



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

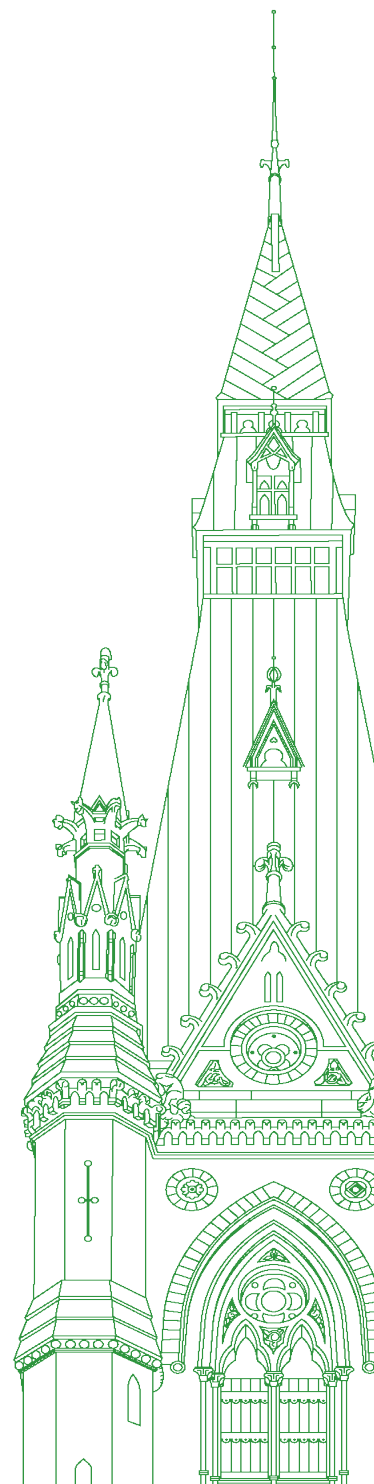
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

House of Commons Debates

Official Report
(Hansard)

Volume 151 No. 023
Thursday, February 3, 2022

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 3, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1000)

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Speaker: I invite the House to take note that today we are using the wooden mace.

[Translation]

It serves as a reminder of the fire that took the lives of seven people and destroyed the original Parliament buildings the night of February 3, 1916.

[English]

Among the items destroyed in that fire was the old mace. The wooden copy that you see today was subsequently made and used temporarily until the current one was given to us by the United Kingdom in 1917.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-227, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (voting age).

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I am honoured to introduce legislation that would extend the right to vote to all Canadians aged 16 and over. I would like to thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for seconding this bill and for his tireless efforts to move this important initiative forward.

The history of the franchise in Canada is one of constant expansion. At the time of Confederation, voting was restricted to male British subjects who were at least 21 years of age and owned property. However, as our country progressed over subsequent generations, voting rights were extended to women, Asian Canadians, indigenous people, those without property and those under 21 years of age, now 18.

I believe it is time to give young people the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship as well. Young Canadians are engaged, well informed and passionate advocates for a brighter future, their future. They work and pay taxes, but they have no say in how those tax dollars are spent. This disenfranchisement is unjustified and must change.

I call on all parliamentarians to make young people equal participants in our democracy by supporting this vital legislation.

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

* * *

• (1005)

[Translation]

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-228, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act and the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to introduce my bill.

[English]

The pension protections act would ensure that people who have worked and paid into pension funds would actually receive that benefit. We have all heard so often about companies going bankrupt and leaving their employees with no pensions or pennies on the dollar. My bill would address this by requiring a report on the solvency of the funds to be tabled here in Parliament for greater transparency. It would create a mechanism to transfer money into a fund to make it solvent without tax implication or to get insurance on the insolvent part and, in the case of bankruptcy, it would pay out pensions in priority before big executive salaries and large creditors.

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

* * *

BANNING SYMBOLS OF HATE ACT

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-229, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (banning symbols of hate).

Routine Proceedings

He said: Mr. Speaker, last weekend we all saw the appalling images of Nazi flags being waved on Parliament Hill, just steps away from the sacred Hall of Honour where we commemorate the 45,000 Canadians who gave their lives fighting Nazism. Today I am tabling an act to amend the Criminal Code to ban symbols of hate.

[Translation]

All parliamentarians must support this bill and speak with one voice to ensure that swastikas can no longer be legally displayed in the very seat of our democracy.

[English]

These despicable Nazi and vile racist symbols of hate signify the worst depravity in human history: the Holocaust, with millions of victims of the most unspeakable acts of racism and hate.

Other countries have banned these symbols to preserve their democracy. It is time for Canada to do the same. I hope all MPs will come together for the speedy passage of the bill, so that never again will Nazi flags fly legally on Parliament Hill or anywhere else in Canada.

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

* * *

EFFECTIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE CHARITIES ACT

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC) moved that Bill S-216, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (use of resources of a registered charity), be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today on Bill S-216. I would like to thank Senator Omidvar for her terrific work and tireless advocacy on behalf of charitable organizations around the world and specifically here in Canada.

I would also like to thank the member for Edmonton Strathcona for seconding the legislation and for her tireless work on behalf of charitable organizations.

I am very excited to introduce this legislation, because it would help charities do their great work around the world. Currently, charities are unfortunately encumbered by significant red tape and bureaucracy. This legislation would go from a granular control, where charitable organizations in Canada have to okay nearly every decision of the partners they work with around the world or in Canada, to a system of accountability and transparency that will increase accountability for charities while giving them the autonomy to do their great work.

I am in the House to do work on behalf of vulnerable people in Canada and around the world, so it is a great honour to present this bill.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

• (1010)

PETITIONS

ACCESS TO MIDWIVES

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise today and present a petition that originated in my riding, from the town of Dryden. The petition looks to bring to the attention of the House the lack of midwifery care and services available in the Dryden area and across northwestern Ontario.

Petitioners are hoping to see the federal government take a leadership role in providing stronger support for midwifery in the Kenora district and the Rainy River district specifically.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I bring forward today a petition from people who are concerned about the Liberal Party of Canada, as promised in its 2021 platform, denying charitable status to organizations that have convictions about abortion and that the Liberal Party views as dishonest. Further, this may jeopardize the charitable status of hospitals, houses of worship, schools, homeless shelters and other charitable organizations that do not agree with the Liberal Party.

I spoke to somebody at the Pregnancy Care Centre, Linda, who is very concerned about this very thing occurring. Therefore, petitioners call upon the House of Commons to protect and preserve the application of charitable status rules on a politically and ideologically neutral basis, without discrimination on the basis of political or religious values and without the imposition of another values test, and affirm the rights of Canadians to freedom of expression.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As we are back in session and petitions are being presented again, I ask that the Speaker review the previous presentation with the idea that we are supposed to be succinct with the comments. I do believe the member presented somewhat more of a political commentary on the petition, rather than the content of the petition itself.

The Speaker: That is a good point. In the Standing Orders, presenting petitions is to involve a concise, short synopsis of what the petition is about, not a commentary or a long speech on it.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured, on behalf of the citizens of Canada, to bring forth a petition calling upon the Government of Canada to call out the ongoing genocide of the Uighur people by the Communist Party of China.

Citizens are calling for Canada to not remain silent in the face of this ongoing atrocity, to formally recognize that the Uighurs have been and are subject to a genocide, and to call forth the use of the Magnitsky act and sanction those responsible for the heinous crimes that are going on.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and present this petition calling on the government to take action on behalf of the Uighurs, who are being subject to arbitrary detentions, the separation of children from families, invasive surveillance, destruction of cultural sites, forced labour and forced organ harvesting. Specifically, petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to formally recognize that the Uighurs in China are subject to genocide and to use the Magnitsky act and sanction those who are responsible for these heinous crimes being committed against the Uighur people.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians need to know what is going on. We are seeing that Canadians are remaining silent on this.

Petitioners point out that we need to move forward and we need to recognize that separation of children from families, invasive surveillance, destruction of cultural sites, forced labour and even forced organ harvesting is not okay. It is estimated that three million Uighurs and other Muslim minorities have been detained in what have been described as concentration camps.

Canada cannot remain silent. Therefore, the petitioners call on the House of Commons to take the following action to address the situation: formally recognize that Uighurs in China have been and are being subject to genocide. This is especially relevant now in light of the Olympics coming up in China. They start this week. That is all the more reason we need to bring this to attention.

• (1015)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour today to rise to present a petition, on behalf of Canadians, recognizing that the evidence now makes it clear that the Chinese government's treatment of the Uighurs meets most, if not all, of the criteria for genocide as outlined by the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Therefore, the petitioners are asking that the House of Commons take the following actions on behalf of the Uighurs: that they formally recognize the Uighurs in China have been and are subject to genocide and use the Justice of Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, the Magnitsky act, to sanction those who are responsible for the heinous crimes that are being committed against the Uighur people.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, like my colleagues, and with the Beijing Olympics coming up very soon, the first three petitions I will be tabling deal with human rights issues in China.

The first petition is about the recognition of the Uighur genocide. Petitioners note the various crimes being committed against the Uighur people: crimes that have been well detailed by my colleagues. Petitioners call upon the Government of Canada and the House of Commons to recognize the genocide. The House has recognized it, but the government has not.

Petitioners are also calling for the use of the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, or the Magnitsky act, to sanction those responsible for these heinous crimes being committed against the Uighur people. The Magnitsky act was passed in this Parliament. It was a private member's bill put forward by Conservatives

and it was passed, but it has been used very little by the government.

Routine Proceedings

HONG KONG

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition deals with the situation specifically in Hong Kong, and is another human rights issue that falls at the feet of the Chinese Communist Party. It notes various human rights abuses.

It calls on the Government of Canada to recognize the politicization of the judiciary in Hong Kong and its impact on the legitimacy and validity of criminal convictions, and to affirm its commitment to render all National Security Law charges and convictions irrelevant and invalid in relation to section 36(1)(c) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. It calls on Canada to create a mechanism by which people who have been charged with any politically related charges dealing with the democracy movement in Hong Kong be able to come to Canada, and that these would not be an impediment for them. It also calls for Canada to work with the U.K., the U.S., France, Australia, New Zealand and other democracies to waive criminal inadmissibility for Hong Kong people convicted for political purposes, who do not otherwise have criminal records.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition is in support of Bill S-223. This is a private member's bill that has already passed the Senate and that I put forward in the House.

The bill would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ taken without consent. This responds to concerns about forced organ harvesting. It has been happening for a long time, targeting Falun Gong practitioners and, as we know now, targeting Uighurs and other communities as well. Canada needs to do what it can to stop forced organ harvesting and trafficking, and that means passing this legislation to address potential complicity of Canadians in those horrific actions.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fourth petition I am tabling deals with human rights issues here at home. It responds to a commitment made by the Liberal Party to impose another values test tied to charitable status. It says that in order to receive charitable status, one has to agree with a certain position of the government when it comes to the question of abortion.

Petitioners believe that charitable status should be provided on a politically neutral basis without discrimination on the basis of the views of the organization, and that this values test could negatively impact schools, hospitals, homeless shelters and other worthy charities that do good work for the public, but may not agree with the particular political positions of the government.

Government Orders

The petitioners call on the House of Commons to protect and preserve the application of charitable status rules on a political and ideologically neutral basis without discrimination on the basis of political or religious values and without the imposition of another values test, and to affirm the right of all Canadians to freedom of expression.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I am tabling highlights the challenges that small businesses have faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It calls on the Government of Canada to adopt the 2017 recommendations of the Alberta skills for jobs task force and create a bipartisan, equal membership committee to develop a small business action plan that will take into account the realities of all communities in Canada, not just those that favour a particular election outcome.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I am tabling was signed by Canadians who were very concerned by the government's decision to move forward with the legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide. Effectively, it is suicide facilitation for those who are struggling with mental health challenges.

Petitioners note that the Canadian Mental Health Association says that it does not believe mental illnesses are irremediable, and note that suicidality is often a symptom of a mental illness. They also note that suicide is the leading cause of death for Canadians between the ages of 10 and 19. The government should not be legalizing facilitated suicide in a medical context for those who are struggling with mental health challenges. We should be focusing on support and recovery. Petitioners call on the government to protect Canadians with mental illness by facilitating treatment and recovery, and not death.

• (1020)

HAZARAS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition highlights the situation of the Hazara people in Afghanistan. The petitioners, as well as members of the House, have been following with great concern the events in Afghanistan. This petition was signed and sent to me prior to the Taliban takeover. Even at that point, there were many concerns regarding the conditions and the treatment of the Hazara people. The petitioners want to see the government recognize the past genocides against the Hazara people and designate September 25 as Hazara genocide memorial day.

Obviously, since the Taliban takeover there have continued to be escalating concerns about the treatment of the Hazaras and other minorities in Afghanistan that call for a strong response from the Government of Canada, Parliament and other actors.

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the final petition that I am tabling today highlights human rights concerns with respect to the situation in the

Tigray region of Ethiopia. The petitioners are very concerned about the violence that has occurred there, and call on the Government of Canada to be more engaged with the situation, to work with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments to push for human rights improvements, to work with international bodies to support credible investigations of reports of war crimes and gross violations of human rights, and to be seized in general with the situation of human rights in that region of the world.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021

The House resumed from February 2 consideration of the motion that C-8, An Act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes) Resuming debate. The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader had 16 minutes left for his speech.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I note that you were in the Chair when I last spoke to this, so I am sure you are sitting on the edge of your seat waiting to hear the remaining 16 minutes of my speech on this topic. I appreciate that some of my colleagues from across the way are as well.

When we last spoke to this, I was referencing the fact that I was concerned about some of the discussion I was hearing from across the way, in terms of the government's motive for this particular piece of legislation. Last evening I mentioned that the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon claimed the objective of helping provinces and territories with proof of vaccinations across the country was somehow just a political tool, because provinces and territories were able to handle that on their own.

My issue with that was that for some reason there always has to be a hyperpartisan and political reason that is put forward by the other side as opposed to, perhaps, just the willingness to want to help Canadians and to move forward with things. My tone yesterday evening certainly was one of skepticism based on the fact that this narrative continually comes from across the way.

The member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon specifically said that this was just a tool to help fuel the partisan fire. As a matter of fact, earlier in those comments he talked about the fact that this pandemic was now moving into an endemic stage and that we have to come to terms with it. I thought it was an interesting discussion. He was basically accusing the government of insisting on driving fear by bringing forward motions or bills such as this one in an attempt to somehow distract from the fact that this was moving into another stage of the pandemic.

I agree with the member that this pandemic, which we have been going through for two years, is reaching the endemic stage, and I agree totally with his comments that we will be dealing with COVID-19 for quite a while. There is not going to be that one defining moment when COVID-19 suddenly does not exist anymore. We are not going to wake up one morning and just have no more coronavirus. That is not going to happen.

The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan spoke at length about the evolution of science. He would know that the evolution of science, and the scientists out there, are pretty much saying the same thing: that this coronavirus will enter an endemic state and it will be here with us for some time to come.

The member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon was saying that this bill was somehow trying to fuel the anti-freedom movement that he proclaims the government is hell-bent on. When I look through the various parts of this bill, I look at it completely differently. If members look at the actual items that are proposed in this piece of legislation, they could not help but see that this is about preparing for the future, endemic part of coronavirus.

We talk about procuring millions of rapid tests for provinces, territories and indigenous communities. Millions have already been supplied, but we are talking about ensuring that millions more can get throughout the country so that the capacity is there to continue rapid testing. We know that, because coronavirus will be with us for quite some time, this is going to be one way that we can try to control it as best we can: by finding out who has it and when, and helping to protect people and prevent the spread of it.

Another item in this is protecting children by making sure that we invest in proper ventilation in schools throughout the country. Elementary schools and high schools would primarily be in those categories. Again, going back to the science that the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is so willing to tout, we know that the science is saying that this airborne virus moves very quickly through indoor settings that do not have proper ventilation.

• (1025)

As we prepare for coronavirus to be with us for a while, why would we not start investing in having the proper ventilation systems in schools? Why would we not help provinces with that? Everybody knows we do not have jurisdiction over education, but we can certainly help from a resource perspective in providing the necessary tools to make schools safer. This is not about fearmongering. This is about providing resources right now so that for years and months to come, however long this takes, schools would be in a better position to fight coronavirus.

Government Orders

We talk about support for workers in businesses through changes to CEBA and EI, which are taking care of people when they have to take time off work. My wife and I have a small business in Kingston. We have an employee who had to take two days off as he waited for the results of his COVID-19 test. Because the province of Ontario has three days of sick pay, businesses across the province of Ontario can help support those employees who have to be off work through the WSIB program. At least in Ontario, that is the case.

This is about continuing to extend supports to businesses and individuals throughout the country as they are faced with dealing with COVID-19 and what is being requested of them. The truth is that there are a lot of employees out there who would probably say they feel fine. They know they just had a test, but they want to go back to work and not take the time off. We know that from a societal perspective it is better to hold them back a couple of days until they get that result before reintroducing them into their workplace. Should we not, from a societal perspective, be supporting those individuals and those businesses?

There are also a host of tax credits that would benefit Canadians, including the ventilation improvement tax credit for small business, which is, again, about helping the ventilation of stores and businesses. I think of my riding of Kingston and the Islands and the downtown area. It is one of the first downtown areas in the country. It is very old, with a lot of limestone buildings that are two hundred or three hundred years old. They do not have the best ventilation systems. These are businesses that have had to close for weeks and months on end at times. Rather than forcing them through some kind of regulation to increase ventilation, why not provide support so they have a fighting chance of surviving? There has also been talk about teachers and farmers and increasing supports to them.

We know that the bill would implement a national tax on value-added, non-resident, non-Canadian owned residential real estate in Canada. I would like to talk about this one for a moment because the member for Calgary Centre's speech yesterday would lead one to believe that this tax was going to be applied to everybody.

I said that he knows this is about non-residents and non-Canadians who have vacant land or unused residential buildings. He agreed to that and concurred with me that I was right, but he then went on to say it is just another added level of taxation and that we are adding another level to the municipal taxes that exist through property taxes, as if to conflate the two issues. He was acknowledging that I was right in my claim and that he had not provided all the information, but then he tried to conflate the two issues again in the same answer to that same question.

Government Orders

This is one of the things that makes me the most frustrated when I have to debate with Conservatives in this place. Time and time again, I find it is as though, as long as we can slightly alter the narrative, even if it does not resemble the truth, it is okay as long as it results in political gain. Therefore, I come back to the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon when he, in his discourse, was doing exactly what I am now indicating that I am concerned about.

• (1030)

The problem with this is that the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon did not come here, look at the elements of the bill, and say that we forgot seasonal tourism and that is one thing he is concerned about. He could have said that he has a number of seasonal tourism operators who may have made a lot of money in the summer, but who are not now, and as a result, they are missing some of the benefits from Bill C-2, and he would really like this bill to dig into that in committee.

My point is that, rather than coming forward and highlighting some of the challenges in the bill and identifying the problems so we can make it better, which is the role of the opposition, he came forward and tried to suggest that this is more about antifreedom and continuing to take freedoms away from people.

The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan started his speech yesterday by promising that he was only going to talk about freedoms and the lack thereof for a couple of minutes and then get back to the bill, which he never did. Members can go back and review Hansard. He spoke the whole 10 minutes on those two issues, and I sat here in silence.

I thought of getting up on a point of order for relevance at one point, but I know that really never results in anything, and of course, I do not want to take away from the member's ability to run a 10-minute continuous clip on Facebook later, or on his podcast—

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable on a point of order.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I think we need to question the relevance of my colleague's comments. I would appreciate it if he would get back to the matter at hand.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): What the hon. member just said is not really a point of order but more a matter of debate, so I would ask him to wait. There are just under four minutes left in the speech.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I was just picking up where the previous speaker had left off as it relates to relevancy.

In any event, at the core of this, it comes back to what a lot of my debates in the House are about. I actually can say that I really appreciated, although it was not under the right heading, what the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan debated last night, and the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands said the same thing. I do not think that this is the bill under which to be having that debate

with him, and I disagree with him fundamentally on some of the ways in which he is trying to make linkages.

Nonetheless, I appreciated the discourse because at least it came from a place of trying to challenge ideas and the way that we move forward. Despite the fact that I disagree with it, I see it as being more productive than just coming in here and saying that the government has failed here, here and here, and that it is trying to lock down our lives and our freedoms and so on and so forth, and therefore this bill sucks. That is really what I hear a lot of the time, and what I have heard for six years. I would implore my colleagues across the way to genuinely look at examples where we can fix this bill. I will be the first to lend my voice to that.

I mentioned seasonal tourism a few minutes ago. There were some unfortunate consequences to some of the supports that came along previously. One is that there are business owners out there who plan an entire year for three or four months of business. This is in a lot of tourism businesses, and seasonal tourism businesses in particular, of which I have a number in my riding. The problem is that sometimes, in the way that we calculate things, we base it on the last 90 or 120 days or whatever it might be.

In the middle of September, if we tell people that they have to qualify based on the last 120 days, but they had to employ people for an entire year, and their revenue was not significantly lost during that short time, but over the whole year they saw a 60% or 70% revenue decrease, we are not capturing them. I would suggest, then, that we have work to do in terms of correcting and making sure that the supports are getting to the business owners who need them. Therefore, I hope that when this bill gets to the point of going to committee, this is one of the issues that can be looked concerning CEBA and helping some of those businesses, particularly in the hardest-hit sectors.

I recognize that my time is coming to a close. I know the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is very disappointed by that, but we can perhaps pick this up on his podcast later on.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do want to thank the member for Kingston and the Islands for referencing my podcast, *Resuming Debate*, which people can download on all available podcast platforms. He might be so lucky as to be a guest one of these days. I do enjoy my exchanges with him on Twitter, especially the last one we had, of which I will not identify the ratios involved, because I do not want to cause too much pain across the way.

I did want to talk about the issue of rapid tests, because Conservatives have been raising the importance of rapid tests. Of course, rapid tests are a tool that was available to us long before vaccinations were available, and today we are recognizing that vaccination is an important tool, but that people still can get COVID-19 if they are vaccinated. We have some examples of colleagues in that situation. We recognize the importance of rapid tests.

The government was very late to be talking about or recognizing the value of rapid tests. Now there has been a shift in just the last few weeks in the way it talks about them, and I would say that is a welcome shift. We welcome the government eventually coming to recognize some of the things we have been saying in the official opposition for a long time.

In my province of Alberta, we do have an opportunity for people who are not vaccinated to still be able to access restaurants if they have had a rapid test. Does the member think a reasonable alternative for people, in the context of the cross-border mandate and other issues, would be to have a rapid test that shows they are COVID negative?

• (1040)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, first of all, I would encourage the member to recognize that it is not the number of one's Twitter likes that matters; it is perhaps more the content that is put out there.

Nonetheless, to his questions specifically about rapid tests, this government delivered. I know I can speak at least of Ontario, the province I am from. This government delivered millions of rapid tests to the provinces. How the provinces choose to use those, when they choose to deploy them, where they choose to store them and how they choose to distribute them is completely up to them. In terms of his question about another alternative in restaurants in his home province of Alberta, I would suggest he talk to Premier Kenney about that.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, let me just say that, in times of crisis, many things can divide us.

Of course, there is one thing that unites us, but that one thing does not appear in the economic update or in Bill C-8: The premiers of the Canadian provinces and the Premier of Quebec are unanimous in their demand for higher health transfers.

I heard my colleague when he said this bill will pave the way to the future for Canada. However, the federal government clearly does not want to increase health transfers in the next five years.

I am trying to understand. We are in a crisis because of the pandemic, and health is the people's priority, yet the federal government is stubbornly ignoring a unanimous request for a significant health transfer increase as soon as possible.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I guess it would not be a question and answer period without a question about health transfers coming from the Bloc, so I can appreciate that. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, this government has provided eight out of every 10 dollars related to COVID supports. We have worked with provinces and delivered money and resources to provinces when the provinces have asked.

I am unaware of a time that a province has asked for a significant support related to dealing with COVID-19 when the federal government was not there to support them. I know the Bloc Québécois has a particular issue with health transfers by and large at the high-

est level, that one annual turnover of a payment, but to suggest that, because we are in a pandemic right now and the federal government has not increased health supports, the federal government is not interested in helping provinces, is absolutely incorrect.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened to the parliamentary secretary's remarks on this bill, and I did not hear him mention anything about the changes to the northern residents deduction, something that affects a lot of residents in Skeena—Bulkley Valley, a beautiful part of northwest British Columbia. Bill C-8, the bill before us, would change the travel portion of the northern residents deduction, but it would do nothing to change the basic residency deduction, which is deeply flawed and based on an arbitrary line on the map.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary would support looking at the way the residency deduction is calculated and helping people in places such as Haida Gwaii, the village of Granisle, and so many other northern and remote communities across Canada.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the NDP for bringing that up.

To be completely honest, this is an issue that I am not very much aware of, so I appreciate his bringing that issue up here. I hope that he or his colleagues have the opportunity to bring it up at committee when this bill goes to committee, and I look forward to learning more about it when it comes back. I do thank him for providing a concern relevant to this bill, and I am looking forward to advancing some kind of change with respect to it.

• (1045)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for Kingston and the Islands for his speech.

One of the elements of this bill includes a commitment of about \$100 million in budget 2021 to provide transfers back to farmers in backstop provinces, including his own here in Ontario, particularly for those farmers who are not able to move outside with the different technologies. I know that the member resides in an urban area, but he would have rural areas and the agriculture heartland around him in southeastern Ontario.

Can the member opposite talk about how important it is to make sure that those farmers have that benefit coming back to them and of course incentivize them to adopt new technologies to reduce emissions on farms, which is going to help our long-term competitiveness?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Kings—Hants for that question.

Yes, it is absolutely critical that we provide supports and resources to farmers. Although I might be from an urban riding, I certainly depend on rural Canada to feed myself and my family and my friends and neighbours. It is important that we have the necessary tools in place. It is important that we help farmers prepare for the future and for new technologies that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

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With regard to greenhouse gas emissions, this government has been very clear since day one that we are not going to put the burden squarely on one person or another. We want to attack this from a holistic, societal perspective when it comes to dealing with our greenhouse emissions. Will we be there for farmers in this regard? Yes, we will, just as we will be there for small businesses in urban settings and larger businesses as they look to make this transition.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the contribution from the member for Kingston and the Islands.

The member opposite mentioned in his speech that he is open to potential solutions or ideas to improve the bill before us, and one that I would throw to him is in regard to travel and tourism.

Would the member support relaxing some of the travel regulations that are in place so that international visitors could be allowed into this country, which would stimulate economies like his and mine, areas that have a significant reliance on international visitors?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, there is nothing that I want more than for all travel restrictions to be gone throughout the entire world.

My riding depends on tourism and visitors, but I think it would be extremely problematic for me, as a non-expert in the field of pandemics and medicine generally, to comment or suggest that this is what we need to do right now.

We rely on the experts to advise us at various times on the best course of action. If we have a problem with the information that we are getting from the experts because we do not believe them, maybe that is a different discussion, but in the meantime we have people we trust and depend on to provide us with information so that we can make the best decisions on behalf of Canadians, and if those include travel restrictions, then I will support those recommendations.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak about Bill C-8, a piece of legislation that will add an additional approximately \$70 billion of new spending to this federal budget.

Before I get into the meat of what I want to say, I will let the House know that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Kenora, who is right beside me and anxious to get going.

Let us talk about the national debt before we really get into it. Right now it is hitting a jaw-dropping \$1.2 trillion. At the start of this pandemic, the government brought in \$176 million in new spending unrelated to COVID. We have said many times in the House, and I know I have, that there is a significant chunk of this new spending, a third of it, that was couched in the language of COVID but yet had absolutely nothing to do with COVID. We saw what happened: The government used that as an opportunity to reward its friends and punish its enemies.

Let us look at housing. This is most important, because everyone is looking at housing with a very serious lens, especially those on the lower side of the income level. Last year, home inflation hit 25%. The Canadian Real Estate Association's chief economist called it "the biggest gain of all time". What happened was that \$400 million of new money was put into the atmosphere, into

the financial markets. Much of it was lent out, and it caused a massive bubble. When the Prime Minister took power, the average home was \$435,000; now it is \$810,000.

I am going to give a couple of examples from my home town. Actually, I will talk about the village of Bobcaygeon first. I

n 2014, this house was listed for \$465,900. It sold for \$455,000, so below asking, in 2014. Now, just last month, it sold for \$1.9 million. It was actually listed for \$1.8 million.

This house is in Lindsay. It is a new build, a three-bedroom, two-bathroom house that was \$319,000 in 2018. It sold last month on January 19 for \$1.1 million. It was actually listed for \$886,000. This is in the town of Lindsay, with a population of about 20,000 people, and it sold for \$1.1 million.

The government continues to turn a blind eye to this problem. What is the government's answer? It is more new spending: Let us have another government program, a program that will inevitably fail, and then the government will come up with another program to fix the problem it created in the first place. What we need to transition to is more of an economy that talks about building things, getting our economy back on track and opening up where possible. The government failed on that as well.

At the beginning of the pandemic, vaccines were coming online, and what did the government do? It put all of its eggs into the CanSino basket. Of course, we all know how that failed. Then the government had to get in line, behind a whole slew of other countries, to try to get vaccines into this country.

Even before that, we here on the opposition benches were talking about different pieces to the puzzle that could aid in this fight, one of which was rapid tests. I remember right at the beginning when we were saying, as the opposition to the government, that we should be looking at rapid tests as a viable piece of the puzzle until we can figure out the next steps. The Liberals basically turned their eyes away from us. They did not want to have this conversation. Those are two main areas where they failed. They refuse to listen to anyone who might have a solution that differs from their vision. They shun them.

There are people all across this country who are frustrated and angry. I think we all are. I think we are all done with this pandemic. We should be talking about how we move to the next stage, but the Prime Minister refuses to say so. In my question just a moment ago, I asked the member for Kingston and the Islands about relaxing some of these travel restrictions, and many in the industry, including the experts that the member mentioned, are also calling for some of these regulations to be relaxed, including those that specifically focus on vaccinated individuals.

● (1050)

Travel and tourism are the industries that have been hurt the most, because the government refuses to move on these files. We heard the Prime Minister say in question period yesterday that he is not going to budge on this issue. Countries around the world are starting to relax some of their restrictions, realizing that we need to learn to live with this virus as best we can, as safely and responsibly as we can, but we continue to be one of the most locked-down countries.

There are ways through this. There are ways around this so that we can start opening up and living again, seeing our families again and not having to watch a loved one die through an iPad. There are solutions. The government just needs to accept some of them and listen to the experts who are saying, yes, there are ways forward.

The Liberals also talk a lot about Main Street. They always talk about Main Street, which is important. Conservatives had a very robust plan in our election platform to get people off their computers and back onto our main streets, but the only thing that is going well is Bay Street, because of those failures that I mentioned just a few moments ago. Who are the Liberals really in it for? I do not think it is the person living in the small town of Lindsay who now has to pay \$1.1 million for a house that sold for \$390,000 just four years ago.

Let us get our economy back on track. Let us start to reopen and have a serious conversation about reopening. Yes, most of it is in provincial jurisdiction. We now see the Province of Saskatchewan moving toward that, and others will follow, but the federal government also has to play a meaningful role in that conversation, from which it seems to be absent, especially with regard to international borders.

Let us get the travel and tourism industries back on track. We can do that safely; we know that. Other countries have done it, but there just does not seem to be any movement, and that is sad. If we really want to help the disenfranchised and their communities, economic activity is where we need to go. Here in Ontario, we have seen manufacturing leave at an alarming pace, and that happened during the 15 years of rule in Ontario when the Liberal Party was in power. It made electricity prices some of the highest in North America. Who relies on electricity the most? It is manufacturing, and we pushed all of that out. When the pandemic hit, what did we realize we needed most? It was manufacturing.

We put ourselves at a disadvantage, even our energy industry. Over the last six years, we have watched the Liberal government put in regulation, red tape and policy that shut down our energy industry, while at the same time promoting bad actors around the world. One example was that the government did not even fight the cancellation of Keystone XL. That was the first thing President Biden did when he got into office. The second was to release the sanctions on the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which allowed Russia to provide energy to Germany, one of the biggest economic powers in Europe. Now we have an incursion paid for in large part by this new-found wealth the Russian superpower now has because it is now powering Germany. Why could we not fill that gap with Canadian energy? It is because we cannot seem to get anything built in this country.

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Let us start focusing on what we need to do: strengthening our economy; creating jobs, opportunity and wealth; attracting the brains here and allowing them to innovate and create new things, including green technology. However, we cannot do that when nobody has the ability to get to their feet, and that is the result of the government continuing to put their boot on the neck of the economy.

I always say we should remember low taxes, less government, more freedom.

● (1055)

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I stand again with a very heavy heart, as I did a few days ago, to speak on behalf of my constituents, who are going through an incredibly terrible time right now because of the unpeaceful protests that are taking place on the residential streets of downtown Ottawa.

I have to say that I was so disappointed to see the Conservative members standing outside and cheering these protesters who are taking peace away from people who live in this community.

I am going to very quickly read an email that I received from one of my constituents. She wrote, "I am again horrified seeing our holy Jewish Star of David sported on jackets, desecrated by anti-vaxxers, which, along with the swastikas on flags, is terrifying for me and unspeakable for anyone who cares."

Let us give them back their peace and end this protest.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, I have said many times that there were acts, some of which the member just outlined, that have to be dealt with. Those individuals have to be held responsible for those actions. If criminal charges are necessary, they should be charged criminally and the law should be enforced. We support that.

However, the member opposite completely ignores how we actually got to this point. There are people who are taking time and money out of their own lives to travel across the country, in some cases, to try to get the government to listen to them. These are people from all walks of life, from all backgrounds, who feel the government has left them behind and has no care in the world for them. That is unfortunate, because they have a valid argument. Yes, there are people who need to be called out for their wrong actions, but to ignore the message that is being sent is a failure on the government's part.

● (1100)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague started off today talking about how much the steps the government has taken to help Canadians have cost, and I agree with him. What I disagree with him on is the fact that the New Democrats will always say that we should be supporting Canadians to get through this pandemic and we should continue to support Canadians as this pandemic carries on.

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One of the things I struggle with is that he and his party voted with the government, with the Liberals, against a wealth tax to make revenue, to have that be more balanced.

Why did he vote with the Liberals? Why did the Conservatives stand with the Liberals again against a wealth tax?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member opposite's work on the committees we have sat on. The contributions she makes are greatly appreciated. I have learned a lot from her.

The government does not have a revenue problem; it has a spending problem. The government is spending more than it ever has. However, what is actually going right at this exact moment? There is a massive housing bubble. Inflation is at a 20-plus-year high. Veterans are still waiting in line for their services. Indigenous communities are still waiting for clean water. We need to see results from the government. Increased spending is not a badge of honour if there are no results that follow.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am going to go off on a bit of a tangent because something has been nagging at me since this morning.

I am sure my colleague knows that the survival of French in Quebec and Canada is a big challenge right now. Last spring, the Conservatives even voted in favour of a Bloc motion recognizing that Quebec is a nation whose only official language is French. That is quite an important symbol.

The government, though, is sending all the wrong messages. For one thing, it appointed a unilingual anglophone Governor General, and this week, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, a department that is key to the survival of French, held a press conference in English only.

Yesterday we learned that the new interim leader of the Conservative Party does not speak French. In other words, the new leader of Canada's official opposition is unable to understand one-quarter of the country's population. Does my colleague feel that sends the wrong message?

[English]

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to this. I think the member is doing her best to learn Canada's other official language, and I encourage her to continue to do that.

Let us talk about the economy, because that is exactly what we are talking about in Bill C-8, and how we are going to fix some of these problems. I will be really quick. Let us start encouraging people to go back to work as safely and responsibly as possible. Let us use all of the tools in the tool box that is at our disposal to get back to work and get back to normal.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I know there is a general attitude around relevance, but we did see, in questions to my friend, basically a number of members making S.O. 31s instead of asking questions that were in any way germane to the debate. I wonder if you could make a ruling or come back to the House and advise us of the appropriate parameters, because it

seems to me that talking about someone's facility in a language is totally unrelated to the topic of debate.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will certainly take this into consideration. However, the hon. member is well aware that there is a margin of flexibility for individuals to be able to make comments. They do not necessarily need to ask a question. A member can make a comment if they wish. It is all part of the debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kenora.

● (1105)

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today in the chamber. I would like to thank my esteemed colleague from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock for being so generous in sharing his time with me today. It gives me the opportunity to share some of the economic concerns we are seeing in the Kenora riding and across northwestern Ontario, and how I believe Bill C-8 does not adequately address some of those concerns. I look forward to providing some thoughts and suggestions to government members on ways we can move forward.

Obviously, there is no question that across the country we are facing a number of serious economic concerns, not the least of which is the cost of living right now, with inflation rising at record rates. This is something the Parliamentary Budget Officer has confirmed is a result of government spending. It is driven by government spending. It is something we are quite concerned about on this side of the aisle.

It is why our party has been continually pushing our proposal that the government cut back on its spending and phase out stimulus programs as things reopen and as we push for our economy to reopen, especially because the Parliamentary Budget Officer has stated that the rationale for this stimulus spending no longer exists. It is high time that we get things back on track, and we are looking for some leadership from the government to do just that.

When we look at everyday items, essential items like pork and beef have increased in price by 12%. I believe natural gas is up about 20%. Everyday essentials are becoming more and more expensive. These are things that were already more expensive for many in northwestern Ontario, for many in my riding, and these added costs of course make things that much more difficult. Also, government policies around vaccine mandates, specifically the vaccine mandate put in place for transport truck drivers, will have negative impacts on supply chains and will only make this issue much worse for a number of items.

I was talking recently with Nevin Nelson from Nelson Granite, which is just outside Vermilion Bay in my riding. This was one of his primary concerns. He is concerned not only about the ability for Canadians to import goods into the country, but about his business's ability to send goods to the United States. He was very clear to me that the vaccine mandate put in place specifically for transport truck drivers is going to have a detrimental impact on his business and on many others across northwestern Ontario.

