech is empty.

Would the member support some more push around the labour shortages, especially in our care economy, including for day care and health care transfers to the provinces?

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his suggestions. The answer is an unconditional yes.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I like my colleague's style and eloquence. It is always welcome. I would like to come back to the part of his speech where he talked about the etymology of the word "promise", meaning to send something forward. Does he think that is what the Liberal Party is doing when it keeps making promises that it does not keep? Take for example the promise of high-frequency rail.

I would like my colleague to give us the benefit of his background as an ethicist and tell us the impact this has on this government's credibility moving forward.

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, in Latin, "promise" means to send forward. However, when there is no follow-up, it amounts to nothing. The Liberals talked about high-frequency rail. It was an election promise in 2015 that was recycled in 2018, then in 2019 and again in 2021. The result is that the public, voters and citizens lose interest in politics. Citizens become cynical and lose faith. To build a society, people need to have faith in it. That is very important. Broken promises lead to a lack of engagement.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières for agreeing to share his time with me. I would have listened to him for another half hour because of his eloquence and rich vocabulary, as my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé mentioned.

I would like to begin this first speech of 2022 by acknowledging the members of my constituency team, who are listening right now because I asked them to prepare this address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. I would therefore like to thank Andrée-Anne, Marie-Christine, Marika, Jacinthe and Mélissa because they really work hard. I am convinced that is the case in all the ridings represented by my colleagues in the House of Commons. We work very hard to address the very moving and personally difficult requests from our constituents.

Some people find themselves in difficult situations. I have to admit that there is a lot of frustration that builds up when we see the lack of support and organization in the services provided by certain departments.

This evening, we will speak to the Speech from the Throne. Not surprisingly, no one is holding their breath about the result of the vote. We have already announced our intentions. However, I find that this is a good time to point out some troubling issues that the current government should have addressed as a top priority.

I want to start by talking about employment insurance reform. Things have gotten worse now, but in 2021, 300,000 applications were not processed on time. Some of these applications have yet to be processed, and it is now February. The normal processing time is 28 days, but that target is rarely met these days.

People are going without income for several weeks. Dozens of cases were referred to the Drummond food bank. These fathers and mothers who were earning an honest living are now in extremely precarious situations.

The Address

We hear heartbreaking stories every week. Not too long ago, when I was first elected in 2019, it was rare to hear such emotional stories. Now it is commonplace. We have almost become accustomed, but we never will, thank God, because we are compassionate, caring people. This type of situation has unfortunately become so common that it is now a regular part of our work day.

Take Mr. Picard, for example. He has five children and has been waiting for EI since the end of November. His file is being processed. When he inquires, he is told that his file is being processed and that they are verifying some information. The system is working, but it is just a matter of speeding up the process and making this department a little more efficient.

Now, let us talk about immigration. I do not know how many times we have talked about it. I do not even know where to begin anymore. Yesterday, according to an article published in *La Presse* and an English-only press briefing by the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, it was announced that the government should be back on track by the end of the year, after COVID-19 caused a significant backlog in processing applications. In 2019, there was already a significant backlog of immigration applications. COVID-19 is starting to become an excuse for everything.

It might almost be better to tear down the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and rebuild it from scratch. Some delays date back to well before 2019 and long before COVID-19. The government previously announced that it would spend \$85 million in 2022–23 to process the backlog, yet there are now 1.8 million pending applications.

I could tell the House about many heartbreaking cases. I would like to talk about Ms. Dupont, a woman in my riding who I have spoken to a few times. She obtained permanent resident status in June 2021, but she never received the documents. It is now February 2022. Ms. Dupont dealt with the pain of losing her father, who became ill in the fall. She was told that she should not travel because there was a good chance she would not be allowed back into the country without her documents. Ms. Dupont was unable to get to her father's bedside, and he passed away without getting to see his daughter and grandchildren in the fall.

● (1810)

Over the holidays, Ms. Dupont found out that her father-in-law had stage 4 cancer. Because she still has not received her permanent resident card, she cannot take her family to France to be with her father-in-law during his final days. The department could maybe do with a little more sensitivity. It might be time to work on that.

From family reunification cases to businesses looking for temporary foreign workers to help them get through the pandemic, there are dozens of cases like these every week, not just in the riding of Drummond but in every riding represented by my colleagues here.

We were hoping for something concrete for culture in the throne speech. Web giants have been stealing ad revenue from our media outlets and content creators for too long. We are expecting the new broadcasting bill to be introduced this week, and I call on all my House of Commons colleagues to get it passed quickly. Our culture, our content creators and our media are at the breaking point. They have been waiting years for an updated Broadcasting Act. We will

be getting a look at the new bill this week, and we must pass it quickly to restore balance to Canada's broadcasting system.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forth with the question on the motion now before the House.

