



HOUSE OF COMMONS
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CANADA

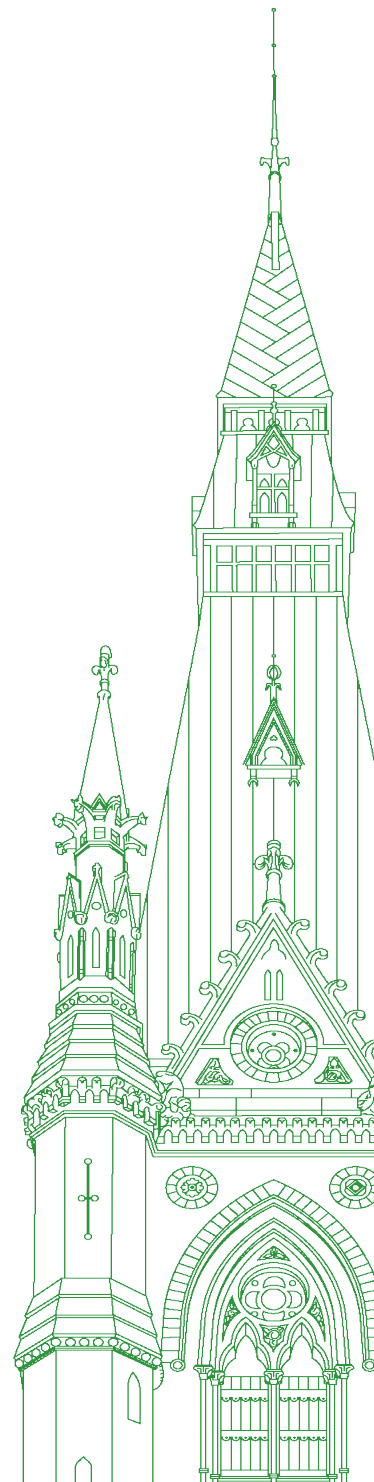
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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 7, 2022

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1105)

[English]

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL UPDATE IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2021

The House resumed from February 4 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.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this bill does not offer any new bold solutions to the challenges we are facing: the pandemic and the omicron variant, the affordability crisis and rising inflation, the climate emergency and the devastating heat waves, fires and floods that have come with it. It is certainly not up to the task of addressing the housing crisis that is being felt so severely by people in my riding of Victoria. In Victoria, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment is now over \$2,000 a month.

The cost of housing is skyrocketing. Families that want to own a home have given up hope of ever getting into the market. Under the Prime Minister, the average cost of a home is now 38% higher than it was just one year ago. Renters have very few options and are too often being forced into precarious housing. Too many people in my community are struggling to find housing. After the immense challenges of the past few years, too many families are struggling to keep a roof over their heads.

I want to share the story of Valma and her family. For the past month, Valma and her partner Darcy have been living with their six-year-old daughter in Hotel Zed by Accent Inns. They are searching for housing. They were paying for their nightly motel costs and they went through almost all of their savings. Faced with no other options, they made a plan to purchase a tent, thinking they would be sleeping outdoors when they ran out of money.

As Valma shared her story with me, she started to talk about that moment and she was in tears. She shared what it was like being on the brink of homelessness, how horrible it was not to have a home

for her little girl and how she was fighting to stay housed. Luckily, after hearing their story, Hotel Zed offered Valma and her family a room for free for another few weeks, buying them some time. She also talked about how she was worried that if she could not find housing, she might lose her daughter, and about how parents experiencing financial hardship also have to worry about having their children taken. It is what she called a broken cycle.

I told Valma I would bring her story to Ottawa. I asked her what she would want me to say to the government. She said, and these are her words, “There has got to be something done. It is not just us. There are other families just like ours. It is so tough out there. There has got to be something done.”

Valma had the courage to share her story, and because she did, Accent Inns reached out to the United Way of southern Vancouver Island to see what more could be done. They teamed up and, just this past Friday, launched a hotels for families in need fund. This fund supports local families that are on the brink of homelessness. Community members have already started donating. The funds will be distributed to families for accommodations, food and other essentials as they navigate finding more stable housing.

It is incredible to see our community come together like this. However, these families should never have been put in the situation where they are competing in an impossible rental market. It is what the provincial minister responsible for housing has called “a Hunger Games-style struggle, competing to access the limited supply of rental housing”.

Housing is a human right, and while the provincial government has been taking bold steps, the federal government's lack of action is shameful. We need affordable rentals, we need housing that has rent geared to income, we need more co-op housing and we need home ownership to be within reach of our community members.

The Liberals have made a lot of big promises for what they would accomplish in the first 100 days of their re-elected government. One of those promises was the appointment of a federal housing advocate. However, that 100-day mark passed last week, with no sign of a federal housing advocate. While I am disappointed, I am sadly not surprised. Like so many Liberal promises, this one is unfulfilled. This was not even a new promise. The position was first announced in 2017. The job posting closed 13 months ago. There is still no housing advocate.

Government Orders

Over the past six years that the Liberals have been in power, they have made lots of promises. They have talked a big game. They claim they care about access to affordable housing, but they have not backed up those words with actions, and because of the government's inaction, the housing crisis has only gotten worse.

The government had an opportunity with this bill to take action, but there is no additional funding to increase an affordable supply of housing. There is nothing in this bill to address flipping or to discourage speculators from continuing to buy properties to renovate and resell quickly for a profit. They are outbidding families and driving up housing prices in communities across Canada.

There is nothing in the bill to tackle blind bidding. There is no change in the definition of what the government considers affordable. What the government calls affordable is still far above what many Canadians can afford. Once again, there is no funding allocated for a “for indigenous, by indigenous” national housing strategy, which the Liberals have been promising but have repeatedly failed to deliver.

I want to take a moment to give a shout-out to the incredible team at the Aboriginal Coalition to End Homelessness Society in Victoria. It continues to do innovative work to provide culturally supportive housing, affordable housing and services to the indigenous street community. It needs core funding to continue to do this important work.

The Aboriginal Housing Management Association in British Columbia recently launched a plan to show how “for indigenous, by indigenous” housing can be done successfully. This approach to housing is badly needed. The federal government needs to step up and provide funding so that indigenous people have access to the housing they deserve.

The Liberals, I am sure, will get up in the House and say that this bill does do something on housing, pointing to the underused housing tax. However, after decades of inaction from Liberal and Conservative governments, and amid a growing housing crisis, this is not anywhere near enough. It is not going to help Valma.

Not only is this one small piece a half measure, but it is full of loopholes. The bill established a 1% annual tax on the value of vacant and underutilized residential property only when the direct and indirect owners are non-residents and non-Canadians. Permanent residents and Canadian citizens are completely exempt, even if the house is vacant. Foreign ownership is exempt if someone declares the home as a principal residence. What is particularly concerning is that the Liberals have indicated that they will introduce regulations to add another exemption for non-Canadians who own vacation homes if they are used at least four weeks per year, potentially reducing the amount generated by this tax to \$130 million per year. This approach is too little and it is too late.

The New Democrats would make different choices. Instead of protecting the profits of wealthy speculators who drive up the cost of housing, we would introduce a tax on flipping, while making significant investments to build 500,000 truly affordable homes. We would invest in co-ops, social housing and non-profit housing.

Everyone should have the right to a safe and affordable place to call home. People should be able to afford to live in the communi-

ties where they work. Young people should be able to afford to stay in the neighbourhoods they grew up in. Seniors should never be forced out of the communities they have spent their lives in. As I was writing this speech, I got a message from a senior who had just been rent evicted and was looking at the rental market scared. All of the prices were above the income they got per month. The reality is that too many people in my community are facing this crisis. They cannot afford rent, they cannot afford to buy a home and they are having to move away, forced out of the communities they spent their lives in.

If we want to solve the housing crisis, it is time to leave half measures behind and take the bold action needed.

● (1110)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have many issues with the member's statements. For one, we have to go back generations to find another national government that has committed more financial resources and other resources to Canada's housing than we have. We would have to go back decades. The Liberals have provided historical amounts of funding for housing.

The member makes reference to programs such as housing co-ops and so forth. Provincial governments do play a role. To try to give an impression that the provinces are playing a more significant role given the nature of the investments that the federal government is putting into national housing is less than being honest. I used to be a provincial housing critic and I understand the role that the provinces play in housing. The provinces need to work in co-operation with Ottawa to take the vast resources we have allocated for housing. We need different levels of government and non-profits working together, including municipalities, to deal with this very serious issue of a housing shortage.

Can the member provide her thoughts on the importance of coming together with other organizations?

Ms. Laurel Collins: Madam Speaker, I agree. The federal government has the biggest role to play in addressing the housing crisis. Unfortunately, more and more Canadians find themselves unable to afford a home and pay rent, and the pandemic has made things worse.

The PBO, the government's own watchdog, reported that the Liberals are failing on housing while patting themselves on the back for a job well done, and that the people with core housing need are worse off under the Liberals' national housing strategy. Last year, my colleague, the member for Vancouver East, obtained data showing that the bulk of the national housing co-investment fund, 74%, was going to Ontario and only a small fraction was going to my home province of British Columbia.

The Liberals need to do better. Housing is a human right and they need to start acting like it is.

• (1115)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for a very insightful speech. I agree with most of the points she brought up.

I am disappointed that the Liberals are blaming the provinces, because as she pointed out, it is a partnership and we have to make this money available to get it on the ground. It seems that they are failing over and over again. She also pointed out the challenge with offshore money flipping. I am getting emails with concerns that we need to tighten that up, and I am hearing a lot from seniors.

I wonder if she could expand on the issue of housing for seniors and the problems they are having with inflation, because it is not just housing, but food and everything else that is going up. Making ends meet seems to be impossible. Could she expand on the issue of inflation?

Ms. Laurel Collins: Madam Speaker, so many seniors are struggling right now with the rising cost of living. I hear from them every day. It is the cost of food and medication, which is one of the many reasons we need a truly universal pharmacare program.

I also hear from a ton of seniors who have just recently experienced clawbacks in the GIS. Those seniors will now have to wait until May for the government to fix its policy mistakes, its policy incoherence. They are struggling. I spoke to a senior who was in a motel. He was about to lose the roof over his head because the government is delaying paying back the money from his GIS clawback. It is heartbreaking talking to these seniors. The government needs to do more.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I really enjoyed my colleague's speech. I think she understands that the housing crisis is one of the most serious crises in Canada right now, because she sees it in her riding, just as I see it in Longueuil and throughout Quebec. We are facing a health crisis and a climate crisis, but we also have a housing crisis.

A Scotiabank study released two weeks ago reported that there is a shortage of 1.8 million housing units in Canada right now, relative to the G7 average, and Scotiabank is not exactly an extreme left-wing group that campaigns for the right to housing or funds the NDP.

We in the Bloc Québécois believe that it is time for the government to recognize the magnitude of this crisis and allocate 1% of its total budget to the current housing crisis.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member.

[Translation]

I apologize for not being able to answer him in French.

[English]

I think it is a bold idea. We need more bold ideas from the government. Unfortunately, it has a track record of big promises but no follow-through.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise this morning to speak to Bill C-8, which would enact tax and spending measures outlined in the government's fiscal and economic update introduced in December.

The Liberal government has now been in office for more than six years. Six years in, we have an inflation crisis, an affordability crisis and a supply chain crisis. The government has presided over massive deficits and massive debt. They are historical levels of debt. In two short years, the government has managed to double the national debt to a staggering \$1.4 trillion. Forty per cent of Canadians are living paycheque to paycheque, \$200 away from insolvency. These same hard-working everyday Canadians are being hit hard by the Liberal government. They are being hit hard in terms of their spending power being diminished as a result of 30-year-high inflation, and they are being hit hard with Liberal tax hikes, including carbon tax and CPP tax hikes. After six years, that is the sad state of affairs in this country under the failed policies and failed leadership of this failed Prime Minister.

What has Bill C-8 done to address these significant challenges? In short, it has done very little. Instead, it does what the government only knows how to do, and that is to spend and spend more. Bill C-8 would provide a fire hose of \$71 billion in new spending. That is on top of the nearly \$600 billion of spending over the last two years, a third of which was completely unrelated to COVID as determined by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

How much is \$71 billion? To put it in some context, it is about 40% more than the government provides to provinces in health care spending by way of the Canada health transfer. It is double what the government collects annually in GST. In short, \$71 billion is a staggering amount of new spending and new debt, and for what purpose?

The Parliamentary Budget Officer does not think this fire hose of new spending is a good idea. Indeed, he recently stated:

It appears to me that the rationale for the additional spending initially set aside as 'stimulus' no longer exists.

Government Orders

The rationale no longer exists. All this will do is pour gasoline on the fire that is inflation, making life even less affordable for everyday Canadians.

Among the measures of new spending provided for in Bill C-8 is \$300 million over the next three years to fund the Liberal government's vaccine mandates. Less than a year ago, the Prime Minister ruled out the imposition of such mandates. He then flip-flopped on that commitment, and when he imposed the mandates, they were understood to be temporary. We have now learned that they are not temporary, and that the government intends to make them permanent.

• (1120)

This is alarming. These vaccine mandates have done nothing to keep Canadians safe. What they have done is destroy lives and livelihoods. Hard-working, law-abiding, taxpaying Canadians have lost their jobs and lost benefits they paid into their entire working lives. These same Canadians have had their mobility rights infringed upon. They are unable to get on airplanes or trains, which inhibits their ability to travel freely within Canada, never mind leave the country.

This is in a free and democratic country. If one would have described what the government is doing to fellow Canadians in Canada two short years ago, no one would have believed them, but here we are today. These mandates infringe upon the medical privacy rights of Canadians, and they infringe upon the ability of Canadians to make individual health decisions free of state coercion. These mandates without more are punitive, discriminatory and un-Canadian, and they could not be more ill-timed because in much of the rest of the world, governments are moving in the opposite direction. The U.K. has lifted all restrictions. Most EU countries have lifted all or most restrictions. The majority of U.S. states have lifted all restrictions, many of which did so some time ago. Saskatchewan has announced it is lifting restrictions. Alberta is about to follow suit, but not this government under this Prime Minister.

Instead, he is doubling down with new permanent mandates, and he is expanding mandates to the transportation sector that will do nothing more, and are doing nothing more, than to exacerbate the serious supply chain issues that we face. For the Prime Minister, it is not about science. It is not about data. It is not about keeping Canadians safe. What it is about is dividing Canadians for short-term political gain and using COVID as a pretext to vastly expand the size, scope and control of government.

It does not have to be this way. In much of the rest of the world, it is not this way, and on this side of the House, we are going to do everything to ensure that it does not remain this way so that Canadians can once again take control of their lives against this massive state overreach.

• (1125)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I find it fascinating that the member would talk about adding fuel to the fire, when his entire speech about mandates, and the Prime Minister supposedly putting in these mandates that lock down the freedoms of people, is absolutely ludicrous.

The only mandate that the member is concerned about that actually relates to the federal government is the fact that we have to provide a vaccination certificate when we cross the border into Canada, which, by the way, we have to provide if we cross the border into the United States to start with. In order to be travelling back into Canada, we have to have already gone into the United States and shown our vaccination status.

All other mandates related to wearing masks, closing businesses and so forth have been set by the provinces. The member knows that, yet he accuses this side of throwing fuel on the fire.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, I would respectfully say that the hon. member is misinformed. In fact, the mandate that he spoke of is one mandate, but it is not the only mandate. In my speech, I noted that if a person is not fully vaccinated they cannot get on a plane or train. Federally regulated employees have lost their jobs and they have lost benefits if they are not vaccinated. Those are punitive mandates that have had a real impact on hurting people, including constituents of mine, and I am going to fight for them in this place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, the economic update does not include any solutions to address the labour shortage or any ideas on how to increase productivity.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is quite right. We have a significant backlog now of immigrants who are skilled workers and who are unable to get here to join the workforce. He is absolutely right that this is a serious issue that the government, despite spending a lot of money, has failed to address.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know we have been talking for over a week now about what is going on outside. I am disappointed to hear what the member had to say. The mandates are in place to protect people: to protect health care workers and protect a system that is so overrun that it cannot keep up. It is to protect those who need the supports in other areas of our health care system, so they are able to access them.

I am absolutely in agreement that the government has not provided the health care transfers to the provinces that it needs to provide. This is something that started, however, with cuts by the Harper Conservative government.

Could the member speak about those needs in our health care system, and the need to better strengthen that system that so many Canadians rely upon and that so many health care workers are now in doubt about?

I am sorry. I am very frustrated, as many are, but we need to protect people and that is what mandates are supposed to do.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, these mandates have not worked, but I do appreciate the hon. member's question about health care. I will note for her that, under the Harper government, health care transfers increased 6% annually through to 2014, every single year.

With respect to the \$71 billion of new spending, there is no money for health care. This is at a time when we have a serious issue in terms of capacity that resulted in some of the restrictions and lockdown measures that provincial governments put into place. The ICU capacity is one-third that of the United States. When it comes to the OECD, we rank at the bottom, other than Mexico, in terms of ICU capacity. All of the provinces have been calling on the government to step up to the plate. All of the opposition parties are united on this, and the government, despite spending \$71 billion, could not allocate more money to address this crisis.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am happy to speak to the bill, but I cannot say I am happy with the bill. However, I will start off with a few positive comments about the bill.