We have been very clear on this side of the House, and we continue to push back against this policy. We are looking to find reasonable solutions and a middle ground so we can ensure that everyone is respected, that we are keeping everyone safe and that we are putting COVID behind us once and for all.

I have also had a number of conversations with folks from other regions of my riding. I saw some photos this week on social media from people at the Safeway in Kenora, where many shelves are empty. People going grocery shopping are not able to get the essentials.

A constituent from Sioux Lookout, Knowles, shared his heating bill. Knowles is currently paying \$70 a week in carbon tax alone, with about \$100 in HST on top of that. He is looking at \$170 a week for just his heating. I do not know if Madam Speaker has spent much time in Sioux Lookout in the winter, but I know she is from northern Ontario, so she understands full well that heating is definitely not a luxury there; it is a necessity. In fact, in many parts of my riding, the wind chill dipped to around -50°C last night. It is quite evident that heating is a necessity, and these added costs are making things so much more difficult for people to get by.

It is not just about home heating, but about gasoline in cars as well. Prices are going up, and this is making it more difficult for people to get to the hospital, for example. Many people in my riding have to drive a couple of hours or more to access medical services, and the added costs for gasoline are making things more and more difficult.

• (1110)

That is why, when we are talking about inflation, our party has been clear that it is time to phase out the stimulus programs and it is time to rein in government spending. However, the government has been politicizing this position, saying that the Conservatives want to cut everything, that we do not want the government to spend anything. Of course, that is not the case. The government has to keep programs and services going. What we are saying is that the government needs to phase out the unnecessary stimulus programs, get things back on track and open up our economy.

I share a concern raised by my colleague in the NDP from northern B.C. about the northern residents deductions. The government has brought forward a plan in Bill C-8 to address the northern residents deductions by expanding the travel portion, but it has done nothing to address the base portion. We ran in the election on a plan to increase the northern residents deductions and to me, that is an example of good and efficient spending and making sure we are supporting those in the north. It is something that I think my colleagues in the NDP would agree with, and I hope the government will take it into account. Given some of the comments I heard earlier in response to a question on it, the government could potentially be considering that.

Another big issue, of course, is housing, something that is not included in the CPI. The prices we have seen have been increasing quite dramatically, and this seems to be impacting people from all walks of life and all income levels.

In the Kenora riding, we are looking for more affordable housing and housing for young people coming out of school and entering

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the workforce who are looking to stay in the community. A lot of people my age cannot find a place to live, frankly. This is also about working families and seniors. It is impacting everyone right across the district.

One of the biggest issues we see is that the government has not been providing incentives for people to develop. There are lots of pieces of land available in my riding, from Sioux Lookout to Ear Falls and everywhere in between. However, some of the solutions we have seen from the government and from some of the other parties in the House have only been focused on subsidizing demand, further driving a wedge into this issue and making it much worse, instead of focusing on the supply and increasing housing stock.

On the same note, housing in first nations specifically is something we need to see addressed. The underfunding we have seen from the government is leading to overcrowding, mould and a number of other issues, and this is having a detrimental impact on many people in my riding, particularly in the remote northern parts of it. In fact, as I mentioned earlier this week in the House, a recent report brought forward by the Canadian Medical Association Journal has shown that the issues in housing have led to worsened health outcomes in indigenous children. That is something we have been hearing from chiefs for a number of years and from community residents in my riding, yet the government has been slow to act. The time is now for the government to act on that and ensure we have stronger housing, better housing and better opportunities for first nations across the Kenora riding.

With the limited time I have left, I will say briefly that the labour shortage is obviously impacting many people across the Kenora riding. I looked at the job board in Dryden recently and there are over 100 positions available, from minimum wage jobs to well-paying jobs that require a lot of experience. This is a small community, of course, with a number of vacancies, and many businesses have not been able to find people to hire. We really have not seen a plan from the government on how to address that.

Those are three big issues that I feel have not been adequately addressed. I hope in questions and comments that I will be able to further share some solutions and suggestions that, going forward, will ensure northwestern Ontario can thrive economically and we can chart a new path forward.

• (1115)

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member opposite talking about some of the concerns of his constituents, and I want to take this opportunity to talk about some of the concerns that my constituents are facing right now daily because of the unpeaceful, unlawful protest that is taking place.

For example, I just received an email from a gentleman who wrote:

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My wife and I live about 10 blocks west of Parliament Hill, and while not in the thick of it, we are close enough to be continually impacted by the protesters' activities. Besides the continuous blaring of horns, we are completely disgusted by the actions of these protesters. They are rude, aggressive and intimidating in the local stores and indoor spaces. One of the nearby parking lots seems to be used as a massive urinal. Insults and firecrackers have been hurled at people wearing masks who are simply passing by. I'm sure that you all have heard these stories and more on the news.

That is the impact on my community. This protest needs to end now.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the hon. member that, just like we do for those who are delivering speeches in the House, the questions and the speeches should be related to the actual debate that is before the House. I just want to remind the hon. member to ensure that his questions are relevant to the discussion that is before the House.

The hon. member for Kenora.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for those comments. I do not believe there was a question there, necessarily, but obviously everyone in this chamber supports the right to peaceful protest in Canada. To the extent that a protest moves beyond that, obviously again, we all support the proper measures being taken.

I do not live in the member's riding, of course, so I cannot comment on the specifics of what has been seen, but I think all of us in the House are on the same page in that respect.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague from Kenora on his speech. He speaks softly, but he is eloquent. I believe he is doing a great job representing his constituents.

His speech echoes the same concerns I hear from the businesses and residents of my riding, Drummond, particularly regarding some of the measures brought in to help businesses and merchants get through the crisis we are currently experiencing.

In my view, there is something missing from the legislation before the House today, Bill C-8. The goal is to stimulate economic recovery, support entrepreneurs and build their confidence. However, entrepreneurs who started their business after the pandemic set in are excluded from many of the measures in place. This undermines confidence, causing people who want to start a business to think twice. I think this is undermining the economic recovery.

I would like to hear what my colleague from Kenora thinks about that.

[English]

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, it sounds like my hon. colleague and I have likely heard many similar things in our own ridings.

Throughout the course of the pandemic, I heard from many business owners in my riding that the programs brought forward had rigid criteria. Many of them were falling through the cracks and were not able to access some of the support services. Specifically, tourist camps and seasonal businesses had a lot of difficulty and, as the member mentioned, a lot of new businesses as well were having

trouble getting off the ground. I would agree wholeheartedly with the member's characterization there.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Qujannamiik, Uqaqtittiji*, and *qujannamiik* to the member from northern Ontario. I am glad to say that I am from a more northern territory, and that the information the member has shared is drastically worse in the north. According to a 2017 statistic, 76% of Inuit over the age of 15 from all over the north suffer from food insecurity. Having said that, many of the other statistics show that there is already a lot of food insecurity across Canada.

These people need help, not more cuts for the working people who are losing their income and paying more for their bills. Why do you want to make their lives even harder?

• (1120)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member needs to address comments through the Speaker and not directly to the member.

The hon. member for Kenora, a brief answer please.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have had to engage with the member for Nunavut in the chamber. I would like to congratulate her on her election and welcome her to this place. She made a very important point of not spending more or less, but spending more efficiently and spending smarter.

Over the past few years we have seen each year that the government has increased funding for Nutrition North, which is the flagship program to deal with food insecurity in the north, yet each year, as the member noted, food insecurity is getting worse. The government is spending more and getting worse results. It is certainly time for a change.

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 and speak to yet another positive piece of legislation that I would encourage all members of the House to support. It is going to be interesting. I am expecting that members from the New Democrats, the Bloc and the Green Party will support this piece of legislation. I hope I am not being too presumptuous in the hope that we will get that support.

The interesting dynamic at play here is going to be how the Conservative Party will vote on this legislation. One member says "against", and that is my fear because if they wanted to listen to what their constituents had to say, I believe they would be supportive of this legislation. I will not be surprised if they vote against it. After all, the very first piece of legislation that we introduced after the election was Bill C-2, which ensured that we could continue the ongoing supports for Canadians from every region of our country. Think of small businesses and the lockdowns, and the financial support that the Government of Canada continued to provide so that we would be in a better position to get out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was surprised that the Conservative Party of Canada voted against that legislation. I do not understand it. On one hand they talk about the importance of small businesses, but when it came down to supporting small businesses, they voted against Bill C-2. Here is a bill in which they could redeem themselves, at least in part, by getting behind this legislation and supporting it. I listened to a couple of speeches this morning and they highlight some issues—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry I have to interrupt, but there is a lot of feedback coming from the other side of the House. I would ask members, if they have thoughts about questions or comments, to jot them down so that they do not forget them. They will have an opportunity to ask not five minutes' worth of questions, but 10 minutes' worth of questions after the hon. member finishes his speech.

Resuming debate, the hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, if the opposition would like, I would give leave so there could be unlimited questions and answers, as opposed to 10 minutes.

The point is that the legislation before the House today is solid, good legislation that should be supported by all members. The Deputy Prime Minister, the cabinet and government members in particular have fed into this legislation some initiatives that each of us should be supporting. I would like to highlight a few of them.

We often hear about taxation. There is an incorporation of some taxation policy within this legislation. The legislation also talks about ventilation expenses. Those that would qualify under a tax credit would improve the quality of the air we are breathing.

There is a good clause that ensures that we deal with housing. We had a member this morning talk about the cost of housing. In this legislation, we are putting into place a 1% annual tax for those individuals who are buying up condos, apartments and houses with no intention of living in them. They have no intention of renting them out. The people who are non-resident, non-Canadians are now going to pay a 1% annual tax on these. When the Conservatives talk about doing something on housing, this is doing something on the housing issue.

• (1125)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: You are doing nothing.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, millions of dollars in taxes is significant, I would suggest to the member. However, will Conservatives oppose that? We need to remember that this is the Conservative Party that opposed the 1% tax we put on Canada's wealthiest a few years back. What will Conservatives do with this tax?

We have supported our schools. They want to improve their ventilation systems, so there is better air quality for school children in the different regions of our country. We have support for our provinces and territories in regard to proof of vaccination in this legislation. We have support for rapid testing. Canadians are interested in receiving rapid testing.

Mr. Ryan Williams: A little too late.

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it is interesting. Members need to be careful with heckling. They could be embarrassed by some of the things they heckle across the way.

I remember Conservatives at one point jumping from their seats and hollering from the skies, saying, "We want rapid tests."

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Two years ago.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it was two years ago, as one member points out.

The federal government acquired well over 100 million tests. As of December, 2021, most of those tests that we purchased long ago were not being used. When we had the COVID-19 variant and the demand started to pick up, we, as a government, purchased over 100 million additional tests.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have a point of order.

The hon. member for Kitchener Centre.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Madam Speaker, many members in the House might have questions and comments for the hon. member. Many of us are waiting until the question and answer period for that. I would ask you to consider the importance of ensuring that those who are speaking have a chance to do so, and that those who ask questions have a chance to do so after the speech is done.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I greatly appreciate the hon. member raising that. As I mentioned a few minutes ago, I would ask the official opposition members to please hold on to their thoughts, questions and comments, and not to think out loud. It is interrupting the debate in the House. I hope they will ensure that they adhere to that.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has 13 and a half minutes remaining.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, how quickly time flies.

I can understand why the Conservative opposition is really concerned about the legislation. The Conservatives have this predetermined position that says, if the Liberals introduce legislation they have to vote against it. They are fairly good at filibustering and voting against government legislation. The problem is that this legislation is direct support for battling the coronavirus. Canadians need this type of legislation, just like they needed Bill C-2. There is this sense that the Conservatives should be voting for the legislation, so they are having a tough time with it.

Getting back to the legislation itself, it provides \$1.7 billion with respect to rapid testing. That was enough money to provide for the demand for testing in workplaces and other places for the last months of December, going into January and possibly into February. We have more legislation that is coming up. Members could get a little advance on it in Bill C-10, where there is an additional \$2 billion that would be invested so that the federal government could continue to support provinces, territories and indigenous communities, making sure they have things such as rapid testing.

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As much as the Conservatives like to criticize the government, they find that when it comes to the issue of rapid testing it really is no issue for the federal government when it comes to criticism. We circulated all the rapid testing well in advance. The vast majority of the provinces had only used a small percentage before it became a much larger issue. When it became a larger issue, whether it was the Minister of Public Services and Procurement or the Minister of Health, supported by the Minister of Finance and the Liberal caucus, we ensured that the monies and resources would be there to support these ministers in acquiring the tests that were necessary.

That is what Bill C-8 does. It is there to support initiatives that are really making a difference. Yesterday we heard a great deal about seniors and, in particular, I was listening to the member for Elmwood—Transcona. The NDP have a focus on trying to give a false impression about seniors and the government's approach to seniors. I thought I would make it very clear, in terms of what it is and how it is this government has been supporting seniors, not only during the pandemic but pre-pandemic.

When I think of seniors and the six or seven years we have now been in government, one of the very first initiatives we did was that we rolled back the age for collecting OAS. The former prime minister set it at 67. We rolled it back to 65. That was one of the first initiatives. Another initiative was that we increased the guaranteed annual supplement. That had a really positive impact, not only in Winnipeg North where hundreds of seniors were lifted out of poverty by that one particular initiative, but thousands of seniors were lifted out of poverty because of a tangible increase back in the first couple of years of being in government through the guaranteed income supplement program.

● (1130)

In the 2019 campaign, we talked about giving seniors aged 75 and over a 10% increase in the OAS. Even though some inside this chamber criticized us about giving that increase, I rooted it back to the fact that we made a campaign promise. It was a part of our platform in the 2019 election, and we began the process of putting it into place before the last election took place just a number of months ago. We are a government that has materialized that substantial increase supporting seniors collecting OAS at age 75 and over.

We provided one-time payments to support our seniors during the pandemic, whether they were collecting OAS, GIS or both. We supported many organizations in our communities that focused attention on providing support services for our seniors. An example of that would be the New Horizons program. Members can canvass their own constituencies, and they will find that there were enhancements of services being provided through the non-profit organizations for our seniors in particular.

I remember a phone call I had with the United Way in Winnipeg a while back, and they were talking about the importance of the 211 line and the importance it could play for our seniors. Through a federal grant, the support of the United Way and its incredible organizing and organization, we now have what many other jurisdictions have: an active 211 phone number. Seven days a week and 24 hours a day, someone can call 211 and they will have access to a person who can assist them and a whole myriad of government re-

sources and programs, not only from the national level but from other levels, whether they are provincial, municipal or non-profits.

This is a support program that will especially help our seniors. When I talk about the types of actions the government has taken during the pandemic, it is an excellent example when we hear of non-profit organizations, because we often hear about the direct payments, whether they are to seniors or people with disabilities through the CERB program or workers and employers. We often hear about that, but there are many other ways we indirectly supported seniors, and whether it is the New Horizons program or supporting organizations like United Way in Winnipeg, seniors were better served.

It does not mean we cannot do better. Within our caucus we continue to advocate for our seniors every day. I hope I can say this: We even have a strong active seniors caucus that is there to ensure that the interests of seniors are constantly being looked at. When the member for Elmwood—Transcona, for example, made reference to the fact that we are not there for long-term care and other issues such as those I just finished highlighting, I suggest to the member that he only take a look at the province of Manitoba. I would compare our record at the national level with the main years I was in opposition in the Manitoba legislature, where I saw the provincial NDP government reduce corporate income tax and do nothing, or very little, to support long-term care.

● (1135)

Today we have a very progressive and aggressive agenda for being there in a very real and tangible way for our seniors. That is why members of the Liberal caucus advocate continuously for long-term care facilities and how we can look at some sort of a standardization of care, what those expectations are and what kind of role the federal government can play.

We see many, including me, who continue to advocate for provinces and territories to take advantage of a federal government that has a very strong interest in a national pharmacare program. Close to two years ago, it was incorporated into a throne speech, looking for provinces and territories that would be interested. The point is that as a government we are very much interested and want to be there for our seniors.

In terms of other initiatives that we have been able to accomplish since the last election, some of the things did not get the type of attention they should have. I would like to draw attention to them, because they are indirectly tied to the legislation. These are things like the \$15 minimum wage for federally regulated occupations. Hopefully, the provinces will see the leadership we are providing. It would be nice to see provincial jurisdictions take up that particular initiative.

The child care initiative shows the degree to which parliamentarians at the federal and provincial levels, working together, can produce tangible results. The pandemic demonstrated that, and so has the child care initiative. We are a government that has brought through a national child care program, albeit one province still needs to sign on.

Those are the types of issues that we have been able to deal with during a pandemic, while supporting Canadians in every region of the country, working with Canadians in different levels of government and dealing with issues of reconciliation, environment, housing, all the important issues for our constituents.

As I said in the past, and will say in future, my first priority is the constituents of Winnipeg North. Rest assured that the issues they raise in Winnipeg North are the issues I will be bringing to the floor of the House of Commons.

• (1140)

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his maiden speech. I hope we have a lot of opportunity in the future to hear him speak again and not be muzzled like the rest of his colleagues. A lot of the back-and-forth with my hon. colleague is good-natured, despite his rather dysfunctional relationship with the truth.

This is a serious and non-partisan question for my colleague. There is new spending in this bill. New spending is required to go through Treasury Board processes. The departmental results that came out yesterday show that one out of every four programs put forward by the government have not gone through the required Treasury Board processes.

Would he identify which in this bill is the 25% that has not gone through the required legitimate Treasury Board processes?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's consistency. I too hope to be able to speak a bit more in the coming days, weeks and months.

When I think of the amount of money that the government has had to spend over the last year and a half as a direct result of the coronavirus and the pandemic, I like to think that the people of Canada appreciate and understand that often we get legislation coming through, such as Bill C-8, which commits \$1.7 billion toward things such as rapid testing so that we can get test widgets to our provinces and territories in order to meet the demand.

As for the actual details of the processes of the Treasury Board, I will leave that for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, after listening to the member for the past two days, it has been quite enlightening to hear that everything is just fine and dandy, thank you very much. It has been a revelation to hear how wonderful his party's programs are and how they leave no one behind.

Basically, what is everyone complaining about?

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There seems to be no nuance here. He was talking about bacon two days ago. It was so suspicious that I was wondering whether this could be the next government sponsorship scheme.

How are we supposed to believe that we are socially progressive when the main universal support program for seniors, namely old age security, available to people age 65 and over—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, there are some members, in particular in the opposition benches, who would portray that the sky is falling, that it is nothing but doom and gloom. There is a bias to make everything look terrible. From my point of view, I see the glass as half full. I see the things that this government has achieved.

Being a parliamentarian for over 30 years, I appreciate and value what we have been able to accomplish in a relatively short time span, especially if we factor in a pandemic. If anyone wants to debate the issue of seniors, given the background work that we have done on seniors and that we continue to do today, I would welcome opportunities to do so wherever possible on that issue. That is how confident I am in terms of the things that we have been able to accomplish in a relatively short period of time.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, how completely out of touch does the hon. member have to be to practically dislocate his shoulder patting himself and the Liberal Party on the back for leaving out hundreds of thousands of vulnerable seniors for a decade until they qualify for Liberal old age supports? The Liberals continue to move the goal posts on our most vulnerable people, including my seniors here in Hamilton Centre. What are the Liberals going to do for those under 75 years of age?

Do not even get me started on the GIS clawbacks. Seniors have to wait until May to receive the compensation promised to them following the GIS clawback. In the meantime, many of them are being evicted from their homes in the middle of winter. This bill does not provide any support for that. Why do the Liberals think it is acceptable for seniors to be evicted from their homes and forced to use our food banks?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the NDP has two approaches when it comes to seniors. I was sitting in the Manitoba legislature for many years when the NDP was in government, and that was a different approach. That is why I say I will compare our approach in dealing with seniors any day to the NDP approach for over a decade in Manitoba. We have accomplished a great deal; it does not mean that we cannot do more. We will continue to strive to do more.

The 10% for those aged 75 and over was an election platform commitment. It was a promise. Is the NDP saying that we should not fulfill our promise? Is the NDP going to roll it back? Is that what the New Democrats are suggesting for those who are aged 75 and over? Shame on them.

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Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member for Winnipeg North. I appreciate his comments with respect to housing in particular. I know he has a shared interest in addressing the cost of housing. As he knows, in Kitchener Centre the cost of housing has gone up 35% in the last year alone.

The member spoke about the underused housing tax that is in this bill. My question is with respect to the number of exemptions to the applicability of that tax, specifically the non-resident and non-Canadian exemptions. The list goes on and on. The work is being done to introduce this tax, but I wonder if the member could share more about the reasons that the list of exemptions is as long as it is.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, my basic understanding is that non-residents or non-Canadians who are buying up condos and houses in Canada are part of the problem in driving up cost. Those individuals would have to pay a 1% annual tax. I see that as a positive contribution to dealing, at least in part, with a very serious issue for Canadians.

The member and I have had discussions before on housing, and he and I are particularly in sync on housing co-ops and alternative types of housing. I am a big fan of housing co-ops. I would like to see more done on housing co-ops. I think there is more that we can do in working with other organizations that deliver housing, such as Habitat for Humanity. Habitat for Humanity in Winnipeg's north end has built more new houses in infill environments than any government has, whether provincial, federal or even municipal. They are an outstanding organization.

Let us get behind some of those types of initiatives that I know my colleague and friend also supports.

● (1150)

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Bill C-8 deals with many of the pandemic issues. The member just talked about housing, and I want to put on the record a statement that was just issued by Cornerstone Housing for Women, which is located in my riding of Ottawa Centre, in which it said:

These last six days have been extremely stressful for people experiencing homelessness and frontline staff working to support them in the downtown core.

Cornerstone's emergency shelter just returned to its downtown location a few weeks ago and is still getting situated and now, we're having to manage through this protest that is creating more barriers and retraumatizing women in the city.

Later it says:

Women and staff are scared to go outside of the shelter, especially women of color, being able to go outside is the only reprieve many women experiencing homelessness have and they cannot even do that.

This unlawful protest has to end so that members of the community and women who need shelter can continue with their lives. I'm sure the member opposite—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I need to allow time for the member to respond.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, as a local member of Parliament in Ottawa, the member has done exceptionally well in conveying a powerful message that it is time for the protesters, in essence, to leave with their semis and the other things they brought to Ottawa. Ottawa needs to get back to a more normal situation, as the government House leader talked about and as the member just said. The protests have been heard, and it is time to allow things to get back to normal here in Ottawa.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague from Ottawa Centre, he has risen several times now to comment on the occupation of downtown Ottawa.

We are all aware of the situation. I am well aware. However, we are having a debate and we would like the questions and comments to relate to the matter at hand.

It might be a good time to point that out to my colleague.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I was just about to remind members that comments and questions have to pertain to Bill C-8.

The member started off well, but the question changed a bit and so did the topic.

[English]

There is a bit of flexibility, but I would remind the member that all questions, comments and debate should surround the actual bill.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I have enormous respect for your work, but the right of a parliamentarian to discuss issues in this House is sacrosanct. The fact that we are talking about a bill that has to do with the pandemic ties directly to the issue of people, particularly the women on Metcalfe and Gloucester Streets, being harassed and threatened. That is his right. The Bloc might not like it, but it is his right to ask these questions in the House.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Again I want to remind members, as I have, that there is a bit of flexibility in the discussion. However, it has to be related to the bill. I appreciate the comments of the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

● (1155)

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I want to thank the member for supporting me. I will not be silenced when amplifying the voices of my community in this House.

Mr. Jake Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my great colleague, the member for Kelowna—Lake Country.

I am very proud to speak on Bill C-8 today on behalf of my constituents of Miramichi—Grand Lake. This is yet another bill that enacts tax and spending by the Liberal government.

Unlike some of the members opposite, I understand that if the Speaker delivers a ruling, as an hon. member in this House I am going to be respectful to the Speaker of the House. I am going to tell a little story about what happened just before Christmas before I speak directly to the bill, but the story goes to the spirit of the bill.

The last bill I spoke on was Bill C-2. After about 25 or 30 hours of the finance committee discussing the bill, the Minister of Finance for our country said it would cost \$7.4 billion in spending. Then the House adjourned and the committee adjourned, and the minister then visited the Senate committee. It was at that moment that I and other members of the committee and members of the House ascertained that it would not cost \$7.4 billion, but \$11.9 billion. The members of that team and the other members from the Bloc and the NDP who sat on that committee for somewhere close to 30 hours discussing a \$7.4-billion bill realized that the Christmas present left by the Liberal government to the consumers and taxpayers of our country was not a \$7.4-billion bill but an \$11.9-billion bill. In that, we learned a valuable lesson not only about committees but about what happens when meetings adjourn. The sitting government changed the numbers and informed us and the rest of the country that there was, oops, a little typo and that it was actually going to cost Canadians over \$4 billion more.

I wanted to make that point today, because I think it is pertinent to this argument.

It is very important to me to be able to rise in these hallowed halls and bring a truly Canadian perspective, a rural perspective and a Miramichi—Grand Lake perspective.

The current state of affairs is in complete disarray. I am here to talk about more proposed spending of public funds. The traditional tax-and-spend Liberal government is whaling away on the public's money, spending it like there is no tomorrow. This is money that Canadians have no choice but to hand over. It is money they trusted us with. Elected officials are trusted to be the voice and good stewards of the public trust and public spending, but with the government members on the other side of the floor, we have seen money being spent and the bill is going down the road. I have four children and I cannot imagine them paying for the sins of today when not one of them is over the age of 15 right now.

When I read Bill C-8, I saw fuel prices rising to almost \$2 a litre in Miramichi—Grand Lake. Bacon is rising more than 20%. Beef is rising more than 20% year over year in Alberta. Bread in Quebec is up 10%. Natural gas bills are up 30% in Ontario alone. We cannot keep printing money and expect different results, because that is inflation. In this House it has become known as “Justinflation”, but it is all inflation. Do members know who pays for it? It is the taxpayers of this country.

I am going to bring to the attention of the House something I find most interesting. I hope the people in Miramichi—Grand Lake and around the country are listening, because I think it is worth listening to.

We have the third-largest oil reserves in the country in Alberta. The government is fixated on what it used to call ozone layer problems, then global warming and then climate change. Now it is calling it a climate crisis, because if there is a crisis, it has to act now.

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As a result, what it is doing is destroying the very foundation of the Canadian economy.

● (1200)

I am also going to tell the House what it is doing for the taxpayers of this country. We are buying oil that emits more pollution, because it contains higher levels of carbons and has caused a 300% increase of shipments on the sea. We are bringing in oil from the Middle East, from warlord nations, and the Canadian people are paying three times as much for that oil, even though we have oil in our own country. People would have a cheaper oil bill if the Liberals had the common sense to see the error of their ways. There is nothing wrong with having environmental standards. We have the best standards in the world in our energy sector. We are the gold standard of the energy sector, but the Liberals' climate crisis agenda is costing people too much money.

We are here every day and talk about affordability, the cost of living, inflation and the housing balloon. We talk about this every day, but nothing is getting better for Canadians because they continue to pay for the sins of the current government. Let us think about this. We are bringing oil from halfway across the world that emits more carbon than our own. Then we put it on a ship and there are 300% increases to ship it because of the state of the world right now. We are still doing that in this country when we have our own oil. It is shameful that the Prime Minister would do that and try to continue with this global elitist agenda that does not completely apply to the Canadian people. It is dangerous.

Does this make us independent? Does it help create jobs? Do we get any additional revenue? The answer to every one of those questions is no. What do we get? We get a bill: a more expensive bill, a more unaffordable bill, a bill that the Canadian people and the people in my constituency of Miramichi—Grand Lake are having a hard time paying for.

I am going to let the House in on a little secret that those in Miramichi—Grand Lake are well aware of: Canadians are sick and tired of picking up the tab for the government. On one side of the Liberals' mouth, they say we are at a pre-pandemic level when it comes to jobs and the economy, but on the other side of that same mouth, they are adding \$70 billion of new inflationary spending. I do not have to tell members what that is going to do to the pockets of Canadians and to young families who are priced out of the housing market. They cannot get a home. I am 43 years old. People who are 10 or 12 years younger than me who are trying desperately to get a home are having a really hard time getting into new houses because the cost is so high that it is not affordable. Since the start of the pandemic, Canadians have been misled on where the money is coming from and where the money is going.

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Last week, during my time on the Standing Committee on Finance, I had the opportunity to ask key questions. Canadians wanted to know from the Parliamentary Budget Officer whether the government, which spent over half a trillion dollars in brand new spending, has misled the rest of us. That was the question. Roughly one-third of this new spending had nothing to do with COVID. It is \$178 billion of new printed money for non-COVID-related expenditures.

The Conservatives are opposed to Bill C-8. The economic and fiscal update adds \$70 billion of new inflationary fuel right to the fire. The delay in the government's release of its audited financial statements has undermined parliamentarians' ability to meaningfully scrutinize proposed government spending. The Parliamentary Budget Officer report shows that since the start of the pandemic, the government has spent or plans to spend \$541.9 billion in new measures, almost one-third of which is not COVID-related.

We are not in support of Bill C-8 because it is another classic tax-and-spend Liberal measure that will only cripple Canadians with more debt and more inflation. The Canadian public is worth more than that, and that is why the Conservative Party of Canada is going to protect their interests regarding public money.

• (1205)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I indicated in my comments, Bill C-8 has a lot of things within it that Canadians really and truly want to see. I am expecting and hoping that members from all sides of the House will support the bill.

Does the member plan on voting in favour of getting Bill C-8 to committee? Does he have any sense of how quickly he would like to see the bill come to a vote?

Mr. Jake Stewart: Madam Speaker, I would like to see the bill debated. I would like to see hon. members from every party stand in the House and speak directly to Canadians about the new expenditures and about economic stimulus.

Economists all over are saying that right now we can bounce back. COVID will be over and we can bounce back, but what are the Liberals doing? They are finding an excuse to cripple Canadians with more debt and more inflation. In my riding, people cannot afford to pay any more. They cannot do it.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague on his speech. I understand that he and his party have criticisms about Bill C-8. I also understand that he and his party feel that businesses, retailers, the business sector need a helping hand to get back up and running.

Barring these assistance programs, what solutions does my colleague propose? What assistance measures does he think should be brought in for rebuilding the economy?

For some sectors, we are unfortunately no longer talking about recovery so much as rebuilding. What does my colleague propose to address the Conservatives' opposition to Bill C-8?

[English]

Mr. Jake Stewart: Madam Speaker, what the Conservative Party of Canada is saying right now is that if economists around the world are telling the government not to spend any more money, not to continue the housing balloon and not to cripple Canadians with mounting debt, the Conservative Party of Canada has a responsibility to protect Canadians by trying to hold the government to account so that it does not spend \$541 billion extra, some of it with no measures. What I would like to see is lower taxes and incentives for companies, not massive and monstrous public spending by the Liberal government.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member raised affordability in his deliberations, which is important. However, one other aspect to government, other than just taxing and spending, is regulation.

I want to ask the member, especially because he is from a rural community, how he feels about the current pricing for wireless broadband for rural Canadians. Does he agree with the Rogers-Shaw takeover?

Lastly, is it not time to bring in some type of price control given the fact that we have some of the highest costs? Consumers cannot pay them, but Internet is important for our accessibility at school, in business and in education. Should we have a regulated industry?

Mr. Jake Stewart: Madam Speaker, I was hoping I would get this question.

The Conservatives believe in the free market and free market enterprise. No matter how much money the Liberal government continues to spend, rural Internet in my constituency does not improve. The reason is that private companies own the infrastructure, the federal government regulates it and the lines and cables in my riding are attached to public telephone poles. The public owns the poles, the companies own the fibre cable, regulations come from the federal government and the equipment is owned by private companies. This creates monopolies. It puts government in the bad position of being forced to spend its own money, and people do not get a better source of Internet. What I want is top-of-the-line Internet for everyone in my constituency, and if the government is going to spend \$540 billion every day I come here, we should have it by now.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are in the fifth wave of COVID, and I do not know how many waves of government spending we have seen in response to it. Could my hon. colleague comment on whether that spending could have been far more targeted? We finally see measures to address more rapid tests, but we have one-third of the capacity of our neighbour to the south regarding critical care in this country. Each wave has put a few people into the hospital in critical care. If we had had more capacity there, would we have needed all of these waves of spending?

• (1210)

Mr. Jake Stewart: Madam Speaker, with the COVID-19 measures, the government has continued to lock down. With testing, the rollout of vaccinations and PCR tests, a lot of things were late and a lot of things were in short supply. The N95 masks, which were supposed to be the best masks, were in short supply. Yes, I think the government could have managed COVID a lot better in terms of our health care system.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, a Canadian waking up in December 1991 would not have a lot in common with many things we see and hear today. At that time, Kellogg's Cinnamon Mini Buns was the number one cereal, Bryan Adams and Paula Abdul were topping the charts and people would make most phone calls from a phone plugged into the wall. However, one thing that is the same is the 4.8% inflation rate. The country was facing this back then at a time when inflation rates were high, and we are seeing it now again.

The government's insistence on throwing our fiscal policy in this time machine fails to address families facing a high cost of living crisis. The measures outlined in this fiscally irresponsible piece of legislation will do nothing to help Canadians looking for a return to stocked shelves and whole paycheques. This legislation would cost taxpayers over \$70 billion at a time when our national debt has risen to \$1.2 trillion.

My colleagues and I on this side of the House have repeatedly called on the government to break free of its continued insistence on ever-increasing spending regardless of economic conditions. We recognize that in times of emergency, some spending is required, just as a house from 100 years ago in the dead of winter needed logs in a fire. Carefully keeping the fireplace lit, placing one log at a time, will keep that house warm, but stuffing all the logs in at once will not accomplish anything except burning it down.

The worst days of the pandemic are thankfully now behind us. We should thank the efforts of our fellow Canadians for doing their part and our health care workers, the true heroes. Everyone is looking for a return to normal, to live with COVID-19, and the government should do the same and put the brakes on the inflationary spending. However, legislation like what we see here today shows that is not happening.

It is not just Conservatives who are confused by the government's inability to see the flashing red lights advising them to turn back. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has been left confused by the government's proposal for \$100 billion over the next three years. The government, Prime Minister and finance minister, committed in December 2020 to have guardrails on our economic recovery spending. They said how fast Canadians would be able to return to their jobs would decrease the stimulus needing to be spent. A surprisingly economically sound idea from a government that proposes so few.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer tells us that those guardrails have been met, yet the government looks to continue spending regardless, deep into this current decade. The budget officer stated, "It appears to me that the rationale for the additional spending initially set aside as 'stimulus' no longer exists." The government continues to insist that we can spend ourselves out of this hole regard-

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less of the consequences of higher potential taxes, sluggish supply chains and rising inflation.

This complete lack of concern for the condition of Canada's finances is alarming, especially when families are increasingly feeling the pinch. The Canadian dollar is a plaything for the government. At the finance committee when asked if government deficits can contribute to inflation, the Parliamentary Budget Officer gave a clear and to the point response: "Yes, they can."

Any Canadian pushing a shopping cart can tell us that grocery stores increasingly are frequently low on the most basic groceries. Often some shelves can go unstocked for days and the products there are increasingly unaffordable for many. It is no wonder we saw such an increase in food bank usage last year. The average family will spend at least \$1,000 more on groceries in 2022.

My colleague, the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, recently told the House of his constituent Madame Tremblay in Quebec paying 8% more on average for her groceries. The finance minister responded that she too does the grocery shopping every week for her family. I do not doubt she does, but it is much easier to afford groceries when earning \$269,800 a year, paid for, of course, by Canadians, including Madame Tremblay. How completely out of touch with the average family was that comment? That is the Liberal way.

Natural gas is also up 19%. I have had many people copy their home gas bill and email it to me, stating they are mortified at the cost and finding it harder to pay their bills. Here is a quote from an email I received from a Kelowna-Lake Country constituent just a week ago. It said, "This is a copy of the highest gas bill we have ever received". They go on to say, "Seniors are losing at every turn these days."

There is nothing in this legislation to address rising inflation or rising debt. The cost of housing remains another pressing concern in Kelowna-Lake Country. The value of the average family home in Kelowna has now surpassed one million dollars. New parents are increasingly being priced out of one of the best communities in the country to raise a family.

I recently sent a housing survey to my constituents to get their feedback on how best to move forward on the issue. One thing I am not expecting to see in their feedback is a call for higher costs. We now own the second most-inflated housing bubble despite being the second-largest nation on earth, and the government has put forth no concrete policies to address this including in this legislation.

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As the shadow minister for small business recovery and growth, I have spoken to many small businesses, both in my riding and across the country, on the issues they continue to face. While some had different points of view on how best to move forward, none of them chose to endorse a higher tax on payroll. However, the Associate Minister of Finance told me in the House that they “can afford this” and went and increased CPP premiums anyway.

This is another example of the Liberals being completely out of touch. Can small businesses afford this? They are struggling and dealing with perpetual lockdowns due to mismanaged federal policies not using all the tools available to deal with COVID-19. Working people are also paying for this tax on their paycheques. It is not only inflation at record-high 30-year levels, Canadians’ take-home paycheques are cut short with a higher tax. It is hitting people on both sides.

• (1215)

If the government is content to ignore not just Conservatives and the Parliamentary Budget Officer but also small businesses and millions of Canadian families, perhaps it will listen to one of its own. Robert Asselin, a former adviser to both the current Prime Minister and the finance minister, who now serves as the senior VP of policy at the Business Council of Canada, said:

Given inflation is looking more and more persistent and is higher than expected, and the fact that we know much more spending is coming following the commitments made by the government in the last federal election, I think there are warning signs on pursuing aggressive government spending in the short-term.

Legislation like Bill C-8 would do nothing to keep the country’s books in order, instead leaving them overflowing in red ink. The bill for this kind of reckless spending will eventually come due for governments, but unfortunately bills will come due for struggling families first.

Here is another email I received last week, from a constituent in Kelowna—Lake Country: “We are taxed to poverty. With EI and CPP premiums all increasing, carbon tax increases along with inflation running rampant, our paycheques keep getting smaller. Canadians are going to be in the poorhouse.”