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Call in the members.

● (1910)

[*English*]

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

(*Division No. 19*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Ali	Anandasangaree
Angus	Arseneault
Arya	Ashton
Atwin	Bachrach
Badawey	Bains
Baker	Barron
Barsalou-Duval	Battiste
Beaulieu	Beech
Bendayan	Bennett
Bergeron	Bérubé
Bibeau	Bittle
Blaikie	Blair
Blanchet	Blanchette-Joncas
Blaney	Blois
Boissonnault	Boulerice
Bradford	Brière
Brunelle-Duceppe	Cannings
Carr	Casey
Chabot	Chagger
Chahal	Champagne
Champoux	Chatel
Chen	Chiang
Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)	Collins (Victoria)
Cormier	Coteau
Dabrusin	Damoff
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Desbiens	Desilets
Desjarlais	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Diab
Dong	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Dzerowicz
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Ersine-Smith	Fergus
Fillmore	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Freeland
Fry	Gaheer
Garneau	Garon
Garrison	Gaudreau
Gazan	Gerretsen

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Gill	Gould	Block	Bragdon
Green	Guilbeault	Brassard	Brock
Hajdu	Hanley	Calkins	Caputo
Hardie	Hepfner	Carrie	Chambers
Holland	Housefather	Chong	Cooper
Hughes	Hussen	Dalton	Dancho
Hutchings	Iacono	Davidson	Deltell
Idlout	Ien	d'Entremont	Doherty
Jaczek	Johns	Dowdall	Dreeshen
Joly	Jones	Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Ellis
Jowhari	Julian	Epp	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Kayabaga	Kelloway	Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Khalid	Khera	Ferri	Findlay
Koutrakis	Kusmierczyk	Gallant	Généreux
Kwan	Lalonde	Genuis	Gladu
Lambropoulos	Lametti	Godin	Goodridge
Lamoureux	Lapointe	Gourde	Gray
Larouche	Lattanzio	Hallan	Hoback
Lauzon	LeBlanc	Jeneroux	Kelly
Lebouthillier	Lemire	Kitchen	Kmieć
Lightbound	Long	Kram	Kramp-Neuman
Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	Kurek	Kusie
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacDonald (Malpeque)	Lake	Lantsman
MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Lawrence	Lehoux
Maloney	Martinez Ferrada	Lewis (Essex)	Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Masse	Mathysen	Liepert	Lloyd
May (Cambridge)	McDonald (Avalon)	Lobb	MacKenzie
McGuinty	McKay	Maguire	Martel
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	Mazier
McPherson	Mendès	McCauley (Edmonton West)	McLean
Mendicino	Miao	Melillo	Moore
Michaud	Miller	Morantz	Morrice
Morrissey	Murray	Morrison	Motz
Naqvi	Ng	Muys	Nater
Noormohamed	Normandin	O'Toole	Patzer
O'Connell	Oliphant	Paul-Hus	Perkins
O'Regan	Pauzé	Poilievre	Rayes
Perron	Petitpas Taylor	Redekopp	Reid
Plamondon	Powlowski	Rempel Garner	Richards
Qualtrough	Rodriguez	Roberts	Rood
Rogers	Romanado	Ruff	Scheer
Sahota	Sajjan	Schmale	Seeback
Saks	Samson	Shields	Shipley
Sarai	Savard-Tremblay	Small	Soroka
Scarpaleggia	Schiefke	Steinley	Stewart
Serré	Sgro	Strahl	Stubbs
Shanahan	Sheehan	Thomas	Tochor
Sidhu (Brampton East)	Sidhu (Brampton South)	Tolmie	Uppal
Simard	Sinclair-Desgagné	Van Popta	Vecchio
Singh	Sorbara	Vidal	Vien
Ste-Marie	St-Onge	Viersen	Vis
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Valdez	Van Bynen		
van Koeverden	Vandal		
Vandenbeld	Vignola		
Villemure	Virani		
Vuong	Weiler		
Wilkinson	Yip		
Zahid	Zarrillo		
Zuberi— 211			

NAYS**Members**

Abouttaif	Aitchison
Albas	Allison
Arnold	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Benzen	Bergen
Berthold	Bezan

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

● (1915)

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That the address be engrossed and presented to Her Excellency the Governor General by the Speaker.

(Motion agreed to)

*Adjournment Proceedings***ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is great to be back in the chamber this year. It is great to be back participating today.

On December 13, I rose in this chamber to ask the minister responsible for FedNor what specific measures her department is taking to improve wait times for funding application decisions. Unfortunately the minister did not respond and instead the government House leader rose to provide, frankly, a non-answer.