I am a teacher by profession. I know that one of the items here is a school supplies tax credit, which would increase the credit from 15% to 25% for teachers who spend on supplies out of their own pockets, including for electronic devices. I think it might be about \$100 for the year that they would get back, so that is positive. School ventilation improvements in B.C. would come to about \$11 million, so certainly the comfort and health of students is important. There is also the eligible air quality expenditures for businesses.

There are some carrots inside the bill, but that is to be expected because the Liberals, when the opposition might potentially vote against this, will ask us how we could vote against teachers and how we could do this and that when it is such a nice bill. These are just the carrots. It is the essence of the content of the bill that is very problematic.

One of the problems in the bill is that it would be adding \$70 billion of inflationary fuel to the fire. Since the pandemic began there has been about \$176 billion in increased expenditures beyond those that were COVID-related. That is very significant when our debt right now is about \$1.2 trillion. The Liberals might yawn and say that for \$1.2 trillion they can just print some more money and ask what the big difference is. There is a real impact being felt at the kitchen table, in homes, with seniors, with younger people and with people everywhere.

The policies from the current government, which has lost control of its expenditures, have an impact on the cost of living. Right now we are facing inflation of about 5%. The wage increase is about half of that, 2.4%, in the last year. As such, people are falling behind in paying their bills, and it is getting harder for them and for anybody who does shopping. I went shopping yesterday or the day before with my wife, and I was noticing that, at Costco and every store, everything is going up. The Liberals will say it is supply chain issues and a worldwide issue and deflect any criticism from themselves.

Government Orders

The fact of the matter is that their out-of-control spending has an impact. The Parliamentary Budget Officer was very clear about that and said, "It appears to me that the rationale for the additional spending initially set aside as 'stimulus' no longer exists". Government deficits can and do contribute to inflation. The Liberals have more than doubled our debt load since they have been in. Think of all the prime ministers before this. Under the current Prime Minister it has more than doubled.

What is the problem with that? I think back to the eighties and nineties, when almost one-third of all the tax revenues from all sources, such as income tax and capital gains tax, went to pay for the interest charges on debt that had been accumulated. There are consequences to out-of-control spending, and it will only get worse because we are at historic lows as far as interest payments. However, as that increases, and the Bank of Canada governor has said that it will be going up, that will add to the debt and to the need for more revenues from people, because the government has to pay its interest charges.

• (1135)

More money spent on interest means less money spent on everything else, such as health care and infrastructure. All of these things have a real impact. The cost of living is going up \$1,000 in just inflation alone, not including the hundreds of dollars more in CPP payments for individuals this year. It is difficult, but put the onus on this government.

When I was driving in the Vancouver area, Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, gas was \$1.78 a litre. Someone driving a pickup truck for work is looking at \$200 in the Lower Mainland to fill up the tank, and if one has to fill up every week, it is very expensive. However, it is interesting that when demand goes down, prices go down, and when demand goes up, prices go up. There is an increased demand worldwide for oil and gas, but the approach of our Liberal government is that this is an industry of the past and we need to move on.

Canada has the third-highest proven reserves of oil and gas in the entire world, yet the Liberals want to phase it out. Ten per cent of our economy is based upon this, providing hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue and hundreds of thousands of jobs, yet this is to be phased out because it is not appropriate. We provide some of the cleanest energy in the world, yet the Liberals would rather close down the sector with all the jobs and import from Saudi Arabia or other countries via oil tanker than to produce it right here in this country. I think that is a real shame.

Government Orders

Right now, outside on the streets we have protests happening all across Canada. People are very upset about the direction of this government and what it is doing. The Liberals call people who are not vaccinated “anti-vaxxers” and inside the report, the finance minister said that it is about 20% of the population who are not vaccinated. Well, 20% of the population is over seven million Canadians and the Prime Minister, when he was being interviewed in Quebec, was questioning if we should tolerate these people. That is irresponsible, inflammatory and wrong. It is inappropriate. I could not believe it. That is terrible, and that is why there is frustration.

I know the Liberals will point to some radicals and, yes, there will be some that are extremists, but it is being felt. People are upset. They are losing their jobs. If members across the aisle or other people lost their jobs, how would they feel? However, it is happening in the tens of thousands. Many of these truckers are losing their jobs because they cannot drive across the border. Not only does that impact our supply-chain issues, raising inflation and costs, but it impacts jobs and the economy. People are upset.

People may say that it is for health, but people need to be able to make their own health care decisions. We support that.

I am double vaccinated, but guess what. I was not here the past couple of weeks, because both my wife and I had COVID. A person who is vaccinated can carry it just as much as a person who is not. I would like to read this letter before I close. It is from a 35-year-old female lawyer. She writes that she is an ultra-marathon runner and spends eight, nine or possibly 10 hours a day running. Before that, she was a varsity athlete at a university in Ontario. Saying she has always been fit would be an understatement. She has no pre-existing conditions, but when she got the vaccine, she started having chest pains and operating at a max threshold, even on walks, doubling and tripling her heart rate. As it stands, she is a 30-year-old with chronic heart pain.

She feels this constantly, and even on a slow walk she is out of breath. She goes on to say that she is not a conspiracy theorist. She actually makes a lot of money defending the largest pharmaceutical companies, but with that comes the knowledge that sometimes mistakes are made and sometimes we don't—

● (1140)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member's time is up, but he will be able to add during questions and comments.

Questions and comments, the hon. government whip.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member seems very concerned about inflation. I just want to ask him this very simply. He ran on a platform that purported to spend far in excess of what the Liberal Party, in fact, committed to spend in the last campaign. Why?

Mr. Marc Dalton: Madam Speaker, we cannot believe what the Liberals say. During the 2015 election they said there would be a \$10-billion deficit. Then what happened? It was \$30 billion, and that was pre-COVID. They were out of control prior and now they blame it all on COVID. They were not accurate with what they said then, and they will not be accurate about what they say in the future. That is my position on that.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I heard my colleague use the words “inflammatory” and “irresponsible” to describe comments he heard from the government side.

Will the member today, in Parliament, condemn the actions of his own colleagues who have emboldened and encouraged the violent and hateful actions we have seen take place in our nation's capital and in communities across our country? They included racist, anti-Semitic and other actions by so-called protesters whose protests have been supported by Conservative members in Parliament, including one of his colleagues who stood in front of a flag with swastikas on it. What does my colleague have to say about condemning those actions, which are deeply disturbing for so many Canadians across our country?

● (1145)

Mr. Marc Dalton: Madam Speaker, the Conservatives and I do not support extremism of any kind, no matter what the source. I certainly do not support that.

People have a right to protest and be listened to. They want to speak up. They are being ignored and are being labelled. It was reported in the media that there was an arrest made during a rally in Toronto because a smoke bomb was thrown in. It was done by someone who was a counterprotester. In Vancouver, where I am from, there were a number of arrests of more people who were against the convoy.

I believe that people need to be heard and listened to. I encourage the member to go talk to some of those people, to walk around and chat with them. That would be a good start.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, the economic update held the Canadian health transfer escalator to 3%. That is well below the annual health care cost increase.

We know the federal government paid for 50% of health care spending in the 1970s. Since then, it has steadily reduced its share down to the 22% we are at now.

Right now, Quebec and the Canadian provinces are unanimously calling on the government to increase the transfer by \$28 billion, which would cover 35% of health costs and be a 6% escalator. What does my colleague think of that?

Mr. Marc Dalton: Madam Speaker, it is really a problem. The impact of inflation on health care also affects seniors on fixed incomes because what they get is not keeping pace with rising prices. Government support is dwindling because it has lost control of the economy and its spending.

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak at length for the first in this 44th Parliament and, in so doing, speak to Bill C-8. I will review what this bill would do.

In alignment with the economic and fiscal update tabled in Parliament by the Minister of Finance last December, Bill C-8 would implement certain provisions of the economic fiscal update. There are a number of provisions in the bill, including several changes to the Income Tax Act; the enacting of a new underused housing tax act; funding for various COVID measures, including the purchasing of tests; and finally, amendments to the Employment Insurance Act. The economic fiscal update presented last year proposed increases in government spending by roughly \$70 billion, which adds to the national debt.

Since the pandemic started, the government has piled on spending and debt totalling in the hundreds of billion of dollars. Budget 2021 predicted a \$354-billion deficit for the 2020-21 fiscal year and an additional \$154-billion deficit for the 2021-22 fiscal year. It should be noted, however, that not all of the debt incurred over the last two years by the government was as a result of the pandemic. In fact, approximately \$176 billion in new deficit spending is unrelated to the pandemic.

I remember when the Prime Minister made a bold, but modest, promise to run a few small \$10-billion deficits to support infrastructure projects. Way back then, Canadians believed him. We all know where that promise ended up: at the bottom of the PMO shredder, ripped up into billions of tiny pieces.

The fact is that the Liberal government cannot be trusted to manage the country's finances in a responsible way. It is one thing for a government to borrow money during an emergency; it is quite a different story for that government to be running up the credit card for things that are unrelated to the pandemic. The government is using the pandemic to hide massive spending increases, and this latest additional spending increase is, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, unnecessary. He stated, "It appears to me that the rationale for the additional spending initially set aside as 'stimulus' no longer exists."

The reality is that we would not be here debating yet another \$70 billion in deficit spending if the Liberal government had not mismanaged and exploited the pandemic over the last two years.

Where has this runaway deficit spending gotten us? Our national debt has now reached \$1.2 trillion and has produced record-breaking inflation. At the finance committee, when asked if government deficits can contribute to inflation, the Parliamentary Budget Officer clearly responded that, yes, they can, and here we are with inflation reaching a 30-year high. Gasoline is up 34%. Housing prices are up almost 27%. Sugar is up 20%. Beef and bacon are up 17%, and carrots are up 13%. Even coffee is up 10%.

It has been reported that nearly 60% of Canadians are struggling to afford food for their families and that only 34% of Canadians believe their families will be better off in five years. It should then come as no surprise that this has led to Canada having one of the lowest levels of economic optimism in the world, well below the global average. I believe that is why we are seeing the mass demonstrations across our country and right outside the doors of this place, together with the thousands of people who have lined the streets and highways in support of them.

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Canadians are looking for hope and a future. In March of 2020, they were asked for two weeks to flatten the curve. They have now given two years. They have been waiting for, and continue to wait for, a plan to reopen our economy, get Canadians back to work and life back to normal. Still, there is no plan.

● (1150)

To be clear, Conservatives always understood that, if Canadians were being told to stay home and shutter their businesses, financial support would be needed. That is why we were supportive of measures that supported Canadians and Canadian businesses. It is why we have supported spending that made a real change for struggling Canadians heavily affected by the pandemic. It is why our Conservative members were there every step of the way, providing solutions to address the shortcomings to make those support programs better and more responsive to the needs of both workers and businesses.

However, we also understood that we needed to position both businesses and workers to be able to open up and get back to work when it was safe to do so. Last spring, the Parliamentary Budget Officer noted that a significant amount of the Liberal spending in the budget would not stimulate jobs or create economic growth. Unfortunately, unbridled spending on Liberal partisan priorities has been par for the course with the government. It has always run deficits, not once trying to control the national debt or rein in spending, and now that is catching up with us.

During debate on the Budget Implementation Act, I made the observation that budget 2021 did not set Canadians up for future prosperity. Rather, I said that it set up Canada for long-term postpandemic failure. It would appear that this is now the case. The Liberals have made numerous missteps in their spending during the pandemic, and Canadians are paying for it with the cost of living ballooning under the government.

As I stated earlier, Canadians are finding it more and more difficult to make ends meet. Families will be paying nearly \$1,000 more on groceries this year. They are struggling to provide for their children today, let alone save for their future tomorrow. Young people are being forced to live in their parents' basements because they cannot afford to buy a home of their own. There has been an 85% home inflation over the last six years, and 25% of that was in the last year alone. The Real Estate Association's chief economist has called it the biggest gain of all time.

Seniors on a fixed income cannot afford groceries with the price of food skyrocketing, and workers are finding it more and more costly to get to work with the price of gas soaring.

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Under the Prime Minister, Canada has consistently had one of the highest unemployment rates in the G7 and record economic decline. In fact, the Liberal government has spent more and delivered less than any other G7 country. Now more than ever, Canadians need a government willing to prioritize thoughtful, focused and effective fiscal policies ahead of its own partisan purposes.

We need policies that support Canadians getting back to work. We need policies that support every sector in every province across our country. For example, the oil and gas industry, which employs thousands of hard-working Canadians, fosters economic growth and provides revenues that support social programs and infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals. We need policies that will put Canadians first.

Conservatives are opposed to Bill C-8, which would unnecessarily add an additional \$70 billion of new inflationary spending to an already jaw-dropping deficit.

● (1155)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I notice my colleague's speech was bent pretty badly to one side and never talked about all the positives. She is saying there is nothing good in Bill C-8 and that we are wasting billions of dollars. If she looks closely, Bill C-8 includes major financial supports for schools, which are crucial, and the business community, which is crucial.

She also never spoke about the good news, like how all the jobs that were lost during the pandemic, which is over three million jobs, are back at 108%. In comparison, the U.S. is only back at 84%.

I would like her to comment about the good things in Bill C-8 that would help Canadians, schools, kids and community groups, etc. Please, find it in your heart to talk about the good things once in a while.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would like to remind the hon. parliamentary secretary that, as I am sure he was not directing that to me at the end, he is to direct all questions and comments through me.

The hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Speaker, I am sure the member would absolutely like me to speak positively about a measure that I can find very little to be positive about.

The bottom line here is that this bill would do nothing to secure long-term prosperity for Canadians, as I stated. It would do nothing to address the rapidly rising inflation that is impacting millions of Canadians, driving them closer and closer to the edge of financial insolvency. Instead, this bill is proposing more spending for a reimagined Canadian economy that dabbles in risky economic ideas and leaves our economy and Canadians behind.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, the more we hear from our Conservative friends, the more we see that they are still obsessed with inflation.

Of course inflation is important, but let us talk about the housing crisis specifically. As I said earlier, Canada is 1.8 million housing units short of the G7 average, according to Scotiabank. Moreover, 500,000 households in Quebec have urgent housing needs, and the federal government stepped away from social housing 30 years ago.

What we are seeing now is that the government is investing in the private sector to create affordable housing units in Montreal priced at \$2,200. That makes absolutely no sense. To tackle this crisis, the government will have to invest money one way or another, even if that could make inflation go up.

Does my colleague think the housing crisis is serious and important enough for the government to invest money, even if that means a little bump in inflation? Would the Conservatives be okay with that?

● (1200)

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Speaker, we know that the housing market for new entrants continues to worsen under the current Liberal government. A recent report by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation indicates a continuing trend of housing starts slowing down across the country, with December showing a 22% decrease from the previous month. This will exacerbate the problem.

As the member mentioned, Canada is facing a housing supply issue, which the Liberal government has consistently failed to address. The Liberals have no plan to address this housing crisis. Instead of figuring out how to implement a housing tax, the government should actually turn its attention to ensuring Canadian homes get built. We will continue to be the voice of Canadians who are left behind by the current Liberal government.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, 11 people die every day in this country from death by suicide. A third of those deaths are of people between the ages of 45 and 59. Suicide is the second-leading killer of people between the ages of 15 and 34. Men are three times more likely than women to die from suicide.

Our good colleague from Timmins—James Bay put forward a national suicide prevention action plan motion that was adopted in this House unanimously back in May 2019. The national collaborative on suicide prevention wants to see that enacted. Today I am hoping that we can actually talk about something and work on it together.

Does my colleague agree that the government needs to implement this right away? We see the grief and the trauma of people who have been impacted by losing a loved one to death by suicide.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Speaker, I agree with the member that creating a national strategy to address mental health and the increase in suicides all across this country is very important. Having had a family member who committed suicide, I absolutely agree that more needs to be done.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the people Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, I thank the Hon. Erin O'Toole for his service to our party and the sacrifices he and his wife Rebecca made as they led the official opposition. This is a huge challenge at the best of times, let alone during a pandemic.

This is my first time speaking in the House since our interim leader, the Hon. Candice Bergen stepped into her new role—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that he is not to use individuals' names. They can be mentioned by their riding or position, but not by their name.

The hon. member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame.

Mr. Clifford Small: Madam Speaker, thank you for straightening me out.

I wish our interim leader well as she guides the party in a strong direction for this country.

I stand here providing an intervention on Bill C-8. Most Canadians are in awe of the government's spending over the last two years. When I talk with my constituents in Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, the chorus that gets echoed is that our children and our grandchildren will have to pay for this. This is absolutely the case, and the additional, immediate concern is that we are actually paying for this now with skyrocketing inflation. The economic and fiscal update of 2021 adds an additional \$70 million to fuel this fire. Seniors and people on fixed incomes just cannot keep up and have to make difficult choices between buying their medicine, heating their homes and putting food on the table.