The Association of Interior Realtors recently reported the benchmark selling price of a single-family home has now risen to a million dollars. Housing prices in Lake Country rose similarly, with new figures from B.C. Assessment showing a one-year increase of 32%. The escalation in home values jeopardizes the ability of seniors on fixed incomes to maintain their homes, prevents first-time homebuyers from ever being able to buy a home, forces families to live in homes that no longer suit their family’s size, and forces people to spend far more than 30% of their pre-tax income on rent.

During the last quarter, I surveyed my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country with a mail-out that went to every household to get feedback on tackling inflation and also what other issues people thought were a priority. I had a huge response, and more than 80% of Kelowna—Lake Country constituents who responded said that tackling rising inflation should be a priority for me and my fellow MPs. It is not just Conservatives in my riding who want Parliament to tackle this. It is across all party lines.

The legislation would do nothing to address the top issue my constituents are raising and would add \$70 billion more in deficit

with no plan to get our fiscal house in order. It is really difficult to vote for the legislation, based on all of the comments I have made here today.

• (1220)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed. I am hearing from Conservative members that they seem not to want to support Bill C-8.

There are many benefits within the legislation, and one that I would like to highlight is something that is in high demand today. The federal government has been there in a very real way for rapid testing. We were able to meet the demands all the way up to the end of December, when most of the rapid tests were not even being utilized. Then, when they became in high demand, we were able to acquire another 140 million rapid tests. Legislation like this would support the financial means to get those rapid tests. Does the member not at least support that initiative?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, I am glad that the member opposite brought up that question, because, in fact, the Liberal government has completely failed on rapid testing. We have been calling for rapid testing since back in 2020. There are other countries across the world that have had rapid testing widely available to families for almost a year now. We have completely failed in rapid testing, and it is one of the major reasons why we have had to have perpetual lockdowns. It is one of the biggest failures of the government over the last two years.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I find it difficult to follow my Conservative friends when talking about housing. They are obsessed with the deficit, and rightly so, because the deficit is increasing and we do not print money.

However, the housing crisis is very real. How can we fix it? My colleague mentioned the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who estimates that the number of Canadian households in need of affordable housing will increase to 1.8 million within five years.

This will be a huge undertaking. The Liberal government is currently investing, giving and lending money through different programs to create affordable housing, but priced at \$2,200 a month in Montreal. That is outrageous and only helps the private sector.

It is clear that the government is going to have to get involved in this major housing crisis. What are the Conservatives' proposals for fixing this problem?

[English]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, this was definitely a big topic of conversation during the past election. We have given many recommendations over the last year to the government, many of which have not taken place.

We have to remember that this is a government that has now been in power for more than six years and all of its policies have failed. In the last year alone, we have had a 30% increase in housing. Its policies are failing and it doubles down on a lot of its existing policies, which are absolutely not working.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I did not hear very much from the member regarding the specific contents of the bill. While I share her concern about the government's overall response to the pandemic, I want to ask a question about specific parts of the legislation before us.

There is a tax credit in here for small businesses to improve indoor air quality and ventilation in response to the pandemic, and \$100 million to improve ventilation in schools. This is a big issue. Ventilation in buildings is one of the most important ways we can prevent the spread of COVID-19.

If not this approach that the government has presented, what is the member's idea for improving ventilation in buildings across our country?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Madam Speaker, that piece is one of my favourite parts of this legislation. However, once you add all of the parts together, you get this incredible amount of spending. Even though there might be parts in there that sound good and make sense, once you add it all up, you get to this point where it reaches over \$70 billion.

There are parts I can definitely support and that are good, but once you add it all up, it gets to a point where, when we look at the whole package, it is really hard to move forward with this legislation.

• (1225)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my friend and colleague, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

It is great to be here this morning. I am pleased to lend my voice in support of Bill C-8, an act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021, and other measures. This bill is the latest important step in our government's relentless efforts to protect Canadians, support them through the ongoing challenges and bridge them through to the postpandemic recovery, which is occurring. Among other things, it would do so by implementing measures from the economic and fiscal update 2021 and from budget 2021 that would support Canadian businesses, so we can start hiring again, which we are doing, and it is great to see. It would do so while making life more affordable for all Canadians and ensuring the economic recovery is inclusive, green, sustainable and robust.

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To date, our plan to fight COVID-19 and its impact on the economy is working. As I stated earlier this week, and as reported by Statistics Canada, our economy is recovering. We have surpassed prepandemic levels of employment, jobs, output and gross domestic product. Canadians are resilient, and because of them our economy is resilient. Canadians expect leadership from their parliamentarians, and we are demonstrating that leadership.

Our economy has rebounded faster than experts predicted, and that is because our government, since day one, was singularly focused on having the backs of Canadian workers, businesses and families. That has been our relentless focus, and going forward we will remain steadfast with our agenda to create prosperity for all Canadians through inclusive economic growth. I know the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Vaughan—Woodbridge, and I see that optimism from businesses that continue to invest in their operations and create good middle-class jobs for Canadians.

As we stated in the fall economic update, Bill C-8 would begin to implement a fair tax system that would help on the front of housing affordability, something that I know is of high importance for the residents of York region and, within it, the riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge.

We know that strong and resilient cities, towns and communities are the backbone of a strong economy and a growing middle class, but cities, towns and communities have been hit hard by COVID-19. High infection rates have put many under public health restrictions for over a year. As Canadians begin the work of building back better together, our government has a plan to develop more prosperous, inclusive, healthy and vibrant communities across Canada, the communities that we call home.

We know, for example, that high housing costs, especially in urban centres, continue to place middle-class and low-income Canadians under huge financial pressure. Constraints on housing inventory, which have been made worse by COVID-19, as well as the environment of low interest rates, have contributed to a recent surge in housing prices in a number of communities across this country.

As a result, across the country young Canadians who are starting to build their future are running up against sky-high housing prices. That is why, in the 2021 fall economic statement, the government announced it would take steps to implement a national tax-based measure targeting the unproductive use of domestic housing owned by non-resident non-Canadians. This would help ensure that foreign non-resident owners who simply use Canada as a place to passively store their wealth in housing pay their fair share, and Bill C-8 would be a first step in making this a reality.

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Part 2 of Bill C-8 would implement the underused housing tax act, which would impose a national annual 1% tax on the value of non-resident, non-Canadian owned residential real estate in Canada that is considered to be vacant or underused beginning in the 2022 calendar. Under this new measure, all owners of Canadian residential property other than Canadian citizens and permanent residents of Canada would be required to file an annual return on the current use of each Canadian residential property they own with significant penalties for failure to file.

It is estimated that this measure would increase federal revenues by \$700 million over four years starting in 2022-23, and these revenues would help to support the government's significant investments to make housing more affordable for all Canadians, something that we know is important to all Canadians and our residents. We are doing this because homes are for people to live in, and Bill C-8 is a necessary first step toward making this a reality, but this measure would be just one tool among several to ensure that Canada's housing market is a place to grow for Canadians starting their families and building their future.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, the national housing strategy is an ambitious 10-year plan.

It provides for investments of more than \$72 billion to give more Canadians a place to call home. Launched in 2017, the NHS will create up to 160,000 new homes, meet the housing needs of 530,000 families, and repair and renew more than 300,000 housing units. More than 10,000 new housing units will be created through the rapid housing initiative from coast to coast to coast, exceeding the initial goal of 7,500 new units. Most housing units will be constructed within 12 to 18 months of an agreement being signed with the funding recipients. Of these units, 33% will support women or women and their children, and over 41% will support indigenous peoples.

The rapid housing initiative takes a human rights-based approach to housing. This initiative serves people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and other vulnerable people under the NHS, including women and children fleeing domestic violence, seniors, young adults, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, those dealing with mental health and addiction issues, veterans, members of the LGBTQ+ community, racialized groups, and refugees or newcomers.

In conclusion, the underused housing tax introduced in Bill C-8 will be a significant addition to our measures to help Canadian families and businesses through the pandemic. We stepped up because it was the right thing to do. We also knew that the investments we were making in our economy would pay off in the medium and long terms. We know that there are challenges ahead and the future is still uncertain, but we will continue to support Canadians as we have been doing throughout the pandemic.

Bill C-8 is the key that will help us rebuild our future and our communities so they are stronger and more resilient. I implore my opposition colleagues to take this opportunity to support this bill and give Canadians the essential support they need.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my friend about the rapid test issue, which in an important issue raised in the bill. From my perspective, the government has had a very late stage conversion on the issue of rapid tests.

Conservatives have been talking about the importance of investing in rapid tests and their value, and we were saying that before vaccines were even available. When vaccines were not available as a tool, it was clear rapid tests were certainly the most effective way of managing this. We know there are breakthrough infections for those who are vaccinated and rapid tests continue to be critically important.

I recognize this discovery of the value of rapid tests in the last few weeks from the government. Does the member have any thoughts on why the government was so slow to recognize effective systems of testing and tracing that could have been in place right in the beginning, prevented lockdowns and kept many of our businesses open.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, there is a lot in that question.

I wish to applaud the minister responsible for this file, the member of Parliament for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, for procuring 140 million rapid tests, which are arriving in Canada in the months of January and February and will be distributed to the provinces. Rapid tests are one tool in the fight against COVID.

Let us be straight on this file. Let us make sure we understand the facts. The first line of defence for getting through this pandemic is getting Canadians vaccinated. I wish to thank the over 90% of Canadians and 90% of residents of York region who have received their second dose. That number is getting higher and higher, and people are also getting their booster shots. That is the way we will get through this pandemic.

• (1235)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was happy to hear the member's comments today.

I was also delighted to see section 4 of this bill about getting ventilation into schools. I think that is very, very important. I have a constituent who reached out to me just today to make sure that this was raised and prioritized. Members will recall in August 2020 I brought forward a unanimous consent motion asking for \$2 billion to make schools safer for teachers and students.

We are now two years into the pandemic. We know there is no downside to improving ventilation in the schools to make them safer for teachers and students. Why has it taken the government two years to finally decide that this was something it could do?

Following on that, will the government also work with manufacturers to develop rapid tests that are more effective for detecting the omicron variant?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I know that our government has been there working with the provinces from day one and providing them the resources they need so that schools can remain open. I know for a fact that I announced an allotment of \$33 million. In my riding, the schools were able to improve their HVAC systems to make sure they are safe for children who go to school. My children are in elementary school today. I am really happy to report that.

We have been there since day one working with the provinces and delivering to them the resources they need. They can implement them and do the right things for their schools to stay open and make sure that kids are getting a great education from coast to coast to coast.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to hear my colleague talk about working with the provinces, because the Quebec National Assembly and the provinces share a demand.

I am, of course, talking about health transfers. They are demanding that the money be sent without conditions and that the provinces be able to choose how to use the money, since they are the ones paying these taxes. They want the people of each province to have a say in how the money is used.

Ottawa should be required to send the cheques but should not be allowed to interfere in provincial jurisdictions. Why did the government not finally respond to this demand in the economic update?

[English]

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, our government has been there since day one of the pandemic, working with the provinces. Much as the Canadian Armed Forces were sent to my riding to help in the long-term care facilities, I know that the same thing was done in the province of Quebec when it asked for assistance.

Whether it is health care transfers, working with the provinces or getting the Canadian Armed Forces to assist when necessary during the pandemic, we have been there with all the provinces working together. We will continue to be there with them, and we will continue to have the backs of the provinces and all Canadians as we get through this pandemic.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking my hon. colleague for Vaughan—Woodbridge for his excellent remarks and his excellent interventions.

It is an honour to rise in the House of Commons for my maiden speech in the 44th Parliament. I would like to thank the residents of

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Windsor—Tecumseh for placing their trust in me to serve as their member of Parliament and their voice in Ottawa. I am grateful for this honour and privilege, and I pledge to continue to work hard and to work with all members of the House of Commons every day to improve the lives of people in our community.

I thank my wife Shauna, my parents and the incredible volunteers who helped make this journey possible. I thank as well my tremendous constituency office team: Svetlana, Alexandra, Yazdan, David, Noah, Teanna, Tartil, Sami and Manvir. Their hard work and passion for our community inspire me each and every day.

Back in March 2020, few people would have predicted how long COVID-19 would be with us; however, one thing is certain. When the chips are down, our government will be there to step up and support Canadians. As we battle yet another wave, we have stepped up again, delivering millions of boosters and over 140 million rapid tests while at the same time creating supports for workers and the hardest-hit businesses.

In January, as temperatures dropped, my team in Windsor—Tecumseh put up a large tent and hosted an outdoor pop-up vaccine clinic at our constituency office. It brought out moms and dads with brave little ones rolling up their sleeves, folks who drove in from the county, residents who could not make previous appointments because of transportation challenges, and a few first-timers getting vaccinated despite their doubts, because they wanted to visit immunocompromised friends and relatives.

We had people tear up. There were many fist bumps, and a lot of smiles through N95 masks. We partnered with the remarkable Dr. Doko and her team of superheroes, including a medical student from the University of Windsor. That team has organized over two dozen pop-up clinics across Windsor-Essex, and I want to recognize their tremendous leadership. It was one of the most rewarding experiences I have had as a member of Parliament. It was a cold January night filled with many moments of warmth. That is Canada, with neighbour looking after neighbour. Make no mistake: Despite what some will say, we are united.

Over 90% of Canadians have stepped up, rolled up their sleeves and gotten vaccinated. They know that the enemy is not vaccines. It is COVID. On this we will not waver, and we will finish the fight. We will continue to be there for families, seniors, workers, businesses and municipalities. Here in this province, our federal government has provided over 90%, or 90 cents of every dollar of pandemic support, whether it was the emergency Canada recovery benefit in the first waves or the lockdown benefits that helped workers and businesses through this cold, bitter winter. We will continue to be there for Canadians for as long as it takes.

I am also proud of our commitment to establish a Canada-wide early learning and child care system that ensures all families have access to affordable, high-quality early learning and child care, no matter where they live.

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Last week, Nunavut signed on to our \$10-a-day child care plan, becoming the 12th of the provinces and territories to do so. All provinces and territories in Canada have now signed on to our federal affordable child care plan, except Ontario. As part of this plan, parents outside of Ontario are already receiving rebates to help with child care costs. Saskatchewan parents received a refund of \$2,000 on child care going back to July of last year.

Affordability is a huge concern for families in my riding of Windsor—Tecumseh, and \$10-a-day child care would help tremendously. I call on Premier Ford to immediately do what every other Canadian province and territory has already done, and sign on to our affordable child care plan. Let us work together and get moms and dads in Windsor—Tecumseh the support that they so desperately need.

On a brighter note, I was excited to see, for the first time ever, the inclusion of a national school nutrition program in the Prime Minister's mandate letters to the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

Nationally, one-third of students in elementary schools and two-thirds of secondary students do not eat a nutritious breakfast before school, and 13% of households before the pandemic were food insecure. In speaking with June Muir of the UHC Hub of Opportunities, during one of its drive-through food hubs, I saw how food insecurity had grown in our community during COVID for families, newcomers, students and casino workers.

• (1240)

The evidence is clear: Providing children with a healthy meal at school makes all the difference and gives them the start they need. Back home in Windsor-Essex, we have some of the highest rates of childhood poverty in the country, so a national school nutrition program would be transformative. Windsor-Essex is also Canada's fresh fruit and vegetable basket, with the largest concentration of greenhouse growers in all of North America.

My community understands the problem of children going hungry, but we also understand and have the right resources for a solution. For years, local organizations such as VON's Ontario Student Nutrition Program, United Way's Summer Eats for Kids, and UHC Community Kitchen and Leamington Regional Food Hub have been on the ground, dedicating time and resources to improving food security and providing healthy meals to children in our community.

I look forward to working with my colleagues, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, to bring partners together to help design a school nutrition program that provides every child in my community, and every child across Canada, with an equal opportunity to succeed.

While we are talking about lifting up families and children, let us also highlight that every year, through the Canada child benefit that our government introduced, moms and dads in Windsor—Tecumseh receive over \$207 million to help with the costs of raising children. An affordable, accessible and quality child care system, a national school nutrition program, and the existing Canada child ben-

efit are three examples of how our government is helping to lift up families and children.

This is real tangible action that empowers parents, especially moms, to reach their full economic potential. It creates good-paying jobs in early learning child care and education. Most importantly, it creates a generation of healthy, prosperous and engaged learners.

Since we are talking about transformative investment, I want to talk about the historic investments we are making in the fight against climate change and the conservation of our green spaces. We are investing over \$100 billion to ensure we pass on a healthy planet to the next generation. I want to talk about two examples of how that investment is transforming my community of Windsor—Tecumseh. In budget 2021, our government committed \$2.3 billion to preserve natural habitat and species at risk.

This week, our government announced close to \$600,000 to begin preliminary studies and consultations to advance the creation of the Ojibway national urban park. Let me talk about Ojibway. Compared with Rouge National Urban Park, it is but a postage stamp of land. However, in its 300 hectares, it has the most biodiversity in all of Canada, with hundreds of plants, insects, reptiles and wildlife. David Suzuki called it priceless. The poet laureate of Windsor, Marty Gervais, wrote a book about it called *Walk in the Woods*. This week, after a 10-year battle, our community has taken a giant step towards preserving Ojibway forever, and a step toward establishing the Ojibway national urban park.

Now let me talk about a second story. On this side of the House, we know that the environment and the economy go hand in hand. Our government's bold leadership on climate change has helped create a once-in-a-generation transition to grow and strengthen automotive jobs back home in my riding of Windsor—Tecumseh. Our climate change plan includes an \$8-billion net-zero accelerator fund that positions my community to bring electric vehicle manufacturing and battery manufacturing to Windsor-Essex. That means thousands of good-paying jobs that guarantee our community's prosperity, while at the same time fighting climate change and helping to protect the environment.

As my friend Dave Cassidy said, "If you want it built right, build it in Windsor." Getting an electric vehicle and battery manufacturing plant would be transformative for our community, and in turn our community would lead Canada's transition to zero-emission vehicles.

Since the start of the pandemic, our government has been focused on supporting people and businesses across the country, and Bill C-8 is no different. The federal government has been a strong partner for our community, and together we are building a strong and prosperous future for all residents of Windsor—Tecumseh.

• (1245)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was a little disappointed to hear the member referencing David Suzuki, who has incited violence towards pipeline projects. I would think that in the context we are living through now, members of the government would appreciate the importance of not being in any truck or trade with those who are communicating in that kind of way.

I did want to ask the member about the child care issue. I am hearing from parents in my riding a significant desire to see flexibility and choice in child care. Part of the government's policy is really to constrain the choices that parents would have. It is not offering more resources to parents to make their own child care choices.

Various day home operators and private child care operators have raised significant concerns about the lack of flexibility and about the government's one-size-fits-all approach to child care. It is not going to be there for the worker working the night shift, for the person in a rural area or for the person looking for flexibility to accord with their family situation.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Madam Speaker, referring to Dr. Suzuki, I was merely referencing someone who was an expert on protecting wildlife and conservation, and who recognizes the tremendous, priceless value of Ojibway national urban park as the basis for why we need to do what we can to preserve it.

On the issue of child care, affordability is a priority for the government. That is why, in the previous budget and in Bill C-2, we provided over \$100 billion for things such as housing affordability, child care, supporting businesses and supporting workers. These are all investments that, unfortunately, my colleague and the Conservative Party voted against.

Affordability is something we are committed to. It is a priority and we believe that \$10-a-day child care will help so many families. It will lift so many families out of poverty, will help so many moms and dads return to the labour market, and will also provide children with the start they need in their lives.

• (1250)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am so proud to rise on Bill C-8 and the issues we are dealing with during the pandemic. This morning, I received three messages from young women around the Gloucester and Metcalfe area talking about the threats of rape they were facing because of the lawlessness and lack of police to protect residents in Centretown in Ottawa from this protest.

The member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford is bringing a motion forward to investigate how GoFundMe is allowing anonymous sources to funnel money to what may be an extremist action.

Would the member and the government support an investigation into how GoFundMe has taken this \$10 million, where it is coming from, what the sources are and if it is a threat to security—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for raising a very important point that we will

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definitely take into consideration. I will most definitely take it into consideration.

Every Canadian has the right to protest. It is part of who we are. It is what makes us unique. We are quite frankly very grateful for the ability and right to protest peacefully, and to bring our concerns to Parliament Hill, or any elected office for that matter.

The operative words here are “peacefully” and “respectfully”. The protest should be one that does not put an onerous burden on residents, does not interrupt business and lives, and certainly one that does not demonstrate deplorable scenes, as we saw, of racism, hatred, banners and flags that all Canadians should reject outright.

I thank my colleague for the excellent question. It is something that we will absolutely consider.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh for his speech.

I am baffled by the Liberal Party's obsession with interfering in other governments' jurisdictions. I am, of course, referring to education here.

The member for Kingston and the Islands said earlier that education is the jurisdiction of the Government of Quebec and the provinces. My colleague repeatedly mentioned that the Liberal Party would like to develop a nutrition program. This was, obviously, an election promise.

I am trying to understand how the federal government would be better than the provinces or Quebec at managing nutrition in schools.

[English]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Madam Speaker, I truly believe in a team Canada approach. I believe we are stronger when we work together, and I believe that making sure that children, teachers and schools are protected should be the obligation and responsibility of all levels of government working together to protect children, teachers and families.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will share my time with my esteemed, and I hope estimable, friend and colleague from Beauport-Limoilou.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-8, an act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021 and other measures. That is its actual title, but since it is a little long, we will simply refer to it as the economic update.

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I would like to talk to you today about an extremely serious problem in my riding of Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot and more specifically in Saint-Hyacinthe, the central city of the riding, which has a population of nearly 60,000, or about 300 inhabitants per square kilometre. Saint-Hyacinthe is well known for all kinds of good reasons that fill us with pride, including its status as the agri-food capital of Quebec, and some would say of Canada. Unfortunately, it is also known for something a lot less positive, namely its inglorious title of the city with the lowest vacancy rate in Quebec, at 0.2%. Given that rate, it is very safe to say that there is no housing available in Saint-Hyacinthe.

To paint a more complete picture, I think it is important to add that there has been a real problem with fires in affordable and low-rental housing units in the downtown area. When we talk to the people who live in these neighbourhoods, they tell us that there is also an issue with “renovictions”, not least because the renovations are not always actually done. Another problem is that the cost of rent increased by 16% in a year, as recorded last July. That is the perfect recipe for a very difficult social situation. We can call it a crisis, because it is one. How can our society accept this and tolerate people having to sleep outside? It is unacceptable.

Before I go on, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the hard-working activists at Comité Logemen'mêle, a group that oversees the many organizations in Sainte-Hyacinthe that work on this issue and promote the right to housing.

The problem that Saint-Hyacinthe and many big cities with similar vacancy rates are experiencing is the result of a long history of a federal government that has underinvested or poorly invested in social and affordable housing. It is the result of a history of gross government negligence.

In June 2021, the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain, or FRAPRU, published a booklet documenting Ottawa's chronic underinvestment in housing since the 1990s. The numbers are quite staggering. If Ottawa had maintained the same level of investment as before the 1990s, today, we would have 80,000 more social housing units in Quebec. Think about that. Federal cuts have deprived thousands of families and individuals of a roof over their heads.

I would like to quote FRAPRU spokesperson Véronique Laflamme, who said, “The loss of 80,000 social housing units that could have been built in Quebec had Ottawa not withdrawn its funding has been a major contributor to the current low-rent housing shortage, and the national housing strategy put in place by the [Prime Minister]'s Liberal government does nothing to compensate for this loss”.

I have heard a number of people say that FRAPRU is a very left-wing group, but if FRAPRU does not seem credible in the eyes of certain parties and individuals in the House, let us see what Scotiabank thinks. Everyone will agree that Scotiabank is not known for being particularly left-wing or anti-capitalist. Just this past January, Scotiabank estimated that Canada had the lowest average number of housing units per 1,000 people in the G7.

• (1255)

To reach the G7 average, Canada would need an additional 1.8 million homes. Scotiabank also estimated that the median home price rose 50% between December 2019 and December 2021 in some parts of Canada.

As for the existing programs, many of them are aimed at the right places, but they too are victims of underfunding.

Take, for example, the Canadian rapid housing initiative, or RHI. It was used in my riding, and we were very happy. It made it possible to announce the creation of 21 affordable housing units in the city of Saint-Hyacinthe. We were very happy. It is a good program, but the budget is far too limited and operates on a first-come, first-served basis. Furthermore, the program is not permanent. It is temporary, so people rushed to apply. Once the money ran out, there was not a penny left, and it was time to move on to something else. The money ran out in the blink of an eye.

The situation is glaringly obvious and deserves to be addressed. We were told that it would finally be addressed in the economic update. Better sooner than later, of course, but better late than never too. Many of us were watching and wondering what we were going to see. We expected that Ottawa would show some ambition in recommitting to this issue by announcing meaningful reinvestments in social, community and affordable housing.

In fact, the Bloc Québécois would like to see new investments amounting to 1% of the federal government's annual revenue on an ongoing basis rather than ad hoc agreements. We also think surplus federal properties should be repurposed for social, community and affordable housing development. To be clear, programs need to be completely overhauled as well.

The billions of dollars invested should be channelled toward co-ops, non-profits, and organizations with a thorough understanding of the issues that need to be addressed and how to do so.

That is why programs that are part of the national housing strategy, the NHS, should be reconfigured financially to create an acquisition fund that would enable co-ops and non-profits to acquire buildings currently on the market and make sure they remain affordable. We need to take control of the market out of private-sector hands.

Of course we have to make sure Quebec gets its fair share of funding, no strings attached, from federal homelessness programs, and funding that was released during the pandemic needs to be made available on a permanent basis.

That is all we were hoping for from the economic update. We have read and studied it carefully.

In the end, we have a single measure: a tax on foreign-owned vacant property. The tax on underused housing would apply to dwellings in Canada owned directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, by non-residents. This would apply to single-family homes, duplexes and triplexes, as well as semi-detached and row houses, and condominiums.

This is a good idea. We have no problem standing up and recognizing that. Its implementation would reduce real estate speculation, which is a real scourge and a real problem. International investors are looking to make a profit, not build affordable housing. They keep an eye on trends based on bubbles, looking at countries where that is happening and where they should go, as most stockholders do.

Such a tax could help prevent artificial market inflation and help free up these buildings. The fact that there are vacant dwellings in large urban centres contributes to scarcity. People need housing and are seeing all these large, empty buildings around them. It is absolutely ludicrous.

This kind of tax, however, would not solve the housing problem the way a renewed government commitment would, but a massive reinvestment could do it. The tax would also constitute interference. There is a real danger here, because with this tax, this is the first time the federal government is interfering in property taxes.

Centralization is second nature to Ottawa. I am afraid it would be fair to say that Ottawa is dealing with housing the same way it deals with health, in other words, it lets things deteriorate and then, when it decides it can no longer stand idly by, it responds by interfering.

• (1300)

I think people who are desperately waiting for housing deserve better.

• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, picking up on the last few comments by the member of the Bloc, toward the end of his speech he talked about the tax being proposed in this bill on real estate as it relates to non-residents' and non-Canadians' vacant land or underused residential buildings. I am really having a difficult time understanding how both the Bloc and the Conservatives are conflating that particular tax, which is a measure to control foreign speculation, with the issue of property tax.

Can the member please explain if he thinks this is a good tool to help control some of that speculation?

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, I do not believe I conflated any such thing. That is not what I said. I invite my colleague to ask me about something I actually said if he wants me to explain any part of my speech.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member from the Bloc for referencing a few anti-capitalist responses to the economic crisis, because there has been a lot of talk about inflation and no discussion on the corporate cartels we have allowed to capture our economy.

I think back to 2017, when the Canada Bread Company and Weston Foods conspired in an alleged price-fixing scheme with major

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grocers like Loblaw's, which made \$400 million in profit and yet claims it cannot afford to continue to pay its UFCW workers an extra \$2 an hour. Working people and their families are paying more for their rent, their groceries and their gas. Instead of supporting them, the government is cutting their aid.

Does the hon. member find it acceptable that Liberals have not tackled the outstanding investigations on price-fixing by big corporate grocery chains or provided any measures to help low-income families deal with the rising food prices?

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, I will try to respond. The interpretation was rather quick. I want to make sure I understood the question.

To my understanding, our colleague would have liked the government to tackle the price of food. Did I understand correctly? Would it be possible to ask my colleague to repeat his question a little slower? I want to be sure I answer correctly.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would ask the hon. member for Hamilton Centre to repeat his question a little more slowly so the interpreters can follow.

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, it is an important question. Does the member find it acceptable that the Liberals have not tackled the outstanding investigation on price-fixing by big corporate grocery chains or provided any measures to help low-income families deal with the rising food prices?

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for repeating his question.

He is asking whether I think there should have been an investigation into that issue. Inflation and rising prices are hot topics right now. There is certainly work to be done there.

The topic of grocery store prices keeps coming up more and more. We as a society should never accept that someone might get to the register and not be able to pay for staples like milk, bread and eggs. That is unacceptable.

[English]

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the proposals for housing, the 1% tax on foreign buyers, is like bringing a balloon to a barn fire. Conservatives had proposed to ban that for two years. We do not think that is going to be enough.

However, when it comes to housing, the biggest issue we have, especially in Bay of Quinte, is a lack of labour. Right now there are 200,000 skilled workers left in the queue, and it has stalled, as the immigration minister has said. They need to fix the problem and they are going to spend more money.

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Does the hon. member agree that we need to get skilled workers into this country now to build homes? Is that something he thinks would be a good priority for the government?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Speaker, there are a lot of questions to answer. This small measure is nowhere near enough, but it is a step in the right direction.

We are not fans of the interference, however. Even though the federal government took over the housing file in 1935, it is meant to be a provincial jurisdiction according to the Canadian Constitution.

Do we need to bring in skilled workers? Yes, absolutely. The Bloc is raising this issue, as are all parties. The solution to the labour shortage is an ongoing debate in the House. We absolutely need to address the shortage in this sector and in many others.

• (1310)

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am the type of person who takes the time to carefully read each bill and who asks herself a lot of questions. My first two questions are always: Is this a good and effective bill for people and their needs? Is this a good way to spend their tax money?

I read the economic update and Bill C-8. Was it exciting? No. Was it interesting? Yes.

It was interesting because I am very curious and I want to know everything. I like looking at things from every perspective. That is what I used to teach my students. I told them that, when they were bored, they needed to switch perspectives and find something interesting. Although I found the reading interesting, I must say that I was disappointed at times. Since I am not mean-spirited, I will start with the positive aspects of the bill.

First, it is important to realize that this is an economic update and that it is the result of a process. As members of Parliament, we know that. We are familiar with parliamentary jargon. However, that is not true for all Canadians. I think that it is important to take the time to mention, however briefly, that this is an economic update. An economic update is an observation, a portrait of the economic situation in Canada at a given point in time. The portrait is based on statistics and, at the time it is painted, it is true. However, we now know how quickly things can change.

Economic updates are important, especially in times of crisis. We have to know where we are in order to determine where we are going. That is a great truth that we should also apply to our personal and professional lives.

The economic update has therefore achieved its goal, which is to inform members of Parliament and Canadians in general of the current situation in Canada. It also provides information on what has been done and what should be done. Since the purpose of knowing where we are now is to determine where we are going, that is where things get a little dicey.

The economic update had no big surprises: We are seeing inflation; the economy, at the time the update was drafted, was in recovery in several sectors; some sectors, such as culture and tourism,

were still and are still being hard-hit; there is an extreme shortage of social and affordable housing; and we need to implement measures, including financial and material measures, to help Canadians through the crisis.

As I said, there were no big surprises. We do not have to be internationally renowned economists to see where we are, the statistics speak for themselves. The update does a good job at painting a portrait of the situation, but it is missing the other aspect: where are we going?

To answer this question, we must absolutely avoid empty or catch-all phrases such as “we will keep working and trying to see the light at the end of the tunnel and do everything we can to end this pandemic”, or “we will keep doing what we have been doing for the past two years: protecting the population and ensuring an economic recovery through strong and innovative measures”. It is not helpful to use buzzwords and put them together in a sentence so general that it does not mean anything. That may reassure some people, but Canadians need more than that. They need to know that a real blueprint for society will emerge from this unprecedented crisis.

Bill C-8 will help companies improve their ventilation through a tax credit. That will have a short-term effect. The government is trying to find a way of mitigating the housing crisis. The tax will have a short-term effect. The bill adjusts employment insurance and the Canada emergency business account. That will have an essentially short-term effect, that is, until the pandemic is over and the economy returns to normal. It allocates \$2 billion to put in place proof-of-vaccination and rapid test delivery measures. That is another short-term solution—at least, we hope. I understand, we need to do these things. Our tourism and seasonal businesses and their workers have been very hard-hit by the pandemic, and the measures are still necessary.

• (1315)

In other words, Bill C-8 has us in the same kettle of fish we have been in for almost two years. Let us be clear, I will say it again: These measures are necessary, but I was expecting something for the long term.

Some people may be tempted to say that the future tax on under-used housing could have an impact in the medium term, since it might force owners to make sure that the units are occupied, therefore increasing the housing supply. That would not make up for Canada's decades of underinvestment in social housing, especially since this measure could end up adversely affecting municipalities' finances.

Every year, good or bad, Canada should have set aside money to build 50,000 housing units across the country. Why were cuts made to social housing for decades? Is it because poor people do not have the means to fight the system? The system should be there precisely to protect those who need the most help.

I would like to bring up two principles that I find important, and I hope that they will also be important to everyone in the House. First, we need to plan and take action for our future generations, not for the next election. Second, we need to fight for the dignity of the weak, for those who have no voice. That is why I am here. I hope that is also the case for all of my colleagues.

By not investing in social housing, successive governments failed to honour these two principles. Bill C-8 has exactly the same problem, since it does not plan for future generations or show that we are fighting for the dignity of those who do not have a voice.

It is not enough to just slap a band-aid on the gaping wounds caused by the pandemic. We must see better and farther ahead. How can we see farther? The history teacher in me would say that we need to examine the mistakes of the past and, above all, make sure we do not repeat them.

Let us make sure we foster the emergence and stability of businesses that feed our economy, such as farming and agricultural production, electrical and electronics manufacturers, domestic and international tourism, natural resource development and processing, shipbuilding, electric transportation, clean energy and green businesses, research, and textiles.

There are a lot of things we could do. We need to encourage businesses in the hardest-hit sectors. We need to export finished products, not just natural resources. Let us export what we make instead of importing what others make.

Let us take concrete action so that the burden of monitoring calls for tenders and filling out procurement paperwork no longer falls on our SMEs, which cannot afford to pay a full-time team to take care of all this monitoring and paperwork.

Let us set aside renewable amounts each year so that the federal government is not tempted to interfere in areas under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces.

If we take a step back and look at federal trends in times of crisis, we see the same thing again and again: interference, lack of respect for the jurisdictions set out in the Constitution. If we take another step back, we notice that one of the reasons for this interference is a lack of planning for the medium and long terms. Finances are managed from a short-term perspective, and cuts get made to budgets that are essential in times of crisis, such as housing, health transfers and pension indexation.

Let us improve supply chains. Let us make sure that we have everything we need to face the next crisis, whether it happens tomorrow or in 50 years. These are only a few examples. There are more.

What are we doing to ensure the dignity of those who do not have a voice? I will support Bill C-8 because it contains necessary measures, but that does not mean I am not disappointed with what is missing from the bill, namely vision, planning, boldness.

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her remarks. There was much in her speech that I found compelling.

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I want to mention one thing that we did not see in the fall economic statement: help for public transit across Canada. On January 26, the mayors of Canada's biggest cities called on the federal government for support for transit operating shortfalls. That support is not in the economic statement. It still has not been forthcoming from the government.

I wonder if my colleague would support that call so we can ensure we do not have a downward spiral and degradation of transit services in the future.

• (1320)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, when I was talking about having a long-term vision and planning for future generations, I was also thinking about public transit. We need to think about the most vulnerable people. People who take public transit are those who made the choice not to have a car or who cannot afford a car. To help these people, we need to set money aside each year to improve public transit.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-8.

[English]

It has been a long two years. To be exact, it has been 21 months of direct challenges to our country and to Canadians from coast to coast to coast. People are tired, and we understand that, but we have stood together as Canadians to fight this global pandemic, and we will soon be in a much better place. What is important is that our country will continue to be a strong economic driver in the global economy. As our Prime Minister has indicated clearly on many occasions, we have Canadians' backs and we will have them for as long as it takes.

I remember that back on March 13, 2020, we decided to shut down Parliament for two weeks. I remember flying home and being a little uncertain, but I felt that I would get back soon. Many Canadians felt that we would get through this quickly. However, that was not to be the case.

Despite all of our challenges, as a member of Parliament I felt that I was really contributing to a strong democracy. For 67 days in a row, Liberal members of Parliament spent two hours every night on the phone talking about how we could build programs. Because of the feedback we were receiving from our constituents, we talked about how we could create those programs, as some individuals and companies in our constituencies were not being helped. We found ways to do that month after month. Even if we had 100 or 200 calls and emails a day, I felt that we were advocating on behalf of Canadians. Our government was responding on behalf of Canadians and helping Canadians.

Government Orders

Of course, we invested in PPE and vaccines, and as a government we were there for the provincial and municipal governments. That is very important to indicate because eight dollars out of every \$10 spent to fight COVID throughout the pandemic has been spent by the federal government. At times we talk about jurisdiction, but we did not worry about jurisdiction. We worried about Canadians, the Canadian economy and communities. That is why we were directly involved in education, health care and so on.

I am very proud of our government's record throughout the pandemic in staying on a strong economic course, which I will describe so members know where we sit today. We have been so strong throughout the pandemic because of what we did from 2015 to 2019. We had the lowest unemployment rate in the history of Canada, since recording it began. Canadians created 1.2 million jobs, which is very impressive, going into the pandemic. We had the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. Those are impressive numbers. Where are we today? About 108% of the over three million jobs that were lost have now been recaptured.

I want to mention that I am sharing my time with the member for Toronto—Danforth, who will be giving her speech just after me. I apologize.