It is concerning, because over the last two years every core program administered by FedNor has failed to meet its own service standards regarding these wait times. There are countless valuable shovel-ready projects across northern Ontario and in my riding of Kenora that would create jobs and enrich our communities. They are just waiting for support from the federal government to make them happen.

The timing on these applications truly matters, especially in a region like northern Ontario. Many FedNor applicants are in rural and northern communities and face logistical challenges in getting their projects under way. For instance, remote communities such as Fort Severn or Kasabonika Lake in my riding only have a small window of winter road access each year, which can limit their ability to deliver equipment and materials. If they do not hear back from the department in a timely manner, they may have to wait as much as another year before they are able to put shovels in the ground and move forward on an important community project.

It is clear that small businesses, municipalities, first nations and communities across northern Ontario rely on this department for support, and they really need clarity on the status of their applications. Successful applicants need to be told as soon as possible, so that they can start to work as soon as possible. Unsuccessful applicants need to find out in a timely manner, so that they can adjust their plans to seek other sources of funding, either at the federal or provincial level.

In these uncertain times, the ability to plan ahead can be the difference between a business or municipality being able to fund new projects or, for a business, to maybe be able to keep its doors open. I know from my conversations with the minister that she recognizes this issue and wants to see it addressed, so I am asking again today if someone on the government side can please share what specific measures they are taking to fix this issue.

• (1920)

Mr. Vance Badawey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, to begin, I want to acknowledge that I am speaking today from the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabe peoples.

Our government shares the member's view about the importance of the efficient and responsive delivery of the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, FedNor, program fund-

ing. We recognize the significant challenges facing northern Ontario's small businesses as well as communities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the particular impact it is having on indigenous communities and rural and remote areas.

The ongoing pandemic has significantly increased the demand for support for communities as well as businesses in this region. Since 2020, FedNor has received more than double the number of yearly applications to its programs. From day one, FedNor moved quickly to respond to their needs, helping to protect jobs and keep businesses afloat as they deal with the impact of COVID-19. With more than \$123 million allocated for northern Ontario through the COVID-19 regional relief and recovery fund and the regional air transportation initiative, FedNor has efficiently and effectively delivered support to key sectors, contributing to the economic well-being of the region.

In delivering the RRRF program, FedNor mobilized quickly to provide decisions on applications in half the time of its current service standard of 80 working days. FedNor is now delivering four new recovery programs that will inject nearly \$83 million in new funding into the region over the next few years. These new programs were launched this summer and include the Canada community revitalization fund at \$19.14 million over two years, the tourism relief fund at \$25.3 million over two years, the jobs and growth fund at \$26.6 million over three years, and the aerospace regional recovery initiative at \$11.88 million over three years.

FedNor staff continue to work diligently to process applications to deliver on new relief and recovery programs, while continuing to offer its regular programs. FedNor is also working to streamline business processes. One of its priorities is to reduce the current service standard of providing a decision on funding applications within 80 working days of receipt of a completed application.

FedNor will continue to remain committed to providing responsive and quality service.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, I must say it is incredibly disappointing that the minister responsible once again was not able to answer my questions. Once again, I had a response that clearly did not answer the questions put forward.

I was asking what specific measures the government is taking to address the wait times. The member mentioned that they are working to meet the current standards, however, over the past two years, every core program has failed to meet those current standards.

I would like to provide the member with an opportunity once again to answer the question that I put. What specific measures is the minister taking to fix wait times and ensure that each core program can meet the service standards as they are set out?

Mr. Vance Badawey: Madam Speaker, frankly, I was very specific to the member across and if he wants, I can pass on my speaking notes to him as well as some of the specifics that I outlined in my response.

From the onset of the pandemic, our government moved quickly to implement Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan. As well, FedNor was a key partner in delivering special relief and recovery funding in northern Ontario. FedNor demonstrated its ability to quickly deliver these special programs to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic for affected businesses, organizations, communities and first nations in the region.

FedNor, as I mentioned earlier, will continue to deliver on its commitments to the people of northern Ontario. It will work to find efficiencies to ensure it remains responsive to the needs of the region and that it meets program delivery service standard timelines.

• (1925)

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, on December 3, I asked the Minister of Health why the government was slow to act in the entire Canadian response to COVID-19.

I tried, with a great many arguments based on documents that I could not table at the time, to show that everyone felt that the Liberal government had been slow in dealing with the pandemic, slow to act in the beginning, particularly when it came to borders and vaccines, and slow to provide rapid testing. The government always seemed to be one step behind. At that time, we also saw that the government was having trouble coordinating its decisions with the various jurisdictions involved.

The government did act quickly on one occasion by calling for border testing at airports on the same day that the omicron variant was discovered, or not long after that, and by responding to the official opposition's call for action at the borders. The minister quickly announced that yes, the government would take action.