I am quite familiar with this. Many of my constituents are living this nightmare. Food and fuel inflation is through the roof, especially in my province. Gasoline is \$1.71 per litre today in Gander and Grand Falls-Windsor. The average family in Canada will pay \$1,000 extra for groceries in 2022. That is an average for Canada. I suspect it will be much higher than that in remote areas like Fogo Island, the Connaigre peninsula and the Baie Verte Peninsula. Extra government spending is relentlessly driving prices higher for my constituents.

Let us not forget the inflationary effect of the carbon tax, especially in remote regions like Newfoundland and Labrador. Here we are with the most vulnerable in our population bearing the burden because those who profited from the government's overstimulation of the economy have more money to chase less goods.

Small businesses throughout Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame are reeling from labour inflation and the rising cost of the products that they sell. According to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, among our small business community, one in six will likely close their doors this year, putting a million Canadians out of work. The average small business has taken on \$500,000 in extra debt, putting everything that they worked for in their entire life in jeopardy. The anxiety of small business owners is on bust, with no clear path forward on the reopening of our economy.

Great Britain and other European nations have latched on to the notion that we are now in an endemic, but they are reopening their economies so that small businesses can have a chance at survival

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and begin paying back the debt they have accumulated. In Great Britain, rapid tests have been available for purchase in convenience stores for months so that individuals could manage their COVID needs without having to place unneeded strain on their health care system.

Bill C-8 authorizes \$1.72 million to provide for extra coronavirus testing. I think the government is a little late to the party when it comes to providing testing such as that available in Europe. As a result, we lag far behind our G7 partners in reopening our economy. Bill C-8 certainly highlights the government's failure to take advantage of rapid testing to keep our economy fluid and keep our workers employed.

As I gaze a little further along in this bill, I spot a clause that introduces a refundable tax credit to return fuel charge proceeds to farmers. It is not a bad idea. However, I cannot understand how commercial fishers were left out. This clause could have been extended to include fishing enterprises. Does the government not realize that the fishing industry in ridings like Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame is crucial to providing food for our tables? A National Post article in 2018 stated that the effects of increasing carbon tax on the fishing industry could degrade its competitiveness.

● (1205)

We are seeing it now. Oil is currently almost \$93 a barrel and is forecast to move well north of \$100 this year, possibly to \$200 a barrel in a couple of years. The effects of rapidly increasing oil prices and the carbon tax will put a heavy strain on fishing enterprises in Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame and in fact in all of coastal Canada. This bill should acknowledge the harm to our fishers and provide to the fishing industry a tax credit similar to that offered to the farming industry. Omitting the fishing industry from fuel tax credits shows how disconnected the government is from the pressures put on fishers by increased taxation on fuels. Fuel is not a luxury item for the fishing industry. Fishers simply cannot pass on the carbon tax to consumers, because they are bound by a market commodity-driven pricing arrangement for their catch.

The government could take this opportunity to use a bill like Bill C-8 to provide a complete carbon tax exemption for commercial fishing enterprises.

I just wanted to highlight how this inflationary danger could have been addressed in Bill C-8.

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Bills like this help a few in our country but neglect to help most, and in the end, we pay more for everything. As well, bills like this that incorporate so many unrelated items to be voted on as a group are unfair to those of us who have to vote on them. This bill covers so many unrelated issues that it makes no sense.

To that point, this buffet of tax-and-spend measures even deals with the Employment Insurance Act as it pertains to seasonal workers. My mind was boggled as I tried to understand part 7, which talks about changes to seasonal workers' EI benefits. Many ridings in rural Canada are like Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame and rely on jobs in seasonal industries, and changes to the EI act are a big concern.

As this debate continues, I look forward to some clarity on part 7 of this bill. The government is responsible for letting Canadians know what its legislation means in layman's terms so that they can understand it. These are just a few things relating to my constituents that render Bill C-8 unacceptable.

From a broader Canadian perspective, the government has brought in \$176 billion in new spending that is unrelated to COVID-19. The national debt has now reached a jaw-dropping \$1.2 trillion. It is not looking good for the “budget balancing itself” act.

I am happy to be part of a team that is fighting to keep the cost of living down for our seniors, families and those on fixed incomes. I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on their behalf.

• (1210)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, regarding the area that I heard our hon. colleague speaking about in Bill C-8, specifically on the subject of small businesses, would he not acknowledge the many different programs we offered, specifically the issue of the \$60,000, and part of it being forgivable? Does he not agree that this was a huge help in getting our small businesses to the point where they are today?

Mr. Clifford Small: Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that the \$60,000 loan, with the \$20,000 forgivable portion, was a help to small businesses in Canada.

However, the other part of it is that the massive spending and the flooding of printed money into our economy caused labour inflation and caused inflation in the products and goods that businesses need to conduct themselves. The other aspect was the needlessly long period of CERB payments that demoralized small business workers, as they figured it was just as easy to stay home as to go in and work.

You created massive wage inflation that is crushing small businesses.

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. He may want to refrain from using the word “you”.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague spoke a lot about how businesses have been affected during the pandemic. However, his party, the Conservative Party,

has consistently voted against any support for businesses and against support programs during the pandemic.

The Liberal government has currently cut support to businesses. The NDP is fighting to get those supports put back in place. Does my hon. colleague believe that we need to keep these pandemic support programs in place to save small businesses?

Mr. Clifford Small: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her question, but I do not wish to thank her for her support of the federal government's policies.

What we need right is the reopening of our economy. That is what my constituents are telling me. They want the pandemic to be behind us. They are tired, broken and demoralized, and their mental health is suffering.

My hon. colleague should think about the people she is representing. What they are telling her is exactly the same as what I am hearing. They are who she should be standing up for.

• (1215)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Canada emergency business account provides interest-free loans of up to \$60,000. Initially, repaying the balance of the loan on or before December 31, would have resulted in loan forgiveness of up to 33 per cent.

However, in Quebec we are seeing that almost a quarter of SMEs might not survive, and we think more needs to be done. For example, we have proposed increasing the loan forgiveness amount for the smallest businesses or those whose sales fell short of a certain threshold. What does my colleague think of that?

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small: Madam Speaker, those are excellent points raised by my hon. colleague.

I have spoken to many small business owners who are feeling the strain. They are worried about having to pay back those loans on time. They can barely keep their doors open, because our economy is shut down.

If the government does not act soon and follow what our European colleagues are doing, those businesses will fail. They can barely keep their cash flow moving at all right now, let alone pay back those loans in two years' time.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to the economic update proposed in Bill C-8. However, I am not at all pleased to say that it is about as weak as the throne speech. There are many things missing from it.

The bill proposes some interesting things, such as credits for ventilation, transportation for people who live in remote regions, medical care and school supplies, and a tax credit to return fuel charge proceeds to farming businesses. These are things that seem to make sense. However, I would like to call on the federal government to be very vigilant and aware that it needs to pay close attention to areas of jurisdiction and to work with Quebec and the other provinces on several of these aspects.

In the economic update, the government also talks about charging a 1% tax on vacant housing. We all know that vacant housing is a major problem, and we cannot really be against such a measure. However, we need to raise a red flag, or at least an orange one, about the fact that this will once again interfere with certain jurisdictions. I therefore urge the federal government to be careful, to work with Quebec and large cities like Montreal and to provide the necessary support, instead of sticking its nose where it might not belong.

No one can be against that idea. However, the proposed percentage of 1% may pose a problem. I would like to think that it will bring in some \$600 million or so, but a similar tax exists elsewhere. Vancouver had a 15% tax, which was later increased to 25%, compared to the federal government's 1%. France's tax is 12.5% for the first year and 25% for subsequent years. In Canada, we are talking about a 1% tax. What will be the real impact of that measure?

The Bloc Québécois believes that access to social housing should be a priority, and that is where we should be targeting our efforts. It is extremely important to increase the housing supply, because the need is there.

From 1960 to 1995, the federal government funded the construction of 25,000 new housing units. Now, with its 20-year strategy, the government is proposing to add 6,000 new units a year, and the Bloc Québécois is very concerned that it is just not enough.

The Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain estimates that since 1994 the federal government's disengagement from these programs has deprived Quebec of more than 80,000 social housing units. It is now estimated that Quebec needs 50,000 units.

I want to make an aside about health. If the government had not made gradual, insidious and even—dare I say it—vicious cuts to health transfers year after year, we might not be in such a predicament today. Our health care system has been significantly undermined over the past two years, and it was already struggling before that. Why was it struggling before? Because it has been underfunded for a long time. Why has it been underfunded for a long time? Because half the taxes go to the federal government, but the federal government has less than half of the responsibilities. I do not know how many times I have to repeat that in the House, but I will continue to do so for as long as necessary. This economic update could have provided for an increase in health care transfers, but it did not. That was just a quick but important aside.

I now want to come back to social housing, a sector where we are seeing the same phenomenon. The federal government withdrew from this file in 1994, and the sector is now lagging behind. That is where the government needs to invest. It needs to build social and community housing. Scotiabank estimates that Canada

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needs to build an additional 1.8 million dwellings just to reach the G7 average. I take that to mean that we are currently doing very poorly in comparison with the rest of the G7. That is what Canada is being told, and that tells us something is wrong.

I would like to point out to government members that social housing is not the same as affordable housing. There is a very important distinction. The cost of social housing is based on the average cost of housing, which means that, because rents in the Montreal area have increased by 18.7% in the past five years, a social housing unit now costs \$2,225 a month.

● (1220)

Do I really need to explain that a lot of middle-class families need social housing? This government is always banging on about the middle class. If supporting the middle class is so important, then the government should prove it. What people need is social housing.

I am calling on the government to respect jurisdictions and consider the work being done in Quebec through the AccèsLogis Québec program, for example. This is crucial.

The government needs to stop trying to grab headlines by making flashy announcements, since the large amounts of money it announces often include the provinces' and municipalities' shares. The government needs to stop misleading the public and start being honest about how much it is actually spending.

How is it possible that just 25% of the money has been spent, two years into a four-year program? This means that the government is insidiously and maliciously planning to ensure there will be money left when the program is over. No one realizes it because what makes the news is the big bucks announced early on. We are tired of this. We want to work for our constituents.

There are some other worthwhile points to consider in the economic update. There are not many, but there are some, such as the Canada emergency business account. My colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île mentioned this program in a question. Our SMEs are drowning in debt. The estimated average debt is nearly \$100,000, which is a huge amount.

SMEs are very important in Quebec. They are crucial. That is another thing that sets Quebec apart: SMEs contribute 30% of our GDP. We have to support those people. We cannot just let half our businesses fail in 2022. Analysts have concerns about that. More flexibility is called for, so we are very pleased that the loan repayment deadline has been extended. That is something we asked for, and the people of my riding are very happy about it.

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How about increasing the amount for small storefront businesses because brick-and-mortar shops cost money to run? There are also online businesses competing with big, powerful multinationals. How about helping those little SMEs compete by coming up with solutions to support online merchants, such as reducing postage rates and credit card fees? Visa and Mastercard are not the ones covering the cost of all the points people get when they pay with a credit card; merchants are. That is an important thing to remember. There is some work to do on that. It would definitely involve negotiations, but I think it can be done, and the Bloc Québécois is offering to help.

I just talked about health transfers, a subject that is not mentioned in the economic update. However, the economic update does talk about ventilation and other things that come under provincial and Quebec jurisdiction, so we need to pay attention to that.

The economic update talks about the duration of EI benefits and the possibility of increasing the number of weeks. We appreciate that, because we have been talking about the seasonal gap for 10 years now. Why is that measure only temporary, though? This needs to be settled once and for all. EI benefits must be provided to people with serious illnesses; we can work together.

There is absolutely nothing in the economic update about supply chain issues. Labour issues were debated throughout the election campaign. Why have no proposals been made on this matter? The government needs to come up with something. The Bloc has proposals to make. Will the government listen to them?

We are proposing a tax credit for people aged 65 and over, after a certain number of hours worked. We are proposing measures for temporary foreign workers. Businesses are in urgent need of workers. These workers are not being allowed to enter; they are being turned away.

Last week I hit the roof over the 12-week waiting period for EI. Things finally got moving on the weekend with the addition of more teams. Why did it take months for this to happen? We are not here to cause trouble. We are here to work for the people, to collaborate, but things need to get moving.

The Bloc Québécois proposed a series of concrete measures for foreign workers, including expedited visas that are valid for five years and the possibility of eliminating the requirement for labour market impact assessments, or LMIA's.

To boost productivity, we are proposing a business investment program. The agri-food sector is chronically underfunded. I worry that it may become more profitable for a business to close up shop and reopen somewhere else. Why not create an investment program that could help with labour issues? That is important.

In closing, there is also the problem of transportation bottlenecks. It defies logic that we transport animals to be slaughtered in Pennsylvania when we are trying to buy electric cars and travel less in an attempt to reduce our carbon footprint. It makes no sense. What about the businesses' bottom line and the animals' welfare? There is a whole host of reasons to stop doing this.

• (1225)

I want to collaborate with the government, but there has to be something to work with, and there is not a lot of substance in this economic update.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to pick up on the member's comments on the importance of small businesses. It is important for us to recognize that the number of small businesses today in Canada is greater than the number prepandemic, from what I understand. I think in good part that is because the Government of Canada is working with the Government of Quebec and with municipalities like Montreal and Quebec City. We have been very successful at providing the supports that were necessary to ensure these businesses would survive the pandemic.

I am interested in the member's thoughts and commentary on how important it is that different levels of government work together for the betterment of our economy and people in general.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. We agree once again. I find that has been happening quite a bit recently. That is a change.

I completely agree with him on the fundamental importance of SMEs. We supported the small business assistance programs because it is important to have them. However, I would like to remind my colleague opposite that small business debt levels are very high. Yes, all levels of government must work together, but we, too, must work together. The Bloc has some suggestions. We believe that the government should be a little more generous with the smallest businesses and consider their prepandemic debt ratio and profitability.

I am also thinking of the businesses that opened their doors during the pandemic. They thought the pandemic was over after the first or second wave, but more waves keep coming and they cannot access any assistance. I think an effort must be made to help these businesses.

We therefore agree on one thing: SMEs are important to the economy.

[English]

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my colleague from the Bloc a question with regard to small businesses. He and a member from the NDP, both of whom are in the House today, supported and helped me with Bill C-208 on qualifying small businesses and interfamily transfers last summer. I wonder if he could just remind my colleague from Winnipeg North that major accounting firms in Canada said that passing this bill did more for small businesses in Canada than probably any other finance decision for those qualifying small businesses in the last 25 years. I wonder if he could also remind my colleagues on the Liberal side of the House that it is this kind of support for small businesses that is really needed, as opposed to some of the things the Liberals have talked about. We know policies were needed to get things going. The problem with the government spending now is that only part of it can be traced to the need to keep small businesses and families going through the pandemic.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Madam Speaker, I thank my esteemed colleague from Brandon—Souris. We are on the exact same page.

I find it quite amusing that he has asked me to pass on a message for him, and I thank him for giving me the opportunity to make a clarification. Small businesses do not exist because of the government. The government did take measures to help them through the crisis, but my colleague from Brandon—Souris essentially wants me to emphasize how important it is to give them a bit more of a hand, because the restrictions are dragging on and on.

If anyone needs proof that these long-drawn-out restrictions are doing economic harm, just have a look at the people out in front of Parliament. It is clear from the protest that these restrictions have been in place for a long time. People travelled all the way here and stayed all week because the situation is having an impact on them. We need to think about businesses, about people in the service industry. Yesterday I saw one of my friends who works in the theatre industry. He was certainly fed up.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising these important points, especially with respect to housing and the housing crisis that so many Canadians are facing.

Does the member think that the federal government should focus on housing, specifically the existing first nations housing crisis in Quebec and across the country? Does the member think that the government needs to immediately invest in first nations housing?

Mr. Yves Perron: Madam Speaker, the short answer is yes, of course.

As I mentioned earlier, my only concern is that the government needs to be mindful of jurisdictions and look at what is being done in the different provinces and territories. Housing for indigenous peoples is a parallel issue. There are indeed urgent needs in that sector, which, by the way, falls under federal jurisdiction. The federal government needs to take care of the areas under its own jurisdiction that it has been neglecting over the past few years.

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With regard to the other sectors, the federal government needs to transfer the money and the work will get done. I am thinking, for example, of AccèsLogis and other programs in Quebec. Our ultimate goal is the same.

[English]

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy stand today to speak to Bill C-8 and join my many colleagues. I believe that together we are working to move our country forward and solve some of the problems we certainly have as a result of the pandemic.

I do want to acknowledge the protesters who continue to be outside blocking the streets and disrupting the lives of many people here in the city of Ottawa. It is nothing more than being obstructionist and it is putting a black mark on Canada. I was told yesterday that a plane flew across a beach in Florida applauding the truckers. Well, I think there are very few truckers out here. There are a lot of other people who are simply trying to cause problems and embarrass our country, and the sooner they leave, the sooner we all can get on to a life that we all want to live.

As I said, I am happy 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, along with other measures that are going to help Canadians from coast to coast to coast. The bill would provide vital funding, tax credits that will aid in the fight against COVID-19, and aid in a variety of areas as we move forward.