We have also seen fewer bankruptcies in the last two years than we have seen in past years. We have seen an increase of 13% in trade. Yes, inflation is at 4.5%, but that is a global challenge. Inflation in the United States is 7%. Interest rates on debt were lowered by \$4 billion last year because of refinancing, and we still have our AAA credit rating.

I am very proud of the economic statement delivered by our Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. It is transparent and gives a good, clear picture of where we spent our money, why we spent our money and where we are going to invest our money as we move forward to make sure that our economy continues to be strong.

● (1325)

Yes, we lost three million jobs throughout this challenge, but we were able to recapture them. Yes, the GDP shrank by 17%, but now we are seeing much improvement in that area. We now have the second-fastest job recovery in the G7. If we compare that to the recession of 2008, when the Conservatives were in power, we are much further ahead. That is probably because of the important work we had done pre-pandemic. Believe it or not, and I was surprised by these numbers, there were over 6,000 new businesses created during this pandemic. This is quite impressive.

We are also helping with the cost of living in two very direct areas. One, of course, is with investments in child care. This will be major in helping families deal with the cost of living and the economic challenges they may face. The second is with housing, which is a crucial investment being made for Canadians. We know the pandemic has caused more challenges in that area. Now first-time homebuyers will have more possibilities to get into the housing market, which is important. Rent-to-own is extremely important as well. Those are straight investments that will, as we move forward, continue to help create positive economic developments.

As a former superintendent of schools, I can tell members that schools are always an interesting place to be. In this pandemic, I cannot praise teachers, students and parents enough for what they have done. They have continued to be there so students could learn. They have contributed and been engaged, and that is something to be proud of. Our government has invested in helping to create more outdoor classrooms. We are investing in ventilation to help in that crucial area. We are also increasing the tax credit for teachers from 15% to 25%, and we have created more flexibility for information technology in that area.

For small businesses, we have been there, as I indicated already, and continue to be there. We have created some tax credits for retrofitting, ventilation and heating. Something important that people need to stop and think about is that the Canada emergency business account supported 900,000 businesses. That is almost one million businesses that were able to initially get \$40,000, and later \$60,000, with one-fourth being forgiven if they can pay it back by a certain date. That date has now been extended to December 31, 2023. For those businesses that require longer repayment, it has been extended to December 31, 2025.

The CFIB stated, "It is particularly good news that the government has announced it will extend the repayment deadline for the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) loan program."

The Business Council stated, "The COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose a risk to Canadians' physical, mental and economic health. We agree with [the finance minister] that 'the best economic policy is a strong public health policy.'"

We also implemented a 1% housing tax, to slow down the challenges with health and to raise revenue, on non-residents who own property in Canada. This does not affect Canadians or permanent residents. It will allow us to support Canadians in the housing market.

● (1330)

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I certainly applaud the passion if not the substance of that speech.

On a serious note, constituents in my riding are having a difficult time getting by. Everything is getting more expensive under the Liberal government. Housing prices have increased by 50% to 60% in my riding, and it is getting more and more difficult. I hear over and over from government members that it is not their fault.

I am wondering if the member would like to take responsibility now for the inflation, or simply explain quantitative easing and why in Canada, unlike everywhere else in the world, it will not impact inflation like it has everywhere else in the world whenever it has been tried.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, one big one related to the cost of living that I talked about in my speech, which is so important, is our investment in child care. This is having a direct effect on families. Also, there are the increases to and investment in the CCB, which is extremely important, and in housing we continue to help. I just made two announcements in my riding last week. One was for 12 units for women's shelters and another was for eight units for African Nova Scotians. Those are the types of investments that are happening on the ground right across the country, including in my colleague's riding.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, that was quite a remarkable speech. I am impressed. The member managed to give an infomercial for the Government of Canada. My colleague claims that everything is fine, everything is going well and there are no problems in Canada.

However, there are 90,000 people waiting for an EI cheque, people who have not been able to pay rent in three months. They are waiting because the government cannot hire public servants. Seniors under the age of 75 have also received no support during the pandemic, even though they face the same housing problems as all other seniors.

Let us talk about housing. Canada has a shortage of 1.8 million housing units. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has reported that this is the number of housing units that will have to be built in the next five years. Canada ranks last in the G7 when it comes to the average number of housing units per capita. This is a huge job.

How does the Liberal government plan to address the massive housing crisis we are experiencing in Canada right now?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, which took me somewhat by surprise. I was expecting a question about jurisdictions. However, that is not the question being asked because we worked with governments and municipalities across Canada.

With respect to seniors, I would like to say to my colleague that we gave an initial tax-free amount of \$500. Then we added \$300 for those 65 and over and \$200 for seniors receiving the guaranteed income supplement. Those are direct investments.

As for his question about housing, I spoke about it earlier. We make announcements about major investments every day. It was the Liberal government that created Canada's first national housing strategy.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, as it was very easy to hear him from this end of the House, so I was able to not need my headphone. That is great. I thank him.

Government Orders

He did speak a lot about the programs that were put in place by the Liberal government, and while I know that some of them worked, many of them did not. We many times brought up in the House those places where there were holes and gaps. For example, he talks about business loans and how they supported businesses, but they did not support new businesses. They did not support businesses like ones in my riding that started right during the pandemic or right before the pandemic, through no fault of those entrepreneurs. There is a business in my riding called Cessco that used the wage subsidy program to actually pay for scab labour and lock out their unionized workers. There were these gaps in these programs, and Bill C-8 would not address those.

As such, I do not want the member to feel that the Liberals can take all the credit for these, when we have been asking them to fix these programs and they have not fixed them.

• (1335)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the work my colleague is doing. I would argue, however, that many of our policies involved not only Liberal members working together, trying to help, but also opposition members. All 338 MPs were giving us suggestions and comments. We were trying to improve on those, and that showed how the minority government can work and how the minority government will continue to work.

I understand her question on new businesses. We actually put in place a strategy to help new businesses, but it did not capture them all. As a matter of fact, there is one in my riding that came to me last week that we were not able to help yet. I am working on it. Once I find a solution the member will be the first one to know.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak in support of Bill C-8, the economic and fiscal update implementation act, and to highlight how it is going to be supporting people in my own community and across this country.

I would like to begin, though, by acknowledging that we are still right at the beginning of Black History Month, and acknowledging the really strong speech by the member for Hull—Aylmer yesterday and how important it is to listen to his words and guidance about how, not only during this month but every day of the year, we really do need to continue to focus on learning Canada's Black history.

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In respect of the fall economic statement, it touched on many important issues. One that I would really like to focus on is its support for the arts. The arts are an important source of employment and work in my community. I am lucky to have some wonderful theatres in my community, and film studios. So many people who work as authors or work in our museums are part of my community. I really appreciate all the work that they do. They have been so hard hit over the course of the pandemic. They have really felt the brunt of a lot of the lockdowns that have occurred across our country.

It was really important for me to see the continued support in the fall economic statement that builds on the support we provided throughout the pandemic. As I mentioned, I have many film studios in my community. It was always fun getting little peeks into the shows and movies that we were going to see down the line when we were walking along. They were hard hit. One of the things that allowed the film industry to continue was actually the support provided by the federal government, such as COVID insurance support. If they had to close down because of COVID they had that support.

The film industry was actually able to continue in a lot of ways but under different rules. It has not been as easy for the live performance industry. One of my priorities throughout the pandemic has been looking at how we provide the supports that we need for the live performance industry.

When we look at it overall, for the cultural domain, by the third quarter of 2021, compared to where they had been before, they were at about 93% from prepandemic times, but the live performance industry is still only at about 62%. There is still a lot of work to be done and a lot of support that is still needed for the live performance sector.

One of the things that I was really excited about was that through the pandemic we provided programs that allowed different live performances, like our festivals and venues, to pivot. When we talk about the programs, there were programs for example that supported small volunteer-run museums, different kinds of programs for people who were not ordinarily recipients of supports through Canadian Heritage.

I do not know about my colleagues but I love to go to a concert. I just love listening to live music. I love going to the theatre. It is one of the things that bring me so much joy. When we are out of this pandemic, I want to be able to go to those places again. I want to be able to listen and dance. No one has to watch me dance, but I want to be able to enjoy all that it brings me to be in the live performance location. In fact, right before this last lockdown I was able to go see *MixTape* at one of my local theatres, the Crow's Theatre, which always has a lot of really interesting performances. I could see the community of everyone there being so happy just to be there, just to have that experience again, even if it was a bit different.

Before the last lockdown here in Ontario, I was also able to go to Dora's, which has now been renamed as Noonan's, to listen to some music and, again, feel that community. When I talk about Dora's, now Noonan's, it was one of many live music venues that received support through the pandemic specifically from the live music fund. It was there to support the infrastructure around our live music in-

dustry, to support the bars that have Canadian performances and to make sure that they are there for us when we are able to go back.

• (1340)

That ties to another piece I will get to in the fall economic statement, which concerns support for the artists. It is for the infrastructure and for the artists, which are both critical pieces.

Before I move on from the live performance supports that were there for venues, I would just like to say I think they are really important, and I do not know if we talk enough about them. They supported places like The Door in my community. They also supported places like the Foulfoues Electriques in Montreal. There have been a lot of great concerts over there.

There is also Lee's Palace in Toronto, the King Eddy in Calgary and The Carleton in Halifax. These are the places that people like to gather. They want to be able to gather there to enjoy themselves and see live performances again. Those places, as part of the pandemic programs, had support for the infrastructure.

In the fall economic statement, there was support for arts workers. It was the Canada performing arts workers resilience fund, and that had \$60 million specifically to support gig workers in the cultural working atmosphere. It is to provide short-term financial supports and also guidance in professional development. It is available to organizations that support the live performance sectors, such as artists, unions, guilds and different associations. The purpose is to retain skilled workers in live performance.

I highlight it because I think it is important to see the work that has been done throughout the pandemic, how the fall economic statement built on that and how we are continuing to make sure that we will be there to support the live performance industry as we go forward and our arts industries as a whole because they are so important. They are important economically, and we do not talk about that enough. They are important to the economic sector, but they are also important for our souls and our communities. I will leave it at that. I cannot wait to see some shows. Maybe we will have a chance, among members, to go see some shows here in Ottawa at some point soon and enjoy that.

I am going to switch gears quickly to talk about schools. When I talk with people in my community, many were really concerned about the safety of schools as they were sending their children back to school in January. There were a lot of questions. In fact, our schools in Ontario were closed for a bit of time right at the beginning of January. There was worry, and parents were asking what we were going to do to make sure that our children would be safe when they went back to school.

Government Orders

This is where the fall economic statement is really important. It increased funding specifically for ventilation improvements in our schools. That will have a long-term impact. Just generally, it is a good thing to have better ventilation. I have to say that some of my kids' schools did not always seem to have the best systems for ventilation. It is great to see we are supporting our provinces to be able to do that important work. That builds on the safe restart funding that had been provided through the pandemic to our provinces and territories to be able to support schools through the process.

I know that in my community, and we do not even think about it, but there are many different kinds of changes we need to bring in. Many of the schools in my community got new types of water fountains. They are not the ones we used to use as a kid in school where we would lean forward, which are not really great for COVID and probably were not good then anyways. They now have bottle refill stations, different kinds of systems. That is an important response to the concerns being raised repeatedly by people in my community, to make sure we are supporting our provinces and territories to support our children.

I know I am running out of time, but I do want to mention briefly something concerning how our schools were closed in Ontario for a bit at the beginning of January. I would like to remind parents, if they are listening, that there is a caregiver benefit. When schools are closed because of COVID, they actually can apply for that caregiver benefit. I also want to highlight that if their kids have to self-isolate because of COVID, they may be eligible for the caregiver benefit. I am encouraging everyone to look into that.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak in support of the fall economic statement.

• (1345)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a specific question for the hon. member around her comments on ventilation in schools. Does the member have an estimate of how long a retrofit to improve ventilation would take in a particular case? I guess that speaks to the question of how long the member expects this pandemic to be going on for. Does the government have estimates for the timelines involved? We saw in the fall economic update, for instance, that funding has put aside for the enforcement of mandate rules for a three-year period.

Is the government hoping to bring this pandemic to an end, or is the government undertaking long-term spending projects with the expectation this will continue for years to come?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Madam Speaker, I really hope we have sunshine tomorrow, but I do not have control over that either. There are certain things that are beyond the government's control.

I will say that, as long as the COVID pandemic continues, and even as it goes into its endemic phase, we will be there to support Canadians. I do not think any Canadian parent is going to argue, pandemic or no pandemic, that we should not have better ventilation in our schools, so I think supporting our provinces to be able to have healthy spaces for our kids is a good thing.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to say hello to the member for Toronto—Danforth. I had the great pleasure of serving with her on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in the previous Parliament when she was the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

We worked together constructively. The committee undertook studies, including one on the impacts of the pandemic on the cultural sector, and made recommendations. Just yesterday, we spoke with stakeholders in that sector, who told us that the funds announced in last year's federal budget are still not accessible. My colleague will undoubtedly remember that the key word in this study was "predictability", which cultural industries need in order to plan. Clearly, an event cannot be organized with two days' notice. These funds are still not available.

I would also like to take a few seconds to talk about the Canada performing arts workers resilience fund, which was announced this week. For over two months now, self-employed workers in the cultural industry have been going without the financial assistance to which they are entitled, because the benefits expired in late October. The government just announced the launch of this \$60-million fund, but we do not know when those affected will be able to access this financial assistance. I would like to know whether we can hope to see some predictability in that regard too, and I look forward to hearing my colleague's comments on that.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Madam Speaker, I think my colleague has some good questions. How can we give our artists predictable and ongoing assistance?

I was not at yesterday's meeting of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to hear the testimony, but if there is something that my colleague would like me to read, I will do so.

For me, the important thing is to figure out how to provide ongoing support and economic assistance to our gig workers. I think it is very important to continue working on the modernization of the employment insurance system, as we were talking about, because it would provide ongoing, predictable support not just during COVID-19, but all the time.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Qujannamiik, Uqaqtittiji.* I want to thank the member for talking about the arts. I also want to let her know that Nunavut is the only jurisdiction that has no performing arts centre at all in any of its communities. I hope she will take that into consideration for any future work with respect to supporting the arts in Nunavut.

Government Orders

As well, as she was talking about the fall economic statement, I want to highlight and remind her of what Bill C-8 fails to do. Bill C-8 fails to help families. The Government of Nunavut announced last week that the price of gas and diesel will increase eight cents a litre each, which will become effective this month. These increases will ultimately increase the cost of living. Essentially, this bill does nothing to help families facing rising food prices. Instead of helping working families with these rising food prices, why are the Liberals protecting wealthy grocery chains?

• (1350)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Madam Speaker, the member opposite raises some very important questions about affordability. I want to remind all members in the House that, for this tax season, the personal amount for which people are exempt from paying taxes is going up by \$600. That means that people making under \$150,000 will be paying tax on \$600 less of their income. It is actually a savings, so I—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, we will go to the hon. member for Hastings—Lennox and Addington.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the hon. member for Bay of Quinte.

It is my pleasure to rise in the House today to address Bill C-8. This bill would enact tax and spending measures outlined in the economic and fiscal update. The bill itself has seven parts. Allow me today the privilege of suggesting some highlights as to why the official opposition opposes the bill.

Canadians are listening. Canadians are seeking more from the government, and they deserve more. Bill C-8 would add an additional \$70 billion of new inflammatory fuel on the fire.

Friends, our national debt has now reached a ridiculous \$1.2 trillion. Since the beginning of this pandemic, the Liberal government has brought in \$176 billion in new spending that is unrelated to COVID-19. The Liberal government ensured Canadians it would find a balance on transparency. I am not seeing it.

Across our country, there are numerous concerns at hand. I see and hear them from my riding every single day. We all recognize the importance of stimulus spending. There is a time and a place. However, the cost of living is out of control. More dollars chasing fewer goods means higher prices.

In terms of groceries, inflation is hurting every Canadian and every family at the grocery store. Chicken is up 6.2%, for example. Bacon is up 19.1%. Working Canadians are sighing every time they pull into the gas station. Automobile gas is up 33%.

The state of our economy is weak. The deficit and national debt are disturbing and Canadians have caught on. People in Hastings—Lennox and Addington, and across this country, are being stretched. To quote the Parliamentary Budget Officer, “the rationale for the additional spending initially set aside as ‘stimulus’ no longer exists.”

Many Canadians are exhausted, financially, emotionally and mentally. We need to reactivate this economy. We need to have

lower taxes, more freedom, smaller government and regain some optimism and hope in ourselves and in our government.

Conservatives are opposed to Bill C-8. As we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Canadians are worried about our economic recovery and security. Unfortunately, debt loads on individuals and all levels of governments have imploded. This is putting businesses, jobs and home ownership at risk.

As communities face unprecedented challenges, the current government sadly is continuing to reward its insiders. Promises made to our veterans, seniors and small businesses have been broken.

Earlier in the House today, we were reminded by a fellow Liberal member that the Liberal government claims it wants to build back better after the pandemic. The Liberals want to do this by spending huge amounts of taxpayers' money. However, in my view, they have no realistic plan for this recovery. The Liberal government has a long and proven record of failing to get the job done for Canadians, and Bill C-8 is no exception. Canadians deserve much better from their government.

Our lives have changed over the last few years, but this has not changed our character. Canadians have overcome adversity in the past, and they will overcome it again. The key to moving past the pandemic in Hastings—Lennox and Addington is to give our communities the tools and resources they need to become more self-reliant and resilient.

Governments, regardless of jurisdiction, need to provide the necessary investments in local infrastructure and relief from taxes that stifle productivity. They also need to cut the red tape that inhibits growth. This includes investing in mental health programs, cleaner energy, supporting the farmers that feed us and our local businesses, which provide for us by creating an environment for new opportunities and investment.

I recognize the challenges are steep. The future of Hastings—Lennox and Addington and this country depends on bringing together people, ideas and working on things that unite us as a community, as a riding and as a country, rather than focusing on those things that divide us.

Statements by Members

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1355)

As we come out of this pandemic, the top issue facing this entire country is getting the economy back up and running. A key part of economic recovery is getting people back to work. Let me say first that the best indicator of future performance is past performance, and it should be remembered that during the 2008-09 recession, the last time this country faced a crisis, it was a Conservative government and Conservative economic policy that was able to strengthen Canada's fiscal position without jeopardizing the goal of income redistribution.

In fact, the same Conservative government's strict fiscal disciplines achieved a balanced budget in 2015, and it did not come from raising taxes or cutting transfers to people, provinces and territories. People should also remember that it was a Conservative government that brought in NAFTA, which has had an overwhelmingly positive effect on the Canadian economy. It has opened up new export opportunities for businesses, acted as a stimulus to build internationally competitive businesses and helped attract foreign investment to Canada.

Conservative governments have had a long and distinguished history of cleaning up Liberal messes, and we stand ready to do so again. We need to focus on getting the economy back on track, bringing back jobs, responsibly balancing the budget and providing accountability.

When COVID-19 hit, the Liberal government was not ready. Liberals were caught unprepared. They made poor decisions, put lives at risk and crippled our economy. It did not have to be this way. Canada has faced pandemics before. In recent memory we were confronted with SARS and H1N1. Each time we learned lessons and prepared for future pandemics. Tragically, the Liberal government undid much of that preparation, cutting funding to key programs. They shut down the Global Public Health Intelligence Network, our pandemic early warning system. They let the National Microbiology Laboratory decline and then depleted Canada's PPE stockpiles. They fought with the pharmaceutical industry and stacked the Public Health Agency with bureaucrats, not scientists.

When COVID-19 emerged, the Liberals were unprepared and slow to respond and made numerous decisions with tragic consequences. At first they denied there was a risk to Canada. They waited too long to close the border and ignored warnings of scientists within their own government and across Canada about the transmissibility and threat of COVID-19. They downplayed the importance of screening at borders, wearing masks, evidence-based contact tracing and domestic vaccine production. Frontline workers were left to fend for themselves, as public health guidance was confused or blocked.

• (1400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member will have two minutes after question period to finish her remarks and for questions from the other members.

[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last week the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion participated in a round table with housing experts in my riding of Steveston—Richmond East. Together, we discussed the important initiatives from the federal government to develop affordable housing in B.C., such as the affordable housing innovation fund to encourage new funding models for affordable housing. The minister spoke about CMHC's call for ideas to develop a housing accelerator fund to help municipalities remove barriers to affordable housing and addressed the urgent need for skilled labour with Canada's leading immigration program.

Our government is working with the provinces and municipalities to ensure Canadian families have access to affordable housing, because every Canadian deserves a safe and affordable home.

* * *

IRVIN GOODON

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, west Manitoba lost a giant with the passing of Mr. Irvin Goodon on December 28. Mr. Goodon was a husband, father, grandfather, businessman, community builder, and writer, and a proud member of the Métis nation.

Growing up in the Turtle Mountains, Irvin was instantly connected to the land. From trapping to hunting and enjoying the bounty of his harvest, he was an ardent conservationist, which led him to founding the Goodon International Wildlife Museum in Boissevain, Manitoba. I will always remember Irvin as an entrepreneur who built a construction business that revolutionized the shed-building industry North America. From humble beginnings to becoming a nationally recognized business leader, such as being inducted into the Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame, Irvin was a pioneer in every sense of the word.

I was honoured to call him a friend all these years and I appreciated his sage advice on all things political. I thank his wife Marge and children Laurie, Will and Jo for lending their father to the world. He was a wealth of inspiration and a friend to all. May he rest in peace.

* * *

ANISHNABEG OUTREACH

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Madam Speaker, recently I met with Stephen Jackson of Anishnabeg Outreach, a non-profit organization for indigenous healing in my riding of Kitchener South—Hespeler. Over the past three years, under his leadership, this centre has grown from a staff of two to 30.

Statements by Members

Using digital technologies, the outreach centre has transformed from a local organization providing service to the 50,000 indigenous people living in the region to a national organization providing healing and employment opportunities to friendship centres, reserves and urban centres. The processes and tools being used by this trail-blazing organization will position the current and future first nation, Métis and Inuit generations as prosperous leaders and strategic partners in Canada's future.

I encourage the members of this House to take a moment and join me in recognizing the remarkable work being done by the Anishnabeg Outreach centre.

* * *

[Translation]

SERGE GUAY

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the house about Serge Guay's invaluable contribution to the Site historique maritime de la Pointe-au-Père in Rimouski.

Mr. Guay was at the helm of this lower St. Lawrence museum for 31 years. During that time, the site blossomed into the must-see attraction it is today, bringing in tens of thousands of visitors every year.

Throughout his career, Mr. Guay was known for his passion, determination and creativity. Last May, the Canadian Museums Association awarded him a prize for his museum leadership skills and the important role he played at the Musée de la mer.

Among his numerous achievements is the ambitious acquisition of the *Onondaga* submarine in 2009, which became Canada's first publicly accessible submarine.

I am grateful to Mr. Guay for his contribution to building this top-notch historical tourist attraction that really puts our wonderful region on the map and makes us all so proud. I wish him a happy retirement.

* * *

ESPOIR ROSALIE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 15, the Espoir Rosalie centre, an organization in Gatineau, celebrated 30 years of serving our community.

Espoir Rosalie helps single mothers and their children develop parental autonomy. Participants have access to respite services and can take various workshops to learn how to build their own support network.

I want to acknowledge the important work this organization does on a daily basis to ensure that we can live in a society where everyone has an equal chance.

I want to sincerely thank the team, the board, and all the volunteers at the Espoir Rosalie centre for their incredible work.

• (1405)

RÉAL GAGNÉ

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to an extraordinary man who left us far too soon, Réal Gagné.

Réal was a proud farmer all his life, a loving husband to his wife Thérèse, an attentive father of five daughters, Stéphanie, Marilyne, Joannie, Danielle and Mélanie, and a wise grandfather of nine grandchildren. He also leaves a void in the lives of his brothers and sisters, his brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, and his friends, who shared his zest for life and his passion for maple syrup farming. Without question, he was the heart and soul of his entire family.

Réal served his community with sound advice, and he was also involved in marketing maple syrup at the provincial level.

Personally, I have lost more than a good friend. He was my neighbour, and every year at harvest time, we would take the time to stop our tractors and share funny stories that only Réal had the gift to tell. His presence was always a source of great comfort.

To my neighbour Réal, rest in peace.

* * *

[English]

SPORT

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow Team Canada will march into the opening ceremony of the Olympic winter games.

[Translation]

The Canadian delegation will be led by three-time Olympic champion and two-time gold medallist Marie-Philip Poulin, the captain of the women's hockey team, and by five-time Olympic short-track speed skating champion Charles Hamelin.

[English]

I encourage every Canadian and indeed every member in this House to cheer on Team Canada, celebrate the victories and triumphs, get to know our athletes and enjoy the inspiring stories of their Olympic journeys. Nothing brings our country together quite like the Olympics, and I think we could all use something to cheer for right now.

Physical activity and recreation are essential for our communities and for our collective mental and physical health. That is why I am so proud that this week we announced our new initiative, called "community sport for all". That is \$80 million over the next two years to ensure that everyone in Canada can access quality, barrier-free sport and play.

[Translation]

Playground to podium, Canada is proud to support our athletes.

[English]

Go, Canada, go.

MARK CLARKE

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of sadness that I rise to recognize the passing of a dedicated community volunteer and loyal friend from my riding of Kings—Hants.

Mark Clarke passed away suddenly yesterday while waiting for delayed heart surgery. He retired from Michelin after 31 years, but as the saying goes, he was busier in retirement than ever during his active working life.

He was a devoted volunteer with a lengthy record of service to the Kentville Lions Club, where he served as president and could often be found on Saturday mornings serving pancake breakfast. He was also a talented musician and would often perform jam sessions in the community, frequently doing shows for seniors. He was passionate about public affairs. In fact, the first meeting I had with individuals to discuss my candidacy to become a member of Parliament took place in his living room. He relished talking to people on their doorsteps during election campaigns. He was well known, well liked and well respected.

To the love of his life, Gay, and to their entire family, I extend my heartfelt sympathy. I was lucky to have known Mark and to have known him as a friend.

* * *

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, forcing people's backs against a wall by imposing unreasonable mandates and demonizing those who seek to create a dialogue and ask to be heard by their government is wrong. We need to safely and responsibly learn to live with the virus, and the government needs to accept that there are many ways forward to give people hope.

Hope is the message we have been hearing, and many are spreading this message of freedom, unity and patriotism across this country. It is shameful that the government continues to divide Canadians.

With this many Canadians from across the country of all races and faiths coming together to seek hope to end the mandates, they deserve to be listened to. So many people I have met are thankful for the polite conversation, because they want to be heard.

I encourage the Liberal members to listen and give hope a chance to be heard.

* * *

• (1410)

CHILD CARE

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has put forth a national child care strategy to help families save thousands of dollars in child care costs and help grow our economy. Almost every province and territory has signed on to a child care agreement with our federal government, except for the Province of Ontario.

Statements by Members

In Brampton East, families have consistently expressed the need for affordable child care and what it would mean for them. Over the weekend, my friend Ajit in Calgary reached out to thank me and our Liberal government for a national child care strategy and shared what it will mean for his family. For his family, that means child care costs going from \$1,300 a month to \$680 a month. That is over \$7,000 in savings in the first year alone.

Our federal government has \$10.2 billion on the table and stands ready to work with the Province of Ontario so that Ajit's reality in Calgary can become a reality for families in Brampton and across Ontario. It is high time for the Province of Ontario to do its part in making affordable child care a reality.

* * *

HIGH-SPEED INTERNET

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, families in Flamborough—Glanbrook are desperate for reliable high-speed Internet. On a regular basis, I receive calls and emails from constituents who struggle with overpriced, unreliable Internet. Take Ryan in Flamborough, for example, who lives just 15 minutes from the city but has no reliable broadband. Last month, to ensure his two kids would have access to online schooling, he had to pay over \$500 in charges for a wireless hot spot.

There are over 8,000 rural households in Flamborough—Glanbrook, the majority with bad Internet, including my own, yet last week the government made an announcement to connect just 47 of them. That is less than 1%.

In 2022, the pandemic has taught us that access to reliable high-speed Internet is no longer a privilege for some but a necessity for all. The people of my riding cannot wait until 2025. They need action now.

* * *

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my heart was saddened to hear the news of four people from India losing their lives last month after becoming lost in -35°C weather during a blizzard. This is a tragedy made worse by the news that it was allegedly human traffickers who put these people in harm's way. Human trafficking causes real harm. No matter what someone may say, it is never safe to cross the border illegally. Human smugglers are only concerned about money and have no regard for the lives lost. They are responsible for over 40 million victims worldwide, often leading to forced labour, prostitution and death.

Statements by Members

There is a substantial need among some individuals to get to another country like Canada, but this is not the way. Canada's Conservatives are calling on the government to ensure that our immigration system is fair, efficient and compassionate to prevent future tragedies like these events. We issue our collective condolences to the victims of this horrendous tragedy and to all fleeing their countries in search of a better life.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was in Quebec City last Saturday to take part in a ceremony commemorating the fifth anniversary of the tragic attack on the great mosque.

I rise today to once again pay tribute to the six men who were taken from us on January 29, 2017: Ibrahima, Mamadou, Khaled, Abdelkrim, Azzedine, and Aboubaker. They were all Quebecers and were all shot by a murderer who entered their mosque carrying a handgun and five 10-round magazines.

The weapon in question, a Glock 17, was acquired legally, and, in less than two minutes, it was used to extinguish the lives of our fellow citizens.

There is no doubt that more needs to be done to combat violence involving guns, including handguns. Survivors, young people, and Canadians across the country are urging us to act, and I will continue to speak up for them.

* * *

[English]

ATHLETES FROM PORT MOODY—COQUITLAM

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I want to highlight three athletes from my riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam who will be competing for Canada at the Special Olympics World Winter Games next year. They are Lindsey Aarstad, Ariel Taylor and Fiona Hall. Lindsey and Ariel will compete in snowshoeing and Fiona will compete in alpine skiing. I had the opportunity to meet Ariel recently, and she told me how important her friends at the Special Olympics are for her social and physical well-being. For all three women, these are their first World Games and they are training year-round. Lindsey and Ariel even have grass “snowshoes” so they can train during the summer months.

I want to give a shout-out to Special Olympics B.C., with over 4,000 volunteers and coaches who deliver year-round, high-quality programs to people with intellectual disabilities through sport.

Congratulations again to Lindsey, Ariel and Fiona, along with the other Canadian Special Olympics athletes. The residents of Port Moody—Coquitlam are cheering them on.

• (1415)

[Translation]

CITIZEN ADVOCACY IN DRUMMOND

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is the 40th anniversary of Parrainage civique Drummond, a citizen advocacy group that provides services for adults living with an intellectual disability, a physical disability or other disorders that may affect functional autonomy.

Parrainage civique Drummond was the initiative of a group of individuals looking for ways to provide specific, tailored support to this clientele. Needless to say, since the beginning of the pandemic, Parrainage civique Drummond has played an essential role in helping these people stay in touch with their community.

I am thinking in particular of Joey, a 27-year-old man with a passion for politics, who was able to do a one-day internship in my constituency office thanks to Parrainage civique Drummond. He is a nice guy and full of energy. His great need for interaction could not be fulfilled without this organization's initiatives.

I really want to commend the valuable contributions made by the volunteers and the remarkable work done by the Parrainage civique Drummond team. They bring happiness to the lives of these wonderful people and help them stay in their own homes, while also providing respite for their loved ones.

In closing, I would like to congratulate the executive director, Michel Gouin, who has been at the helm of this valuable organization for 20 years now.

* * *

[English]

QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on her 21st birthday, Princess Elizabeth declared, “my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service”, and what a record of service that has been, through 12 Canadian Prime Ministers and 14 Governors General, including the first Canadian-born Governor General and, today, the first indigenous person to serve as Governor General. During her reign, the Queen has visited Canada more often than any other country, endearing herself to generations of Canadians.

February 6 marks the 70th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the throne as head of the Commonwealth and Queen of Canada following the death of her father, King George VI. As she enters her platinum jubilee year, Her Majesty's loyal opposition extends our best wishes for continued health and happiness. God save the Queen.

GUELPH BLACK HERITAGE SOCIETY

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Guelph Black Heritage Society has begun its Black Heritage Month celebrations and continues to preserve the historical significance of Heritage Hall, a former church that was built in 1880 by former slaves who arrived in southern Ontario through the Underground Railroad. This building continues to serve as the cultural, historical and social centre within Guelph and Wellington County, and is the headquarters of the Guelph Black Heritage Society, which continues to work toward a more equitable society. It is a rich resource empowering Black Canadians and educating all around on anti-racism and discrimination while promoting cultural diversity, giving a leg up to Black entrepreneurs, running mental health workshops and bringing important lived experiences to our community.

The Government of Canada is proud to support the Guelph Black Heritage Society in my riding, and I look forward to joining it for events in Guelph celebrating Guelph Black Heritage Month.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the protesters and, to be more accurate, the trucks have been parked outside in Ottawa for almost a week now, and instead of presenting a plan, which is what I think a lot of people in this country would like to see, to work with the people who are out there to help them feel they have been listened to, the Prime Minister is threatening Canadians with more vaccine mandates for inter-provincial trade and travel. This is not helpful.

Can the Prime Minister please tell Canadians what role he feels the government can play and what it can do to help solve the impasse?

• (1420)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to first congratulate the member for Portage—Lisgar on her election as interim leader of her party. It is great to see another strong western woman leading the official opposition. As well, allow me to thank the member for Durham and his family for their public service. I got to know him during his time as the official opposition's critic for foreign affairs, and I know he is a strong advocate for his community and for Canada.

When it comes to the ongoing protests, all of our government and I clearly condemn the desecration of national monuments and the display of hateful symbols that this protest has tolerated.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Deputy Prime Minister's kind words.

Maybe all the horns affected her hearing, because I do not know if she heard my question, so I am going to ask it again. Where is the olive branch? I ask this because Canadians are looking for an olive branch. I appreciate the olive branch she just extended to me right now, and I think that is what Canadians are looking for. The gov-

ernment does not have to agree. Its members do not even have to like the protesters and the trucks that are parked outside, but they need to provide a solution.

Could they please tell Canadians what the solution is to get past this impasse?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hearing is just fine, and yesterday I heard very clearly my colleague from Hull—Aylmer, who explained what it means for a Black Canadian to see swastikas and the Confederate flag displayed at a protest in our nation's capital. He told us that this horrible emblem makes Black Canadians question who else among us would infringe on their equality and freedom. His words are a powerful reminder that every member of the House has a responsibility to speak out against a movement that tolerates such—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that, I am afraid, is classic gaslighting, and it is very disappointing to see the deputy leader do that when we are in the middle of what is going on in the streets right now in Ottawa. There is nobody in the House who tolerates racism, like wearing blackface. We do not need to go through the litany of racist things that have been done by people who clearly have very poor judgment. That is not what we are talking about. We are talking about an impasse on Parliament Hill. We need to have some solutions.

There needs to be an olive branch. Where is it?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has just used the “bad apple” excuse. She has excused the desecration of the national monuments and the display of the swastika and the Confederate flag on the grounds that these are just the actions of a few. We tell our children that when they see a bully, even if that bully is their friend, their job is to speak out. It is our job as members of the House to speak out against these hateful actions.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a disappointing answer.

The Prime Minister's policy is causing the price of everything to soar, but he smugly brushes that away, just as he brushes away almost every other challenge that Canadians are facing. He looks at single moms, for example, who are struggling, and seems to smugly not understand that they are just trying to put nutritional food on their kids' plates. He looks at families who are trying to pay their rent. Does he understand how difficult rent is to pay right now? Rent is soaring.

What is the Prime Minister's plan to stop runaway inflation?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to irresponsibly push a false economic narrative. The truth is that Canada is resilient, and our economy is strongly recovering from the COVID recession.

Our GDP grew 5.4% in the third quarter. That was stronger than the U.S., the U.K., Japan and Australia. We have replaced 108% of jobs lost to COVID, and S&P and Moody's have reaffirmed our AAA credit rating.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is an indisputable fact: Yesterday, Bank of Canada governor Tiff Macklem issued a warning that, unfortunately, directly affects all Canadian families.

He said that there is certainly uncertainty about interest rates before they can return to normal levels. It is not just anyone saying this, it is the Governor of the Bank of Canada who is issuing a warning.

The best way to control inflation is first and foremost to control spending.

Why is the Liberal government refusing to do what any responsible government must do, which is to control spending?

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

The latest inflation rate stood at 4.8% in Canada, 7% in the United States, 5.3% in Germany, and 5.4% in the United Kingdom. Our inflation is below the G7, G20 and OECD averages.

HEALTH

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to a Leger poll that came out yesterday, Quebecers and Canadians have made it clear that health is their priority.

They have made it clear that the health care system is getting worse, the pandemic has had a negative impact on health care, Ottawa is not contributing its fair share of funding, and Ottawa needs to do more. They have been clear about all of this.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister also be clear and tell us whether she will increase health transfers to 35%?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I can be very clear. I want to be very clear about the fact that \$8 out of every \$10 spent to fight this pandemic came from our federal government.

Bill C-8 outlines our government's plan to continue to support the provinces and territories, and that includes allocating \$1.7 billion to provide over 180 million additional rapid tests free of charge.

We are doing more, but I do not have time to talk about everything the government is doing.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister is not capable of being clear. We are talking about health transfers.

I will show her what it means to be clear. A total of 85% of Canadians and 86% of Quebecers agree with the provinces and Quebec, which are calling for the federal government to increase health transfers from 22% to 35%. That is clear: 85%.

It is not just the Bloc Québécois, Quebec, the provinces or the government who are calling for this. It is everyone.

Will the minister respond positively to everyone's request and increase health transfers to 35%?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can be very clear. It is the federal government that is supporting Canadians across the country today. It is supporting the provinces and territories and also our health care system in the fight against COVID-19.

The federal government has provided \$8 out of every \$10 spent on rapid tests, vaccines and therapeutics in Canada. We continue to spend money because we know that it is necessary.