Unfortunately, it took days, weeks, and months before we even knew who would be responsible for administering these tests at the border. Those measures were supposed to prevent a new variant from sweeping through Canada, but unfortunately, they did not work, and Canada was ravaged by a fifth wave, as we saw. The government said all the right things but did not follow through. It seems that the government has not learned its lesson since the beginning of the pandemic.

It used to be that we all knew someone who knew someone who had COVID-19. I remember that at the start of the pandemic, we were all worried about this illness, this virus, but it did not really affect us directly. Today, however, the reality has changed. It is not happening to someone else anymore. Now we are the ones contracting COVID-19. A close family member of mine has had COVID-19. I have had COVID-19. The Prime Minister currently has COVID-19. COVID-19 has spread exponentially, and the situation continues to evolve quickly.

Adjournment Proceedings

Unfortunately, this government still seems to be one step behind this rapidly spreading virus. The government only moves quickly to announce that it is going to do something, but it is ultimately unable to deliver the goods.

I understand that Canadians are tired of the restrictions imposed by every level of government. However, I would like to point out that despite how slow this government was to act to protect them, Canadians stepped up and got vaccinated. We are one of the most vaccinated countries in the world. I thank the Conservatives, who insisted from day one of the pandemic, at every question period, that the government focus more and more on securing vaccines and signing contracts with pharmaceutical companies.

I want to take a moment this evening to commend Canadians for their resilience nearly two years into this pandemic. I sincerely hope that the government learns from past mistakes so that we can deal with any new waves caused by new variants.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague and tell him that I look forward to working with him at committee.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk about Canada's border measures to protect Canadians from COVID-19. Border measures continue to be an important part of Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and serve to protect the health and safety of all Canadians.

Testing at our borders is a crucial aspect of Canada's COVID-19 monitoring strategy. It helps detect variants of concern and variants that escape vaccination. Even if fully vaccinated, travellers can still be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.

That is why it is important to continue taking precautions. Each positive case identified reduces the risk of further community transmission in Canada. All travellers entering Canada by land or by air are subject to the same rigorous pre-entry testing requirements.

The Government of Canada continues to require that all travellers, unless specifically exempted, have a valid negative pre-departure COVID-19 molecular test result taken no more than 72 hours before a scheduled flight to Canada or arrival at the land border, or a previous positive molecular test result taken between 10 and 180 days before departure to Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

● (1930)

[*English*]

Foreign nationals with symptoms or who provide a positive pre-entry COVID-19 molecular test result from less than 10 full days earlier will be denied entry. A traveller with right of entry, such as a Canadian citizen, a person registered under the Indian Act or a permanent resident, with a positive pre-entry COVID-19 molecular test result from less than 10 full days earlier or more than 180 days earlier, will be allowed entry but may be subject to a fine of \$5,000 plus additional surcharges or face criminal prosecution. They will also be required to isolate for 10 days from the date they enter Canada.

The Government of Canada continues to assess the latest available evidence and monitor the situation to determine when to ease or adjust border measures accordingly. Canada's border testing is intended to mitigate the risk of further importation and help slow the spread of COVID-19 and its variants in Canada.

I will conclude by expressing my gratitude, as my colleague did, to the millions of Canadians who continue to do their part in the fight against COVID-19. It is thanks to their solidarity that Canada is now among the countries with the highest COVID-19 vaccination rates in the world.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary, my colleague from Milton. We will have the opportunity to work together on the standing committee on health and have some great discussions.

At the standing committee on health we recently spoke with the Minister of Health. I asked him whether he thought the response to the pandemic should be guided by science, policy or personal intuition. He replied that it must be guided by science. Allow me to share an excerpt from an article about testing travellers arriving in Canada:

With one of the highest infection rates in the world, it doesn't make sense, especially when it comes to requiring tests to allow vaccinated people on a plane, said

David Juncker, the chair of the Department of Biomedical Engineering at McGill University.

That comes from a scientist. The government is supposedly listening to the science, but many people are speaking up, including Dr. Mona Nemer, who has also come out in support of testing fewer people at the border. Why does the government not listen to its own experts?

I hope we will have the opportunity to debate this in committee.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I would like to reiterate that the Government of Canada's top priority is the health and safety of Canadians. To protect Canadians, the government has implemented some of the strictest travel and border measures in the world. The party opposite did urge the government to do so, as the member mentioned in his speech.

[*Translation*]

The Government of Canada is well aware that these changes to border procedures can pose challenges for people and families, but these measures are intended to limit the number of new cases of omicron entering Canada. The measures also prevent new chains of transmission in Canadian communities and protect vulnerable Canadians and the capacity of our health care system.

● (1935)

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given. Accordingly, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[*Translation*]

The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:35 p.m.)

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