I bring to the attention of everyone that after the American Civil War unfolded, the founders of our great country realized that we had to start giving out some additional responsibilities to the provinces; hence, education was allocated as a responsibility of the provinces, and we respect that continuously.

For the Province of Ontario in particular, approximately 80% of the funding that has been used in the pandemic to help the citizens, in particular of Ontario and across Canada, came from the federal government. It was money from the federal government that has improved the air quality throughout our schools, which should have been done a long time ago. Whether it was improving air quality or making sure that school boards had the funds for students to get an iPad and study and do online learning, even those are provincial responsibilities, I was very proud that the federal government stepped up to make sure that the provinces had the money to make a difference in those schools for the students, who are now grateful all across Canada to be back to school again.

One thing it created was responsibilities. We had to do all of that together with our provincial governments. The provincial funding has been continually cut, and one of the results of those cuts is that teachers have to pay for supplies out of their own pockets. From pencils and paper to educational programs, more and more costs have fallen on our education providers. I hear that a lot from teachers. I hear their frustration at the things that they have to do because the provinces are continually cutting the education budgets.

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We all understand that budgets have to be dealt with, and none of us want to have to make cuts, whether it is the provinces, the municipalities or the federal government, but the reality is that we have to make sure Canadians have the resources they need to continue to grow and advance their businesses and their communities.

When COVID-19 began, schools across the country found themselves closed to in-person learning and classes were moved online. Many of the students in Humber River—Black Creek did not have access to the Internet and did not have iPads and computers. I am pleased to say that the money that was transferred from the federal government to the provinces was dealt with very quickly. Students throughout Humber River—Black Creek were given an iPad if they did not have one or a computer to help them so that they would not fall behind. They were already dealing with enough challenges and they needed all of the assistance that was possible.

Bill C-8 makes changes to what is called the school supplies tax credit. It amends the Income Tax Act regulations through a rate increase from 15% to 25%. It also expands the list of eligibility to include electronic devices such as webcams, microphones, headphones, speakers, laptops, desktops and tablet computers.

● (1235)

For the past two years, all of these things enabled thousands of children across Canada to continue their education. It was not ideal, but it was the best thing we could do to keep our children from falling behind. These changes would apply to 2021 and all years afterward, providing aid to teachers now and also in a post-COVID future.

Another way that the government is aiding our schools is the safe return to class fund. It was originally \$2 billion and provided the provinces and the territories with funding to schools as they made investments to protect the students and staff. Bill C-8 would top up \$100 million to support investments by schools in increasing outdoor air intake or air cleaning. It would help reduce the transmission of COVID-19 by supporting ventilation improvement projects in schools.

I will go back to when the founders of this great country allocated education as a provincial responsibility, which is respected continuously. This pandemic called for extraordinary circumstances. As a result of that funding, many of our schools are open and our children are back to school.

As a government, we have purchased and shipped over 80 million rapid tests at a cost of over \$900 million. We can recall that about a year ago, many of those rapid tests were sitting on shelves and were not being used by the provinces. Provinces thought they did not need them. That certainly changed, so they ended up utilizing the thousands and thousands of rapid tests and ordering another \$1.72 billion to procure and provide rapid antigen tests to the provinces and territories so they could be distributed to Canadians, which is the process, especially since there has been a growing demand from the provinces and territories for rapid tests to be provided around the holidays to prevent further outbreaks. These rapid tests are also key to the health and well-being of many vulnerable Canadians.

Over the Christmas period and in January, while we were waiting for a delivery of additional rapid tests, I cannot tell members the number of people who called my office asking if I could help them to make sure they were being tested as frequently as possible. One particular young woman who has MS was very concerned about her ability to get out to get her second vaccination and wanted access to the rapid tests. I have to say that our local hospital was very helpful to her and her family to make sure she had some rapid tests and that she and her family were going to be safe.

While rapid tests might aid us in controlling the spread of current variants of COVID and any that may come in the future, the best path forward, in spite of the people outside objecting to it, is a vaccination requirement. Those who are not vaccinated put themselves and all of us at risk of contracting COVID-19 when they enter group settings, particularly indoor ones. This is why the proof of vaccination program is important. It is so that vaccinated Canadians can move to get back to their lives under this new reality.

I walked over here to Parliament and I saw all of the signs up there outside the cars, and all the ranting and raving going on by some folks. They are putting all of us at risk. I did my best job to protect them by getting vaccinated. All we are asking is that they get vaccinated, and if they do not want to get vaccinated, then to accept the consequences of that decision.

It is important not just here in Canada but internationally, as those who need and want to travel need appropriate documentation to enter these countries. I have been talking to many people in the medical field. Many of them want to travel, but unfortunately they are not able to do that, for a variety of reasons. However, people who have both their vaccines and a booster and have done everything possible should not have to worry that when they go out onto Wellington Street they are being exposed to the variants and the possibility of getting ill in one form or another. Proof of vaccination programs and their credentials have played a major part in allowing our businesses to reopen.

I am very thankful for the opportunity to make my comments this morning. Stay well and stay safe.

● (1240)

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for mentioning the protest outside. I think it is important for all members to condemn the fascist and anti-Semitic symbols displayed by some. I hope the member will support the NDP's push to ban hate symbols.

I would like to talk about some pieces of the bill and the many essential measures that are not included in the bill.

There are so many seniors who are struggling after months of uncertainty around the GIS clawback. The government proposed a one-time payment solution, but this promised compensation would not be made available until May. Last week, my colleague for North Island—Powell River shared the tragic fact that this delay resulted in the unnecessary death of a senior in her riding who could not afford their medication, and it is having other devastating impacts. I spoke on the phone to a senior in my riding who was in a motel room. He had recently lost his housing because he could not afford rent without the GIS. He was using the last of his money to keep a roof over his head, living temporarily in a motel, and he was distraught about the idea that he would soon be on the street.

Will the member commit to calling on her own government to provide an emergency payment now—not in May, not in another four months—to keep seniors off the streets and to save lives?

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for asking that question and continuing to work with us to make a difference in the lives of many people.

When we were able to give seniors throughout the country approximately \$1,500 in these last two years as extra money to help them get through the difficulties, it was a huge help to many of the seniors I know in my riding of Humber River—Black Creek and across the country.

We are working on the issue that the member has mentioned. We understand that there have been some challenges and we are looking to try to remedy that situation as soon as possible.

• (1245)

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from the government side for her comments today and for contributing to the debate.

When it comes Bill C-8, one of the topics that I do not think was addressed well enough is housing. We know that it is an important issue that is impacting people from many regions of the country at different income levels and from different walks of life. It seems that the government has put forward a lot of plans that would help to subsidize demand and actually further drive a wedge between the supply and demand sides of housing and widen the gap.

I wonder if the member can elaborate on what this government plans to do to increase the housing supply in Canada.

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Madam Speaker, I am happy to comment.

The housing issue, of course, is important to all of us, and I am very proud of the work that our government has done. With our Minister of Housing, we have committed billions of dollars, and we have seen it on the streets of Toronto. Over 700 more housing units have been created through the accelerated housing program, and we are working on the issue of rent-to-own and a variety of other programs to ensure that affordable housing is created.

We understand that it is a problem throughout the country. The Minister of Housing is working full time to make sure that all of this is accelerated and is working with our municipalities, mayors and councillors to attempt to reduce red tape so that we all understand the need that is out there for affordable housing.

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[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, who chairs the committee I sit on. We will see each other there a little later. I am happy to work with her and to be able to talk to her in the House now as well.

My colleague was saying earlier that government transfers made it possible to buy iPads for students. I would like to ask the member what the point of buying iPads is if high-speed Internet is not yet available in all of the regions. It took a pandemic for the government to realize that this is an essential service.

[English]

Hon. Judy A. Sgro: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. He is a great member of our committee, and I very much enjoy working with him.

Yes, getting the Internet broadband situation solved in this country is a huge challenge. We recognize that there are still areas that have very poor Internet quality or next to no Internet whatsoever. It has been and continues to be a major commitment of our government to ensure that we have high-speed Internet available to all Canadians, no matter where they live.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity in my first speech of the 44th Parliament to congratulate my Conservative colleague, the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar, on her recent election to be our party's interim leader. I look forward to working with her and with all of my Conservative colleagues in the days, weeks and months ahead as we hold the government to account while growing our party stronger.

I would also like to take a moment to provide my sincere thanks to the former Conservative leader, the hon. member for Durham. I want to thank him and his family for their dedication and efforts in helping guide our party over the past 18 months.

While the leadership of the Conservative Party has undergone change over the past week, I am disappointed to report that the Liberal government leadership in Ottawa remains the same: missing in action, as thousands of protesters from the “freedom convoy” have camped in the nation's capital and blockaded downtown Ottawa for over a week now. What is the government's solution to this impasse outside the walls of this place? We still wait to hear of one. In fact, he is so committed to resolving the issue, the Prime Minister was required to take a personal day off yesterday. Instead of ignoring the situation at hand, where is the leadership required to bring about an expeditious resolution so the citizens of Ottawa can go about their normal lives? More than two years into the pandemic, this is what Canadians simply want: a return to their normal lives.

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Let me be extremely clear. There is no question that vaccines are critically important in our fight against COVID and to help us get there. Canada's Conservatives have consistently taken this position throughout the pandemic. We have also encouraged all Canadians who are willing to get their shots. I am fully vaccinated, and I encourage everyone who can to get vaccinated as well. It is the best tool we have, but it is not the only tool. Leadership is about bringing Canadians together. It is about providing the assistance required so we can get to the recovery everyone wants so badly.

Since the early days of this pandemic, Canada's Conservatives have been strong proponents of both vaccines and rapid testing. While vaccines are now widely available, the unfortunate reality is that rapid testing devices are still rare to find and expensive to buy. The government will say Bill C-8 addresses this question specifically by allocating funds directly to this, but why has it taken two years? The increased use of rapid testing will offer early detection of COVID to help limit its spread, and it would also be an important health care tool to let vaccine-hesitant and unvaccinated Canadians carry on with their lives responsibly.

Speaking of those who are hesitant, I receive calls and emails every day asking why there is a delay in the approval of a traditional vaccine from Novavax. Many Canadians have said they are prepared to get vaccinated, but would prefer the protein-based vaccine as opposed to an mRNA vaccine, and that is their rightful choice. Over a year ago, the federal government purchased 52 million doses of Novavax. However, it has still not been approved by Health Canada. Meanwhile, the status of the \$126-million Novavax plant production in Montreal remains in question. It disappoints me greatly that the Prime Minister and his Liberal government are delaying access to critical health care tools that can give all Canadians a greater freedom of choice, especially as it pertains to managing their personal health care and family well-being.

In fact, where are the additional resources the provinces have been asking for in terms of federal health transfers to address the issue of a lack of health care surge capacity? The provinces have been asking for over two years and now, and instead, today we are debating Bill C-8, an additional \$70 billion in spending that does not tackle this question head-on. We are now two years into this pandemic and it is all too clear that the Liberal government has failed to ensure we have the tools necessary to not only respond to, but, more importantly, live with COVID so Canadians and the people of Niagara can get on with their lives.

Another federal failure in the pandemic response has been excessive government spending. Since the start of this pandemic, the federal government has brought in \$176 billion in new spending that is unrelated to COVID-19. Overall, the national debt has now reached an astounding \$1.2 trillion. The cost of government is ballooning the cost of living. More dollars are chasing fewer goods and that means higher prices. Spending more costs more. That is the inflation tax.

• (1250)

We are seeing that inflation tax in everything essential to Canadians, from food to fuel to housing. For example, the price of food is skyrocketing. The average family will pay nearly \$1,000 extra on groceries in 2022. Rent is up 5%, chicken is up 6.2%, beef is up

11.9% and bacon is up 19.1%. The same price increases are being felt by Canadians on fuel. Gas prices have soared by 33%. This weekend alone, I saw one gas station in Niagara selling gas at \$1.56 a litre. Natural gas prices have also shot up, by 19%.

Perhaps the worst has been seen in Canada's housing market. When the Prime Minister took power, the typical house cost \$435,000. Now it costs \$810,000. That is over 85% inflation in just six years. Last year, home inflation hit 25%, which The Canadian Real Estate Association's chief economist called the biggest gain of all time.

It has been two long and difficult years, and some say it still feels like March 2020, when the countrywide lockdowns first started. All Canadians deserve a federal government that is here to serve and protect its citizens and our nation's best interests. That means it does not matter what their political party is, where they live in the country, what faith they follow or what their vaccine status is. All Canadians deserve so much better from their federal government than what we are getting now.

From the very beginning of COVID, the Liberal government was grossly unprepared for the pandemic, just as it is grossly unprepared to deal with the consequences and ramifications of its own vaccine policies that it is mandating on Canadians when alternative solutions and options exist. I mentioned this earlier: The duty of government and of everyone here is to work so that we can bring people together to find solutions in the best interests of all. Instead, we have a government in place that revels in wedge-issue politics, and the division that it brings has now manifested in the anger and frustrations we are witnessing today in Ottawa and across the country.

What we see happening outside the walls of this place today is a problem that can be directly linked back to the Liberal government's unpreparedness for the pandemic in the first place. Whether it was expired PPE stored in warehouses when the pandemic first hit, or the federal government deciding to ship good, usable PPE to China when our frontline health care workers desperately needed it here, or when we found out that the Liberal government decided to abandon the Global Public Health Intelligence Network just months before the pandemic hit, or the fact that many of our hospitals were already facing severe capacity limits before the first cases of coronavirus arrived or when the Liberal government decided to prorogue Parliament in the middle of a pandemic, all of the colossal failures add up to the frustrations Canadians are feeling today.

The weight of responsibility for this pandemic and Canada's response to it is on the federal government's shoulders. Vaccines and rapid tests should have been fully accessible by now to all Canadians. Our economy should be open and recovered from this pandemic by now. The provinces should have had additional resources to tackle the surge in capacity COVID brought. Workers should be back to work to help alleviate the severe labour shortages we are experiencing and to help strengthen our supply chains.

For two years, Canadians have done their part. Why has the government not done its part?

• (1255)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I disagree with much of what the member said. As a country, we have done exceptionally well in working with Canadians and other stakeholders to ensure that we had the vaccines that were necessary and had PPE. We have ensured that ultimately Canada is in a great position to recover and do better, and it is as a result of the actions from the government in working with other people. The member is so wrong on many accounts.

Within Bill C-8, there is an allotment of \$1.7 billion to provide continuing support for rapid testing. Let us keep in mind that there was no backlog of demand for rapid testing at the end of the year. This government has met its expectations and in fact has exceeded the number that was required by the end of last year, yet the member is still convinced that the Conservatives need to go against this bill. Why would he vote against a bill that would help hundreds of his constituents?

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his faux righteous indignation, which shows up on the Liberal side.

It has been two years now. Why is the government continuing the process of playing catch-up? Last February it took four months. Why is the government four months behind in the acquisition of vaccines? I had to call and write in to ask why the CBSA agents and border workers were unable to get vaccinated when other people were. The government has been far from quick on this.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: We already won the election over that one.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Oh, yes. Again, it is more righteous indignation—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. There is no cross-debate.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, what we are seeing is exactly what has been happening for months. We hear about divisions and bickering when they cannot seem to agree on vaccines and science within their own party.

Sometimes they say that it is good to demonstrate, and other times they say it is illegal to stay in one place. Sometimes they say

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that vaccines are good, and other times they say that science proves otherwise.

My colleague talks about the government being divisive and lacking direction, but I would like him to explain his own party's position.

• (1300)

[English]

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Madam Speaker, the member is correct in mentioning the issue of divisiveness. The Liberal government revels in the whole notion of wedge issues to create division, to turn Canadians against one another.

I do not know about the members opposite, but I think we are all here because we want to help people, not because we want to turn the majority against the minority. Our job as representatives is to work together to find solutions that bridge those differences and find accommodations for those who do not want to be vaccinated. We should not be seeing what we are seeing on the streets of Ottawa. The government has brought it about. It is the manifestation of its own wedge-issue politics, and it should be ashamed of that.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am going to read a quote from February 13, 2020, from the member for Carleton. On the protesting of indigenous land defenders, he said, “These blockaders are taking away the freedom of other people to move their goods and themselves. That is wrong and the government has laws and tools in place to combat it.”

Right now we are seeing an occupation in a Canadian city, and the member for Carleton, and the Conservative caucus primarily, are standing with the occupiers. We are seeing horrible acts.

If this is the way protests are going to take place and the Conservatives want to govern in this country, how do they expect to govern if they are supporting occupations and protests done in a new way like this? Maybe the member could explain.

Mr. Tony Baldinelli: Madam Speaker, I will comment on the member's question by repeating that what we see on the streets of Ottawa today is a manifestation of the divisive nature of the government's politics. It is reaping what it has created by running on wedge issues. It is turning Canadians against each other.

We all believe in the right to peaceful protest. Where was the government this weekend? The Prime Minister decided to take a personal day off instead of working to resolve this issue. Canadians deserve better. We need to get back to work. We need to be working for Canadians.