[English]

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Madam Speaker, many indigenous community members, racialized community members and Black community members are raising a very serious question. When indigenous land defenders protect their land, their sacred lands, or when racialized people and Black people protest against police brutality that strips communities of loved ones, they receive a very different treatment by the police than the convoy in Ottawa.

Their question is simple. Why are indigenous, racialized and Black community members treated so differently when they are protesting for their rights?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for his hard work in supporting racialized and indigenous Canadians.

Earlier today I quoted what for me were very powerful and deeply moving comments made by my colleague, the member for Hull—Aylmer. When we consider the protests that are happening right now in Ottawa, we need to be very mindful of the impact they are having on racialized Canadians, new Canadians and indigenous Canadians. I certainly am.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, indigenous, racialized and Black communities are raising a very serious question. When indigenous communities defend their land or when Black or racialized communities protest against police brutality, they receive very different treatment by the police than the convoy in Ottawa.

Their question is simple. Why are they treated differently?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, our colleague from Hull—Aylmer explained what it means for a Black Canadian to see swastikas and the Confederate flag at a protest in our nation's capital.

He told us how these horrible emblems have Black Canadians wondering who among us would diminish their equality and freedom. His powerful words remind us that every member has a responsibility to stand up to a movement that tolerates such symbols.

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[English]

HOUSING

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, do we remember the Liberals' election promise from 2015, "real change for the middle class"? It was a winning election slogan for them. To give credit where it is due, things have certainly changed for the middle class. Those looking to break into the housing market, for example, have seen the average home price in 2015 of \$430,000 go to now over \$798,000. As a result, most young people will never own a home.

Is that the "real change" they were planning for the middle class?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to respond to that important question.

This is the change we implemented: We brought federal leadership back into the housing sector. We brought in the national housing strategy. We brought in the first-time homebuyer incentive. We brought in the rapid housing initiative. We brought in the co-investment fund. We brought in the greening homes initiative. On all of those measures that help middle-class Canadians, what did the Conservatives do? They voted against them each and every time.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all that Liberal spending, we have only seen housing prices in Canada become the most expensive in the world. Maybe that is what is influencing it.

Just as housing has become unaffordable since that fateful 2015 election, so have basic necessities. Milk is up 12%, eggs are up 14%, and baby food has seen an astounding 79% increase since the current Prime Minister took government. The price of gas was \$1.03 back in 2015. Now it is \$1.40. How are people supposed

Oral Questions

to feed their families, fuel their cars and get to work on that? I will ask again: Is this the "real change" the Liberals were promising the middle class?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting for me to hear the Conservatives today criticize government spending, because I remember just a few months ago on the campaign trail they proposed government spending that was actually higher than what we proposed. They proposed a \$168-billion deficit, while we proposed a \$156.9-billion deficit. I wonder if the party of flip-flops could tell Canadians what they stand for today.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the price of gas is at an all-time high since the Liberal government first came to power. In most parts of the country, it is over \$1.50 per litre, and it shows no sign of stopping.

The Liberal government's war on Canadian energy combined with out-of-control spending has created an inflationary spiral. The government is printing money to finance unnecessary deficits, which is just making matters worse.

Will the government admit that its policies are directly responsible for Canadians' misery?

• (1435)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to irresponsibly push a false economic narrative. The truth is that Canada is resilient, and our economy is strongly recovering from the COVID-19 recession.

Our GDP grew 5.4% in the third quarter, surpassing the U.S., Japan, the U.K. and Australia. We have replaced 108% of the jobs that were lost.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals can say whatever they want, but the fact is, Canada's inflation rate is among the worst in the G7. The government is putting off dealing with the problem, apparently hoping that inflation will sort itself out. Unfortunately, we are going to need a course correction to stop inflation.

The Bank of Canada has to rethink its interest rates, contract monetary policy and regain control over spending. When will the Liberals stop selling Canadians a dream and give them the straight goods?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again with the false narrative. The member talked about inflation in G7 countries. Let me share those numbers. Our inflation rate is 4.8%. In the U.S., it is 7%. In Germany, it is 5.3%. In the U.K., it is 5.4%.

The G7 average is 5.3%. That is the truth.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Alberta families are feeling the squeeze as the cost of everyday essentials continues to rise. The cost of groceries and housing is through the roof, and with record high prices at the pumps, just getting to work is becoming unaffordable. Not everyone can work from home, and when people have to decide between putting gas in their cars and putting food on their tables, something has gone seriously wrong.

When will the government get a grip and realize that the more it spends, the less Canadians can afford?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a bit rich to hear the Conservatives presume to offer any kind of economic advice. After all, let us remember that just before Christmas, when the omicron wave was rising, it was the Conservatives who voted against Bill C-2 and the lockdown support that is providing such essential support for Canadian workers and small businesses across the country, supports the CFIB says are essential.

I am so glad the Conservatives failed in their economic effort.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is about time the government actually does start to listen to some of the Conservative economic advice. As if the cost of living crisis was not hard enough for Alberta families, the government is also attacking their livelihoods. Canadian-made natural resources are a cornerstone of our economy and our Canadian identity.

Alberta's oil and gas workers keep us warm, support our families and keep our economy running, yet the government continues to rely on high-carbon Saudi oil tankers over our own environmentally friendly Canadian energy.

Will the Liberals finally start supporting Canadian energy, or will they just continue to treat our oil and gas sector as the enemy?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly I agree with parts of what the hon. member said. Certainly the energy sector in the country is an important part of our overall economy and will continue to be as we move forward toward a lower-carbon future. We are working actively with companies and with governments to ensure that we are creating the jobs and the economic opportunities for families in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and every province and territory in this country.

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

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I heard the Prime Minister say again this morning that the Ottawa police need to do their job against these occupiers, but the police have been doing their job since day one. It is the feds who are hiding.

From day one, the Prime Minister has been adding fuel to the fire and then hiding behind the police, like a little boy in a schoolyard.

The Ottawa police are exhausted. Yesterday the police chief said that this is a national problem, not a City of Ottawa problem, and he is right.

When will the federal government take responsibility? Where is the Minister of Public Safety in this whole mess?

● (1440)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

The Ottawa Police Service and the Parliamentary Protective Service are the ones responsible for the areas affected by the protests. If the municipality requests assistance, the RCMP will be ready to respond, as they did at the beginning of this protest. The RCMP will continue to support law enforcement in managing the disruption so that all residents and people working downtown feel safe.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that the Ottawa police are expecting more protesters on the weekend. We know that the trucks are equipped to stay for weeks, even months. We know that the organizers are receiving money from international sources. This is a planned occupation and the federal government is leaving Ottawa and its residents to fend for themselves. That is what is happening, and it is even encouraging people to do the same in Quebec City.

Rather than allow the situation to escalate, when will the Minister of Public Safety take the lead in managing the crisis?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the RCMP has been there since the beginning of the protest to provide resources and money. There are several agreements between the RCMP and the Ottawa police.

These are independent decisions because they are operations. We have to respect the fact that the government, here in the House, does not make the decisions. These are independent decisions. I know that my colleague understands that.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the crisis is not going to resolve itself.

The Minister of Public Safety needs to set up an official crisis task force with all police forces, the Government of Ontario and the City of Ottawa. He needs to provide a daily update on the situation, the way a real leader would do in a crisis. He needs to make sure the public sees that there is a real pilot at the controls. The situation is getting worse every day. He must not wait until things get violent before stepping in.

Will the minister set up and lead a crisis task force?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I respect my colleague's point of view, and even the concerns of Ottawa residents, many of whom are suffering from numerous disruptions because of the protest.

The protesters' message has been delivered. Everyone understood, but now it is time to clear out, respect the process and respect the freedoms of the people who live in Ottawa.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the increase in the cost of living has hit a 30-year high with 4.8% inflation, a 27% increase in the cost of housing in a single year and a 33% increase in the price of gas. I am not even talking about the cost of groceries, which is skyrocketing. More than one in two families is afraid of not being able to feed their children, and food banks are overwhelmed by the demand.

When will the Prime Minister present a concrete action plan to combat the rising cost of living in Canada?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to denigrate the Canadian economy with a false narrative.

I will therefore take this opportunity to announce some good news. This week, Statistics Canada released new data showing that our GDP increased by 0.6% last November. That is the sixth consecutive month of growth and it means that, before omicron, our economy had completely recovered from the pandemic.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I listen to the minister, I really feel like she is completely out of touch with the reality of Canadians. I invite her to visit my riding and come with me to see the families who are now knocking at the doors of food banks because they cannot make ends meet. The cost of living is skyrocketing in every area, including the basics of food, shelter and clothing.

People do not want to be given numbers or hear about what is happening in other parts of the world. They want to hear about what the government can do to lower the cost of living for all Canadians. Period.

● (1445)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there may be a reason why the numbers, the data and the international comparisons do not please the Conservatives. That is because there is a stark contrast with what happened during the recession in 2008. It took roughly four more months for real GDP to recover after the 2008 recession, whereas we have already recovered all the jobs that were lost.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is talking and putting everyone to sleep, but that does not change the fact that Canadians' wallets are getting thinner every day as the Liberals spend taxpayers' money.

I have a very simple question for the Minister of Finance. Can she tell me whether she agrees with her Prime Minister, who thinks that budgets balance themselves, or does she believe that the government needs to take concrete measures to manage the money that

Oral Questions

taxpayers have given them? Will something be done to lower the cost of living and control—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to talk about the concrete measures we have taken, such as the Canada child benefit and the child care plan.

Today, we joined the Province of Manitoba to announce that we are lowering fees for more than 12,000 more children. That is 12,000 families who will pay less for child care. That is a concrete measure. We are very serious about addressing the issue of cost of living for families across Canada, and we are keeping our promises to them.

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[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the last five years, more than 25,000 Canadians have died of toxic drug overdoses and the pandemic has only made things worse. In my home province of B.C., drug toxicity is the leading cause of death for those aged 19 to 39. That is why I proposed the bill to decriminalize personal possession and increase access to harm reduction and treatment. It is essential to deal with this crisis and save lives now.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister recognized that this is a health issue. Today it is still a criminal issue. Will he do the right thing and support my bill for a health-based approach to substance use?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like the member opposite, our government recognizes that problematic substance use is a health issue. We are working very hard to divert people who use drugs away from the criminal justice system. The Public Prosecution Service of Canada issued guidance stating that alternatives to prosecution should be considered for simple possession offences.

Our comprehensive approach builds on the action of \$700 million in investments to community-led harm reduction, treatment and prevention projects. We will continue to work with this member and do everything we can to save lives and end this national public health crisis.

Oral Questions

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, the COVID pandemic has exposed the dangerous results of underfunding Canada's health care system. Overburdened ICU wards, burnt-out staff, cancelled surgeries, excessive wait times for diagnostic tests and millions of Canadians without a family doctor, mental health care or prescription medicines are impossible to deny, but this is not surprising. The federal share of health care spending has plummeted from 50% to just 22% today.

Will the government provide national leadership at the upcoming premiers meeting and increase the Canada health transfer to ensure the long-term funding needed to protect Canadians?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was proud to hear my colleague and want to congratulate him for speaking about the serious challenges we have around health human resources. I had a meeting just about two hours ago, one more with my colleagues of health ministers across Canada. We all agreed that we have to work together, not only to repair the damages created by COVID-19 but to build a stronger health care system to look after the long-term health care needs of Canadians.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was speaking to Melissa, a young professional who lives in my riding, last night. She shared with me that she supports our generational investments in affordable housing, in fighting climate change and in child care, but she is worried about the impact of this spending on our long-term economic future.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance explain to the House and Canadians the ways in which this generational investment in fighting climate change, in affordable housing and in child care actually helps to support our long-term growth and our future economic prosperity?

• (1450)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his advocacy on behalf of his constituency.

Our government has invested over \$70 billion in our national housing strategy, over \$100 billion towards climate action and clean growth, and \$30 billion in early learning and child care, including a deal with B.C. that will get us to \$10-a-day day care in five years. These investments not only make life more affordable; they drive economic growth. Thanks to our AAA credit rating and our declining debt-to-GDP ratio, our financial situation is sound.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, inflation is at a 30-year high, paycheques are getting smaller due to increased CPP rates and household debt is at a record high. I asked the Prime Minister what would happen if interest rates go up and people cannot afford their payments anymore.

Does he have a plan or does he just have more empty words disconnected from Canadians' realities?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yet again, I would like to point to the fact that Conservatives are pushing a false economic narra-

tive. The reality is that Canadians are resilient. Thanks to the ingenuity and the strength of Canadians, our economy has staged a remarkable recovery from the COVID recession. We lost three million jobs at the depth of the crisis. We have now recovered 108% of those jobs. The economy shrank by 17%. We are now back to pre-COVID levels. I congratulate Canadians.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the slower the finance minister responds to questions of real concern does not make the matters any less urgent. To the federal government, our payments on debt servicing alone are growing faster than our health care transfers. If interest rates go up when affordability has never been worse, what would happen?

The Prime Minister and finance minister believe that budgets balance themselves, but payments will not pay themselves. What is their plan to help Canadians cope with rising gas prices, inflation and everything else?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite referred to federal public debt charges, so let me offer him some reassurance. First of all, this fall, Moody's and S&P reaffirmed our AAA credit rating. Second, as I detailed in the economic and fiscal update, nearly half of our bond issuance will be long-term bonds. That is up from 15% of bonds issued in 2019-20 that had a maturity of 10 years or longer. Our public debt charges as a percentage of GDP are 0.9% this fiscal year. That is the lowest in 100 years.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister had no answer for the feed shortage crisis in western Canada and that is unacceptable. This is an animal health crisis that needs to be addressed immediately. Trucking mandates have cut off the vital feed supply from the United States and now an interprovincial trucking mandate could put our last lifeline, Hay West, in jeopardy.

Is the Liberal government really going to make matters worse and implement an interprovincial trucking mandate? If that is the case, what does the minister suggest that desperate livestock producers feed the animals in their care?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to the farmers and ranchers who are affected by the historic drought of last summer. We are working hard with the provinces and the industry to provide them the support they need and I am in constant contact with the president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and the president of the Canadian Pork Council on this issue. We are providing \$500 million through the AgriRecovery program and \$4 million to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture for the Hay West initiative.

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● (1455)

HOUSING

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to the Deputy Prime Minister, this is a false narrative.

Barrie house prices in December have averaged \$855,000, which is a year-over-year increase of 30%, putting more and more young people out of the housing market. The price of gas this morning at Costco in Barrie was \$1.488. A year ago, it was \$1.068. This is not a false narrative. Families and seniors are anxious about the growing cost of groceries, heating and life. Their budgets are being stretched.

Affordability anxiety is real and Canadians feel it getting worse. The Liberals have created this problem. Why are they not solving it? Is it because their rich friends are getting rich by—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since we came into government, we have invested almost \$30 billion in affordable housing measures.

My hon. friend talks about help for Canadians. Why did Conservatives vote against the Canada housing benefit, which is delivering real money into the pockets of Canadians to help them with rent? Why did they vote against the first-time homebuyer incentive, which is about making sure that Canadians have access to their dream of home ownership? Why did they vote against the rapid housing initiative, which has housed over 10,000 households and lifted people's lives up and enabled them not just to get by, but to get ahead?

We know what works. The Conservatives have no credibility on this issue.

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[Translation]

PRIVACY

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Ottawa has issued a call for tenders for a vendor to collect location data from all citizens' cellphones, without their knowledge, and share it with the Public Health Agency of Canada once it is anonymized. The deadline for the tendering process is tomorrow.

I do not want to be alarmist, but we must be vigilant in the face of such a lack of transparency. At the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics meeting on Monday, following a Bloc Québécois initiative, all parties of the House, includ-

ing the Liberal Party, called for the tender to be suspended. I repeat, the deadline is tomorrow.

Will the minister suspend the tender, yes or no?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

He is quite right to emphasize the importance of protecting people's privacy, especially in the context we have been living in for some time now, where privacy is not only a concern for most Canadians, but also requires concrete action and important discussion on the part of the Canadian government.

That is why, in just a few minutes, I will be speaking with members of the committee to explain why these data are confidential, private, disaggregated and anonymized, and why they are so important to the Canadian government.

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is not questioning the Public Health Agency of Canada's motives.

What we want is time. We want time for the ethics committee to make sure this move to collect massive amounts of personal data protects people's right to privacy. The tendering process closes tomorrow. The committee does not have time to investigate.

If there is one principle Health Canada should be thoroughly familiar with, it is the precautionary principle. Will the Minister suspend the tender, yes or no?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been adhering to the precautionary principle right from day one with respect to COVID-19. We have applied it to protecting personal information, of course, as well as to protecting people's health and safety.

Sadly, tens of thousands of Canadians have died in the past 22 months, and people have had to forgo hundreds of billions in employment income. There is so much fear, so much worry. Families are suffering so much. That is why we have to protect both safety and privacy.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the Prime Minister is not concerned about monetary policy, but Canadians are.

Oral Questions

I ran into my constituent, Anousha, at the grocery store in January. She was close to tears, and frankly scared about how she was going to get her family through in heat and meat all this winter. The price of gas for Anousha to get her from work to her kids' school is, wait for it, \$1.78 a litre in B.C. There is no false narrative there.

Will the government tell us what plan it has to dry Anousha's tears?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already spoken about something Canadians understand, which is that inflation is a global phenomenon.

We understand that affordability is a challenge for many Canadians. Let me talk about what our government is doing to help. A single mother with two children will receive up to \$13,660 from the Canada child benefit. An average family in Saskatchewan will receive nearly \$1,000 from the climate action incentive. Seniors received an extra \$500 through the GIS this summer, and we are increasing OAS by 10%.

• (1500)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, people living on a fixed income in my riding cannot afford to live.

With the Liberals' policies driving up the cost of home heating, their trucker mandates driving up food prices, the out-of-control escalation in the housing market, which they have not addressed, and the CERB GIS issue, which is still not fixed, people are being driven into homelessness.

When will the Liberals quit increasing the carbon tax, roll back the mandates and take action to help struggling Canadians?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite spoke about people living on a fixed income, so let me remind the member that seniors received an extra \$500 through the GIS this summer, and we are increasing the OAS by 15%. As I announced in the fall update, we are making a one-time payment to support seniors who qualify for the GIS who were challenged because they received the CERB.

Let me talk about students. They will save more than \$3,000 through our plan to eliminate federal interest on student and apprentice loans. On child care, I could say more—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Jodi in my riding of Calgary Shepard is the latest victim of the Liberal cost-of-living inflation. She is on a fixed income and got her January, 2022, ENMAX bill, which was \$638 for her utilities. That was a \$200 increase over the last month. She said that this was absurd, and she is right. It is absurd. She said, "This is tough. It is like another mortgage payment."

I would ask the government this: Is she another victim of Justinflation?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will tell the member what is exactly like another mortgage payment for a young family with children: exorbitant fees for early learning and child care. That is

why we are so proud to be putting in place a plan to make early learning and child care affordable across the country, including in Alberta where costs will go down 50% this year.

What I do not understand is how the Conservatives have the temerity to talk about affordability, but they campaigned on killing our early learning and child care plan.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Sudbury has a long, proud mining history.

Canada has the potential to become a world leader in critical minerals.

Could the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry give us an update on the critical mining strategy the government is developing?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question and for the great work she does on behalf of her constituents in Sudbury.

As the member said, Canada has a considerable competitive advantage when it comes to critical minerals. That is why we are developing a pan-Canadian critical minerals strategy with the Minister of Natural Resources to position Canada as the leader in exploring, extracting, processing and producing, so that we can become a global leader and develop a battery manufacturing ecosystem here in Canada.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a study recently released out of Johns Hopkins University is ringing the alarm bells on the devastating effects of lockdowns. It concluded that lockdowns are ineffective in reducing mortality rates. The study goes as far as saying that "lockdowns should be rejected out of hand as a pandemic policy instrument." However, the Liberal government continues to promote lockdowns across Canada.

Will the Prime Minister catch up to the science, apologize to Canadians, get out of the way and let people earn a paycheck again?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that question.

As we all know, or should know at least, the enemy is not vaccination. The enemy is COVID-19. One way to avoid lockdowns, and one way to return to a more normal life, is to be vaccinated. I hear that most members of the House have made the right choice. All members of the House must make the right choice.

• (1505)

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals came to power they promised to help Canadian families. Instead, this government has made everything more expensive. Their inflationary policies are the largest cost increase of all. Inflation has made us all poorer, because it adds to the price of everything. Today, the price of gasoline in my riding is over \$1.50 a litre. It is 35% less across the border, in the state of Maine.

Does the finance minister understand that the government's policies are hurting Canadians and making us all poorer?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, we are actually taking concrete actions to help Canadians with the high cost of living.

In fact, in that member's province of New Brunswick, we worked with the provincial government to come to a historic child care agreement last December, which is going to help families in New Brunswick see a 50% reduction in fees this year. That is going to help with the high cost of living. That is going to help with their bottom line.

Our government is committed to supporting families, and we are going to do that right across the country.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents are literally in distress. We are not just talking about unemployed people who are unable to get their EI benefits, because that is a crisis in itself, but we are also talking about full-time workers and people who earn a very good living but are no longer able to make ends meet.

A litre of gas costs \$1.61 in Rivière-du-Loup today. Grocery store prices are up 8% due to inflation, as are heating costs. The price of everything is going up at an unbelievable rate. Meanwhile, the government is sitting on its hands, unable to solve the problem.

Dealing with inflation is urgent. What is the government going to do?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have explained many times before, and as Canadians fully understand, inflation is a global phenomenon. The Canadian economy and Canadians themselves are very resilient.

At the same time, our government understands the cost-of-living challenges that Canadians face. We are taking tangible action to help Canadians. For example, a single mother with two children

will receive up to \$13,000 from the Canada child benefit. An average family in Saskatchewan will receive almost—

* * *

[English]

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government announced the first-ever women entrepreneurship strategy, a now \$6-billion program to advance women's economic empowerment. Supporting women entrepreneurs and small business owners is now more important than ever, especially for our economic recovery from COVID-19.

Can the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development update us on her recent announcement about the women entrepreneurship ecosystem fund, and how it will support women who were especially hit hard during the pandemic?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the women entrepreneurship strategy ecosystem fund is working for women entrepreneurs and businesses. It has helped 500 women start new businesses, and 7,000 women increase and grow their existing businesses.

We know, though, that women entrepreneurs continue to face barriers. That is why I was very pleased to announce last week a new call for proposals. It is a \$25-million investment with the aim of removing systemic barriers and creating more equal access to resources for intersectionally diverse and underserved women in business so they can succeed.

* * *

POVERTY

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, under the Liberals, soaring food prices are squeezing families who are already struggling to make ends meet. This is resulting in children across Canada, including in my riding of Winnipeg Centre, going to school hungry, yet we are the only G7 country without a national school meal program. No child should ever have to go to school hungry.

Will the Liberals commit today to implementing a national school meal program?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, I look forward to working with my hon. colleague on this initiative. We both agree that it is unacceptable for children to go to school hungry, and that is why it is in my mandate letter as well as in the mandate letter of the Minister of Agriculture.

Government Orders

I look forward to working with her and stakeholders to deliver on this important policy so that we can support our children, so they are not hungry, and so they have the best learning outcomes possible.

* * *

• (1510)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am raising a question today that involves a massive industrial expansion in Nunavut. It is the Baffinland Mary River Mine. It has proposed to double production, and it is all going to Europe. It is an iron ore mine that wants to go to 12 million tonnes of production a year, with building a railway and doubling the number of ships going through sensitive habitat for whales.

The Mittimatalik Hunters and Trappers Organization opposes it. Oceans North is very concerned. However, it appears from satellite imagery that the mine is already expanding before it gets a permit.

Can the minister assure us that this industrial expansion will not be allowed to cut corners?

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a process, and it is set out in the Nunavut agreement. The independent Nunavut Impact Review Board, which is known to most as NIRB, was a process that was codeveloped with Inuit and territorial partners to ensure the interests of Nunavummiut are protected. We will continue to work with the Inuit rights holders as the independent NIRB process unfolds and ensure that their interests are protected.

To prejudice the outcome of the board's recommendations or any decisions regarding this project right now would be premature and inappropriate for all parties. Both I and—

The Speaker: I am afraid that is all the time we have for question period today.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties, and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: That the House deem the occupation in front of the parliamentary precinct in Ottawa to be illegal, that it ask GoFundMe to put all funds intended for this siege on hold, and that it call on participants to leave peacefully.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is our first Thursday back in Parliament and I am pleased to ask the traditional Thursday question.

[English]

Speaking about the week, this week has been a very busy one. Canadians recognize we have tough discussions sometimes in the House of Commons, and sometimes very harsh debates, but I am very pleased that we show respect to each other.

This week especially, Canadians have seen how much both sides of the House can be respectful to each other. We saw the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and everybody here show a lot of respect to the hon. member for Durham and to the new interim Leader of the Opposition in the House. I respect every member who showed this dignity this week.

[Translation]

Since the week is almost over, now is the time to learn about the upcoming week. Could my hon. colleague tell Canadians what to expect in the days to come?

[English]

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I echo the comments made by my hon. colleague on the other side. We fiercely disagree on many things. The debate we have is important, and dissent is important, but the way we do that is extraordinarily important. I want to echo what he said. We have been able to find a good tone in this House as we disagree with one another and fight on the issues of the day, and do it in a way that respects the roles we have as parliamentarians in this place.

For the week that is forthcoming, this afternoon and tomorrow will be dedicated to the second reading debate of Bill C-8, An Act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021 and other measures. On Monday, we are going to commence debate on Bill C-9, which seeks to amend the Judges Act. Lastly, Tuesday and Thursday shall be allotted days.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1515)

[English]

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-8, An Act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Hastings—Lennox and Addington has two minutes remaining.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin my comments by acknowledging a short conversation I had with one of my colleagues in the lobby with regard to his grandson, who has just gone through a successful heart surgery. Perhaps we can give a small moment of prayer for the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup and his grandson Oskar. He is doing well, but it is appropriate to acknowledge we have strength on both sides of the House to wish him and his family well.

There have been several challenges. We need to be ready and our goal needs to be simple. We need to be prepared and we need to take rapid actions. We need to be able to protect the health of all Canadians while avoiding long-term impacts on our economy and of course on the mental health of all Canadians.

Productivity is down and debt levels are up. I believe we are in a hot mess. The Canadian way of life is being threatened, and many people are fragile. We need to reactivate this economy. We need to have lower taxes, more freedom and smaller government and we need to regain some optimism and hope in ourselves and in our government.

I am speaking today on Bill C-8, and Conservatives strongly oppose it. Day in and day out, I hear the phone calls to my riding offices in Ivanhoe and Napanee and my office in Ottawa from Canadians of all walks of life who are exhausted and tired. We have no room for this additional spending.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I apologize that I was not able to make it for all of the member's speech, because of question period.

She mentioned at the end that Canadians are exhausted and tired. I would agree. So too are the people of Ottawa, with the protests we are seeing outside right now. Although the member was not in the House in 2020, the Conservative Party was quick to call on the government for police intervention on some of the blockades that we have seen across the country. I have not yet heard that same language from the Conservative Party, nor from this member.

Would this member agree with me that it is time for the protesters to go home and for the police to use their discretion to take down the blockade of downtown Ottawa?

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Mr. Speaker, indeed it is a tricky situation here in Ottawa, but Canadians want to be heard. Canadians want to be heard, and by all means we oppose any of the rhetoric about the small numbers of the population that are being talked about and that the Liberals are repeating today.

Canadians want to have some freedoms. Canadians want to have their choices. Canadians want to go ahead and live their lives with dignity. Canadians want to use all the tools we have in our tool boxes. We need to have the rapid tests, we need to wear our masks and we need to have social distancing, if that is what we choose. I am not encouraging or acknowledging this, but we need to move forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech.

Government Orders

I would like to hear her thoughts on inflation, which must certainly be affecting families, fathers and mothers, in her riding who are forced to make difficult decisions to feed their families. Should the government have intervened? How long should the government let inflation keep rising before it does something?

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I think I will answer in English today and in French tomorrow.

• (1520)

[English]

There is no doubt that inflation is hitting Canadians day in and day out. It does not matter whether they are at the gas station or going for groceries; it is in all walks of life.

The emails from seniors are really sad. I have seniors who are sending me emails saying they do not know whether they are able to pay for their medication. There are children who are talking to their parents at home, learning about how money is being spent, and there is not enough at the end of the day. Bills are all over the table and piling up, and families are needing to choose which ones they are going to pay. The interest rates that are being charged are just outlandish.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives oppose this bill. Do they oppose better ventilation for schools? Do they oppose more COVID tests? Do they approve improving the number of weeks of EI that workers are capable of getting? Do they approve of more relief for the businesses that took advantage of the Canada emergency business account?

These are all seemingly pretty important things, particularly as we hopefully near the end of worst part of the pandemic. Do the Conservatives really oppose those measures?

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Mr. Speaker, do the Liberals really approve of the inflation rates that Canadians are facing today?

With regard to some of the elements of the bill. I can acknowledge that as with anything, there is room for agreement and respectful disagreement across the aisle. There are parts of the bill that I would suggest are good, and I have no difficulty saying that. I think there needs to be room where we can have dialogue and agreement across the floor, but I will leave it at that.

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Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we only have to listen to the constant sound of horns outside of Parliament to hear the siren of Canadian voices discontent with the state of our country. Meeting to have an open conversation with truckers and now farmers is not a sign of defeat or concession, as the government tries to make it appear. It may be the only way to end this protest and send our truckers home. It is a sign of leadership. It is the job we all signed up to as parliamentarians. We are the representatives of everyone in our riding, not just those who voted for us, not just those we agree with, but everyone.

Canadians need hope. They want to know that the sacrifices they have made for their businesses, their families, their friends and their fellow Canadians by stepping up to get vaccines and boosters mean that they will see the light at the end of the tunnel. Canadians see where other nations are, and they see the hope that is coming from within them. The U.K. has lifted all restrictions from COVID-19. The Americans had full stadiums as they watched some exciting football for the AFC and the NFC championships last weekend. Go, Rams.

Canadians heard the health minister muse about seeing it coming with regard to a mandatory vaccine mandate on January 7, and when Quebec announced an anti-vax tax, the Prime Minister said that it could work. Vaccines are the best tool for fighting COVID-19, but we must use hope, not fear. The over 85% of Canadians who have made the choice on their own accord to get vaccinated want to know that there is hope and not fear as we end a pandemic and enter an endemic.

Part of that is Canada's ability to develop vaccines to contribute to COVAX and provide alternatives for the vaccine-hesitant. Quebec has two vaccine facilities that could provide these options. Both Medicago and Novavax, a plant-based vaccine and a protein-based vaccine, could provide Canadian jobs and help us meet promised COVAX goals, as we have only met a quarter of those, and help vaccinate the vaccine-hesitant here at home and the vaccine-starved across the globe. However, the government has not yet been able to see approval of these vaccines, both of which submitted applications for approval in early 2021, and Canada has yet to produce a vaccine through this pandemic.

Instead of acquiring vaccines and rapid testing in a timely manner, or approving vaccines that would help get the world vaccinated to help quell COVID-19, the government response has been consistently to dither and spend money it does not have. As our debt is now reaching a jaw-dropping \$1.2 trillion, the desire to spend our way out of the pandemic has led to some far-reaching results for our country: a housing crisis that is the worst in the world; an inflation level that is the highest it has been in 30 years; and the largest increase in poverty and inequality in this country in 20 years. The government's continued fantasy of spending to end the pandemic has not worked yet, and it will not work now.

We need real solutions to solve our crises. Government needs to work on listening to Canadians, reducing red tape and allowing the Canadian economy and Canadian innovators to be unleashed as this pandemic becomes an endemic, instead of its failed spend-to-oblivion policies.

Housing is a crisis, an existential crisis that requires massive ambition and innovation to solve, working with all levels of government. Working with the housing industry, we can help lead and find solutions now. We have over 200,000 skilled workers who are in limbo with Canadian immigration, which includes skilled trades that could start building homes today.

The immigration minister acknowledged this week that the shortage of skilled workers is in flux and that he does not know when it will be open again, maybe at the end of 2022. However, we need \$85 million, again more money, to fix it. Meanwhile, Canadian trades are screaming for more people to build homes and are not building them because of the lack of labour. This is an issue that could have been fixed years ago. Now with the housing crisis, it is only adding more fuel to the house fire that is our housing market.

The Conservative plan to use 15% of existing vacant government buildings for housing would have meant that trades could build units of housing today, not in the 10 years that it takes Toronto to build a high-rise now. Working with provinces in declaring a crisis on housing, we could start to massively contribute to an economic boom that would create jobs and create homes.

More important, we in the Conservative Party believe that if we are going to add more debt to the Canadian public, it should be on investments that better this country, including our health care.

● (1525)

For Bill C-8, our opposition is that, if we are going to spend \$70 billion, then why not spend it on health care to increase health care capacity in our ICUs and our hospitals? Some of our provinces were locked down and businesses were closed completely because of the lack of staffed health care capacity in this country.

Looking at hospital beds per capita in the most developed nations in the world, Canada was behind 37, including being dead last in the G7. As a matter of fact, Japan, Korea and Germany have four to six times the number of staffed beds per capita than Canada does. In the Conservative platform, we had dedicated \$60 billion, if we are talking about money, to new health care transfer spending to increase health care capacity.

If we are going to spend money, whether that be for Bill C-2 or Bill C-8, would it not be better for all Canadians if, instead of money being provided to businesses that are shut down, that money were to be used to prevent the economy from being shut down?

This bill is no different. This \$70 billion needs to be spent now in health care transfers to increase both health care and ICU capacity, and to increase the number of health care professionals that we are desperately missing in our regions. We need health care professionals, nurse practitioners and nurses, and we need doctors. In Bay of Quinte, we are short over 30 doctors. That means that residents who need primary health care are going to the ER. Canada is short over 70,000 nurses.

Spending \$70 billion more of taxpayer dollars without that money being invested into health care first and foremost is a travesty because it will add to the growing inflation that is plaguing this country. It would also not take care of the problems causing more lockdowns in the country and more angry Canadians desperately looking for the government to listen to them.

If we are going to fix inflation and the housing crisis, if we are going to listen to angry Canadians, we must fix those issues that are plaguing them, and we need to fix them now. Spending more money we do not have would fuel our already mammoth inflation, our housing crisis and the growing inequality in Canada without fixing the problems that would help Canadians get through the dark tunnel of this pandemic into the light that would be living with an endemic and getting lives back to normal.

• (1530)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is not being consistent. On the one hand he is saying to cut back and stop the spending. He opposes the legislation because it involves spending money.

On the other hand, he is saying that we should spend more money on health care transfers, even though this government has sent record amounts in health care transfers. Not only that, but we are also dealing with mental health and many other issues in health care. In this bill, there is \$1.72 billion being allocated to purchase rapid testing and equipment such as that. If we did not spend the money, those tests would not be there. Then it would have to be the provinces to come up with it.

Does the member not support the financial expenditures that are targeted in Bill C-8?

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, I support the spending that needs to happen to increase our health care now, and I supported rapid testing a year and a half ago when we asked for it and did not get it.

We had residents lined up for rapid testing because there were no rapid tests. Now that they are saying they are going to fix it, we do not need it. We need health care fixed. Let us put money towards health care, and fix our problems in health care.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was touched by your statement this week and I want to offer my condolences.

I have a question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government on the other side of the House. I would like to

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know who ultimately makes health care expenditures. Do the provinces spend the money or is it the federal government?

Is it not an indication of some kind of structural problem when the federal government holds on to money from Quebecers and Canadians and sets conditions on that money, interfering in provincial jurisdictions?

Would it not make sense to solve this problem once and for all by transferring the money to the provinces without conditions?

[English]

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, we all agree that the provinces want just as much as the federal government, and it sometimes thinks it just grows on trees.

I know the federal government has to be responsible for what it is putting its money towards. I understand the provinces will decide where it wants that money. If we put money towards federal transfers for health care capacity, and we as the federal government could always track that capacity, then we would be fixing the problem once and for all with not just beds, but staffed beds. We need staff and we need beds. We need to work with the provinces to make that happen.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, picking up on my hon. colleague's comments, he is absolutely right. Among OECD countries, Canada's ICU beds per capita is less than everyone but Mexico. We are 26 out of 27 in terms of number of doctors per thousand. Among developed countries, we rank tenth out of 10 in terms of wait times. Of course, the reason for this is that in 2014 the Harper Conservatives capped the federal health transfer at 3% when health care costs are rising at 5%. The current government said it would change that, but then it adopted the Harper cuts.

Will my hon. colleague finally acknowledge that part of the problem today is the Conservative and Liberal cuts to health care that kept federal transfers at 3%, and does he agree with the NDP that it is time to raise it so that we can start properly funding the health care system in this country?

Mr. Ryan Williams: Madam Speaker, a kid in kindergarten pushed me, and I do not hold a grudge against him as that happened 20 or 30 years ago. We have to focus on today. I am not sure about the Harper government. I was not here, but I love when Stephen Harper's name is brought up because he was a great prime minister.

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We have to look at health care and health care means looking at ICU capacity. It means looking at staff. It means looking at nurse practitioners and doctors. I know my hon colleagues on the health committee are going to be studying that. I look forward to those results. Let us get those to the House and let us get those passed so that Canadians can benefit from better health care.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today to Bill C-8, an act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021 and other measures.

The economic and fiscal update is a transparent report of our nation's finances, but it is about making sure that we have the tools we need to protect Canadians and keep our economy growing. It is about prudence, not austerity, and intelligent investment, not a blank cheque. It would set the stage for us to build on the supports and investments that are bolstering our economy and ensuring its growth for the long term. This means making generational investments in our recovery, such as early learning and child care, so kids in Vancouver Granville and across Canada can get the best start in life. It also means making sure parents, most often women, do not have to make the difficult decision between taking care of their kids or returning to work, adding their immense talent and skill to contribute to Canada's economy.

According to RBC, closing the women's participation rate gap would add another 1.2 million people to the labour force at a time we desperately need workers to fill the almost one million jobs across Canada. It means investing in affordable housing and in a green transition. We all know full well that a green transition of our global economy is well under way. It represents a great economic opportunity to create good, sustainable jobs across Canada for generations to come. It means supporting the technology sector, the world from which I came, so that we can be a global leader in innovation and in building the economy of the future today.