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Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am rising to speak on Bill C-8 with some sadness. Yes, there are some minor provisions in it that we support. However, what this represents is a real disconnect between the Liberal government and what is actually happening across the country. The fallout from COVID has been enormous, but it is not just from COVID. A series of policies put in place by the former Harper government and by the current government have all led to the same thing: massive levels of inequality, more poverty and misery, and more difficulties for Canadians.

Bill C-8 does not mention this, but it should: the appalling withdrawal of CRB benefits with just a few hours' notice when it took place a few months ago. There were 800,000 Canadian families who were depending on those benefits to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads. The government crudely and irresponsibly ripped that safety net away from nearly a million Canadian families with a scant few hours' notice. It is unbelievable that any government would act this way, but the government does not seem to understand the impacts of its many policies that promote inequality and what that has done to Canadians over the last few years.

As I have mentioned in the House before, my wife, Limei, and I grow vegetables for local food banks in Burnaby and New Westminster out on Barnston Island. It has very fertile land and we basically use space that is rented by Chuck Puchmayr, a local municipal councillor. It is about 40 hectares of land. We are able to grow squash, tomatoes and a wide variety of vegetables. We then contribute to the food banks. We have been doing this for many years, and for many years we have seen, tragically, a maintaining of the long food bank lineups. Canadians of all backgrounds, seniors, people with disabilities and students, all have to go to a food bank to make ends meet.

In the last two years, we have seen a sharp increase in the number of Canadians, the number of British Columbians and the number of people in New Westminster—Burnaby who have had to go to food banks to make ends meet. We have seen in sharp relief how the massive level of inequality in this country and the devastation left by COVID has created more difficulties for Canadians. What we need to recommit to in the House of Commons is responding to what Canadians are feeling across the length and breadth of this country. Food bank lineups are growing. When the number of homeless is growing, there should be a compelling argument for the government to act to respond to those needs.

The government has an ability to act. We saw that at the beginning of COVID, on March 13, 2020, when the House leaders, and I was one of them, marched out into that corridor and announced that we would be suspending Parliament because of the incredible increase of cases across the country in this pandemic. We called at that time for the government to take immediate action to help Canadians. It acted promptly. Within 96 hours, four days, it took the initiative, without the support of the NDP, to immediately prop up Canada's big banks and their profits. They were given \$750 billion in liquidity supports.

I want to say that figure again because it is so incredibly large it is unbelievable. There was \$750 billion made available to the banking sector to make sure their profits were maintained, with no conditions. They did not have to do anything for that massive amount

of liquidity support, including from CMHC, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which is supposed to be providing supports for Canadians to get housing. There were no conditions at all. They just threw the money at the banking sector so that they could maintain their profits. They got that in four days.

● (1305)

Therefore, the NDP got to work because the government really did not seem to have any direction at all. The leader of the NDP from Burnaby South and the entire NDP caucus leveraged our position in this minority Parliament to force the CERB at \$2,000 a week, to put in place a student CERB and to put in place supports for seniors and people with disabilities. We made sure we pushed for paid sick leave for Canadians. This was absolutely fundamentally important.

The government's priority was to prop up banking profits. Fortunately, because it was a minority Parliament, we were able to force the Liberals to actually start thinking about people. There was \$750 billion in liquidity support for Canada's big banks and a reluctance to do things for real people, except when they were forced to do so in a minority Parliament.

This is something that is clear to Canadians when they look at what the government has done since the increase in inequality and the massive propping up of the banking sector we saw under the former Harper government. The Harper government was criticized for \$116 billion in bank supports and we are now at \$750 billion.

The Harper government was criticized quite justifiably for the massive tax loopholes we have seen to overseas tax havens. In fact, Conservatives and Liberals agree on that. There is no limit when it comes to making sure the ultrarich can take their money offshore. Both parties have participated in this feeding frenzy to give as much as they can to the ultrarich. We are now looking at \$25 billion a year. That is \$50 billion since the beginning of the COVID pandemic. There was a quarter of a trillion dollars over the course of the last decade under the Conservatives and Liberals that the ultrarich were able to take offshore.

Imagine if we were looking at a Bill C-8 that actually responded to Canadians' needs, if we actually stopped those massive tax loopholes for the ultrarich and reinvested that money in housing, supports for seniors, post-secondary education and expanding our health care sector. When Tommy Douglas forced the government of the day to put in place universal medicare, it was always with the idea to move from there to public universal pharmacare, to put in place dental care and to make sure, as the member for Burnaby South says so eloquently, that we have health care from the tops of our heads to the soles of our feet.

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If we just stopped for a moment that hemorrhaging of \$25 billion a year to offshore tax havens, imagine the kinds of investments we could make in public universal pharmacare and dental care. We could actually make a difference in people's lives, Canadians who are struggling with record levels of inequality.

The inequality is getting worse. The top 1% of Canadians now have a quarter of the pie. Nearly 50% of Canadians, and that includes indigenous peoples and marginalized Canadians across this country, are within \$200 of insolvency in the course of any month and have no share of the pie at all.

Look at the picture these policies have created. We see this in Bill C-8, where there are minor things done, which we support but that do not tackle the fundamental issues we are seeing in inequality in this country. Imagine a Bill C-8 that actually started to reinvest in Canadians, in the right to housing and in public universal pharmacare. Imagine a Bill C-8 that made the investments that are so important so that Canadians could see their standard of living improve. We would no longer have a country where half of Canadians are excluded from any share of prosperity or any share of the economic pie and where 1% of Canadians, the ultrarich, not only have access to a tax system that allows them to not pay taxes but also to hog a quarter of the wealth in this country.

We believe in this change and that is why we fight in this Parliament.

• (1310)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, within the legislation there is a significant allotment of \$1.5 billion for rapid testing. I want to pick up on this point because it really highlights the importance of the national government working with provincial governments with respect to the federal government acquiring rapid tests. We had a stockpile of them, even up to the end of last year, with an additional 130 million purchases in the month of January alone, that were distributed to the provinces and territories, but it is the provinces and territories that actually do the distribution.

I wonder if my colleague can provide his thoughts on the important role both jurisdictions play in ensuring that Canadians and small businesses have access to rapid testing.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I think my colleague missed the point of my speech. There are measures in Bill C-8 that we support. Of course we support the provision for rapid testing. That was not the point of the speech I just made and I wish he would have listened a little more attentively.

When we have a situation where half of Canada is excluded from any share of the wealth of the country, where \$25 billion a year in taxpayer money is sent to overseas tax havens, where the banking sector and pharmaceutical lobbyists are a higher priority than regular Canadians, where food bank lineups are growing day by day and where more and more Canadians are homeless, that is not a tenable situation. We cannot go back to business as usual. We need a government that actually puts in place the measures that will help Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for New Westminster—Burnaby for his comments today. I always appreciate the thoughtfulness he brings to the discussion in this chamber.

He rightfully pointed out how expensive life is getting for Canadians and how inflation is continuing to rise at record rates. It is concerning for us on this side of the House and I think for everyone in this chamber. One of the solutions that the Conservatives have put forward is to have the government spend smarter, spend more efficiently, control its spending and get to a position where we stop printing money, which we know is driving up inflation. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has confirmed that.

However, it seems, from what I hear from that member and from many in the NDP, that if they had their say they would spend even more. I wonder if the member would agree it is time for the government to control its spending so that we can get the cost of living crisis under control.

• (1315)

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I would point out that I have been in the House now for a number of years and saw how the Harper government treated financial management. Conservative financial management is an oxymoron. What the Conservatives did over time was not only give \$116 billion to the banking sector and run record deficits, but they created the condition, which shamefully the Liberals have continued, of massive handouts to overseas tax havens of \$25 billion each and every year. That is money that seniors, students, families and a whole range of Canadians would benefit from. That \$25 billion a year carves a massive fiscal hole, so we take no lessons from the Conservatives. Their financial management was appallingly bad.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like my colleague to talk a bit about my Liberal friends' optimism. I have been here for the past few days as we have debated Bill C-8 and the government's record, and the Liberals continue to rise to say how good things are, how great the government is and that things are fantastic.

Let us look at a few facts. The nation's capital is completely paralyzed right now, and we do not know when the government will take action. In Quebec, because Service Canada is so bogged down, 90,000 households have been waiting for months for the EI cheques they are owed and that they need to pay their rent and buy food. We are the worst G7 country in the fight against climate change. Canada needs an additional 1.8 million homes to achieve the G7 average. Quebec's health care system is on the brink of imploding because of 30 years of underfunding by federal governments of all stripes.

Even so, my Liberal friends are having fun and saying that all is well. Could my colleague comment on that?

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Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, it is true, they are jovial. The Liberals must be completely out of touch with what is happening to Canadians given their response.

The reality is that they have cut benefits that 800,000 Canadians needed to survive. They made the cuts with only 72 hours' notice. In my opinion, that shows that they are completely out of touch with reality, which is extremely sad and irresponsible.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I want to address Bill C-8. I want to make sure it is clear that I will be voting for it, but I find it inadequate. In that, my views are shared by the hon. member for Kitchener Centre. I want to reflect on the excellent points in his speech, especially related to the housing tax.

We had a speech given by our Deputy Prime Minister and finance minister on December 14. We are now debating it on February 7. Things change very rapidly right now.

As I think back to December 14, when the Deputy Prime Minister gave the speech, we would not have believed that we would be dealing with such a strain on our health care system, that the omicron virus would be so very transmissible, that so many people would be getting sick and that we would have the country, or at least the national capital, in a state of occupation with nerves frayed.

As an opening comment to my friends on all sides of the House, we need to do whatever we can as parliamentarians to display a non-partisan spirit of care and love for each other as neighbours and as Canadians. I have always felt that a hallmark of a Canadian debate is that we can agree to disagree without being disagreeable.

We are at real risk here. I never would have imagined in a million years that I would read, as I did on Twitter today, that there were such people as protesters in the nation's capital who thought it was a good idea to start a fire in the lobby of an apartment building. We really need to find ways to reach out, even to those people who are part of the convoy and who think they are in a glorious moment of grassroots democracy, to say please respect each other. Please be careful. Please go home.

As for Bill C-8, for those who have not studied it and for those who might be watching on CPAC or at home, the elements of it are all understandable, particularly with a lens on December 14, when there was a sense that perhaps we were coming out of the pandemic.

There is not nearly enough economic relief here for Canadians who are now not coming out of the pandemic as we felt we might be. The cutting of the benefit from \$500 a month to \$300 is completely unacceptable, and we know we need to see that improved. I certainly hope the government ministers recognize that this needs to change.

Yes, it is a good thing to see \$1.72 billion for rapid testing. I agree with many of my opposition colleagues who have asked why it took so long. Why did we not have more focus on testing earlier?

I experienced what it was like to have daily rapid testing when I was on the Canadian government delegation to the climate negotiations in Glasgow at COP26. It was really interesting to know that the National Health Service in the U.K. could manage to test 35,000 people every single day. We tested ourselves and sent in the results, and then those results had to be double-checked. It did keep COP26 from being a super spreader event. They worked hard.

I think we need to look at testing, and I am glad to see this money is in the budget. I spent many months trying to prepare for people going back to school in the fall of 2020. I worked extensively with people in the office of the minister of finance and deputy prime minister, and attempted to reach all the ministers of education across the country, with a simple idea that the spaces that had been shut down because people were not allowed to congregate, such as community centres and empty buildings of all kinds, including hotels and convention centres, could be put to use as schools with greater distancing for children and better ventilation.

Of course, as ever, the barriers here were the provincial jurisdiction over education and the federal government having the role of providing money once the provinces asked for it. In that spirit, I think we are really late in getting around to ventilation in schools.

I do not uniquely blame the federal government for how long it has taken, because I know the barriers lie in provincial governments not asking. If a provincial government says, "Please, we need money to ventilate our schools better", I am glad to see that the federal government, and we as parliamentarians, will approve that and write a cheque. This should have happened before our children and teachers, and in my case, my daughter is a teacher, all went into spaces that could have been made safer more than a year ago. It will take some time to use this money to better ventilate schools, but I am glad it is finally happening.

● (1320)

The measures here are good measures. At 1%, the so-called underused housing tax, or what could have been better described as a speculative investor housing tax, is a very small step in the right direction. We have seen the housing market skewed on the Lower Mainland of the province of British Columbia, as well as on Vancouver Island and throughout the province. Now, because COVID has led people to realize they can work from home and that they can buy a home anywhere, we have seen a real distortion, but a lot of that distortion has been from people buying houses for investments.

For Airbnbs and foreigners who keep houses empty, a 1% tax is good, but as the hon. member for Kitchener Centre said in his speech, it is like someone waiting for the fire department to show up when their house is on fire, and the firefighters coming with one bucket. This is not going to do the job. It will be a good first step. Perhaps we will learn from it and extend it to be a more meaningful tax to keep people from speculating in the housing market. Houses should be homes first, and not investments for those who do not plan to live in those houses.

There is much more I could say about what is in the bill. I want to talk about some of the things that are not there. We need, of course, more support on the EI front. There are EI changes in the bill, but we need more. We need more support for individuals who are falling between the cracks, but we also need to talk about what the real threat is globally of different, mutating forms of COVID-19. We know, and we have heard many members on all sides of the House say, that until everyone on the planet is vaccinated and until vaccine equity takes place between the industrialized world and the developing world, we will not be through it. It is now basically a giant petri dish of humanity, with the virus being more in charge than humans. We need to make sure that developing countries' citizens get access to vaccines.

Here we are. I am double-vaxxed and I have had a booster, and millions of people around the world have not had a first shot. We need to get big pharma out of the way. To do that, Canada needs to side with India and South Africa at the World Trade Organization and support a waiver under the trade-related intellectual property regime, such that developing countries can manufacture their own vaccines without patent protection for the larger pharmaceutical companies.

I will note these larger pharmaceutical companies received millions of dollars from governments around the world to speed up the development of vaccines for COVID-19. I do not think they deserve any patent protection or profits out of this. I think some of the anti-vax protests that we see would be much reduced if the additional argument, which is really a logical fallacy, that just because big pharma is a terrible group and collectively represents a global version of organized crime, people are angry at vaccinations. We can be saying both that big pharma does not deserve a profit out of this, and that vaccinations are essential for public health.

In any case, I would have liked to see in this bill a commitment to move forward to get vaccinations to the developing world. I also look at this bill in the context of the Deputy Prime Minister and finance minister's speech back on December 14. She noted that the province of British Columbia had been walloped over and over again. We had a heat dome that killed 600 British Columbians in four days. We had an extremely stressful summer of emergency evacuations and stretched wildfire response to thousands of fires across the province. Just before the fiscal update was delivered, we had the loss of billions of dollars of infrastructure, as well as lost lives and devastating impacts, in Abbotsford and all up the Fraser Valley. We heard, and still hear, the Prime Minister's voice saying "We are with Lytton," and that we would help them rebuild.

In point of fact, nothing has happened to help rebuild Lytton. There is not a new housing permit out there. We have a lot of backlog to make up for from climate impacts that have already occurred,

yet as I speak today on February 7, Canada's commitment to hold to a target of 1.5° Celsius, which we committed to in the climate negotiations in Paris, remains unfulfilled. Even our promises will not get us there, much less our weak delivery.

• (1325)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member referred to the importance of one aspect of the bill that I think many Canadians are interested in, and that is the 1% tax on non-residents and non-Canadians where there are vacancies. We recognize that across the country we need to deal more with the housing issue. We have the rapid housing initiative and the housing strategy, and are working with the provinces.

Would the member not agree that dealing with the housing crisis Canada is facing is going to take more than just the federal government? I am looking at municipalities and provinces and their investments. I ask the member to provide her thoughts on that perspective.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I totally agree with the hon. parliamentary secretary. Multiple levels of government, and multiple orders of government, are involved in this moment. There was a period of time when the federal government took a hands-off approach to housing. I welcome the fact that CMHC has made a commitment on housing being a right, and that Canadians should have affordable housing.

There is more that the federal government could do. We used to have special tax treatment to encourage developers to build purpose-built rental housing. We have some of those programs now, but they are highly specialized. They increasingly say that they can build a property, but a small fraction has to stay below market. We need below-market pricing for rents. We have a huge problem with vacancy levels for people to rent decent homes. We also have, as we know, unaffordable-to-buy homes, but we need to look at smart development in our urban areas and in our communities, look at info, and find ways to promote smart housing, particularly co-operatives.

• (1330)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague because I obviously agree with most of what she said.

However, I would like her to rely on all her wisdom and experience to explain why Quebec, the provinces, organizations representing health care workers, and the public have been unanimously calling for immediate health transfers for months.

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The government will say that it gave billions of dollars to fight the pandemic. That does not change anything. I would like my colleague to explain what the Prime Minister is waiting for. When will he increase transfers? The situation is urgent.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I completely agree, but I do not know what the Prime Minister is waiting for.

I think that, as always, the provinces and the federal government need to work collaboratively. There has always been conflict between the federal government in Ottawa and the governments in Quebec City and Toronto. We need to work together to protect our universal health care system.

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I always enjoy hearing the thoughtful remarks of the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

I want to let her pick up on where she left off on the cost of inaction on climate change. We lived with the effects of climate change in this past year. We are seeing immense costs.

Could she comment further on the ambition that the government has to show not only to fight climate change, but to adapt to it? We are stuck with it for the rest of our lives.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, the hon. member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay is one of the more thoughtful and scientifically literate people in this place. I am grateful he is here.

We have a very brief amount of time to ensure that the climate impacts we experience are survivable. I do not think we talk enough in this place about worst-case scenarios. We assume a rosy future in which we adjust and adapt to bad weather. That is not what we are facing. We are facing an existential threat to human civilization and it requires courage, which is what the government lacks.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, today I am pleased to speak to Bill C-8, the federal government's fiscal update from this past fall. This gives me an important opportunity to share some of the feedback I have received from constituents over the holiday break. These constituents are really struggling right now because of the policies of the Liberal government and our current economic situation.

Over the holiday break, I had an opportunity to speak with some seniors in my riding about the challenges they are facing. One senior couple I spoke with had a heartbreaking story that I want to share with the House today.

These constituents of mine suffer from disabilities and are in their sixties. During the early days of the pandemic, as their disabilities prevent them from working, they utilized the Canada emergency response benefit. They were told by representatives of the government that applying for these benefits would have no impact on their pensions. While this is technically correct, many Canadians mistakenly understand their guaranteed income supplement or old age security benefits to be pension benefits when, in fact, they are not part of the pension plan. Due to this misunderstanding, these

constituents applied for the CERB, which they needed early in the pandemic.

Now, these elderly folks have no savings. They do not own their own home, and they do not have workplace pension plans. They rely solely on their Canada pension plan, OAS and GIS payments. However, in July 2021, their world was turned upside down when they learned that the roughly \$8,000 they had received from the CERB made them ineligible to receive GIS payments.

This massive hit to their bottom line means that they need to access payday lenders and food banks just to survive. These folks told me over the phone, almost crying, that the only food they had eaten in weeks was bread because the food bank is so short on food that the only food they have in supply is the leftover bread sent from the grocery store. These folks cannot survive on bread alone.

I understand that, on December 17, the government announced there would be a one-time payment for those who had their GIS clawed back in July 2021. According to the government's own figures, over 183,000 people had their GIS benefits cut. These are vulnerable seniors living with the lowest possible incomes, and this Liberal government cut their benefits out from under them. It is shameful.

It is especially shameful because so many of these seniors were misled that their pensions would not be affected by taking CERB. As I said, many Canadians think of their GIS and OAS as their pensions. Sadly, for these constituents, since they do not own a home and do not have any income apart from government transfers, they have not been able to access support from the traditional banks with competitive lending rates.

Now, these payday loan firms have rates that are up to 700% or higher than what one would get at a traditional bank. One figure had an annualized percentage interest rate of over 500%. These folks are being dug into a hole so deep that they will never be able to recover. They are being pushed into a position of extreme poverty because this government has given them no option. It is absolutely shameful.

I recognize that the government has said that it is going to do something about this, but with every passing day, folks like these constituents are being buried in a deeper hole of debt. They need the restoration of their GIS benefits immediately. They require financial support now to recover what they lost so that they can begin repaying their debts and getting their lives back on track. What is the Liberal government waiting for?

Today, we are amending acts to provide ventilation in schools, business tax credits for teachers to spend more on school supplies and a bigger tax credit for northern residents. Now, all of this is important, but what could be more important than ensuring that vulnerable seniors are not left in crippling poverty, with only bread from the food bank and their electricity and heat providers preparing to cut them?

• (1335)

I am told these seniors will not receive the Liberal government's announced support until May, yet these folks on fixed income are paying over 500% interest rates on an annualized basis on payday loans, just to heat their homes. The fact that the government is not taking swifter action on this is shameful.

There are other challenges facing disabled people. I have a constituent whose door I have knocked on many times. His name is Fred Glaubitz. Fred lost both his legs in an accident. He lives in rural Alberta. I have knocked on his door many times, and he always has such specific questions and very good insights on issues that are not really talked about.

Fred's particular situation is that he drives a diesel van with modifications because of his disability. In Canada, people who drive a gasoline-powered vehicle with somebody who has a permanent mobility disability can get a rebate on the excise taxes they pay on gasoline. However, people who drive a diesel-fuelled vehicle do not get any rebate on their excise taxes. Fred is not being treated fairly by the government, and this needs to change.

Disabled people with permanent mobility impairments who live in rural areas often drive diesel vehicles. There is inequity, not only for disabled people, but also for rural Canadians who need to be able to access this critical rebate. They cannot walk to the store. They need to drive. They are burning more fuel just to survive every day, yet people who drive a diesel vehicle are being left behind. It is time to allow this exemption for folks who drive diesel vehicles. I thank Fred for bringing this to my attention.

Talking further about the cost of fuel, Canadians are being driven into energy poverty by the Liberal government. Folks in my riding, for the past two months, have been sending me their home heating and electricity bills. Compared to last year with similar weather, they are paying over double what they paid last year.

Over the break, I spoke with Troy, a constituent of mine who runs a small automotive business. It has been a real struggle these past two years with COVID-19, and I think everyone in this House will agree. However, when Troy told me about his heating and electricity bill, I was shocked to say the least.

Since the phase-out of the coal-fired power plants in much of Alberta, our electricity grid has come to overwhelmingly rely on natural gas for electricity and home heating. Before the pandemic, the world had a glut of natural gas. The stuff is so abundant in Alberta, it was dirt cheap. When the Liberals applied the carbon tax, the cost of natural gas was so cheap that often times the carbon tax would cost more than the natural gas itself.

One of my colleagues actually shared with me a copy of the bill from a small seniors home in his community. Its heating bill last

month was \$5,000, and the carbon tax was \$1,200 of that \$5,000. These seniors cannot afford this carbon tax. Now, the price of electricity and home heating in Alberta and across Canada has skyrocketed because of out-of-control inflation, a constrained natural gas supply due to more stringent environmental and investing requirements, and a rising carbon tax. Folks are paying more than double what they were paying at the beginning of this pandemic. They are paying more for the gas and more in taxes to the federal government.

Small business owners are going through a rough time, even with signs of an economic recovery. The cost of labour is skyrocketing. Business owners cannot get key parts because of a broken supply chain, and the cost of any parts they can get is rising pretty fast. These people built businesses and are watching them go bankrupt before their eyes. Where is the federal government? Why are the Liberals not talking about tax relief for families and business owners who are beginning to experience what a world of energy poverty looks like that? Why are we not looking for ways to cool off inflation or address the supply chain crisis that is impacting all sectors of our economy?

When the Liberals talk, they claim that all is well, but they need to come to visit the people outside the halls of Parliament who are struggling every day: families and small business owners. All is not well in our country, and it is time for the government to stop being missing in action and to deliver what Canadians desperately need.

• (1340)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the entire speech, but I will focus on the last couple of words. It is a far stretch to make the claim that the Liberal government has been missing in action.

Over the last two years, the Liberal government has rolled out supports to Canadians during this pandemic, making sure they had the resources they have needed in order to get through it. Will there be more work to do? Did the member identify some areas where people perhaps may have been missed? Absolutely, and I applaud him for bringing forward those stories from his constituents.

However, to suggest that by and large the Liberal government has been missing in action is quite simply false. The government has done a lot more than the Conservatives ever wanted us to do, in terms of helping Canadians through this pandemic.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Speaker, that was a typical Liberal answer, that the government has done so much for Canadians.

That is cold comfort to the over 183,000 seniors who had their GIS benefits cut out from under them by the Liberal government. This is not just some crack that a few people fell into. There are 183,000 seniors living on bread and whose home heating is being cut off—

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Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I was talking about—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Speaker, they cannot survive, and the Liberal government is ignoring them.

• (1345)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I do want to remind the hon. parliamentary secretary that he had an opportunity to ask a question. If he has another one, or another comment, he should wait for the appropriate time.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

I would also like to ask him a very simple question. If he and his colleagues care so much about the needs of SMEs and other businesses, why did they oppose the assistance program just before the holidays?

[*English*]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Speaker, we do not want to see the country undergo any more lockdowns. That is key. We want businesses to be open. We want them to be safely serving their customers.

We know that a thriving SME sector is key to a thriving Canada. Conservatives will always have the back of small businesses and entrepreneurs across this country.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Sturgeon River—Parkland for actually talking about a really important issue. We have seniors who are on GIS and whose money is getting clawed back right now and a promise from the government that the government does not want to talk about.

This clawback affects seniors, the most impoverished seniors, those who are in a housing crisis and who have not gotten a pharmacare plan, which the government promised. For single women over 65, 30% are living in poverty. The government's promise is for a one-time payment in May. We are in the middle of winter.

How does my colleague think many of his constituents who are being affected by the clawback are going to get by until May? Why does he think the government is not addressing this really critical question or acting in a timely fashion?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Madam Speaker, the NDP has been raising this issue in the House, and I have been raising this issue for over a year.

There were unscrupulous firms out there claiming they would help people apply for their CERB benefits, even in many cases when people did not truly qualify. When I brought this to the attention of a member of the Liberal government, their response was that it was not illegal. These Canadians are having their money clawed back, and the Liberal government is turning a deaf ear to them.

We need the Liberal government to take action now. As my colleague has said, families cannot wait until May. These payday loans

are so large that even with this one-time payment, even with increased payments going forward for the next however many years, they will not be able to dig themselves out of this hole of debt the Liberal government has helped to create.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to take part in a debate in the House. I have been asked to give my opinion on the economic and fiscal update. I do not claim to be able to do it as well as my colleague from Joliette did last week, but there are still several elements I would like to address.

First, no one will be surprised to hear that the Bloc Québécois more or less supports this bill. My colleagues who spoke before me said that it contains good measures. We agree on that.

However, the text of the economic update itself was nothing to write home about. It is a little like the throne speech. It did not contain much, at least not enough to convince us that it was so important that the government had to dissolve Parliament and call an election so that it could have both hands on the wheel. The economic update contains no major reforms and ignores several sectors. In short, there is nothing in it to really reassure us about the future and the economic recovery.

First, the economic update offers no response to the labour shortage and no solutions for boosting productivity. The labour shortage is probably one of the main issues raised in my riding during the last campaign. Business owners are at the end of their rope because they cannot find anyone to work for them. It is unbelievable that their number one problem is finding workers. When they finally decided to invest in a last-resort solution, the federal government made it harder for them, despite the fact that the logic is simple enough to follow. Difficulty recruiting workers will inevitably affect the growth of our economy. Every business in my region that decided to take the huge step of recruiting internationally and using the immigration process to make up for the labour shortage ran up against one obstacle after another.

One of those obstacles is related to the percentage of immigrants a business can hire. However, I must admit that progress has been made in this area thanks to a partnership between the governments of Canada and Quebec. A pilot project launched last month raises the current limit of 10% temporary foreign workers per business to 20%. This is definitely good news, especially for farmers, who often need a large number of workers to help with the harvest. However, the measure does not apply to all sectors, even though I am pretty sure that every sector could benefit considerably.

The Quebec government also announced that the temporary foreign worker program would be relaxed to exempt businesses from having to advertise externally and provide proof of their recruitment efforts in Quebec in order to fill positions in certain occupations for which there is a labour shortage. This relaxation of the rules will allow many businesses to get reinforcements in by hiring temporary foreign workers. The process of getting them to Canada will also be streamlined, according to a recent announcement by Quebec's minister of labour, employment and social solidarity.

It appears that Quebec is being far more proactive in this area than the federal government. It has often been said that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is the federal government's most dysfunctional department. Our proposal to repatriate all immigration powers to Quebec appears to be more topical than ever, when you see the efforts made by Quebec. I am not saying that everything is perfect, far from it, but at least something is being done, and, unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Ottawa.

Recruiting students is also problematic. Foreign students have to pay a lot of money to access education in Quebec, and then they have to grapple with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and its red tape. Let me explain. When foreign students study in Quebec, some of them move to Ontario after graduating, because then they can get Canadian citizenship faster. This situation is very common and puts Quebec at a serious disadvantage, because we cannot retain the new graduates we need.

There are solutions, however. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada could, for example, improve coordination efforts with Quebec's department of education and department of advanced education to facilitate the recognition of diplomas, degrees and equivalences. This might reduce the time it takes to process applications from international students and make sure that they are able to start their programs on time. The federal government could also give priority to the immigration files of applicants who already have a job offer and foster their integration in Quebec by ensuring that the time frame for obtaining Canadian citizenship is the same as in the other provinces. No, that is too complicated for them, and the result is that our entrepreneurs have to lower production, reduce their offerings and, as a result, cut their profits because of labour shortages.

At the same time, people who want to settle specifically in our province, in Quebec, are being rejected by the federal government. I am not even commenting on the issue of immigrants from French-speaking African countries, who are rejected en masse by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

That is what happened to Aurélien, a 29-year-old French-speaking Cameroonian with a degree in mechanical and production engineering from his native country. He enrolled in a diploma of vocational studies program in welding and fitting at the vocational training centre in Matane in my riding. There is a desperate need for welders in Quebec.

• (1350)

The Quebec government was very interested in his application and, through Éducation internationale, offered him a scholarship of excellence to cover his tuition fees. Despite this, an IRCC officer once again refused his application for a study permit. Why? The of-

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ficer who handled his file said he was not convinced that the student would remain in Canada at the end of his stay. That is unbelievable and it is very unfair.

Aurélien is not the only student in this situation. According to Radio-Canada, applications from Cameroon are overwhelmingly rejected by the IRCC. In 2020, 88% of applications from that country were rejected, and the figures are apparently similar for applicants from Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Algeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Togo.

Aurélien had to give up his dream of living in Quebec. At the same time, the economies of Matane, the Gaspé, Quebec and Canada are all suffering. We urgently need workers. Why is the federal government being so stubborn? It makes absolutely no sense.

When our economy is suffering, I think we should find solutions or some way of getting the money that the federal government is letting slip away. I think that measures to fight tax havens would be more than welcome in this context. The Deputy Prime Minister announced last spring that such measures would be in this economic update. However, they have either been put on the back burner or disappeared completely. I guess this is not important enough to the government.

We are right in the middle of a recovery, and it is difficult to see any federal leadership when it comes to the economy.

Another element is conspicuous for its absence in the economic and fiscal update, namely health transfers. I cannot believe that the government is not yet tired of hearing the Bloc Québécois talk about health transfers, because we have been talking about them for two years. Even last week, the Conservatives and the New Democrats woke up and said that that would be something good to discuss.

Now all three opposition parties in the House of Commons are calling for action with respect to health transfers, as are the premiers of every province. The annual meeting of the Council of the Federation was held last week, and its members unanimously called on the federal government to do more to help the provinces and territories ensure the survival of the free and public health system. The health care system has been undermined by the impacts of chronic underfunding, which have been exacerbated in the past two years by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite that fact, the federal government has categorically refused any increases to health care funding. Although there is growing pressure on the government to immediately pay out \$28 billion to cover 35% of costs, indexed at 6% thereafter, the economic update is keeping the Canada transfer indexed at 3% until 2027.

Statements by Members

The government's message is clear but totally oblivious, in my opinion, because the government can see the needs of Quebec's health care system as well as we can. It thinks it spent enough last year on the pandemic, so it is refusing to contribute. That is flawed logic. COVID-19 spending was a temporary, one-time expense, whereas the federal underfunding of health care is a permanent problem that has been squeezing Quebec and the provinces financially for years.

Not only is the federal government perpetuating the fiscal imbalance, it is ignoring the lessons it should have learned from the pandemic. If the three opposition parties and the Council of the Federation are not enough to convince the government, it might want to listen to the people who voted it in. After all, MPs are here to represent their constituents.

A Leger poll released last week revealed that a vast majority of Canadians want the federal government to increase its contribution to health care. Fully 85% of Canadians think it is urgent. Most respondents believe that health is one of the most important issues in Quebec and Canada. Almost four out of five Canadians think that the pandemic has had a large negative impact on the health care system. It could not be more clear.

I see that I am running out of time. There were, of course, many other topics I could have addressed, but this is really what concerns me right now. I spoke about the labour shortage and immigration issues. Last week, I spoke about employment insurance and our increasingly divided society. That is what concerns us right now, and there is a lot of work to do. Let us get to work.

• (1355)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, perhaps my colleague's speech was written before she became aware of what the minister announced last week. The fiscal update allocated \$85 million, and processing times have improved and are now 87% faster. A new permanent residence application tracker was introduced in February 2022 for spouses. Citizenship and Immigration, the IRCC, has increased its processing capacity for permanent residence applications and made a record half-million decisions in 2021. For people who want to live in Canada, the IRCC plans to make 147,000 permanent residence final decisions in the first quarter of 2022. I have four or five points to add along those lines, but I think it is clear the minister is very engaged and dynamic and determined to improve the situation.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comment.

We are indeed pleased that the minister is acting in good faith and wants to move things forward. Unfortunately, all the investments of the past months have not meant much on the ground.

In our riding offices right now, we are handling a lot of EI cases for constituents who, unfortunately, are not getting their money. We usually handle mostly immigration cases because Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada cannot process its own cases. For some reason we do not really understand, people like Aurélien, who wants to move to Matane and become a welder, are being stymied.