This is not just about spending, but about creating conditions for future growth, fighting climate change by building a greener economy and ensuring that indigenous communities are included in every conversation about the innovation economy. Fostering diversity and inclusion are not just the right things to do for the fabric of the country, they are also the right thing to do to build a more prosperous future. By ensuring an economy that includes all of us, we access a wider range of experiences, perspectives and skills that would increase global competitiveness, support the long-term success of Canadian communities, rural and urban, and allow us to leverage best in class Canadian expertise on the world stage.

As we emerge from these moments of uncertainty, our priority must be on economic stability and long-term growth. The choices we make now will lay the foundation for the future that we will be leaving to our kids. I am proud of the work this government has done to keep us moving forward since 2015, no matter what challenges we have faced as a country.

• (1535)

[Translation]

We have also heard a lot about the pandemic's impact on our supply chains. That is why our government announced a call for pro-

posals under the national trade corridors fund, which has allocated up to \$50 million to support projects designed to eliminate supply chain congestion.

We know good transportation infrastructure and efficient trade corridors are crucial to Canadian businesses' success in the global market.

[English]

Many predicted it would take years to rebuild our economy from the wounds of the pandemic, but look at us now. We are poised for robust growth in the months to come, growth that will help us pay down the debt and reduce the deficit. We can already see the results of the work that has been done. The December labour force survey from Statistics Canada showed that our labour market gained 55,000 jobs and our unemployment rate dropped to 5.9%, its lowest since the start of the pandemic. Thanks to the resilience of Canadians, we have well surpassed our target of recovering one million jobs.

Our plan is working. As we continue to meet the challenges of COVID-19, we are staying the course, focused on climate change, advancing reconciliation with indigenous peoples and building an economy that is stronger, fairer, more prosperous and sustainable for the long term.

Let me talk about specifics. I spent a large part of my life in the tech sector building small companies into larger ones and taking intelligent managed risks knowing that I have accountability to my employees and investors. Like many business owners and entrepreneurs, I had to think about long-term growth and building resilience for rainy days, and often we have to borrow to invest in growth. That is what this government has done for Canadians during the pandemic. Now it is time to build on the remarkable return on that investment.

This pandemic, as we all know, has not been just a rainy day. This is a once-in-a-generation black swan event, a global crisis. That is why in Bill C-8 the Canada emergency business account is such an integral and important measure. The CEBA is one of the key government supports that local businesses have relied on to weather the darkest days of this pandemic. As we all know, the CEBA provides interest-free, partially forgivable loans of up to \$60,000 to small businesses to help cover their operating costs during difficult times.

Let me put that into perspective. We all know that small businesses in each of our ridings are the backbone of our economy. My constituency office is in the neighbourhood of South Granville, a vibrant neighbourhood where the streets are lined with small businesses, mom-and-pop shops, restaurants, sidewalk cafes, bookstores and gift shops, all of which build and contribute to thriving communities. They employ our neighbours. They help families pay their rent and mortgages. Without government support, many of these pillars of our community would be out of business today.

Because of the Canada emergency business account, nearly 900,000 small businesses have been able to keep their doors open. Eligible businesses have accessed nearly \$49 billion in federal support, and because many small businesses continue to face pandemic-related challenges, in January of this year our government extended the repayment deadline for loans, to qualify for partial loan forgiveness, to the end of 2023. This extension will support short-term economic recovery and offer greater repayment flexibility. Bill C-8 would give folks six years to pay off their CEBA loan, ensuring that loan-holders are provided consistent and fair treatment no matter where they live.

Bill C-8 would also deliver financial support to our Canadian farmers, who never stopped working to keep food on our tables, through the challenges posed by COVID-19 and beyond. Canadian farmers, like Mickey and her family, with whom I had the pleasure of meeting yesterday, have demonstrated great resilience, stepping up to deliver despite their own challenges. They have done their part in shoring up our food supply by investing in greener, more sustainable farms. With Bill C-8, we would be giving them a well-deserved hand while continuing to help meet our national climate change objectives.

The new measures in Bill C-8 would build on the significant support for businesses that became law with the passage of Bill C-2 in December. With Bill C-2, our government made sure that the economic supports needed for businesses would still be available, if and when needed. With the reality that provincial health restrictions remain in effect in certain regions across this country, we know that businesses continue to suffer and face challenges. Applications are now open for the local lockdown program, which provides wage and rent subsidy support of up to 75% for employers who have had to reduce the capacity of their main business by at least 50%. To expand access to the program, we have temporarily lowered the revenue decline threshold for eligibility from 40% to 25% through to mid-February. For businesses facing other pandemic-related losses, support is also now available through the tourism and hospitality program and the hardest-hit business recovery program.

By supporting businesses through these challenges, these programs are protecting people's jobs and allowing people to stay connected to their employers. As the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has said, this keeps people strong, it keeps families strong and it keeps businesses strong. That is what we need to keep our economy strong.

As we emerge from the pandemic, our national focus must be jobs and growth. This means attracting top international talent and more immigrants and temporary foreign workers to help Canada meet long- and short-term labour market needs.

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We have heard a lot about labour shortages recently, but our Canadian economy continues to grow. We have now surpassed our target of creating one million jobs. In fact, in December, as I said, we recovered 108% of the jobs lost at the peak of the pandemic. Immigration is a big part of the engine of our economy. It helps address labour shortages and strengthens our communities. Not only are immigrants essential to Canada's economy, but they also bring fresh perspectives and connect Canada to the world. In short, immigration bolsters our economic future and connects us to the world.

The good news is that the fall economic statement allocated \$85 million to help unlock access to Canada. This targeted investment will reduce processing times in key areas affected by pandemic-related delays. Ensuring Canada's immigration system is well positioned to meet Canada's economic and labour force goals is essential to our future success.

As I said earlier, our long-term strategy of prudence, not austerity, and intelligent investment, not a blank cheque, is the best path forward for success. To bring this to life, we must lean into our clear vision and use public policy levers to make Canada a global leader in technology and innovation. For Canada to lead on the global stage, we must ensure that we create the conditions necessary for that to happen. That is exactly what we are doing. When we implement new approaches, Canadian innovators, businesses and non-profits respond. Building an innovation economy means thinking about where we want to go, not where we are today. It is clear that Bill C-8 is the next essential step in keeping Canadians and our economy strong, while setting the stage for long-term economic prosperity.

The record is clear. Our government delivered unprecedented support in order to keep Canadian families and businesses solvent throughout the pandemic, and investment in our economy has continued and will continue to pay off. The plan is working. Our GDP has returned to prepandemic levels, and both Moody's and S&P have reaffirmed Canada's AAA credit rating. We came into this crisis with the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7, and we have increased our relative advantage throughout the pandemic.

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• (1540)

The measures contained in Bill C-8 are fundamental to supporting Canadians and Canadian businesses, and the provinces and territories, as they continue to battle COVID-19. They need the support to get through the fight and come out stronger, and they are counting on it. They are counting on us. I encourage my hon. colleagues to bear this in mind in their consideration of this essential bill, and join me in supporting its expeditious passage through the House so that Canadians can get the help they need at the time they need it.

I am thankful for this opportunity to make this case.

• (1545)

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question that no one has been talking about, and I would like to address a couple of the member's statements on the future of our kids and borrowing.

First of all, we have a lack of supply. In my riding, the average price of a condo is \$1 million. Apart from the average price of the condo, we also incur costs when purchasing property, so addressing the financial burden on new homeowners is essential. Taxes, such as the carbon tax, the tax on energy and the tax on fuel, create the opportunity for individuals not to be approved by financial institutions. When we take into consideration their gross income and their qualification based on TDS and GDS, it is very important to understand that a person's income can buy less because of the inflation situation.

Can my hon. colleague please explain to me how we are going to help people get into the market when we do have inventory, given their income is dropping and they cannot afford it?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Speaker, there is no question that around the world inflation is a challenge that countries are dealing with, but Canada has fared better than most countries, including the United States.

The reality is that many of the measures we need to put into place for future-proofing our economy are the types of measures that require government investment. They are investments we have made. They also requires us to think about the challenges that Canadians, like those in the member's riding, are facing. This is why the supports and incentives this government has put in place for folks to improve their quality of life, including for child care, for example, will help to increase the wealth of Canadians. These are important initiatives and we are going to continue to invest in them.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague's speech was very interesting.

My background is in education, where we use the sandwich method to talk about the successes and challenges we observe. We start with the bread, a positive comment, such as, the Liberals do an excellent job of highlighting their own qualities. Next up is the baloney, and there is a reason it is called baloney: there is something about it that is not quite right and could be a lot better. Last is another slice of bread.

In this case, there is not much to the sandwich if we are talking care. If I look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, right at the bottom is food and housing security, but we have been short 50,000 units a year for 30 years.

When will meaningful new investments be made in affordable social and community housing?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Speaker, I will try to answer in French.

As my colleague knows, our government has made incredible investments, with an additional \$6 billion for affordable housing. We will continue to invest, and we will continue to work with the provinces and communities in every region of our country on this very important issue, in order to determine what solutions will work for them in their particular circumstances.

• (1550)

[English]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to talk specifically about housing. In his statement, the hon. member made mention of the importance of making generational investments. I took a good review of Bill C-8, and there are many deficiencies. One of the biggest deficiencies I noticed, which I would like the hon. member to comment on in particular, is the fact that there is no mention of the anti-flipping tax. We know that flipping properties and injecting wealth into these properties to increase their value is creating more barriers for people to participate and purchase housing, which is a serious problem that is driving the cost of housing up and limiting the market.

Will the member comment on why the anti-house-flipping tax is not in this bill?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Speaker, as the hon. member knows, there are provisions that have already been put in place to address foreign buyers. We will continue to move forward on all the commitments that were made, including such provisions. I think all of the provisions we can put in place to increase affordability and make it easier for Canadians are not only important, but essential to making sure we can reach a place where every Canadian has a place to call home. That is why our government is going to continue to take those steps and make those investments, as the Minister of Housing has been doing and will continue to do over the coming weeks and months.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge my colleague and thank him for his recent support with respect to a round table I hosted on co-op housing.

I thank the previous questioner from the Bloc Québécois for raising the topic of public housing, because it is something I am passionate about and I know my colleague on this side shares that.

It seems that a lot of the questions coming from the other side, particularly from the Conservatives, indicate they may not have read the bill. They are asking about rapid tests, yet the bill includes rapid tests. They are asking about kids getting back to school, yet this bill includes a lot of support for schools to get back to a healthy way of learning, with better ventilation. They are asking about workers and businesses, yet there are provisions for all of those entities in which it is very important that we invest. They also suggest that the sky is falling with respect to the economy, while experts are indicating our recovery is quite strong and the job market is strong. The most recent labour force survey of Canada indicates our recovery has been strong.

Could my hon. colleague comment on some of the relevant aspects of Bill C-8 that would have a positive impact in his riding?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Speaker, as with many of us, our ridings are vibrant communities and in fact microcosms of Canada, so the small businesses that are dependent on government support to get through difficult times are beneficiaries of what is being provided here. I know there are folks who have connections to family farms. In fact, I met with some of them yesterday. Although they may live in my riding, they have connections to family farms outside of it. They will benefit from some of the provisions in this legislation. It is not just about the things that affect us directly in our ridings, but the fact that our constituents have family connections across the country.

We may often think about things in the context of what will affect us directly, but the reality is that Canadians think about the things that are affecting other Canadians, as well. That is the beauty of this legislation. It is not just about urban or rural Canadians, but about all Canadians and helping them move forward.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I really appreciate this conversation. I wonder if the member listened to my colleague for Bay of Quinte, when he spoke about the traditional vaccines that have been made in Canada. The government has not made them available to Canadians as a vaccine or an essential means of investing in our own economy. It is the same with the high-quality rapid tests that were developed in Canada. They were reasonably priced, yet they were not picked up.

The government has unlawfully mandated that those who are not vaccinated cannot travel on federally regulated flights and trains, even though Dr. Tam confirmed that vaccinations do not prevent the carrying and transmission of COVID.

Would the member agree that everyone, including the vaccinated, should have a rapid test to return the rights of mobility to all Canadians, or should we return to the PPE protections that were already in place and effective at our airports so Canadians can be engaged all across the country in improving our economy and getting back to normal?

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Speaker, vaccines are the best way for us to move forward through this pandemic, and making sure that every single Canadian is vaccinated is the best way to move forward. We know that folks who are vaccinated do not suffer the same consequences when they get COVID as those who are not. This is an important thing for us to consider as we move forward. We know that the folks who are vaccinated tend to be 67 %

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less likely to end up in an ICU, so when we think about air travel and being able to connect with Canadians and to connect with our families, we are going to have to trust the science.

The science is clear that vaccines work. The science is clear that masking works. The science is clear that rapid tests are not always accurate. We need to think about what the best solution is, not just for ourselves. We have a social contract in this country to take care of one another. We have a social contract to look after every single one of us, even if that means making sacrifices for ourselves.

• (1555)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to engage in this debate, but let me first address another issue.

I am so very disgusted by the images and displays of Nazi symbols and the use of the Confederate flag and other such hate symbols by those participating in the convoy. This is absolutely despicable, especially in light of the fact that racial and systemic inequity has been exacerbated with the impacts of COVID on the Black community, the indigenous community and racialized and marginalized people. The problems of racism and structural inequity existed even before the pandemic, but COVID-19 has exposed for many the serious inequities in our country.

I do not think it has escaped many, especially those in indigenous communities, Black communities and racialized communities, that the police's treatment of the convoy is starkly different from the treatment of indigenous protesters who are fighting for their land rights and protecting mother earth. My colleague, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby, has put forward in this Parliament legislative solutions to amend the Criminal Code to broaden the provisions relating to hate propaganda to make it an offence to publicly display visual representations that promote or incite hatred or violence against an identifiable group. He is asking the government to take specific steps to immediately counteract all forms of hate and discrimination, hate crimes and incidents of hate. I hope the government will adopt this private member's bill as a government bill.

On the issue of inequities, we are now deeply in the fifth wave of the pandemic. The wealthiest continue to make record profits, and the government still refuses to bring in a pandemic profiteering tax. Canada's banks earned a combined profit of almost \$58 billion in 2021. Meanwhile, the lowest-income seniors are getting their guaranteed income supplement cut. The New Democrats flagged concerns even before the election last summer and the government did nothing.

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In Vancouver East, seniors are getting evicted and are being rendered homeless right now. The government says it cares deeply about seniors, but it thinks that doing nothing until at least May of this year is somehow good enough. It is as if the government, the Liberals, is blind to the fact that seniors are getting kicked out of their homes this moment, not in May. This is happening in the middle of the fifth wave of the pandemic during the winter months. Action needs to be taken now. Seniors cannot wait until May to get the support they need.

The government brought in the Canada worker lockdown benefit, but let me tell members about the nightmare that my constituents are having in trying to access that support. Wait times over the phone are at least two to four hours, from what my constituents report. A lot of people cannot get through and they have tried multiple times a day. There is no information on navigating the phone menu—

• (1600)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There is an issue with the hon. member's microphone. There is no interpretation.

We will try again with the hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, the phone lines are not clear in what prompts to follow and the number to press for the CWLB. Callers are put on hold for hours, and then when they finally get through, they are navigated to the wrong menu, only to have to start all over again. The phone system is not set up in the same way that it was for the CERB or the CRB where one—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We are actually going to move to the next speaker and come back to the hon. member for Vancouver East once IT has had a chance to reach out to her. The hon. member will have seven minutes remaining once we can return to her. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope the member is able to get her technical problems resolved. I was looking forward to enjoying her speech. I know how challenging it can be with technical things.

I want to start with the substance of my speech. Like everyone else today, I am addressing Bill C-8, which is a financial update to the fiscal update.

I am going to talk about some specific issues. Over the next few days, we will have a well-rounded discussion, but today I really wanted to talk about one area specifically, and that is part 1(d). It has to do with the introduction of a refundable tax credit to return fuel charge proceeds to farming businesses in backstop jurisdictions. Before we get into that, I want to talk a little about farmers and how important they are to our economy.

They provide the very sustenance we need every day, including throughout the pandemic. They actually account for nearly 7% of our GDP. In addition to feeding Canada and Canadians, people around the world are counting on our Canadian farmers. We are the

fifth-largest agriculture exporter in the world and that provides nearly one in eight Canadians a job. We are one of the world's largest producers in flaxseed, canola, pulses, oats and durum.

Our farmers, despite providing an incredible bounty for us and around the world, have undergone some significant challenges throughout the pandemic. Like everyone else, they fought through the challenges of the pandemic. They also had challenges going into the pandemic, like the harvest from hell in 2019, which had the significant challenge of crops literally rotting in the field because it was so wet and farmers were unable to dry their fields. That harvest exacerbated the challenges our farmers were already facing, such as the self-inflicted wounds from the government in the form of the carbon tax.

The fact is that in some cases there is no doubt that the claims of revenue neutral do apply. If a person lives in a condo in downtown Toronto, there is a very good chance that their rebate is equal to the amount of the carbon tax they pay. However, if someone is a grain farmer in Saskatchewan, there is a very good chance and, in fact, a 100% chance, that they are paying thousands and thousands of dollars in carbon tax while receiving a mere pittance in return from the carbon tax rebate.

That is what led me, after discussions with some of the great advocacy groups for our farmers, to bring in a private member's bill, Bill C-206. Bill C-206 was legislation that would have exempted propane and natural gas from the carbon tax for farmers. It was well received and it created some great discussion. Our stakeholders were very pleased with it.

Initially, if one can believe this, the agriculture minister said that the carbon tax was not significant. Despite me and others receiving carbon tax bills from farmers around this great country in the amount of tens of thousands of dollars, she said it was not that significant.

However, as the bill gained momentum, all of a sudden the tone changed, which was quite odd. She said that there now might very well be an issue. The minister went from "it is not significant" to "it might be an issue at some point". Then, of course, as we know, later on in the fiscal update, she announced that there would be a rebate program. That rebate would be a \$1.47 for every \$1,000 of eligible farming expenses, or \$1.73 in 2023. We will see the math, but we will see that is not nearly as much carbon tax as farmers are actually paying.

Before we get into that, let us talk about a rebate versus an exemption and why we still need an exemption. A rebate takes money from the farmer, puts it in Ottawa and then takes it back to the farmer. Why would we go through that machination of having it go to Ottawa and then come back to the farmer? Why would we not just leave it in the pockets of farmers?

● (1605)

I can only speculate but I have a couple of ideas. It might be that, in fact, the government wanted to take credit for an idea that came from farmers, and it wanted to have that credit. It just might be that the government wants control of that money. It is funny what happens sometimes when people's money goes to Ottawa. It tends to diminish. In talking to advocacy groups, whether in the agriculture committee or one-on-one conversations with farmers, we hear that they welcome the rebate but they would much prefer an exemption.

Let us move on from there to see how this is calculated.

It is calculated based on eligible farming expenses. For those of you who are not aware, who have never filled out a tax return for a farmer or done it for their own farm, a farmer has to state and list all of their expenses on their tax return. This bill says that, if they had \$25,000 or more, based on the amount of those expenses, the more carbon tax rebate they will get. Therefore, they are using eligible expenses as a proxy for the amount. In other words, the more they burn the more they earn. Where have we heard that before? That is exactly how the system works. Only it does not work. In the proxy that they use, they are saying that with more eligible farming expenses there is more carbon tax rebate.

The challenge with that is that not all farmers are the same and not all areas of the country are the same. The temperature is very different in the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia than it is in northern Alberta. Of course, the amount of fossil fuels, including natural gas and propane, is different. In addition to that, different industries have different routes to alternatives to fossil fuels. For certain industries, it may take years but it is relatively inexpensive to switch to alternative sources. In contrast, with other industries, it may take decades and hundreds of thousands of dollars, yet we are blanketing it. We are using the same formula for different types of farms.

I am pleased, once again, that the government is starting to recognize that the agriculture industry, in addition to being great stewards of our land, already carbon neutral and ahead of many other industries, is what is called “an emissions-intensive trade exposed industry”. That means that there are certain industries, of which agriculture is certainly one, that do not have the ability to switch to alternatives, and there are certain emissions that may take years, if not decades, to get out of the system, despite the best efforts of our farmers.

The reason, as we heard over and over in the agriculture committee, is twofold. As I already said, there simply are not alternatives, so all this is an increased cost. There is no way to motivate farmers to do something that is impossible. The other part of it is that farmers are price-takers. The price that farmers get for their commodities off the gate is set by markets thousands of miles away from them. Therefore, they are unable to push that cost onto the consumer. That means many of our farmers are struggling to hang on

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and are struggling to get through Justinflation like everyone else, so it is a significant challenge.

I will just wrap up here by going through an example of how ineffective and insignificant this rebate is. For example, if a grain farm in Manitoba had a gross income of \$2 million, which could very easily be a net income of zero, a farmer could expect a rebate of \$3,446. That same farm would be paying a carbon tax of almost \$10,000. It is woefully insufficient. Farmers need an exemption, not a rebate. They need more money in their pockets, not in Ottawa bureaucrats'.

● (1610)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member made reference to the price on pollution. There was a time when the Conservative Party in opposition opposed a price on pollution. The Conservatives would call it a tax. Then they had a flip-flop and changed their position on it. I was glad to see that. I think most Canadians saw the value of having a price on pollution.

I wonder if this member is shying away from having a price on pollution once again. Can we anticipate another flip-flop on this issue?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, if you want to talk about flip-flops, your minister said this was not an issue. It is costing our farmers tens of thousands of dollars. After my bill, suddenly it is an issue and now you are introducing a rebate just for political points. That is disgusting.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that he is to address questions and comments through the Chair and not directly to the member.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Edmonton West.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his passionate speech. It is very important for Canadians to understand the effects of the Liberal carbon tax on our farmers and on our cost of food. One of the things that we have been arguing about for years is that the government will say it is a levy and, therefore, it is not a tax. However, if we look at the OECD guidelines, a forced charge is a tax. This is a tax and they charged the GST on the carbon levy.

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The government will say it is okay, because it gives it all back in rebates. The public accounts, if anyone is interested in reading through them like I do, actually states that the government pocketed \$136 million above what it actually returned to Canadians with its carbon tax. I would like my colleague to perhaps expand on what that is doing to farmers when we take that extra money out of their pockets.

• (1615)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I had an interaction with a member of the ministry of finance at the agriculture committee who tried to say, no, it is actually the amount that goes in that comes out. I had read the public accounts, like the great member over there, and I knew that was not the case. They actually denied it at first. The fact remains that millions of dollars from the carbon tax stays with government and that is money that could be with our farmers.

I believe that the best people to spend their money are the people themselves. The best people to plan their future are Canadians, not some bureaucrat in Ottawa.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, since we are talking about agriculture, a subject that really matters to me, how can we help in the current context? We all agree that this government has not introduced very many measures. What concrete action can we take to help our farmers make ends meet? At the same time, how can we help them make the transition to a greener economy?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, agriculture is very important to me, too, and to my constituency. I thank my hon. colleague for his question, which is a good one.

[English]

Farmers are incredibly important. I have spent my entire life working and surrounded by farmers and they are incredibly entrepreneurial, intelligent and thrifty individuals. If we leave that money in their pockets, they will do things, just like they already have with no-till technologies and otherwise. We need to make sure in our trade agreements that we are setting the economic table so they will be successful. Ultimately, the government just needs to get out of the way.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will resume debate and I will come back to the hon. member for Vancouver East. We are certainly hoping that everything has been resolved.

The hon. member for Vancouver East has seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will pick up where I was before the technical issues. I was outlining the problems my constituents were having in their application for the benefits they need because of the pandemic. One constituent advised my office of their experience when they attempted to apply online. They were prompted to enter their postal code, which showed that they were from British Columbia. Even though the website stated that all regions in B.C. were eligible if employment had been impacted by COVID, they received a message saying that the region was not valid. These are the kinds of problems people

are having. They cannot get through on the phone, or they wait for hours and get sent to different menu choices. They are trying online and are also getting these kinds of frustrating messages.

People are desperate. This is a time when their resources are running dry. Rents are due and they cannot put food on the table, so this is just not acceptable. I sure hope the government will fix these problems.

Then there are those who do not qualify for this program, such as artists, musicians, performers and cultural workers. They are among those who have been hardest hit by the pandemic. In Vancouver East, which is home to the most arts and cultural workers, on a per capita basis, of any riding in the country, the local arts and music scene is going through difficult times. I am very concerned that our community's cultural workers and venues alike face a longer road to recovery, which puts the live performance industry particularly at risk. Even before the pandemic, arts and performance venues were facing enormous pressures and challenges.

The calls of the #ForTheLoveOfLIVE campaign went unanswered by the government. The federal government needs to do more to protect these small and medium-sized enterprises and their employees and to preserve the cultural industry within our communities.

When we are talking about small businesses, I have to raise the issue of start-ups. They have been left out in the cold right from the start of the pandemic, and they continue to suffer. They continue to close down. The truth of the matter is that small businesses are the economic engine of our communities. If we do not support them to survive, our communities will not survive. That is our reality.

In Vancouver's Chinatown in my riding, we still cannot get support from the federal government or a special grant such as the one for Granville Island. Granville Island received a special grant from the federal government at the beginning of the pandemic, to the tune of \$17 million. It later received subsequent grants, as well.

Vancouver's Chinatown could not get any support from the government. This is wrong. Chinatown is the jewel of our crown. It is recognized by the federal government as a national historic site, and we need to put the supports in place for small businesses and the community to survive.

I opened my comments today with the issue of racism and discrimination. Chinatown also continues to face ongoing attacks on this front. The Chinese Cultural Centre and the Dr. Sun Yat-Sen gardens, among other iconic locations in our community, are being defaced with graffiti and racist comments. This also needs to be addressed, and we need the federal government to work with local communities, the provinces and the City to tackle this issue. We need to save Chinatown and preserve our history.

I want to take a moment and turn to the issue of housing. Today is actually the first 100 days of the Liberal government, and it declared that it would do many things in the first 100 days. The Liberal government still has not appointed anybody to the position of federal housing advocate.

The announcement of this new position was made in 2017. It has now been over a year since the government closed the job posting. In fact, it has been 13 months to be exact, yet there is still no progress. There is still no federal housing advocate. It should not take over 13 months for the government to hire someone after the job posting has closed. If the Liberals cannot even do that, how can they be expected to address the housing crisis that is precluding families and people from finding homes they can afford in the communities where they live and work?

• (1620)

Right now, we know that housing costs have increased exponentially—in fact, by some 38%. People who wish to own a home cannot get into the market. People who rent are losing their homes and are faced with renovations. Those who are on the streets, who are homeless, continue to be unhoused.

The Liberals keep talking about their housing plan, but they continue to prevent scrutiny on it, which is not a surprise, I suppose, given how much the housing prices have gone up in the six years under this government. People cannot wait for the government keeps talking about it; we need action and we need it now. We need to address it.

I would be remiss if I did not touch upon indigenous housing. The government promised a “for indigenous, by indigenous” national housing strategy. Budget after budget, there is still no funding allocation to it. It was not in this economic update, and it is shameful.

The Aboriginal Housing Management Association in British Columbia just made an announcement and launched a plan to show how to do it and to showcase how this can be done. It needs to be done and it needs the federal government at the table to fund it so that we can ensure indigenous peoples have the proper housing that they deserve.

There has been enough talk. It is time for action. Let us get on with it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad the member makes reference to the issue of housing, because within Bill C-8 there is a measure that will make a difference.

For the first time, we are seeing a tax on non-residents and non-Canadians purchasing and possessing unused properties, either directly or indirectly. That is going to be an annual tax. I am hopeful that this measure will have at least some impact in conjunction with other actions by the government through the national housing strategy and a number of projects that the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion has alluded to time and time again. I believe that the federal government is showing goodwill in moving forward on the issue of housing for Canadians.

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What are the member's thoughts on the specific initiative of the annual tax within Bill C-8?

• (1625)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, the measure the government introduced is minuscule, given the crisis we are faced with. A 1% tax is barely going to do it. What we are faced with is a huge financialization of housing, in which housing is being treated as though it is the stock market. Yes, we need a foreign buyers tax; actually, we need to ban foreign buyers at this point in time. We need to stop the financialization. We need to stop renovations. We need to make sure that the government invests in housing, starting with a “for indigenous, by indigenous” housing strategy with real funding. We need to build 500,000 units of affordable and co-op housing in our communities. We need to fund non-profits so they can get into the market and buy up housing coming onto the market so it does not get swept up by REITS.

This is what we need from the federal government.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, before my hon. colleague from Vancouver East was interrupted by technical difficulties, she spoke at length about the issue of seniors and the fact that they are the most vulnerable.

Back in August, the Bloc Québécois wrote to the Minister of Finance to denounce the cuts to the guaranteed income supplement for seniors who had received CERB. On top of that, there is nothing in the economic update about providing assistance to seniors.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on the importance of increasing old age security starting at age 65 and supporting seniors before May.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, New Democrats were raising this issue even before the election, saying that seniors will be suffering because the GIS will be cut. The government did not take any action. It said it was going to do something about it in May. Well, seniors are being evicted right now, so that is not good enough.

Aside from that, seniors actually need a boost in their incomes, not a differential treatment whereby seniors who turn 70 and those who have not yet done so have different payment increases. That is wrong. If someone retires at 65, they deserve to live in dignity. Seniors need to be supported throughout this pandemic and beyond.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for highlighting the Liberal-Conservative coalition to protect the financialization of the housing industry. We keep hearing about affordability and the Liberal and Conservative definitions of what is affordable.

Maybe the member could speak about how there is nothing in this bill to fix the broken language they have used in their definition of what is truly affordable.

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Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, the Liberal government and the Conservatives over the years have actually co-opted the word “affordable”. In fact, some people actually think that this is a four-letter word, because there is no longer anything affordable, and saying that rentals being made available way above market are somehow affordable is an insult. That is what has to stop. We need to provide rent that meets core needs. That is what we need to do.

By the way, I want to thank the member for the great bill he introduced today to address the opioid crisis and to call on the government to take action on decriminalization. It is time to save lives.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): 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 Courtenay—Alberni, Health; the hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe, Aviation Industry; the hon. member for York—Simcoe, Transport.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always an honour to stand in this place and speak on behalf of the people of Parry Sound—Muskoka from their seat here.

I am speaking on Bill C-8 today, and I am excited to do so, because it is an important issue. I think that the Liberals like their talking points, and when they are asked legitimate questions about the reasonableness of their spending plan, they just spout talking points. I thought I would try to simplify things and get right to the point and see if we can maybe get some good questions.

I would like to point out that of course this all started a couple of years ago at the beginning of the pandemic, and in many ways we in the House worked really well together. Pandemic supports were important, and all parties in the House worked well to improve many of the programs that the government offered and got them implemented as quickly as possible in the uncertain days at the beginning of the pandemic. I was really proud that we worked so well together.

Fast-forward a couple of years and here we are, hopefully seeing light at the end of the tunnel. However, over the course of these two years, we know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer reported that since the beginning of the pandemic, the government had spent or planned to spend almost \$542 billion in new measures, but he also reported that clearly one-third of those new measures were not COVID-related at all. We are talking about almost \$200 billion of new whims from this tax-and-spend Liberal government. In his report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer also pointed out that the remaining platform measures that the Liberals are now talking about would be another \$48.5 billion in net new spending between fiscal years 2021-22 and 2025-26.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer, from a non-partisan office, pointed out the government's own fiscal guardrails. I am sure everyone recalls that when we were expressing concerns about the amount of deficit spending and borrowing that was being done, the

Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister told us not to worry because we had these fiscal guardrails that were going to make sure we were in good shape.

However, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has now told us, “The Government’s own fiscal guardrails would indicate that its latest round of stimulus spending should be wound down by the end of fiscal year 2021-22.” That is this March. “It appears to me, he said, “that the rationale for the additional spending initially set aside as ‘stimulus’ no longer exists.” That is the independent, non-partisan Parliamentary Budget Officer.

I do not know what is confusing about that to this government or to the Minister of Finance or her officials, but clearly it is.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer was also asked in the finance committee if excessive deficits and borrowing can in fact lead to inflationary pressures. His answer was very simple. It was one word: “Yes.”

Now, I will acknowledge that speaking points across the aisle are all about how inflation is a global issue, that there are global pressures, and I do not doubt that for one minute, but the fact of the matter is that we have a government that refuses to take responsibility for its own contributions to these inflationary pressures. That is real as well; the Parliamentary Budget Officer has told us so, but the Liberals do not like to talk about that. However, the reason we need to talk about that is that when we stand here, we speak for Canadians struggling to make ends meet.

We know what we are talking about when it comes to making ends meet. Trying to put food on the table is becoming more and more expensive for Canadian families. We know that chicken is up 6.2%, as we heard today. We know that beef is up almost 12%, bacon is up almost 20% and bread is up 5%. It is tough to make a sandwich with those numbers. The cost to put fuel in our cars is up 33%, and natural gas is up 19%.

• (1635)

Now, that may not matter in some of the urban ridings that the Liberals hold, but in Parry Sound—Muskoka, where the median income is 20% below the provincial average, people are struggling to make ends meet, and they have to drive to get to their jobs because we do not have the option of the TTC or major transit. They have to drive. It is a rural community. What else do we have to do? In Parry Sound—Muskoka it is cold, and we have to heat our homes. There are an awful lot of people in Parry Sound—Muskoka who heat their homes, not with natural gas because they do not live in the smaller communities, but with propane and oil. On top of the inflationary pressures that we see on home heating fuels of all kinds, there is the carbon tax thrown on top of that as well.

I cannot count the number of phone calls, emails and discussions I have had on the street with working families and seniors on fixed incomes. Seniors on fixed incomes call in tears, not sure how they are going to choose between heating their home and putting food on the table. That is criminal in this country, yet all we hear is talking points and more stimulus borrowing that the Parliamentary Budget Officer has said is not necessary.

Everyone would like to think that Conservatives want to slash spending, and that is not what we are calling for. We are just saying, “Stop borrowing. It is not necessary. Just stop borrowing.” We do not need to borrow any more money. Maybe then we could help bring some of these costs down so that working-class Canadians, everyday folks, could afford to heat their homes, could afford to get to their jobs and could afford to put food on the table.

We hear a lot about housing, and that is a significant issue in Parry Sound—Muskoka as well. I was pleased to hear the member for Vancouver East agreeing with a campaign pledge from the Conservative platform in the last election to actually ban foreign purchases of residential homes for up to two years. This tax is another example. The Liberals want to have a 1% tax on foreign purchases of homes, which would generate more money that they could spend on stimulus that is not necessary. However, it is a 1% tax that would actually have pretty much zero impact on people who are trying to buy and make investments in our real estate market from overseas. The Liberals would just collect more tax and not solve the problem, and that just makes it more difficult for Canadians to ever own a home.

If the Liberals really cared about this issue, they would work collaboratively with the Conservatives and apparently with the NDP to ban the foreign purchase of residential homes for up to two years, but encourage foreign investment in the development of multiresidential rental properties, many of which could be affordable rentals. There is a desperate need for that in Parry Sound—Muskoka and all across this country. I have said many times in this place that affordable housing and access to the housing market is not just an issue in the big cities. It is a major issue all across this country, in smaller communities and rural communities as well. The Liberal government has pretty much forgotten rural Canada when it comes to this issue.

It is a real struggle on this side of the House to take the Liberals seriously when they refuse to listen to even the Parliamentary Budget Officer. If we want to make life more affordable for Canadians, if we want to help Canadians get ahead, we need to help reduce the pressures on their family budgets. All I am asking is why the Liberals will not use their own fiscal guardrails and get the spending under control.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in the speeches I have heard today from Conservatives, the right wing of the Conservative element, that Reform element is flying high.

They have a number of ideas, I must say. On the one hand they are saying they do not want any more tax dollars being spent, and then on the other hand they are saying they still want some of the services. For the tax dollars, we often need to borrow money. For

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example, when we talk about the supports for businesses, the CERB and the increase to the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, these all cost money.

Where would the member suggest that we start cutting back dollars? He is giving us ideas on how to spend money. Could he be specific on where he believes we should be cutting dollars?

● (1640)

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, I suggest that the government start with the almost \$6 million to renovate the main cottage at the Prime Minister's residence. I am sure that in a multi-billion-dollar budget there are lots of places that you can trim the fat, because you guys are quite good at adding it on.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I remind the hon. member that he is to address all questions and comments through the Chair.

The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, inflation does not happen overnight.

It is a slow process that generally occurs over 12 to 18 months when there is a crisis like the one we are in. It can also take 12 to 18 months for deflation to return things to normal, and there are ways to get there.

I would like my colleague to talk about his suggestions for how to bring about deflation, which would let Canadians and Quebecers better live within their budgets.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, I think the first step in all of this is to get the outrageous spending under control. I completely agree with my colleague that it will take time. There is no real quick answer to this. However, it starts with stopping the borrowing, getting the spending under control, spending smarter and investing in the areas where it makes most sense. We need more housing supply, for example. We need to stop funding programs that give people money to try to get into a market that they cannot get into. They are not working. It will take time, but it starts with stopping the spending.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague referenced affordable housing and the lack thereof in his home riding. Certainly it is an issue in Chatham-Kent—Leamington as well. We are not a large metropolitan area. It is a mix of rural and small cities and towns.

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He just touched on this in his answer to my Bloc colleague. Do the basic laws of supply and demand continue to hold true in the housing market? We have huge demand. Would it not be better, rather than adding another small tax that is not going to make a difference, to look at the barriers to supply? Could he comment?

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Madam Speaker, the simple answer to my colleague's question is yes. As the former mayor of a small town, I can tell members right now that despite taxes on property, there is not enough room to fund all the responsibilities that municipalities already have. They take care of two-thirds of the transportation infrastructure in this country, and they do not have the tax revenue to actually fund the maintenance of it. However, we are hearing musings about the government looking at ways to tax things over a million dollars, which is barely an entry home in Toronto, because its members think they can dig a little more and find more tax revenue to spend. It is just not there.