Investments are all well and good, but we would like to see them make a difference on the ground so we can get people into Quebec to alleviate the labour shortage.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have three minutes after question period to continue his speech.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

DEMONSTRATIONS IN OTTAWA

Mrs. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our city and our democracy are under siege. I spent the weekend speaking with residents and hearing first-hand about the harm that the current occupation is having on them and their families. Our mayor has declared a state of emergency, citing the serious danger and threats to the safety and security of residents here in Ottawa.

Women, especially women of colour, are afraid to venture outside alone and face harassment by the protesters. Survivors of domestic violence are being retraumatized. Ottawa residents are being held hostage in their homes. This occupation is threatening the rights and wellness of the city's most vulnerable residents. Many of our community's support services have had to close their doors out of fear. This cannot continue.

Our government has asked the RCMP to provide support. I implore the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Police Service to determine the path forward to resolve this crisis and know that our government is here to support them. They just need to ask. Tell us what is needed.

* * *

RETROACTIVE PAY FOR THE RCMP

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, a lot of municipal leaders have contacted me recently about the issue of retroactive pay for the RCMP. It was settled after a number of years. The RCMP deserves this raise. They provide policing in many rural communities and constituencies like mine. However, the negotiations were with the federal government, not the municipalities and not the province. Mayors have told me this property tax could be anywhere from 5% to 10%. Coming out of COVID, we do not need a tax increase on property, which is a very regressive tax to small businesses in my constituency.

The feds negotiated this contract. I believe they should take responsibility for the retroactive pay and not put it on the property owners in my riding.

*Statements by Members***LUNAR NEW YEAR**

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to wish the Chinese communities in Canada and across the world a very happy, healthy and prosperous Year of the Tiger. I would like to recognize the contributions that Chinese-Canadians have made and continue to make to the socio-economic development of our country in adding to the richness of the multicultural fabric of Canada.

I would like to recognize and thank some of the community leaders in Ottawa for their hard work and inspiring leadership: Jin Xue, founder of the Chinese Community Association of Ottawa, and its key members, Yang Yang, Timao Li, Mingxuan Herb and Yilong Ma; Jason Zhang of the Canada-China Culture and Art Association; Bin Chen and Xio Jian Zhou of the Federation of Chinese Canadian Organizations; and Peter So and Yukang Li of Ottawa's Chinatown BIA.

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[Translation]

PIZZA SALVATORÉ

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I want to acknowledge a remarkable initiative by a family business in Quebec, the Pizza Salvatoré restaurants. Tomorrow, February 8, 50% of Pizza Salvatoré's profits will go to its 1,500 employees in the form of a bonus. That is not all. The other 50% will be delivered as free pizzas to community organizations in the Saint Eustache region.

This is not Pizza Salvatoré's first rodeo. In October, to mark its recent opening, the restaurant in Saint Eustache sent 150 free pizzas to organizations in my riding. In these difficult times, as we deal with inflation and the pandemic, it is nice to see a business back home lead by example by paying it forward.

I congratulate Pizza Salvatoré on its wonderful generosity and its caring business model. Once again, Quebec businesses are leading by example.

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● (1405)

NOVA SCOTIA HERITAGE DAY

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the third Monday in February is a statutory holiday established to celebrate the remarkable people, places and events that have contributed to making Nova Scotia what is today.

To mark the 10th anniversary of the Landscape of Grand-Pré becoming a UNESCO World Heritage site, we will honour the rich, exceptional heritage of this traditional agricultural settlement, which is still in use today and was founded by the Acadians.

I hope that all families in Halifax West and my province will enjoy this time with their family and friends, and I encourage everyone to take the opportunity to learn more about our rich history and our cultures.

I wish everyone a happy Nova Scotia Heritage Day.

[English]

PASSIONATE HEART AWARDS

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our communities are made better by the selfless contributions of so many who live within our region. The Passionate Heart Awards are an opportunity to recognize and celebrate individuals and organizations that contribute to our community, enhance social services and improve the quality of life for all of us.

The Family & Community Support Services of the city and the county of Grande Prairie and the towns of Beaverlodge, Sexsmith and Wembley have made the Passionate Heart Awards an important annual tradition. Coming together as a community to recognize the commitment and the hard work of our frontline social services professionals and see their excellence honoured by their peers and colleagues is always a meaningful occasion, made even more significant by the challenges we have faced over the last couple of years.

On behalf of local residents, I would like to extend a special congratulations to this year's nominees and award winners. I thank them for their commitment to helping build a stronger and better future for all of us.

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BLACK COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN SURREY

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in honour of Black History Month, I want to acknowledge the great work of organizations that highlight Black voices and support the Black community in Surrey.

Solid State works with local youths to build co-ops with support from professionals, providing training and employment opportunities.

Co-ops like Daily Dose of Blackness use various platforms to share stories that centre around and celebrate Black youth experiences.

BLAC is a Black youth-owned and youth-operated gallery and performance space opening this year that will support young Black artists and events as well as BIMPOC artists of all ages.

The Kingdom Acts Foundation is involved in a number of initiatives, including community development, youth mentoring, food security and much, much more.

I also want to thank the Great Light Healing Community Services Society, a very lively and energetic group that delivers various programs to help seniors, particularly Black Canadian seniors, learn online literacy and cybercrime prevention techniques, all while having a blast.

Lastly, the Nuru Training Association and the Umoja Operation Compassion Society of British Columbia work with newcomer immigrants and refugees and provide various educational, technical and vocational training opportunities.

I thank them for the work they do to support our community, and happy Black History Month.

*Statements by Members***CELTIC RADIO STATION IN CAPE BRETON**

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to share with my colleagues, constituents and all Canadians a piece of Gaelic culture that can be enjoyed from anywhere in the world.

Here in Cape Breton—Canso, we take pride in our Gaelic roots. Recently a constituent of mine, Ryan MacDonald, launched a Celtic radio station based out of The Gaelic College's new location in Mabou, Cape Breton. Within the first week of the Celtic radio station being on air, it reached over 15,000 listeners.

An integral part of Gaelic culture is music, and with music comes dancing and the iconic ceilidhs, or kitchen parties, where strong connections are made to the Gaelic culture. CBFM is an excellent way to share Gaelic culture, a way to make those folks who have ventured far from the east coast to feel a little more connected. Most importantly, it is a way to keep Gaelic culture alive.

I am watching, but more importantly, I am listening to the success of CBFM, the thriving Celtic radio station.

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• (1410)

WILLIAM ATTEWELL

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to former member of Parliament William Attewell, elected in 1984 to serve Don Valley East and in 1988 for the riding of Markham. He passed away on Christmas Eve.

Bill was a gentleman of the highest order. He rose from humble beginnings to be an executive in the financial services industry. His 1984 election win was my first campaign. I campaigned with him every day. I then joined him in Ottawa, which changed my life forever.

He advocated for the right of Jews in the Soviet Union to emigrate, helping Natan Sharansky escape. He fought for human rights and believed in fiscal responsibility. He was key in the restructuring of Canada's financial service industry laws. He served as parliamentary secretary to the prime minister. He made a difference in everything he did.

He left this world a better place for his family, for his community and for his country. I shall miss him, his political mentorship and his friendship.

On behalf of this House, I thank Sandy, Howard, Pamela and Leslie for sharing him with our country.

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ONTARIO LONG SERVICE MEDAL

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last year Chief Ian Laing of the Central York Fire Services received his 45-year provincial service bar, awarded in recognition of, and as public appreciation for, his dedication and hard work.

His career in fire services began in Mississauga, where for 34 years he served as a firefighter, a captain, a district chief and an as-

sistant deputy chief. In 2010, he joined the Central York Fire Services, where he has served as the fire chief ever since.

Chief Laing's continued vision and guidance are an inspiration for the fire service and to our community. On behalf of Newmarket—Aurora, I would like to thank Chief Laing for his many years dedicated to making our community a safe and better place. I congratulate Ian on this well-deserved recognition.

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MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANIES

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the recent flooding in British Columbia brought out the best in Canadians: neighbours helping neighbours, charity springing into action and farmers working together for the common good.

I want to highlight the work of an exemplary corporate citizen in my riding of Langley—Aldergrove, a whole industry actually. Mutual Fire Insurance of British Columbia was started about 100 years ago by farmers and for farmers, and they insured many of the properties that were damaged. Besides its legal obligation to pay benefits, MFIBC also made a charitable donation to help those hardest hit. In keeping with the sense of mutuality, Mutual insurance companies across the country followed suit, and I ask the hon. member for Bay of Quinte in Ontario to thank the team at the Bay of Quinte Mutual Insurance Company for its very generous donation to help British Columbians hardest hit by this natural disaster.

This is what Canadians do. They help each other in times of need.

* * *

MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANIES

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member stated, in Canada when one of us is in need or distress, it is often Canadians who step up the most to help our own. When Canadians help Canadians, it exemplifies just how incredible this country and its people are. Such was the case when British Columbians needed help after the floods this fall. Canadians stepped up where needed to help B.C. in its time of need.

I am happy to acknowledge that all the way from Bay of Quinte, Ontario, the Bay of Quinte Mutual Insurance Company came through for B.C. with a donation of \$100,000 toward the efforts. Neighbours helping neighbours is the entire reason Bay of Quinte Mutual was founded in 1874. In this case, the neighbour just happened to be a few provinces away.

Please join me, on behalf of Canada, in congratulating Jeff Howell and his company for their incredible support for Canadians in their time of need.

[Translation]

24TH WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 24th Winter Olympic Games began last Friday in Beijing.

While I encourage all Canadian athletes, I am particularly proud of the athletes from Sherbrooke who are participating. I would like to introduce our eight athletes from Sherbrooke. In speed skating, we have four-time Olympic medallist Kim Boutin, world champion Jordan Pierre-Gilles and world medallist Antoine Gélinas-Beaulieu. In cross-country skiing, we have two-time world medallist Olivier Léveillé. Jules Burnotte will compete in biathlon and Samuel Giguère will compete in bobsleigh. In freestyle skiing, we have world medallist Marion Thénault, while Lyne-Marie Bilodeau will compete in para Nordic skiing.

Sherbrooke is the perfect place for Olympic and Paralympic athletes to develop their skills. Who can forget Sylvie Daigle, Annie Perreault, Sarah Vaillancourt and Mathieu Turcotte?

They are a source of immense pride for all of us, especially for our young people. I really look forward to following them in the coming weeks and years.

Go, Sherbrooke. Go, Team Canada, go.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Qujannamiik, Uqagtittiji.*

This “freedom convoy” exposes the injustice that first nations, Métis, Inuit and people of colour experience in Canada. The convoy has the freedom to demonstrate unrestricted violence, mainly without punishment. On the other hand, indigenous peoples live in fear of reprisal for protecting indigenous lands, as they are met with violence by law enforcement.

The CGL pipeline did not achieve the consent of the appropriate first nations to have their proposal approved. Since then, the Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs, who have the authority to consent, have been forced to defend their territory for the last seven years. I stand with the Wet’suwet’en hereditary chiefs.

I call on the Liberal government to protect indigenous peoples' rights, as accorded in section 35 of the Constitution Act and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to uphold the rule of law.

Qujannamiik.

* * *

[Translation]

FRANCINE MURZEAU

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, some people are able to make a significant impact by channelling their remarkable commitment and determination.

Statements by Members

There are great women who have strong convictions and who strive to set an example. These are the kinds of people whose passion for a healthy planet can galvanize and inspire others.

There are some people without whom our communities would not be as green, as beautiful, or as educated and aware.

I have the privilege of knowing Francine Murzeau, an environmental activist who has stepped down from the board of directors of CRIVERT, an environmental group, after 31 years of loyal service.

I hope that Francine realizes what a big impact she has had on our community. She has fought hard on every front. She has built a legacy of thousands of healthy trees and a generation of schoolchildren passionate about the environment. I thank her and I hope we cross paths again. I cannot imagine that she will be putting away her shovel and gloves for long.

* * *

[English]

LOUIS ROY

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise today and honour the life of World War II navy veteran Louis Roy.

Mr. Roy passed away early in January at 101 years of age. He enlisted in the army in 1942 and served Canada in Ireland, Portugal, Italy and England until his discharge in 1945. A well-respected family man and community member, Mr. Roy spent his years after the war as a trapper and hunter before beginning a career as a carpenter. At the young-hearted age of 85, Mr. Roy built himself a home on the banks of the Beaver River in his home community of Beauval, Saskatchewan, where he enjoyed time with his children and his grandchildren.

His granddaughter, Glenda Burnouf, said it best about her grandfather: “He was just a very well respected man. He lived a fulfilled life rich with adventure.” He was loved by all.

I ask all members in the House today to join me by recognizing the life and the legacy of Louis Roy.

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THE QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply honoured and quite moved to rise today to honour our Queen, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, on a milestone that none of us will see again.

It has been 70 years devoted in service of her 15 realms and the Commonwealth, 70 years of fulfilling a uniquely subliminal contract with the millions of citizens who rely on Her Majesty to provide a continuity that is so difficult to define.

[Translation]

I have been interested in and intrigued by the concept of constitutional monarchies and, of course, our Queen, for as long as I can remember, even before I became a Canadian citizen.

Oral Questions

My admiration for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has grown over the course of her 70 years as Queen. She has remained steadfast in her reign over a society that is constantly evolving.

• (1420)

[English]

Her Majesty honoured her engagement to a life of service like few others. My admiration for her steadfastness as well as her capacity to meet the times is boundless. It has been 70 years, almost 25,600 days, of unflinching service and commitment.

Your Majesty, you are an inspiration who has never let me down. Long live the Queen.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are telling the Prime Minister they want to get back to work and they want to get back to normal life. That is why we are seeing demonstrations not only in Ottawa, but right across the country. The Prime Minister has caused division by overtly politicizing vaccines and the pandemic, and calling these Canadians names. He is now saying these protests really are not his problem: they are the provinces', or maybe even the cities'.

When will the Prime Minister stop hiding, show up for Canadians, show some leadership and fix the mess that he has created?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. I think what we have to ask at this moment in time is what needs to get done to get Canadians safe and out of this pandemic. What we know is that the best way we can get out of this pandemic is to get vaccinated. We are all tired. We are all frustrated, but we have to ask how we can continue to sacrifice to keep those safe around us, to make sure that we follow public health measures and do our best to get out of this pandemic keeping as many people safe and alive as possible.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Dr. Tam and other health officials across the country have started to change their language on lifting restrictions. According to Dr. Tam, things like vaccine mandates should be re-evaluated. Countries around the world have started to lift restrictions, or end them altogether.

Can the Prime Minister tell Canadians today when the government will quickly respond to our public health officials and begin to lift all the restrictions it has imposed on Canadians?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear that most of the mandates she is speaking of are provincial in nature. The mandates—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition just asked a question. She would like to hear what has to be said in response to her question. Please let the hon. government House leader answer.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I heard some yelling that some members want to end the mandate for truckers to be able to get vaccinated, but I would point out to the hon. members across that the rule exists in the United States. Even if it did not exist in Canada, truckers would have to have it in order to enter the United States.

Here are the plain and simple facts. Canadians need straight talk about how to get out of this pandemic. That means following public health guidelines, that means getting vaccinated and, yes, it means talking calmly and rationally about real solutions instead of trying to be incendiary and elevating a situation that is not about the pandemic, but is about politics.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see the Prime Minister is still in hiding. That member is mansplaining to me how to stay calm and rational, which I do not appreciate.

Canadians have suffered. They have followed the rules and they have done what they were asked to do. We cannot have a slow and drawn-out process of reopening just because the Prime Minister is hiding and in denial. Dr. Moore in Ontario said recently, "I think we have to start to understand we have to learn to live with this virus." In Canada, living means living freely.

Will the Prime Minister follow the science, follow the advice of experts and assure Canadians he will be removing all federal vaccine mandates quickly?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for two years Canadians have dealt with a global pandemic that has stressed all of us. There is not a Canadian who has not gone through an incredibly difficult time. The question that we ask on this side is what is the science.

• (1425)

The Speaker: The rules say that we stop at three o'clock. We have been very flexible going beyond that. I am sure we do not want to cut off any questions because we cannot hear anything.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, we need to follow science. We need to very closely look at what is the best way to get out of this pandemic using evidence and not politics. We are not in a place where we can afford to play games with public health. Instead, we have to take each step one at a time. The reality is that our beleaguered health care workers, who are on the front lines in hospitals and in health care settings across the country, are tired. Our hospitals are full. All of us need to step back and ask how we can sacrifice and do everything we can to get out of this by following the best public health advice.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Dr. Tam said that it is now time to reassess vaccine mandates. Dr. Tam is a scientist. We are asking the government to listen to what scientists are saying.

When the Minister of Health was asked if there is scientific evidence backing up these vaccine mandates, he said nothing because there is no scientific evidence behind the vaccine mandate for truckers.

The question is simple. When will the Liberals listen to the science and lift the current restrictions that have been imposed on Canadians?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague asked when the government would start following the advice of doctors and scientists. The answer is that we have done exactly that from the start.