Frankly, the simple answer to the question is that we need more supply and we need to stop the incredible pressures of foreign investors buying up properties so that we can actually make things more accessible for everyday Canadians.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, my youngest son was born in the riding of my colleague for Parry Sound—Muskoka many years ago, and I always have fond memories of living there.

I am very pleased to join the debate on Bill C-8 today. Technically, it is called “An Act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update”, but it is also known as, “What is another \$7 billion between friends or between the government and taxpayers' wallets?”

I am opposed to this bill, not necessarily the item by item and bit by bit of the bill but the out-of-control spending of the Liberals. It is part of the fiscal update the government introduced in December, which adds \$71 billion of new spending, \$71 billion of new debt, and that is even before the Liberals' election promises are counted in.

As my colleague mentioned, the government has also put aside \$100 billion in added stimulus. The PBO said that the government has reached its fiscal guardrails. It does not need to add that extra spending, yet here we have the government barrelling ahead. That \$71 billion in new inflation spending is \$71 billion that eventually will have to be paid back.

I want to put into perspective how much \$71 billion is. The government brings in about \$32 billion to \$35 billion a year in GST. Just to cover the new spending the government added from its fiscal update in December, which covers Bill C-8, GST would have to go up to 16%. For Bill C-8 alone, all the GST in the country collected for three entire months would support just this small bit the government is adding, at 16%. Here in Ontario, HST would have to go to 24% just to cover this new Liberal spending, and in Saskatchewan it would go to 22%. In Alberta, we do not have the sales tax, thanks very much, but it still would be 16% GST just to cover this added spending.

My colleagues with the Conservative Party, the Bloc and the NDP actually agree on something, and that is that the government

should be increasing health care transfers to the provinces. According to the public accounts, there were something like \$42 billion in health care transfers last year. The government could increase health care transfers 58% just with this new spending. It could increase health care transfers to the provinces by 16% just with the money spent in Bill C-8.

Regarding income taxes, we are already among the highest-taxed populations in the developed world. Income taxes would have to go up 41% just to cover the new Liberal spending from December. What could we do with that \$71 billion instead? The government could actually fund 75 WE Charity scandals with that money.

We found that the government is great friends with SNC-Lavalin. The government gave the company \$150 million for field hospitals. We asked the public works officials and the public works minister who had asked for these. They did not know.

Did the provinces ask for these hospitals? No. Did public health ask for these hospitals? No. Who asked? Public Works says that Public Works asked for them.

We asked, “Who in Public Works?” They answered that they just told us and that it was Public Works.

Apparently, if we look at GEDS, which is the government employees directory, we will see someone called “Mr. Public Works”, because that person apparently asked for this \$150-million, sole-sourced, urgent contract for the Liberals' friends at SNC-Lavalin. It was so urgent that the government sole-sourced it without going out to bids from other companies.

By the way, guess how many of those hospitals have actually been delivered or used. It is zero. With this \$71 billion, the government could buy 4,700 added hospitals from its friends at SNC-Lavalin.

According to the public accounts that just came out, which, by the way, are the latest public accounts to have been delivered in about four decades, the interest-bearing debt for Canadians has now reached an eye-watering \$1.4 trillion. I am going to break that down a bit. That is \$1,440,000 million in debt.

• (1645)

Now, to put it into numbers that perhaps the Liberals can understand, and for their billionaire friends, that is \$1,440 billion in debt. I mentioned the Liberals' friends because in the public accounts, \$91 million of taxpayers' money was spent last year to subsidize wealthy owners to buy Tesla vehicles. Taxpayers gave \$91 million to Tesla so that wealthy Canadians could buy cars made outside of Canada. The wealthiest man in the world, Elon Musk, got \$91 million in subsidies from the government. He owns about 17%, so maybe he gets about \$16 million directly. He is a great entrepreneur. I love his tweets. He is hilarious, but he does not need subsidies from the government or from the taxpayers.

I want to put this in perspective so that people can understand the money. The City of Edmonton got \$17 million from the government for the rapid housing initiative. In the paper today, there was talk about it. Of the \$17 million from the federal government, \$11 million will be for buying the old Forum Hotel by the Rexall Centre, where the Oilers used to play. It is \$11 million from the government for housing for the homeless, and \$91 million to Elon Musk so that wealthy people can afford a Tesla.

In Canada, if one tried to buy a Tesla on a five-year loan at maybe 4.9% or 5.9%, it would cost well over \$1,000 a month. I am not sure how many Canadians trying valiantly to work into the middle class could afford \$1,000 a month, or who deserves \$5,000 from taxpayers so they can stuff Elon Musk's pockets.

Poverty in Edmonton under the Liberal government has gone up, according to the Library of Canada, by 58%, from the most recent StatsCan numbers. For those without housing, like the homeless in Edmonton, the numbers have gone up two-thirds. Nevertheless, former Liberal Amarjeet Sohi, who is the new mayor of Edmonton, a wonderful guy whom I quite enjoy, is cheering on the Liberals because he got \$11 million for housing for the homeless. It was \$91 million for Elon Musk and \$11 million from the Liberal government for the City of Edmonton. It is a disgrace. The money should not be going to corporate welfare, but to people who need it.

Now, for the debt mentioned, the \$1.4 trillion, the government says do not worry, as we have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. However, guess what? The government is using what is called net debt. There is about half a trillion dollars in the CPP and QPP set aside for future payouts. This is not the future 30 years down the road, but payouts tomorrow for anyone who is 65. The government is counting that money toward the federal debt when it is claiming that it has the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. This is money for seniors, not money for the government to use, to cash in and to pay on the debt. If we take it away, we are fourth out of seven. Consider the top 29 developed countries in the OECD. If we take out the \$500 billion that belongs to seniors, because it is not the government's money, nor the Liberals' money, and show the real debt, we are the 25th worst out of 29 countries in the developed world for debt-to-GDP ratio.

The government should stop misleading Canadians. The government should keep its hands off the money set aside for seniors and stop pretending that it will be able to access that money to pay for its out-of-control spending.

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I want to wrap up by talking about the need for focused spending. We have the public accounts and we have been going through the money. There is a disgraceful amount of waste by the government. I mentioned the \$91 million for Elon Musk. There is another \$50 million to General Motors, Toyota and Nissan for electric vehicle rebates. There is also \$50,000 that the government prioritized to give to a corporation to develop a new taste for an India pale ale.

• (1650)

The government asked where we would cut. I would cut corporate bailouts. I would also end the corporate welfare and focus money on Canadians where it is needed.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I suspect that if I were to go over the Public Accounts from the Stephen Harper era, I would find more than just one minister who spent \$60 or \$40 for a glass of orange juice. There are ample examples of Conservative waste during the Stephen Harper era. However, my question is in regard to Bill C-8.

Bill C-8 would have over \$1 billion being spent for rapid tests. Does the Conservative Party not support rapid tests? For months and months, they were like jumping beans in this place, jumping around saying that they want rapid tests. However, we have rapid tests in the bill. It is an investment in rapid tests. Canadians want rapid tests. It is also about putting cleaner air in our schools. There are hundreds of millions being spent to support and to continue to support people in Canada.

Whether it is rapid tests or cleaner air, why would the Conservative Party oppose it?

• (1655)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my associate from Winnipeg North. In jest, he is not my friend but more of an associate.

We in the Conservative Party have been asking for these rapid tests for close to two years, yet now the government is finally saying, "Oh, we'll get around to it, but you better give us the money." It is not an issue of just spend, spend, spend or we are going to take the rapid tests away. We want the rapid tests.

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What I would suggest to this gentleman is that perhaps, instead of using the \$20 billion to \$30 billion in corporate welfare to pay off Air Canada, Lululemon, Bell, Telus, Rogers and their wealthy insiders with taxpayers' money, they should have spent that money on rapid tests two years ago.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I own an electric vehicle and I find these issues to be rather interesting. Clearly, I am not interested in funding Elon Musk. I am interested in owning an electric vehicle. The United States has developed a strategy to ensure that Americans can buy vehicles designed in the United States. That has repercussions for us.

How can we ensure that every Canadian and every Quebecker can have access to an electric vehicle? Should we not increase tax credits for the purchase of electric vehicles? Could this be good for Canada's economy? I wonder about that. I think that would be part of the solution and that it should have been included in the economic update.

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, we have a philosophical difference. I do not believe that we should use taxpayers' money to subsidize wealthy people. As members of Parliament, I think we are in the top 4% or 5% of income level in Canada, and we should not be subsidizing members of Parliament to buy electric cars, period.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his speech. On the topic of cars, I have given him a ride in my car. I do not know if he will ever come again after that, and it was definitely not electric.

I want to go a little more into this whole idea of subsidizing a car, which drives up inflation. I remember back when I was a kid, the government had a program for well drilling and immediately the price of wells doubled. I wonder if the hon. member can comment on that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the question and for the rides from the airport. Yes, the more we subsidize it, the more it is just driving up the price. Demand will always expand to take up every free thing offered by the government.

Further to the gentleman from the Bloc's question, study after study shows that the actual return on investment and the reduction of GHG with electric cars is one of the very worst. If the government is going to subsidize something, let us subsidize upgrades to housing, windows, insulation and those items, but not subsidize the wealthy.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will just take this moment to remind members that they do need to have the proper headset in order to participate. It is not that we do not want them to participate. I do not think that there is a reason for MPs not to have them. I have asked IT to reach out to the previous member as well. I would ask members to reach out to IT if they do not have headsets for wherever they are. I know that they can be purchased through the budgets as well.

That is just a reminder so that we can keep the flow going into the House of Commons, and everybody is able to have the interpretation that they rightly deserve.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

I know we are having some technical issues, so I will go to the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

● (1700)

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to be confused with the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot, who is a great member from that part of the country. I am located a bit north of his riding. Nonetheless, I am happy to share the stage with him. He is a good friend of mine.

Today I am speaking about the fiscal update, Bill C-8. I think the title of this story is "inflation". We have seen inflation run wild right across the country. I am an auto mechanic and come from the automotive world. I spent most of my life before this place working at a Chrysler dealership in northern Alberta and Abbotsford, B.C., so that is the world I know more significantly. I do not know about others, but I have been driving around Canada noticing that the parking lots of car dealerships are empty. Anyone who has a three-year-old vehicle can trade it in for the same amount of money it was bought for three years ago.

I talked to a fellow during the election campaign who had a 2019 Ford one-ton pickup. He uses it to pull his holiday trailer. The dealership called him to say that since he only uses his truck to pull his holiday trailer, would he consider trading in his 2019 truck in August for a 2022 pickup truck in April of 2022. The man was told the dealership would guarantee him a new truck in April of 2022 if it could have his truck that day with no increase in his payments or the money he owes. It would be a clean swap. He got a pickup that was three years newer. That is a picture inflation. That is a picture of supply chain shortages and life getting more expensive. The fact that pickup trucks are now more expensive today than they were three years ago shows that inflation is happening.

We see it all around us. Now we have major supply chain shortages that are causing some of this inflation, whether it is microchips not making it across the ocean from China to manufacturers or a problem with trucking, but it also has to do with the amount of cash that is being put into the economy in Canada. We are also noticing higher prices in grocery stores of things that we have always relied on. To some degree it is the success of capitalism; when people go to the store, the bread lines up for them. The things we have come to appreciate and take for granted in many cases are not necessarily there today. Because of shortages, we are seeing the prices go up.

Farmers are saying they are getting record prices for their products, but when they buy their inputs, their inputs have increased threefold. They are getting double for their products, but their inputs are threefold higher, so their margins are all in flux. They are not able to predict what they are going to be doing and, in many cases, it does not matter how much money they have, they just cannot get the product. It does not matter whether the product was priced at zero dollars or \$100. If they cannot get it, they cannot get it. That is an increasing challenge in this new world.

The point of all of this is that we are driving inflation through flooding the country with cheap cash. Statistics Canada says inflation is currently running at nearly 5%. When people can get money at 2% or 3%, they are basically getting paid to take on debt and we are seeing massive amounts of household debt. People are using the equity in their homes to run their lives, and it is spurring on inflation across the country. All of these things contribute to inflation. Folks continually tell me their groceries have gone up twice the price from a year ago.

• (1705)

There are increased trucking costs associated with this. I spoke to a sawmill owner in Slave Lake, Alberta. Two years ago, it typically cost him \$2,000 to get a B-train of lumber down to the coast; today it is costing him anywhere from \$5,500 to \$6,000. That is a three-fold increase in the price of the trucking. The fuel cost is up 50%. A year ago it was hovering around a dollar; now it is running at about \$1.50. All of these things are making our lives more expensive.

The other thing I heard from constituents around New Year's was that the December natural gas bill for most people in my riding was the highest bill they have ever had, and a big part of that is due to the carbon tax. Folks were complaining to me that the carbon tax portion of their bill was larger than the actual natural gas costs of the bill. There are the transmission fees and things like that on there, but the actual natural gas they pay for would have been about a third of the bill and then the carbon tax would be about a third of the bill.

That was extremely frustrating to many Canadians, given that they said they had already done everything to reduce their bill. They had upgraded their windows and they had put in more insulation into the ceiling and they had reduced the temperature in their house, all to try to reduce their bill, and yet they had the largest bill in their entire life in December 2021. Again, we are seeing inflation being driven by things like the carbon tax and government policy in this country. They were calling on me to alleviate the carbon tax on home heating or eliminate the carbon tax in its entirety.

The other thing I wanted to talk about is about what it is going to take to get the economy up and running again.

We are seeing the cost of labour going up significantly. There are plentiful jobs. During the election I stopped in at a restaurant, and it was not open. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and they were not open, so a week later when I drove through, I stopped in again, earlier in the day. I had a chat with a waitress and I said I was there last week and they were not open. She said, "Oh, no; we close at four o'clock. We have not been able to get enough staff to stay open

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all day." That is something I hear from people all across northern Alberta—that they cannot find enough people to fill the jobs.

Again, that is causing them to offer more pay to attract people to come, and that is also another thing that is driving inflation. Basically, if someone is getting paid more to do the same job but their life costs more on the other side, they have not gained anything. All that happens is that the dollar numbers are higher. That, essentially, is what inflation is. It is the devaluing of our money so that it takes more money to do the same thing, and that is happening in both directions. That is happening in the wages and also in the costs of everything.

We are not necessarily seeing massive increases in production. We are seeing bigger numbers all around, larger numbers, but we are not necessarily seeing the tonnes of coal go up significantly or the barrels of oil go up significantly. All we are seeing is the dollar numbers associated with that going up, and that is, in a nutshell, what inflation is. The government has the levers to make sure that our dollar is worth something in the world, that our lives are affordable and that when we work for our money, we are able to pay for the things we need in order to live our lives. This particular suite of policies the government is proposing would do nothing to alleviate inflation, and for that reason I will not be supporting this bill.

• (1710)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member described the problem with excellence, but his allocation of fault may be a little faulty. I was wondering how the hon. member thinks that the Government of Canada has much to do with the supply of microchips to make cars go. I have made the same observation that he has. Car lots are empty.

Members should know that the hon. member is quite an outstanding mechanic, and had won several awards for his work prior to being an MP. However, I am not sure that his speech is actually such an outstanding description of the issues.

Could the member tell me what the Government of Canada has to do, for instance, with the issue of supplies, or input costs, or grain or other necessities? These are just issues that are worldwide, and we are the unhappy recipients of that reality.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, the basic issue that we are dealing with is that the government has pumped a huge amount of cash into the system, and that has inflated the prices that people are receiving for their goods. All that has happened, though, is that everybody has taken advantage of the increased prices that they are getting for their products. Then the folks on the bottom end are saying their costs are going up as well, so they have to increase their prices.

Basically, if my grain is sold for X dollars, and my fertilizer company sees that the farmer who was getting \$10 a bushel last year is now getting \$20 a bushel, it will probably increase the price of its product and still get paid for it, because it thinks that farmers are now flush with cash. That has a domino effect down the economy.

A host of government policies are driving the costs up in both directions.

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[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Peace River—Westlock.

He raised the issue of the supply chain and cars, and I would like to come back to something the member who spoke before him said. That member said that it is important to invest in better windows but that the government should not necessarily be investing in electric cars by providing credits to further encourage the electrification of transportation, for example.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about this issue because I think that, if we want to get away from oil and move toward a much greener economy, electric vehicles are the way to go.

What does he think about providing credits for electric cars and making an investment in that industry?

[English]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I guess I am not a big fan of picking winners and losers. I am a big fan of things that work well and things that do what they are intended to. For that reason, I am excited about the electrification of, for example, the new Ram 1500, which is like a mild hybrid. It gives a 13% increase in fuel economy without sacrificing any of the other capabilities of that pickup truck. I am amazed and impressed by it.

I would just push back a little bit to say that the environmental impact of electrification is not zero. There is an environmental impact of electrification. If someone is getting their power from a hydro dam somewhere, the CO₂ emissions might be reduced, but if they are getting their power from a coal-fired power plant, electrification does not help us at all. That does not say anything about mining for the cobalt and the things that go into these batteries, and the copper for all the wiring that we need for these kinds of things.

• (1715)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, in terms of inflation, I do not think we will see more inflation or a better example than that of prescription drugs, which have gone up every year for years and years. In fact, it is the single fastest-growing product in insurance services. We know that with pharmacare, with bulk buying, with streamlined administration and with cost-related non-adherence, we can save over \$4 billion a year and produce drugs for every Canadian at a reduced cost.

I am just wondering if my hon. colleague can explain why the Conservative Party is opposed to universal pharmacare, when it will help reduce the cost of drugs.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I am happy to answer this question and I thank the member for asking it.

There is no other industry that is more tied to government spending than the pharmaceutical industry. It is 100% driven by the government pouring money into it. The fact is that they put huge, bold letters on the bottles of pharmaceuticals to show how much these items cost so that the consumer knows what the cost is. That is how they drive down the costs of these things.

Government spending on specific things traditionally raises the price of them and drives inflation, and there is no better example than in the pharmaceutical industry.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to give my maiden speech in this 44th Parliament. It is an honour to continue to represent the wonderful riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, and I want to thank my constituents for placing their faith in me and re-electing me once again. A note of appreciation goes to the many volunteers and donors who gave great support.

Despite the pandemic and disruptions outside, I am here in the House today to speak about Bill C-8, an act to implement certain provisions of the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament on December 14, 2021.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There is a problem with the interpretation and it is creating a lot of confusion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We are going to check a few things.

[English]

We are going to try again.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Jean Yip: Madam Speaker, through Bill C-8, we are continuing to provide much-needed support to Canadian workers and businesses through the implementation of tax measures, including tax credits. Targeted tax measures can help make life more affordable. Through Bill C-8, we hope to create a number of tax credits that would benefit Canadians, such as a ventilation tax credit to improve air quality for small business owners and an expansion of tax deductions for travel expenses incurred by residents of northern Canada, and tax credits for teachers and early childhood educators who spend their income on school supplies, and for farmers by returning fuel charges and involuntary backstop jurisdictions.

Furthermore, in Scarborough—Agincourt, we have many schools that are older and could benefit from a top-up from the safe return to class fund, which the bill seeks to provide. It has taken a pandemic to highlight the fact that many of our schools rely on aging infrastructure and that there is a need to bring it up to current ventilation standards for safe indoor air. Although education is a provincial matter, this Liberal government has stepped in to ensure a safe learning environment is possible. The original funds provided \$2 billion to provinces and territories, and this top-up of \$100 million will help increase outdoor air intake and/or increase air cleaning in order to help reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

Government Orders

I could see a lot of schools benefiting from the repair or replacement of heating, ventilation and air conditioning units and increasing maintenance of the existing systems. In my riding's local school board, this fund has not only been used to address HVAC re-commissioning deficiencies, but it also went toward purchasing over 10,000 additional HEPA filter units across 314 schools, many of the high schools in the riding who do not have full air conditioning or have poor circulation of air.

With older schools, installation of operable windows would be helpful. Some of the interior classrooms that do not have windows, such as a computer lab, would benefit from portable air filtration units. By providing this top-up, schools across Canada would be able to make those necessary renovations and repairs while also funding critical programs that would support student mental health and nutrition.

While we are on the subject of schools, the teacher and early childhood educator school supply tax credit would also greatly benefit students in Scarborough—Agincourt and beyond. It currently stands at 15%, but with the passing of this bill, it would be increased to a 25% refundable tax credit. What is new is that it will no longer require that the school supplies be used in a school or a regulated child care facility. This will enable students to bring home the supplies to do homework or even to use those supplies on field trips.

Using technology can further engage students and help those who are in special education classes. Some of these eligible goods, such as external data storage devices that increase a system data storage capacity or wireless pointer devices and printers, are practical, but other goods, such as electronic educational toys, puzzles, video streaming devices and multimedia projectors can take learning up to the next step, open up new worlds and be fun. This can make learning a much more interactive and engaging experience for students.

Housing is another area of focus our government is targeting to make life more affordable. Part 2 of Bill C-8 introduces the underused housing tax act, which will support the work of our national housing strategy, reduce homelessness and create affordable housing. We have all heard housing is becoming increasingly out of reach for many people, and this is one way to discourage vacant or underused homes while generating revenue. The underused housing tax act would only apply to foreign owners of residential property who are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents to pay their fair share of Canadian tax by filing an annual return. Residential properties are exempt if they are rented out for at least 180 days, or about six months in a year, so there would be no short rentals like Airbnb.

While this alone would not solve our housing issues, this would help on the peripheral in that it would reduce foreign ownership and penalize those who use Canada as a place to passively store their wealth in housing. Taxes on capital gains do not apply to principal residences. Part 3 of the bill touches upon the Canada emergency business account loan, which has provided over \$49 billion in interest-free partially forgivable loans to nearly 900,000 small businesses affected by the pandemic.

• (1720)

Many of the small businesses in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt have been finding the roughly four lockdowns in Ontario difficult and have asked for an extension on their Canada emergency business account loans. This loan has helped a variety of businesses, from restaurants to manufacturing companies to fashion wholesalers. Our government listened. The time period would be extended from December 31, 2022, to December 31, 2023. If a business repays its loan by December 31, 2023, up to a third of the value of its loan, up to \$20,000, would be forgiven. Loans not repaid by this date would convert to a two-year term loan starting January 1, 2024, with 5% interest per annum.

Part 3 of this bill would set a limitation period of six years for debts due under the CEBA program to ensure that CEBA loan holders are provided consistent treatment, no matter where they live. The proposed limitation period is also consistent with other COVID support programs, such as those covered by the Canada Recovery Benefits Act.

This past January, with the surge of the omicron variant, came a corresponding need to obtain rapid tests. The government had already purchased and shipped over 180 million rapid tests and has signed agreements to secure over 460 million tests in total.

Part 6 of this bill would allocate an additional \$1.72 billion to the Minister of Health for the procurement and distribution of rapid antigen tests to provinces and territories. Many seniors have called my Scarborough—Agincourt constituency office worried about leaving their homes to get a rapid test, but still wanting one. This is why this bill is so important. It would give people the peace of mind that they can access rapid tests during difficult times where then could be a possibility of testing positive. Our recently introduced Bill C-10 authorizes the Minister of Health to make payments of up to \$2.5 billion out of the consolidated revenue fund to purchase COVID-19 tests. I know many seniors will be less anxious, knowing they have something at home that can easily be administered and distributed by local organizations they can trust.

Bill C-8 has many practical parts, whether it is helping small businesses and schools or bringing families peace of mind. I hope we can all agree and pass this bill to a second reading.

Government Orders

• (1725)

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague spoke a lot about investments in housing. Although there have been some investments, I would have to say that more needs to be done. Under consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments, we have had decades of underfunding in affordable housing with rents geared to income. In my riding of Winnipeg Centre, we have a housing crisis that is literally costing lives.

I wonder if my colleague agrees with me that more needs to be done to deal first of all with this problem. Does she agree that her government continues not to do enough?

Ms. Jean Yip: Madam Speaker, I will agree with you that all of us need to do more for housing and housing affordability for everybody. However, our government, through the national housing strategy, which is a 10-year program, will be investing \$72 billion. I feel that is something that Canadians can rely on and will understand that our government is there to support them, whether they are first-time homebuyers looking to go through the new housing accelerator fund, working with the municipalities, hoping to see some fairness in a real estate action plan that is going to forbid blind bidding or looking at home inspections and making sure there is transparency in the history of recent house sale prices.

I believe that the Prime Minister's recent announcement of investing in 10,000 new homes for Canadians is on the right track.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that she is to address all questions and comments through the Chair.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, over the past few months, we have noticed that the housing construction programs have created certain problems, to say the least. For example, subsidies were given to private companies that ended up charging \$2,200 a month for housing, which is not affordable. That is worse than a mortgage plus taxes, electricity and heating.

What concrete action will be taken to ensure that these problems, which seem to benefit some companies and some segments of society more than others, never crop up again?

[English]

Ms. Jean Yip: Madam Speaker, as part of our national housing strategy, we have a rental construction financing initiative. We are providing low-cost loans to encourage the construction of sustainable rental apartment projects across Canada. We will also be providing some low-cost funding to all eligible borrowers in the most risky phases of project development of rental apartments.

• (1730)

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to speak about the CEBA loans. Can the hon. member explain why CEBA loans were important for the small businesses, which are the backbone of our economy, especially in Scarborough, which is home to many small businesses? How have those

CEBA loans made a difference for our small businesses in terms of keeping their lights on during the darkest days?

Ms. Jean Yip: Madam Speaker, the CEBA loans have been so instrumental in saving many small businesses in Scarborough from completely closing down. They have really helped very small businesses, such as restaurants, carry on to be able to pay their rent and other expenses, like COVID expenses.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise this evening to speak to the economic update. I have a lot to say, but I will have to narrow it down.

Let me start with health transfers. This is important to me as a member for the Bloc Québécois, and it is important to Quebec as a whole, to my riding, Manicouagan, and to Canada as a whole.

Obviously, these transfers are not included here, and we are disappointed about that. We have known for a long time that the transfers are crucial, but the government may not have realized that yet.

Earlier, I heard several colleagues from different political parties say that this is the second year of COVID-19 and there may be a third, though I hope not, but that there is hardly anything about COVID-19 in the economic update.

My colleague from La Prairie brought it up again this afternoon. Some 85% of Canadians and 86% of Quebecers are calling for these health transfers. For many years now, the government has limited, or, I should say, gutted, health transfers. It still refuses to index these transfers, which means that the 22% of expenses that the government currently covers is not enough. We want the government to provide 35% and index the transfers at 6%, but there is absolutely nothing in the economic update to that effect.

Everyone knows that COVID-19 kills. That is one of the things that it does. It kills because the health care system cannot provide the services required and this is because the health care systems in Quebec and the other Canadian provinces have been damaged. When the money is not there, even though it is our money and we have responsibilities, it is hard, virtually impossible, to meet everyone's needs.

The federal government loves to boast and act the saviour when it claims that 80%, or \$8 of every \$10, as they like to say, of COVID-19 spending came from the federal government. It is far from being a saviour, though, since we will never forget that this is taxpayer money and taxpayers want health transfers. I am using the word "taxpayer", but I want to remind members that all provincial premiers and Quebec's premier, Mr. Legault, are calling for this as well.

I want to point this out because the government has presented an economic update that does not reflect reality and does not take these demands into account. The government likes to boast, though. It is happy, it struts around, acting proud of what it has achieved. I could also talk about two other measures that have not seen much progress. Not only is the economic update weak, but it might also be counterproductive in some cases.

To conclude, I would like to speak about jurisdictions. I am again asking the government to do its job. It needs to look after its own affairs and provide the provinces and Quebec with the money to look after theirs.

I spoke about responsibilities earlier. There is a huge fiscal imbalance, and Ottawa has so much money that it does not know what to spend it on. It should spend it on health, by sending the transfers and letting the provinces and Quebec manage that money for their own people, because they want to get out of this pandemic. It is not by crippling health care systems that the government will help Quebec and the provinces get through the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the Prime Minister stated, there are vaccines, yes, but there is all the rest too, including the health care system. The system needs substantial support. There was and still is a shortfall, and it only continues to grow because transfers are frozen.

I would also like to talk about the SMEs in my riding of Manicouagan, which is a vast, remote area covering 350,000 square kilometres of forests, fisheries and mines. There are obviously many natural resources and people all over the riding. SMEs make up a significant segment of our economy. In Quebec, approximately one-third of businesses are SMEs, but I note that the government has not really listened to them.

• (1735)

Of course there is the Canada emergency business account, but the government needs to listen to what small and medium-sized businesses want. The situation is evolving as we enter the third year of the pandemic. For example, SMEs had a hard time accessing the wage subsidy. They needed accountants and tax experts, but many of them could not afford those professionals, so they could not ask for help. All the business support programs in the world are useless if entrepreneurs cannot access them because of red tape and impossible criteria. The wage subsidy is great for people who already have enough money to access it, but that does not include small businesses. Members of the chamber of commerce in my riding, Manicouagan, would like to apply a third time. They would not necessarily need \$60,000, but even \$20,000 would help them stay afloat and survive. It would not be too hard to set up that mechanism.

It would have been easy to listen to these businesses and implement the measures they were asking for. The Bloc Québécois has proposed many other ideas for supporting small businesses, particularly with regard to loan forgiveness. The Bloc proposed that the percentage be increased in order to support these businesses based on their revenues at a time of great uncertainty. I am thinking of outfitters in my riding and their revenues. No one was visiting the outfitters during the first year of the pandemic, and the second year was extremely difficult for them because certain health measures prevented people from coming to the region.

Government Orders

I am pleased that the repayment deadline is postponed until 2023, because these businesses would not have been able to repay their loans quickly. The year 2023 may not be the right year either. I am therefore warning the government right now that it may have to extend that deadline as well, in order to give these businesses time to rebuild their financial health and get enough revenue coming in to be able to repay the loan and receive forgiveness. The Bloc is in favour of loans. However, we really want the percentage to increase.

We are also thinking about e-commerce. Of course this is very important where I come from. People in certain parts of my riding do a lot of their grocery shopping using the postal service. As I have often said in the House, this is very important to me. People have the right to live in remote areas and to occupy the land, and they need to be supported. We already have a great deal of inequity in our postal services compared to the rest of Canada. Northern regions, very remote regions, islands and places with no roads at all really need this service. We want to be able to increase this kind of trade. It would be good for small businesses to be able to import and export. It would also stimulate our economy. The Bloc proposed this, and it is feasible.

I would like to talk about several other measures, but I will end with some criticism. As I said earlier, we sometimes need to think about the negative effects of certain measures.

Let us talk about the travel tax credit. As I mentioned, I represent a large riding, and I have to travel a few thousand kilometres to get to the House. For someone taking a flight out of the North Shore, the tax credit would cover about one trip a year, and perhaps only one way. The \$1,200 will not make it into anyone's pocket right away. For individuals struggling to pay for airfare, waiting until the end of the year to receive the tax credit will not help them. The tax credit will go to people who already have money, people who can afford to put that amount on their credit cards and pay the interest afterwards, which is terrible. This measure will be ineffective.

Then there is the issue of commuter workers. People come work in my riding and then leave again. They do not necessarily want to live there because it is hard. They do not spend any money and do not contribute to the economy of the North Shore, but they are the ones who will likely benefit from this tax credit. I am glad they can work. I want everyone to be able to earn a living. At the same time, we have to think about not adopting measures that will ultimately harm the regions. This is incredibly important to me. We have to look at all the policies and these measures in relation to remote regions such as the North Shore.

Government Orders

• (1740)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member referred, if not directly then indirectly, to the importance of small businesses and how it is important that the government provide financial support. We have done that in many ways, whether through loans, wage subsidies or rent supports. It is important to recognize that the Bloc party supported Bill C-2, which supported small businesses.

Now we have Bill C-8 before the House. It provides different types of support, at least in part, through rapid tests for small businesses, which many of them will require, but also for ventilation in schools.

I would like to get a sense of the Bloc party's position with respect to Bill C-8. Does the member support this legislation?

• (1745)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, in fact, I will support it a bit because I cannot support it more than that, if that makes sense. In other words, there is room for improvement. Of course, we supported Bill C-2. We want help to be provided, but that help has to be flexible and based on needs. We have had to pass some bills hastily, even urgently, because businesses were closing. Many filed for protection under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. That was a very difficult time.

In the meantime, this is still going. We have been studying it for two years. What we are saying now is that this could have been part of it. One does not preclude the other. We could have thought of another smaller emergency account for businesses, something the Bloc proposed last spring. This already existed and we could always enhance it. Of course, there is help, but we also have to listen to the little guy.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell my colleague from Manicouagan that I support her vision for land occupancy. The House should more clearly define its position on this issue and act accordingly. Having people settle all over Quebec and Canada is fundamental.

She also mentioned that she had many ideas about how to help SMEs. I would love for her to present them.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, earlier we spoke about the Canada emergency business account. With regard to help for businesses, I did mention the issue of accountants and tax experts, which could be a solution and would keep them working as well. Maybe we should help businesses with that.

There is also the whole issue of paperwork, which can always be reduced. We are in an emergency, and we need to focus on the time factor, so that people can get money quickly.

I am almost tempted to talk about employment insurance and what is happening with fraud. People need EI benefits right now. There will be time to look into the fraud cases later. I would say that the same thing applies here: Let us give people the money and have them fill out the paperwork afterwards, to give them more

time. When it is a matter of saving the ship from going down, it is impossible to do everything at once.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague wanted to speak about employment insurance, so I must give her the opportunity to go ahead.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, of course I will talk about employment insurance, after all, it is mentioned in the economic update. In fact I hope to see a reform. I thank my colleague because I love talking about this issue.

Back home, employment insurance is not just assistance, it is practically a development tool. That is a serious thing to say, but it is what it is. Some people in my riding have not had access to EI since November.

I am thinking about one fishing industry in the Lower North Shore, about some tiny villages of just 100 or 150 people, about the Newfoundlanders who came to fish. What happened? Every single employee of the plant was denied EI because of alleged fraud. It is funny. In my region, 30 or 40 people is an entire town. The entire plant apparently committed fraud and the workers got nothing.

We are asking that these people get their money now, because they need to eat and put a roof over their heads. The government can then conduct its investigation, and if some individuals committed fraud then they can pay the money back. The way things are done now is causing people to leave the regions, as is happening in my colleague's region, and that is not what we want in terms of land use, as we have mentioned.

This would be easy to do. The government did it with CERB, so it can do it with EI.

• (1750)

[English]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the pandemic persists, more individuals are experiencing precarious housing situations, and first-time homelessness is rapidly on the rise.

Housing is a human right that has been neglected by successive Liberal and Conservative governments, and although the current government has made investments in housing, including with the rapid housing initiative, it is a drop in the bucket. Years of underfunding have resulted in a massive shortage of housing with rents geared to income, and the normalization of violating people's right to housing. This is resulting sometimes in individuals dying on the street. This is becoming a new normal. It is a callous turning of a blind eye to human suffering, sometimes resulting in death.

Poverty is a violent human rights violation, and failing to ensure that everyone has a roof over their head is, in fact, a political choice. I share this because the current government has made it a practice to bail out and fund its corporate buddies. It gave \$50 million to Mastercard, while millions were struggling to pay their credit card bills at the end of the month; \$12 million to Loblaw's to install new fridges, a company that eliminated the \$2 per hour pandemic pay bonus for its workers, despite earning windfall profits; \$14 billion in tax giveaways in its 2018 economic update alone, including writeoffs for private debts and limousines; and \$18 billion in fossil fuel subsidies, while we are living through a global climate crisis.

CEOs and their C-suite executives rewarded themselves with millions in dividends when their companies received hundreds of millions from the Canada emergency wage subsidy that was meant to protect jobs, and Air Canada received hundreds of millions from the CEWS, and a bailout of \$5.9 billion, but paid out millions of dollars in executive bonuses while cutting thousands of jobs.

However, I have to beg for crumbs for my riding. It is the third-poorest riding in the country, where lives are continuously and consistently lost to poverty. People are freezing to death in the cold because they have no place to sleep. Bus shelters are filled with people seeking refuge from the cold. There are fires in rooming houses and apartments because of overcrowded conditions, and families are cramped in small living quarters because the cost of renting a place to live is out of reach. In fact, the rate of unsuitable housing, meaning not enough bedrooms according to family size, is 7% in Winnipeg. This is approximately 21,500 households, and this crisis continues to grow.

In the last four years, only 11 rent-geared-to-income housing units have been filled in Manitoba, and while new funding has been announced to build some new units with rents geared to income, it still fails to meet the housing needs in Winnipeg Centre as a result of decades of underfunding. In fact, the End Homelessness Winnipeg 2021 Interim Street Census Community Report counted 1,127 people experiencing homelessness in a 24-hour period. It was -45°C in Winnipeg last week.

This is unacceptable. This is a political choice, and the choice not to invest adequately is costing precious lives. At the same time, tenants in my riding are feeling the squeeze as a result of this underinvestment and neglect.

• (1755)

In fact, approximately 50% of Winnipeg renters are in housing that falls short of at least one standard of affordability, adequacy and suitability. In addition, 40% of Winnipeg renters are living in unaffordable housing, meaning they are spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs.

I have visited homes in my riding with holes in the walls into the main hallways, and it is not unusual for our constituency office to receive calls about heat not working, broken windows or pest infestations. In Winnipeg, the rate of inadequate housing, meaning housing that is in major need of repairs, is 7.6%, with 23,440 households being impacted. This is abhorrent, and this is completely unacceptable.

Government Orders

No one in a country as rich as Canada should have to live like this, and again I will share that this is a political choice. It does not have to be this way. It is a choice. We could make, for example, the political choice to stop investing in corporate bailouts and handouts and ask the wealthy to pay their fair share in taxes. That would be a choice.

Housing is a human right, and this right is violated daily in this country. In Winnipeg, 35,760 households are in core housing need, and according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Winnipeg has the highest number of indigenous households in core housing need. The government has left indigenous people homeless on their own lands, which they have graciously shared with others. This is a tragic outcome of colonization that has resulted from the often violent dispossession of land, and the vacancy rates tell an important story.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation reported in its most recent rental market report that vacancy rates in Winnipeg are highest for the most expensive rental housing units and lowest for the most affordable ones. While the vacancy rate is 13.8% for units with a monthly rent of \$2,000 or more, it plummets to 4% for units with rents of \$1,000 to \$1,400 and to just 2.9% for units with monthly rents of \$625 or less. What that tells us is that there is a critical shortage of genuinely affordable housing with rents geared to income.

Most of the new housing being built is out of reach for the majority of people in the riding of Winnipeg Centre. Speaking of things that are out of reach, skyrocketing housing prices are putting the dream of home ownership even further out of reach for many of my constituents. In fact, under the current government, the benchmark price for a home in Canada has jumped \$300,000, while in Winnipeg prices for single homes in the city increased by 14.7% at the end of 2021 and 16.1% for condos.

This is a crisis, and we need to address this.

I know that I have painted a very bleak picture here, because the reality is, right now for so many across the country, things are becoming bleaker and bleaker, especially in regard to upholding the right to housing. However, as I indicated, we have a choice, and I am urging the government to make a different choice and ensure that all individuals' right to housing is respected and upheld.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member and I share something in common that is not a good thing, and she made reference to it in her speech, and that is the bus shelters. Whether it is on Portage Avenue in her riding or on Selkirk Avenue in my riding, we see bus shelters being used as homes. One cannot help but be fearful and sympathetic when they see those visuals, especially when the weather is this cold.

I can appreciate the member is in opposition and is critiquing the government, but would she not agree that the best way to deal with that kind of homelessness is to have different levels of government all at the table, and even factor in some of those wonderful non-profit organizations that are doing a lot of the ground work? It is time that we really all came together to deal with this very serious problem.

• (1800)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Speaker, I totally agree with working with all levels of government, and as a practice, I even work across party lines to fight for my riding of Winnipeg Centre and to fight for human rights. However, here is the thing. This behaviour of incremental justice by the Liberal government has resulted in people literally freezing to death on the streets of Winnipeg Centre in bus shelters. They do not have three years to wait for the government to cough up the funds they need.

As I said, it is a political choice. I am asking the government to divest in its corporate bailouts, invest in saving lives and ensure that Winnipeg Centre gets the resources it needs to build the housing it needs.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg Centre, who is a fellow member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. I know these issues are very important to us both.

We agree on two things. First, the rich must pay their fair share. The Liberals had announced measures to crack down on tax havens, so it is deeply disappointing to see next to nothing about that in Bill C-8, because that would be one way to make the wealthy pay. The second thing we agree on is that the Liberal government lacks vision for social housing. Either there is not enough funding or the money is not being put to good use.

What we may disagree on is the need for Ottawa to transfer the money as soon as possible. This falls under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. Quebec, the provinces, the territories and municipalities are in the best position to tackle 30 years of underfunded social housing. They know the needs on the ground. They know which women are fleeing intimate partner violence and need shelter. They know how many units are needed. They know which senior women are struggling right now and need social and community housing.

I would like my colleague to comment on the importance of giving the provinces, Quebec and the territories the power to invest in social and community housing where they see the real need.

[English]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Speaker, it is so nice to be on the status of women committee with my hon. colleague from Shefford. It has been a pleasure to get to know her.

I certainly agree that the provinces play a part. However, the federal government has a responsibility to provide the financial resources to places in need, whether it be in Quebec or Manitoba. That has not happened. In Winnipeg Centre, we had an investment in housing, and although it is greatly appreciated, it is not even a drop in the bucket.

We need more resources. We need greater investments in affordable, accessible housing, with rent geared to income. We cannot wait; lives are on the line.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Winnipeg Centre and I share a lot in common, particularly with my district in Edmonton Griesbach, one of the hardest-hit communities of poverty. My colleagues and I know the importance of ending poverty, and the Liberal legislation does not go nearly far enough in fixing the poverty issues.

Would the member agree that ensuring a guaranteed livable basic income is truly the appropriate response to ending poverty in Canada?

Ms. Leah Gazan: Mr. Speaker, yes, absolutely. I introduced a private member's bill, Bill C-223, to implement a framework for a guaranteed livable basic income. There has been a lot of research on it in Canada, Manitoba being the place for research in the MIN-COME study. We know that when we invest in people, it is good for the economy, it is good for people and it saves lives.

There has been cross-partisan support for it. It is a practice that has been implemented in other places in the world, with guaranteed livable basic income programs. This would be a game-changer. This would save lives. It is time to implement a guaranteed livable basic income.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (M  gantic—L'  rable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we had a nice chat earlier about translation. In English, we call you the Speaker, but in French, maybe we should call you "*haut parleur*", because you do make quite a good loudspeaker. We know that you are the Speaker and that you are doing a great job. You can tell your constituents that we are very proud to have you as Speaker of the House of Commons presiding over this debate.

It is my turn to speak to Bill C-8, which would implement certain provisions of the 2021 economic and fiscal update.

I took the time to read through the 2021 economic and fiscal update that was presented by the Minister of Finance. This week, during question period, I had the opportunity to put several questions to both the minister and the Prime Minister, who was participating virtually. I was struck by their answers and by the scant compassion they showed for the mothers and fathers affected by inflation. When I asked the minister when the government would start trying to curb inflation and how it would react to Canadians getting poorer, she proudly rose and announced that inflation in Canada was 4.8%, while in other countries it was 4%, 5%, 6%, 7% or 8%.

It is true that inflation might be a bit lower in Canada. However, both single- and two-parent families are being forced to make tough choices at the grocery store because budgets are tight, and the problem is that inflation may be 4.8%, but grocery bills are going up by 6%. That 6% increase represents the increase in prices across the board, but on specific products, such as beef or chicken, that increase can be 10%, 15% or even 20%.

People now have to start making choices. They have to start leaving things out of the basket to feed the family, instead of taking the nutritious and good food they were used to getting. Why? Because when they get to the cash register, no one wants to be in a situation where they have to leave something behind for fear of being short on money. No mother or father wants to go through that. It is inhumane. Unfortunately, that is what is happening. I know this because I have received testimonials. I have actually received a lot of them since I asked the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister these questions. When we talk about it, we learn things.

People call us and talk to us. I have learned quite a few things, including that food banks have seen a rise in the number of people who come looking for food. I was a bit surprised because the unemployment rate in Quebec is relatively low. I asked whether these were people who did not have a job or who were unable to get employment insurance because of fraud on their file, given that the government has been unable to resolve their situation since November. I was told no, these are workers, families who do not have enough money to put enough food on the table for the week. We are talking about working people who have a job but are no longer able to make ends meet. They unfortunately have to make these kinds of choices because the cost of gas, housing, and absolutely everything is going up. We are seeing prices skyrocketing, and, sadly, the 4.8% inflation rate is just a fraction of the rise in costs.

● (1805)

There are all kinds of things that Statistics Canada does not take into account, such as vehicle prices. Plenty of things are not taken into account in calculating inflation, so inflation is in fact much higher.

I would like the government to put forward some solutions. Unfortunately, there are none to be found in the economic and fiscal update.

I would like to quote from an article published on January 28, so not that long ago. Nathalie Elgrably wrote:

As if the horrors of the pandemic were not enough, the spectre of inflation is now rearing its ugly head. After 30 years of stability, we are all worrying about it again. If this trend keeps up, inflation is likely to become our number one economic and social problem in short order.

Government Orders

We are in the middle of a pandemic. The government asked people to make sacrifices. People stayed home. Now an inflation problem has been thrown into the mix thanks to the government's excessive spending. The government injected too much money into the economy, and now prices are rising across the board.

Here are some figures from the economic and fiscal update forecast. From the start of the pandemic, the government has spent \$176 billion on expenditures that are not related to COVID-19. It is using the excuse of COVID-19 for spending unrelated to the pandemic.

Canadians agree that we must invest to help businesses and people and to meet needs. When the government decides to close something, it is normal for the government to be there to help the closed businesses. However, \$176 billion was spent on items unrelated to COVID-19. That is the main driver of this inflation and what makes it rise.

Let us go back to Ms. Elgrably's article, because I think she is right. She confirms precisely what I believe.

To explain this impoverishment, Ottawa is blaming supply chain disruptions, or any random misalignment of the stars.

The "explanations" given by Ottawa are nonsense! It is a dog-and-pony show to make us forget that the [Prime Minister's] staggering spending, which was basically financed by the Bank of Canada, caused the inflation.

I am not the one saying so. Other people are also speaking out. It is not just the nasty Conservatives complaining about this overspending. Economists and banks are talking about it. Let me quote some of them.

BMO chief economist Douglas Porter said those two issues, coupled with reports of labour shortages suggest inflation rates may yet rise higher despite widespread hope that they had hit their peak.

"They definitely may still rise in the coming months...."

"I'm not at all relieved or relaxed on the inflation outlook. I am quite concerned that we could have more of an inflation issue than I think is commonly believed among economists."

Unfortunately, the economic and fiscal update gives no indication of the government's plan. We have no idea what the government intends to do to finally stop the collective impoverishment of Canadian families. What are we supposed to tell families who have to pay an extra \$300 or \$400 a month in rent, because their houses cost more? What are we going to say to those families? What are we supposed to say to parents who have to decide what to leave on the grocery store shelves because they cannot afford it? Inflation is a serious problem.

Government Orders

We are not going to fix the problem for fathers and mothers by telling ourselves that we are doing better than other countries. What I want to know is how much inflation is too much for the government. It is now at 4.8%. Is 5% too much, or 6% or 7%?

In its own economic and fiscal update, the government even targeted 2% inflation. We are at 4.8%, and that is enough.

• (1810)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I listen to the speeches from the Conservative Party, there is no doubt its members are taking a hard right. It is almost as if we are going back to the days of Stephen Harper and possibly even the Reform Party. They are applauding from across the way, so I guess their intent is to go right.

The member talks about inflation. Yes, we all have concerns with regard to inflation, but it has to be put into perspective with what is happening around the world, and Canada is doing well. When I responded to the budget, I made reference to the third quarter report on the GDP, which said Canada was at 5.4% growth. That is better than the U.S., Japan, the U.K. and Australia. It is not as bad as the Conservatives are saying. The sky is not falling. Canadians are coming together, and we will get through this.

I am wondering if the member can indicate to us why it appears today that the Conservatives seem to be going quite far to the right.

• (1815)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, the national debt has reached \$1.2 trillion. That is an amount, a word I never thought I would have to use here in the House.

To come back to what my colleague from Winnipeg North just said, the Parliamentary Budget Officer clearly said that the additional spending that was justified by the economic recovery is no longer reasonable. The Parliamentary Budget Officer himself is saying that to the government. What is more, the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister are saying that our economy is doing well, and yet they continue to spend. Continuing to spend money on things that are not related to COVID-19 puts pressure on inflation, which keeps going up.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his empathetic speech.

I remember all too well what it feels like to put back a can of juice, telling myself that we will drink water. I know what it feels like to skip buying bread, telling myself that we have a bit of flour and we will make crepes with water for lunch this week. I know that feeling, and it happened to me not so long ago. I thank him for his empathy. I know what it means to count every penny in order to be able to pay the rent.

Now there are people, not only families, but seniors who worked their whole life, who lived through other inflation crises, including those of the 1970s and 1980s. They are living on pensions that have increased by barely \$13 a month during a period of more than 10

years. Last year, they got an increase of 61 cents, after a cut of several dollars.

How can we really help these people deal with the current crisis, in terms of both the pandemic and inflation?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, inflation is indeed affecting the most vulnerable in our society. This is because they are the ones whose wages are the slowest to increase.

Pensions do not increase in line with inflation, far from it. On this point, I agree completely with my colleague. That is the problem. Every month that inflation continues to rise, seniors, vulnerable individuals and people living on low incomes lose purchasing power and are faced with agonizing choices.

What we are asking for is not complicated. When will the government put an end to the spiralling inflation that is impoverishing Canadians?

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member represents a very beautiful part of the country, but I know that people in Mégantic—L'Érable are struggling just like people in New Westminster—Burnaby are.

Seniors, students and families are really struggling to make ends meet. At the same time, as we know very well, the Liberals have done nothing to combat the tax avoidance that allows \$25 billion a year to go to tax havens.

I would like to know whether my colleague thinks this is a sound approach, that is, the Liberals refusing to close the loopholes that lead to the loss of \$25 billion a year from taxpayers.

The Deputy Speaker: I invite the member for Mégantic—L'Érable to give a very brief answer.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, it is impossible to give a very brief answer to a question like that, but I will try.

Today, we were accused of taking a hard right. However, if being right-wing means taking care of the most vulnerable people, the people who need help, who have no money and who have to make tough choices when grocery shopping, then I am proud to be right-wing.

• (1820)

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is such an honour to rise to speak to Bill C-8 on behalf of the good people of northwest B.C. This evening, I would like to talk about people in small communities and at the end, if I have time, I want to touch on an issue facing some of Canada's largest municipalities.

At heart, I am a small-town boy, so I will start with the rural communities in the riding I represent. The largest community in Skeena—Bulkley Valley has only about 12,000 or 13,000 people. The rest of the residents live in very small communities, villages and rural areas, and it is their concerns and their needs that I would like to begin with tonight because this legislation includes changes that affect them in many ways.

The ones I want to focus in on are the proposed changes to the northern residents tax deduction, a part of the Income Tax Act that is intended to account for the higher cost of living in Canada's northern, rural and remote communities, the farthest flung places in our country. For a long time, the system in the Income Tax Act had a very complex formula for determining the remoteness of these places in the north. In the 1990s that formula changed and essentially the federal government drew an arbitrary line across the map of our country. If people are above the line, then they get the northern residents deduction. If they are below the line, they do not get it.

This affects a lot of people in the place that I get to represent. In the bill before us the government has seen fit to make changes to the travel portion of that northern residents deduction. That is certainly a welcome change, making it more flexible in the eligibility criteria so that residents within one of those northern zones are able to claim more of the expenses they pay out for travel. However, it does not get to this underlying problem with the fairness of that arbitrary line on the map.

This is an issue that has been raised by my constituents for a long time, going back well over a decade. My predecessor, Nathan Cullen, who sat in the House, brought this up and tabled a private member's bill on behalf of the good residents of Haida Gwaii. I was honoured in the last Parliament to table a similar bill, because Haida Gwaii is one of the most remote places in our country. This is an archipelago that is separated from the mainland by a seven-hour ferry ride. Haida Gwaii used to qualify for the full northern residents deduction, but in 1993, it was moved to the intermediate zone, so residents there now only receive 50% of the deduction.

When I travel to Haida Gwaii, and I hope to be back really soon, this is something that so many residents bring to my attention. On Haida Gwaii the cost of living is high for a number of reasons, mostly because all of the goods that are purchased have to be brought in by ferry. Also, for so many reasons, residents have to travel to the mainland for services and other reasons.

I talked to Evan Putterill, a local government representative on Haida Gwaii. He talked about auto repairs and that only certain auto repairs are available on the island and people have to go off island for so many others. I have had residents raise the issue of shipping rates. That is another huge issue, postal shipping to remote parts of the riding, and so many other things. The cost of groceries, fuel and building supplies are all more expensive in remote places in northwest B.C.

The hope is that we can change that arbitrary criteria. This would help places like Haida Gwaii, but other places as well. Although Haida Gwaii is in that intermediate zone and does qualify for half of the tax deduction, there are other communities in northwest B.C. that do not qualify at all and for which the changes that the govern-

ment has proposed in Bill C-8 are irrelevant because they do not fit into one of those prescribed zones.

There is a story that the mayor of Fraser Lake brought this to the attention of the North Central Local Government Association. They proposed something called the rural living allowance. They have ideas for how we can fix this, but we need to go beyond an arbitrary line on the map.

I also met with Linda McGuire, the mayor of Granisle, and her council. They talked about the fact that, to access services and goods, many of their residents have to drive to the district of Houston, which is 80 kilometres away. They want to attract more residents to their community, but the cost of living and the cost of goods are major barriers.

I spoke about this in the House earlier today, and then later posted about it on social media. Brian Lande from Bella Coola brought to my attention his beautiful community. I was thinking about the last time I went to Bella Coola. For folks who have not been, Bella Coola and the Bella Coola Valley, on Nuxalk territory, are spectacular.

By car, the nearest major centre is Williams Lake. I only say major centre in the sense of rural places, because it itself is not a huge municipality.

It is a 450-kilometre drive from Williams Lake to Bella Coola. It is across the Chilcotin Plateau and down a gravel road over an incredibly steep hill that drops 5,000 feet into the Bella Coola Valley.

It is one of the most remote places in British Columbia, yet it does not qualify for the northern residents deduction under the Income Tax Act.

The residents of Bella Coola pay exorbitant costs for all sorts of things. The one they brought to my attention most recently is parcel shipping. Because their postal code has been designated by Canada Post as a remote postal code, companies that do mail orders charge exorbitant costs to get parcels to Bella Coola.

These are the kinds of costs that an improved northern living allowance in the Income Tax Act could help to offset. It would help small communities, like Bella Coola and Granisle and Fraser Lake, to attract residents and develop their economies, and it would help the people there to live more affordable lives.

Government Orders

Government Orders

I was very pleased to table a petition in the last Parliament on this topic. Hundreds of residents from northwest B.C. signed a petition urging the government to bring Haida Gwaii into the northern zone for the northern residents deduction. I also tabled Motion No. 22, which I was pleased to retable in this Parliament.

That motion calls on the government to strike a task force and look at the eligibility criteria in the Income Tax Act for the northern residents deduction. We need a better way of defining what a remote community is. Not all of the remote communities in Canada are in the far north. Many communities are separated by long roads that are only seasonally accessible, and they face really high costs of living. Those communities need to be served by this provision in our Income Tax Act.

Despite a decade of members of Parliament calling on the government to make those changes, we have heard nothing. It is something that needs to change. Rural and remote residents across our country would be better for it. Rural places are an important part of the fabric of this country, and we can recognize that by changing the Income Tax Act.

I want to shift to an issue facing some of Canada's largest municipalities. Please excuse the whiplash while I move to the issue of public transit.

On January 26, just last week, the mayors of Canada's biggest cities called on the government. They said they were pushing the emergency button on public transit funding. Public transit is in crisis right now. The pandemic has cut revenue for transit systems by as much as 80%. Even two years into the pandemic, transit systems are only at 40-50% of their original ridership. The only way municipalities can make their budgets balance, and they are not allowed to run deficits, is to cut services and cut routes.

What we risk here is a downward spiral. We are building new transit systems. We are building new infrastructure, and that is wonderful. However, we need to ensure that essential workers, seniors, students and all people who relied on public transit during the pandemic have that service available to them. If we cut transit service in Canada's cities, we are going to see people move to other modes of transportation, and it is going to be very difficult to get them back on public transit.

We need more people riding public transit, not fewer. It is important for so many reasons, including equity and climate reasons, and it is part of the future that we need to build together.

The big city mayors have spoken. We have not heard from the government. We do not see, in the fall economic statement, any money for transit operating costs. We need to see it. There is still a chance. I hope this government will hear the call of the FCM and the big city mayors, and make that funding a part of Canada's future.

• (1825)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a federal government that has invested in public transit, which is somewhat new. The question I have for the member is on whether he could provide some clarity.

Also, within the legislation we are saying that there is going to be a 1% annual tax for non-residents and non-Canadians for unoccupied dwellings. That is in its simplest form. Does the member support that, and is there any other initiative that he would like to encourage on that specific front?

• (1830)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, there were two pieces to that question.

The first one was around transit funding. There was funding for transit operations as part of the safe restart agreement. I know that was welcomed by municipalities, but it ran out a long time ago. What they are asking for is continued support on the operating side until we get through the pandemic and transit ridership rebounds. It is absolutely vital that we get that in place.

Yes, the 1% tax is a very small step. We need much more on housing, including a dedicated plan on indigenous housing. I will leave it at that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke about the problems with postal service, and it brought back memories of when I lived on the North Shore.

Canada Post has a service called Solutions for Small Business, and I was wondering if there is any way to improve it. Furthermore, how are medications, food and other goods shipped to my colleague's riding?

[English]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, the situation facing small businesses in shipping goods is a huge issue, especially when shipping through the postal system. I think it is wrong that big companies like Amazon get preferential rates when they use our national postal system, compared to small businesses that want to do mail orders. They want to ship a smaller volume of packages and they have to pay exorbitant rates to do so. I think that is fundamentally wrong.

The issue residents face is a little bit different. I would be happy to talk to my colleague about it afterward.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the last election I have to say that the most common global concern I heard was on the climate crisis, and my hon. colleague touched on public transit.

I am wondering if he can expand a bit on how a massive expansion of public transit in Canada may help us address the climate crisis, and particularly how that might reveal itself in terms of smaller communities like the ones he represents, and what that would look like between cities.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the climate crisis and driving down Canada's greenhouse gases, public transit is absolutely such an important solution, not just for big cities but for rural places as well.

When we look at the transport sector as a whole, we see one of Canada's fastest-growing sources of emissions. We know that when we get people on public transit, we have less congestion, we have better-developed communities and we have people who are more socially connected as well. There are so many reasons to get people riding public transit. We cannot do that unless the government helps municipalities with the kind of funding that they have asked for.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak about one of the most important issues in our country, the public health emergency that is taking place in our country.

We know that the Public Health Agency of Canada expects that more than 3,000 Canadians will die just in the first six months of 2022 from toxic overdoses. We know that they will be from all ages and all walks of life, but it will disproportionately impact indigenous peoples.

We do not know yet how many Canadians have been lost from overdoses in 2021, but it is likely to be over 7,000 lives. That is almost double the number of deaths from toxic overdoses in 2019. Since the pandemic began in 2020, over 3,389 people have been killed from overdoses in my home province of British Columbia, while the COVID-19 pandemic has taken 2,455 lives. All are obviously a huge loss to our communities, but behind these statistics there is real heartbreak for families, as they lose sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, friends and colleagues, and community members. As members of Parliament, most of us have had the call that we all dread, as I am sure you have too, Mr. Speaker, from a family member who has lost a loved one because of their use of poisoned drugs. I have had too many calls in my six years from loved ones, representing a rural riding and small communities, including just this last weekend.

Substance use and addiction are born of trauma, poverty, homelessness and colonialization. These are important areas of policy that we must act on with urgency, to be sure. However, we also need to take other measures. I look forward to the engagement of members from all sides of the House concerning the provisions of my private member's bill, Bill C-216, on a health-based approach to substance use, in the coming weeks.

Adjournment Proceedings

Regretfully, as The Globe and Mail recently pointed out, “The words opioids, overdoses, decriminalization and safer supply do not get mentioned at all in the mandate letters” of the ministers of the government, nor in the Speech from the Throne. In fact, there is no mention of overdose deaths at all in the mandate letter for the Minister of Health. Problematic substance use ranks sixth on the list of top 10 priorities in the mandate letter of the Minister of Health.

The truth is that we know it is not addiction that is killing people. It is toxic, illicit drugs and a poisoned drug supply that are killing them. My bill calls for the decriminalization of possessing illicit drugs for personal use and for the expungement of records of conviction. These measures are intended to remove the stigma of drug use and remove barriers to accessing recovery programs, housing, child custody and travel. My bill also calls for a national strategy that will expand the availability of treatment and expand the availability of a regulated, safer supply of drugs.

The government has ignored the expert task force on substance use, which presented its recommendations before the unnecessary election last year. Most importantly, it ignored the call for a safer supply of drugs as an urgent priority. The Globe called the government's approach a “recipe for failure” and a “slow-motion policy response” to a national emergency, with a certainty of “more needless deaths”. This will mean more calls to members of Parliament from families that could have been spared unimaginable loss.

• (1835)

[Translation]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that the member for Courtenay—Alberni has fully recovered from COVID-19.

I thank him for his work and his commitment to ending the opioid overdose crisis and eliminating the toxic drug supply in Canada, and also for starting this discussion this evening.

[English]

Our hearts go out to all the families and communities of those we have lost to opioid overdoses. Our government recognizes that problematic substance use is, first and foremost, a public health issue.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[Translation]*

We will keep working with our partners to find ways to support the programs and services that divert drug users away from the criminal justice system and toward health and social service supports, such as supervised consumption sites and addiction treatment services.

On December 7, my hon. colleague, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, introduced a bill that, as part of a suite of measures, would ask police and prosecutors to consider alternatives to prosecution, such as diversion and treatment programs, for certain drug-related offences.

[English]

The Public Prosecution Service of Canada has also issued guidance, stating, “alternatives to prosecution should be considered for simple possession offences”.

- (1840)

Health Canada is also currently reviewing several requests submitted for a section 56 exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to decriminalize the personal possession of drugs on a case-by-case basis.

[Translation]

Several factors are at play in this tragedy. The appearance of synthetic opioids in the illegal drug market coincided with a dramatic rise in fatal overdoses. We know the pandemic resulted in an even more unstable and dangerous supply of illegal drugs, which led to many more overdose-related deaths across the country.

Our government believes that providing a safe supply of drugs prescribed by health care professionals is essential to helping prevent overdoses. This is part of our comprehensive plan to tackle the opioid overdose crisis.

[English]

We have allowed pharmacists and practitioners to extend, renew and transfer prescriptions to make it easier for people who use drugs to access the life-saving medications they need during the pandemic.

[Translation]

However, in addition to this government action, we have to keep working on helping the public understand that substance use problems are not a choice, but a treatable medical condition that calls for an array of care and treatment options.

Our comprehensive public health approach is built on our previous actions, which included over \$700 million invested in community projects aimed at reducing risk, preventing harm and providing treatment.

[English]

We are working closely with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners, along with other key stakeholders, to reduce harm, save lives and get people the supports they need.

[Translation]

Canadians can rest assured that combatting the opioid overdose crisis is a priority for our government.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, since the government got elected there have been over 25,000 Canadians who have died from this toxic drug supply and overdoses. It is not in anyone's mandate letter. It is not in the Speech from the Throne. It has been six years. The government has ignored its own Health Canada task force on substance use and the recommendations they put forward that are reflected in my bill.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said he understands this is a health issue, yet today it is still a criminal issue in this country. Why? It is because he is worried about votes. He is worried about votes instead of having the courage to do the right thing. Listen to the health experts, the criminal experts, law enforcement, the people working on the front line of this crisis and the drug users themselves.

I am calling on the government and all parliamentarians to support my bill and do the right thing.

[Translation]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: Mr. Speaker, our government understands the urgency of the situation and is moving forward with an evidence-based approach to ending this crisis.

[English]

Overcoming the stigma associated with substance use is also essential in addressing this whole-of-society problem. It is vitally important to our work to turn the tide on this crisis. This includes investing over \$30 million to help change attitudes and perceptions about people who use drugs and an additional \$25-million commitment in our most recent platform to reduce the stigma.

[Translation]

Our government is working with the provinces and territories and with communities to develop a comprehensive health-based strategy to address this tragedy. This includes \$500 million to support our partners in providing a range of treatment options.

[English]

We will continue doing—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

AVIATION INDUSTRY

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be able to rise this evening to discuss the troubling changes that the Liberal government has been trying to make to the non-certified aerodromes of this country. These facilities are community airports like the one in Ponoka in my riding.

The changes that are proposed regarding the instrument-approach procedures would make these vital facilities much less accessible, unless the facilities spend hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars that they simply do not have. In fact, an analysis done in central Alberta suggests that it would double the number of days that airports and facilities are not able to be used.

These airports are vital, especially for rural communities. Stopping airports like the one in Ponoka from being able to receive planes for 14 or more days a year is not just a problem for pilots who fly for recreation. These are vital facilities for medical evacuation and patient transportation. The impact of this change could literally mean life or death for Canadians if they cannot get the emergency services that they need.

The Minister of Transport would never accept a policy that prevented ambulances from operating 14 days a year in his home riding in Mississauga. I am sure his parliamentary secretary would likewise speak out against this type of cut in service in Laval or Montreal. Therefore, why do they think it is acceptable for people in my riding or across many parts of rural Canada?

These airports are also important economic drivers that communities count on to get goods and people in and out of rural and remote regions. On top of the increased uncertainty for businesses and lost profits, productivity and time from these sorts of delays, it will also incur hundreds of thousands of dollars in increased costs as flights have to be rerouted to other airports farther away, increasing costs for overtime, fuel, accommodation and meals that these small businesses cannot afford during the difficult economic times they are already facing.

This whole situation appears to have been little more than a bureaucratic make-work project. I have no doubt that when the parliamentary secretary has her turn to reply she will go on at length about safety, undoubtedly a top priority for all of us. This is especially true for those in the aviation industry who make their livelihoods flying. They, more than anyone else, want to ensure that the regulations that we adhere to are at a high standard, so that every day they can get up, go to work and be confident that they will be able to come back home and kiss their families good night.

Representatives of every stakeholder group that I have spoken to on the issue have told me that this is a solution in search of a problem that we simply do not have in Canada. I have been told by representatives of organizations that help with the instrument-approach procedures for over 100 of these aerodromes, that they are aware of exactly zero accidents that have been caused because of the current standards.

It appears that Transport Canada is trying to harmonize our standards with the International Civil Aviation Organization, despite the rationale for those standards not being at all reflective of the actual experience or needs of Canadian aviators.

Of equal concern is that repeated requests for information about the risk assessment and impact analysis by stakeholders have been ignored for over two years. This has led to the belief that there simply was no proper risk assessment or impact analysis completed. Even during what can only be described as a check-box consultation that did not include those with expertise in the actual advisory

circular they were seeking to amend, they did not provide an impact analysis. It is my understanding that a series of privately conducted impact analyses of over 100 of these impacted airports showed that nearly all would be negatively impacted, with no meaningful upside.

Can the parliamentary secretary confirm if a risk assessment and impact analysis were actually completed?

• (1845)

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand changes to regulations and guidance can be disruptive for air operators and the communities they serve. I assure members that we do not take them lightly. Where appropriate, we revise regulations and guidance in consideration of the feedback we receive.

Transport Canada advisory circular number 301-001, issue number three, which deals with the issue being raised by my colleague, was due to come into force on December 31, 2021. However, this was delayed after further consultation with stakeholders and a new version is being developed.

Aviation safety is a key priority for Transport Canada. The objective of any amendments to Transport Canada's guidance and regulations would be to further improve the level of safety within our aviation system. Transport Canada is continually working to ensure that our aviation safety system is among the best in the world. This is not bureaucratic busywork as the member suggests.

Alignment with international best practices ensures we maintain a safe air transportation system. The value of this approach is borne out by the excellent aviation safety record we have in Canada. Overall, the number of air accidents has been decreasing over the last decade. In 2020, a total of 170 air accidents were reported to the Transportation Safety Board. This represents a 25% decrease from the previous year's total of 227 accidents and is 32% below the average of 251 reported in the prior 10 years from 2010 to 2019.

Transport Canada will continue to work with key stakeholders, including Nav Canada, on the implementation of the revised advisory circular and to keep Canadians safe.

• (1850)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, what I heard the parliamentary secretary say is that accidents are going down, so we need to increase the regulatory burden. If we are going to put lives at risk or force hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars of structural changes to community airports, it must result in safer outcomes. There has to be a real-world problem we are fixing.

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According to the ICAO, people over 65 or with type 1 diabetes should not be pilots for airlines, for example. However, in Canada, with our high quality of life and preventive care, we could allow people in both of these groups to fly without fear, so we filed differences with the ICAO to bring the regulations into line with the Canadian context. Therefore, why will the Liberal government not take this route and prioritize saving the lives of Canadians requiring emergency medical assistance?

I hope the government will stop and consider the devastating medical and socio-economic impact that this change will have in hundreds of communities across the country and commit to the proper consultations and the impact and risk assessments it has so far failed to do. I also hope it will maintain the status quo if there is no overwhelming reason not to.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Mr. Speaker, I understand the issue that the member is raising is important for his constituents, and I will definitely bring it to the attention of the minister.

Aviation safety remains of paramount importance for Transport Canada and our government, and there is good news on this front. The number of overall air accidents has been decreasing over the last decade, as well as the number of fatal air accidents. In 2020, there were 420 aviation incidents reported to the Transportation Safety Board. This represents a decrease of 54% from the 915 that were reported in 2019 and is 47% below the average of 790 incidents per year between 2010 and 2019.

These statistics are a testament to the good work being done by Transport Canada and by the air operators and pilots it regulates to prioritize safety. We need to continually remain vigilant and build on this enviable track record.

TRANSPORT

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in December I raised my question in the House of Commons about a proposed aerodrome in Georgina, in my riding of York—Simcoe. In other communities there have been high-profile incidents where corporations use the false pretense of building or expanding an aerodrome or an airport to cash crop dirt. Because aerodromes fall exclusively under the federal jurisdiction through the Canadian aviation regulations, these corporations are able to dump tonnes of contaminated fill with no regard for municipal or provincial soil laws.

Nearby, at Greenbank Airport in Port Perry, operators illegally dumped more than 2.5 million cubic metres of contaminated soil. They did this after they initially received permission to supposedly expand their facilities to runways. With the airport all but abandoned, there are now extensive and expensive costs required to clean up and restore the site. This practice has dire consequences for the environment and leads to significant financial hardship for municipalities and taxpayers.

This has happened in other places too, such as Tottenham and Burlington. Now Georgina residents are faced with a similar situation. The sole director of the companies that own the proposed site is the president of a Toronto-based waste disposal company. The spokesman and contact for the aerodrome's proponent, Mauro Marchioni, is a lawyer who has previously represented companies in the waste management industry. These companies have been fined

by the Government of Ontario for illegally dumping contaminated fill.

• (1855)

At a special meeting of the Georgina town council to discuss this proposal, the proponent reluctantly admitted its plan was to dump more than one million cubic metres of fill on the property. That is more than 100 trucks a day. This is unacceptable. The proponent misrepresented the extent of its consultation with officials, the public and the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, and were combative and aggressive when local officials asked reasonable questions about the proposal.

There are other issues as well. The proposed aerodrome would be built on an ecologically sensitive area within the Lake Simcoe watershed. The site is protected wetland and is adjacent to active farmland and waterways that feed directly into Lake Simcoe. Also, the need and purpose of the aerodrome have not been made clear. There are numerous local and regional aerodromes in the area, and the planned length and direction of the runways will be unsuitable for most types of aircraft. This significantly limits its economic viability.

Unfortunately, Transport Canada does not account for these factors when deciding to approve or reject an aerodrome proposal. This means that even if all evidence points toward this being an illegal for-profit dumping operation, the current regulations state that these considerations only factor into the minister's decisions as they relate to aviation. Even though regulations provide for municipalities to enforce their own soil laws, the aerodrome proponents simply need to argue that fill is being dumped at these locations for aviation purposes under federal jurisdiction to avoid further scrutiny.

Is the Minister of Transport aware of these loopholes, and what are the government's plans to address this?

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I truly understand the concerns of my colleague, the hon. member for York—Simcoe, and his constituents, and I commend him for his advocacy on their behalf.

The Georgina aerodrome will be a new construction. Canadian Aviation Regulation 307—Aerodromes—Consultations applies to new aerodrome development and requires the operator to undertake a consultation process with the interested parties. The public consultation phase ended on December 22, 2021. The proponent will then send a summary report detailing its consultation process to Transport Canada for review to determine if it meets the regulatory criteria.

Contaminated fill has been an issue at aerodromes in Ontario in the past. Transport Canada's responsibility is to ensure the safety of air operations in our country. It does not regulate the quality of fill used at aerodrome sites. This would fall under the purview of Environment and Climate Change Canada or the province, depending on the land use authority. Aerodromes are also subject to provincial laws, with some exceptions. For instance, if the developer of an aerodrome deposits fill on the aerodrome lands, such fill would have to meet provincial guidelines.

Determining who is responsible for an environmental contamination on airport lands is a case-by-case situation. In the context of the development of the Georgina aerodrome, the private owner could be held responsible for any environmental contamination resulting from activities where contamination is on the aerodrome lands and/or escapes outside of those lands.

The member's question also provides me an opportunity to talk about the great work that Transport Canada is doing to help protect Canada's environment. For example, budget 2019 provided \$700 million to support the increased uptake of zero-emission vehicles, including \$300 million for a new purchase incentive program and \$265 million to encourage business fleets to switch to these cleaner vehicles. As of September 1, 2021, more than 114,000 Canadians and Canadian businesses have benefited from this point-of-sale incentive, which will help reduce emissions by up to 160,000 tonnes each year. The funding also includes \$130 million to increase deployment of zero-emission vehicle infrastructure. This is in addition to the more than \$180 million invested in expanding the coast-to-coast network of electric vehicle fast chargers on Canada's national highway system. That is just one example of the many significant measures our government is taking to protect our environment.

Mr. Scot Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the parliamentary secretary's response and the minister's willingness to engage me and my office on this very important issue for my constituents in York—Simcoe.

I am not against building airports or aerodromes, and I am a private pilot myself, but it is clear that this process needs to be looked

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at. Dumping fill now is a lucrative business, and certain individuals have identified the Canadian aviation regulations as a great way to do it with no scrutiny at all. This jeopardizes the future, the actual future of aviation in this great country; it threatens the environment and it gives Canadians the impression that collaborative federalism just does not work for them.

This is not a partisan issue. I am here tonight advocating on behalf of my constituents for an acknowledgement and a response from the Minister of Transport that something needs to be done on this issue.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Mr. Speaker, there is no loophole, as the member for York—Simcoe suggests. As I mentioned previously, generally speaking, aerodromes, airports and airport authorities are subject to provincial law, except where such laws impair federal aeronautics jurisdiction or conflict with federal law. For instance, if the developer of an aerodrome deposits fill on the aerodrome lands, such fill would have to meet provincial guidelines.

Allow me again to take this opportunity to highlight the significant steps Transport Canada and our government have taken to protect our environment. For example, to further support the transition to low-carbon transportation systems, this government has established very ambitious targets for the sale of zero-emission vehicles in this country.

Time does not allow me to continue, but these are just some of the many measures we have taken to ensure a cleaner environment in Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank everyone for their interventions this evening.

The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted.

[Translation]

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:58 p.m.)

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