I know that it is frustrating for the Conservatives opposite, who believe that the hundreds of people hurling insults on the Hill are a clinical trial, but it is not true.

We will follow the advice of doctors, and the member should take care not to put words in Dr. Tam's mouth.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's stubbornness is incomprehensible. He is hiding rather than dealing with the real problems facing our health care system.

Canada is one of the worst OECD countries when it comes to the number of hospital beds and doctors per capita. Last week, at the Council of the Federation, Premier Legault spoke on behalf of all the premiers when he said, "We made a unanimous request to the federal government. We quickly, urgently need better funding for our health care systems". We need an unconditional increase in transfers to the provinces to put an end to the crisis.

Will the Prime Minister come out of hiding and talk to the provinces about health transfers, yes or no?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for several years now, we have been engaged in an ongoing, constructive dialogue with our partners, the provinces and territories, about the best way to support the health care system that is so important to Canadians.

Last week, I spoke with the chair of the Council of the Federation, Premier Horgan, to discuss how exactly the federal govern-

ment can continue to support the public health care system in Canada, as we have always done.

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COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Ottawa has been under siege for 10 days. For five days, the Bloc Québécois has been proposing a crisis task force made up of the different levels of government and police forces. Now, five days later, the minister is finally announcing that he will create this task force. That is good news, but we have been waiting for it for a long time. Five days is a long time for the residents who are being bullied. I applaud the creation of this task force.

Now, when will it meet? What is the deadline for the game plan?

The clock is ticking.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the community expects the law to be obeyed and public safety to be upheld. The federal government has been there from day one to support the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Police Service, and the RCMP has provided officers and other additional resources.

It is important to note that operational decisions are made by the police, independent from the government. The federal government will continue to work in close collaboration with the city and the police until Ottawans feel safe.

● (1430)

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the problem with this government is that it is incapable of being proactive.

This has been dragging on for 10 days. The City of Ottawa asks the government to intervene and it does nothing. The Ottawa police chief asks the government to intervene and it does nothing. The public asks the government to intervene and it does nothing. The Bloc Québécois makes proposals to the government and it does nothing.

It took Mark Carney, the future leader of the Liberal Party, to write an op-ed in *The Globe and Mail* for the government to wake up and decide it was time to do something. That was enough for the government.

Will the Prime Minister commit to ensuring that this whole thing is resolved by the end of the week?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps my hon. colleague missed the news that the RCMP has sent more than 275 additional officers. These officers will support and assist the Ottawa Police Service. This is just one example of the concrete solutions and support the federal government and the RCMP have offered the Ottawa Police Service.

Oral Questions

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians across the country are struggling to pay for groceries and rent. Demand for food banks is skyrocketing. Where is the Prime Minister? What is he doing?

The city of Ottawa is under occupation. Residents are being harassed, and their city is being taken over. Where is the Prime Minister? What is he doing?

We expect the Prime Minister to step up during times of crisis, but he has been missing in action for days. Now is the time to show leadership.

When will the Prime Minister do something to stop residents from being terrorized in their own city?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of this convoy, the government has been there to support police services in Ottawa and provide additional resources.

The RCMP announced that it would send 275 officers, which is why we have seen a lot of progress in the past 12 hours. We will continue to be there for the people of Ottawa and for the City of Ottawa to help put a quick end to this convoy.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of Ottawa are being terrorized by the ongoing convoy. Health care workers are being harassed, retail workers have been assaulted and small businesses have had to shut down.

People do not feel safe in their own city. It is completely unacceptable. At times of crisis, Canadians expect their prime minister to show leadership, but there has been no help to de-escalate this situation.

Will the Prime Minister finally meet with municipal leaders and come up with a plan so Canadians can feel safe?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of this convoy, the federal government has done everything in its power to assist the City of Ottawa, as well as the police services, by providing additional RCMP resources. I want to pause to thank them for their service on the ground.

We will continue to offer whatever support we can to ensure that Canadians feel safe when they leave their homes. Of course, we have to respect the operational independence of police services, which are responsible for upholding the law.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, January job numbers came out and they were really bad. They show 200,000 Canadian jobs gone, higher unemployment and an inflation rate that is out of control. This has turned into a disaster, and Canadians are paying the price.

Will the minister finally admit that her plan is not working and come up with a plan that includes dealing with the costs of gas,

home heating, groceries and life becoming unaffordable for Canadian families and seniors?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the inevitable challenges that Canadian workers and businesses have been facing because of the necessary omicron lockdowns, I want to remind all members of the House that Canada has still recovered 101% of all jobs lost to COVID, compared with just 87% of jobs recovered in the U.S.

I want to say to all the members on the Conservative benches that we knew omicron was going to hurt Canadian workers, so we put support measures in place.

Why did the Conservatives vote against that?

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is cold comfort for Canadians who are losing their jobs and seeing the prices of everything go up. Prices are skyrocketing, yet the Liberals keep pretending that everything is fine. Let us be clear: Things are not fine. Canadians are struggling and it is getting almost impossible for many families to put gas in their cars, to put food on their tables or to heat their homes.

Will the minister own up to her mistakes and apologize to the 200,000 Canadians who saw their jobs disappear last month?

• (1435)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the Conservatives who should be apologizing for blocking, at every possible opportunity, the measures we have put in place to support Canadians during this difficult time, for example Bill C-2, of course, and the lockdown support measures.

The Canada child benefit is providing a single mother of two children with nearly \$14,000. 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.

Conservatives—

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

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Fraser Institute has revealed where 35 developed countries rank on its Misery Index.

Thanks to its high rates of inflation and unemployment, Canada is ranked the sixth most miserable country. That does not come from me, it is what the report says.

This ranking does not even include January's data, which confirms that 200,000 jobs were lost.

Jason Clements, the institute's executive vice-president, stated that "Canadians are rightly concerned about the country's high inflation and unemployment rates".

Will the Prime Minister finally admit that his economic strategy for Canada is a pathetic failure?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the member for the position he has taken on these protests, which have really created a serious problem for the people of Ottawa. I hope that all Conservative members will follow his lead.

Concerning the Canadian economy, I have to say that the Conservatives keep repeating a false narrative on the economy. The reality is that Canada is strong and resilient, our economy has already—

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

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her comments, but I invite the Prime Minister to leave his house and find a solution to the problem.

In January, Canada lost 200,000 jobs and the unemployment rate reached 6.5%. In December, it was 5.9%. The Liberal government has no plan for creating jobs and no plan to reduce inflation, which means that Canadians, again, Canadians, are having a hard time paying for the luxury of healthy food.

Is the Prime Minister going to suggest that they start eating baloney?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that we are again hearing the Conservatives repeat a false narrative on the economy.

I want to lay out the facts and the data. Our GDP increased by 5.4% in the third quarter, surpassing the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom and Australia, and we have recovered 101% of the jobs that were lost because of the pandemic, compared to only 87% in the United States.

[English]

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as of January 2022, we have lost 200,000 jobs. More Canadians are underemployed and unemployed than ever before. Canada is blessed with amazing natural resources, incredible agriculture, advanced technology and cutting-edge industry and manufacturing sectors.

When will the government get off the backs of ordinary Canadian workers and small businesses and allow our economy to thrive?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a bit rich to hear any Conservative today presume to support Canada's small businesses. Why? It is because when omicron first hit, our government was ready. We knew that the provinces would be imposing lockdowns. That is what our health care system needed, so we were there. We provided support for small businesses and for workers, but the Conservatives voted against that support. Thank goodness they failed.

The Speaker: Before going to the next question, I want to interrupt for a second. I want to remind all members that in the House, if they are not speaking, they should make sure to have their mask on. It is for their own safety and the safety of others. It is considerate.

The hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk.

Oral Questions

• (1440)

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a typical non-answer. We are all employed in the House. We need to have some compassion for those 200,000 people who are unemployed. We are not just talking about 200,000 jobs. We are talking about 200,000 families that are now wondering how to put food on the table and how to pay their bills, all while facing record inflation.

Therefore, I will ask my question again. When will the Prime Minister and the government allow Canadians to get back to work and get on with their lives?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I actually agree with the member opposite that jobs are the single most important thing when it comes to the well-being of most Canadians and most Canadian families. That is why when Canada lost three million jobs at the depth of the pandemic lockdowns, our government knew we had to act and we did, with unprecedented support for workers and businesses. The good news is that action worked. Canada has had one of the strongest job recoveries in the G7, with 101% of jobs recovered compared to just 87% in the U.S., for example.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, all the provincial premiers once again asked the federal government to pay its fair share for health care. They unanimously reiterated that the federal government must increase transfers to cover 35% of health care costs.

They are once again reaching out to the Prime Minister in the hopes of coming to an agreement in the next few weeks. My question is a very simple one. Will Ottawa finally pay its fair share and increase transfers to cover 35% of health care costs?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is well aware that our government has been there for Canadians and the whole country's public health care system ever since the pandemic hit.

In the last two years alone, we have invested over \$64 billion to support the health care system. The Prime Minister has made it very clear that we will always be there to work with our provincial and territorial partners to support the public health care system Canadians want.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate, but the investments the minister just mentioned are not sustainable investments. They are pandemic-related investments.

Oral Questions

I issued a challenge to the minister. If he believes that funding 22% of health care costs is enough, he should follow our leader's suggestion and call a summit on health care funding. If everyone agrees that 22% is enough, I swear I will never talk about health again.

I have a simple question for him. Is he willing to call a summit on health care funding, yes or no?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague is well aware, the Prime Minister has called more than 35 meetings with the premiers and territorial leaders over the past two years or so.

Time and time again, we have worked together to discuss what can be done to support the public health care system that Canadians want, and rightly so.

As I have said to my colleague, we are in ongoing discussions with our provincial counterparts to find the best way to support a high-quality health care system.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government's decision to underfund health care comes at a cost. There is a price to be paid for pushing health care networks to the limit and hoping that nothing unexpected brings it all crashing down.

Quebeckers feel as though they are the ones paying the price, what with the offloading of responsibilities and the lockdown measures. We need to rebuild the health care system, and the federal government needs to prove it has learned from past mistakes.

When will the government understand that it needs to urgently invest in the health care system?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I explained, we did urgently invest in the public health care system across Canada. We have been there throughout the pandemic to support Canadians, Canadian businesses, and our health care system, which is essential to all Canadians.

We also said that once the pandemic is behind us, we are prepared to sit down with provincial premiers, as we have been doing for months now, to discuss essential funding for the coming years.

• (1445)

[English]

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a recent study stated that lockdowns contributed to saving 0.2% of deaths worldwide. Do members know what contributed to lockdowns in Canada? It was the abysmal lack of health care capacity in that system. The \$700 billion spent on COVID created no new beds, and none of the 7,500 doctors and nurses promised by the Prime Minister have materialized.

When will the government properly fund health care?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, opposition members keep referring to lockdowns, and I want to be really precise and understand exactly what they are talking about. What federal mandates do they

oppose? Do they oppose that people have to be double-vaccinated to get on a train or an airplane, or to drive a truck? If they oppose that, as they have, given that some of the members of their caucus are still not vaccinated, can they say that? Can we have an honest discussion about the fact that perhaps they do not believe in some of the public health measures that have allowed Canada to have one of the lowest death rates in the world and one of the best pandemic responses in the world?

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in spite of the spin doctors, I am a doctor and want members to know that Canada has one-third of the ICU capacity of Germany and roughly half that of the United States. The moral distress from working in an unsupported system with an overwhelming tsunami of backlogged cases looms. As Premier Horgan said on Friday, “a quality service” like this is “not sustainable in its current model”.

When will the Liberal government end this moral distress and admit that the pandemic crisis has multiplied because of health care underfunding?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our ICUs are filled. Canada is continuing to be in the circumstances we are seeing globally, where we have enormous stress.

To the member opposite, who is a doctor, does he not want to see those numbers come down? Would he not agree that the best way to make sure those numbers come down is for people to be vaccinated, that the vast preponderance of people filling our hospitals are unvaccinated and that him attacking mandates, which, by the way, on our side are about ensuring people are vaccinated, is injurious to this, is filling our hospitals and is exactly the problem we are facing right now?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can shift the attention to Canadians and blame them all he likes, but at the end of the day, it is ultimately on the back on the government.

We are two years into this pandemic and our health care system has been on life support the entire time. Canadians have missed elective surgeries, they have missed early diagnoses of life-threatening diseases and they have missed numerous other treatments. Mental health concerns are through the roof. People are literally dying.

There is no increased funding to the anemic health care system under the government. It just continues to shoulder the burden off to the provinces.

My question is very simple. When will the Prime Minister stop worrying about—

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply proud of our country. About 90% of Canadians have had at least one dose of the vaccine. We are seeing one of the lowest death rates from COVID-19 out of anywhere in the world.

However, what we know is that our ICUs continue to be filled with the unvaccinated. When the members opposite attack mandates and attack things that encourage folks to get vaccinated, I do not understand how they can, in the same breath, complain about the stress on the health care system. They know that about 75% of people who are in ICUs are unvaccinated, even though they only represent 10% of the population.

Let us get through this pandemic. Let us follow and back science.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on southern Vancouver Island, primary care clinics have been forced to close because of understaffing, leaving residents without anywhere to turn when they are sick. Challenges finding a family doctor are not new, but after two years of the pandemic, critical staffing shortages and burnout have only gotten worse.

The federal government has failed patients who need primary care. It has also failed exhausted health care workers because it has failed to reverse the chronic underfunding of our health care system.

Will the government commit to immediately increasing health care transfers so that all Canadians can access the health care they need?

• (1450)

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our commitment is to ensure that we work in lockstep with the provinces. We have seen an escalation in the amount of money we are transferring to the provinces throughout this pandemic. It is essential that we work in collaboration with every jurisdiction. This is the greatest challenge that our generation has faced. We continue to meet it with science and support, and leadership in working with other jurisdictions, to make sure Canada continues to have one of the best COVID responses anywhere in the world.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend saw protesters blocking patients, health care workers and ambulances at hospitals in major cities across Canada. This is putting lives at risk. Paramedics have been delayed, rocks were hurled at emergency vehicles and first responders were subjected to racist slurs. This is completely unacceptable.

Just weeks ago, this Parliament passed a law making it a criminal offence to intimidate, obstruct or interfere with a health care worker or a patient seeking care. What is the government doing to ensure that this law is being enforced to protect Canadians?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we passed Bill C-3, which made sure that health care sites, like hospitals, are protected from the types of harassment and the barrage of attacks we are seeing.

Oral Questions

We are going to work to make sure that the new law is implemented so that health care workers, who are already carrying such a disproportionate load, are not going to be influenced from not being able to do their jobs by the kinds of horrific actions we are seeing. When we see rocks thrown at ambulances and we see the kind of aggression we have seen from some of these protesters, it is truly shameful, and particularly for our frontline workers.

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in December, the House unanimously passed Bill C-3, which establishes paid sick leave for federally regulated workers and protection for health workers, and those accessing their care, from harassment and intimidation. As a nurse and as someone who recently volunteered at a COVID testing clinic, I can say this matters a great deal, not just to me but to health workers across Canada.

Could the Minister of Labour tell the House what is being done to bring this legislation into force?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while we see that an impossible amount is being asked of health care workers, they are going in every day to sacrifice to make sure we get through this pandemic. As we see people talking about freedoms, it is important to ask what we all do with our freedom to make life easier for those around us and what sacrifices we are making in a global pandemic to lift people up and to find ways to help our neighbours, to de-escalate tension and to make lives easier for people in one of the most trying times.

Bill C-3, I think, would do so much to protect those health care workers, but it begs a broader question about what each of us is doing in this pandemic.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is ruining Canada's future.

This government has carelessly wasted astronomical sums of money on its universal programs. Think of the 65-year-old seniors who have been abandoned. Now it is access to property. Canadians need to be able to pay their rent. Housing costs are skyrocketing. We have to take action now.

What is this government going to do right now to put an end to this situation and give Canadians hope?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the member that it was the Conservatives' plan for seniors to prolong the age of retirement from 65 to 67. The first things we did as a government were to reverse that and give seniors the benefits they are entitled to. We also raised the GIS for single seniors, increased the old age security, enhanced the CPP and invested billions into housing and home care. We have always had their backs and will continue to deliver for seniors now and into the future.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sadly eastern Ontario provides a perfect example of how the Liberals have mismanaged the housing file under their watch. In five years the average price of a home in the Cornwall area has doubled to over \$400,000. The Liberals boasted their plan is working, but the problem is only getting worse, not better. A realtor told me that one house in Cornwall recently had 13 offers in just four days and got way over the asking price.

As housing prices keep skyrocketing in this country, when will the Liberals realize that their plan to flood the market with cheap cash just is not working?

• (1455)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives face a leadership problem on this issue. They have never spoken about affordable housing. They did not invest adequately in all their time in office. In their election campaign platform, the words “affordable housing” did not show up, neither did they show up in their opposition house motion. We have invested more than any other government. We brought the national housing strategy into existence. We are investing to make sure that there is more supply in the market, and we will continue to work with all provinces and territories, and the municipalities and non-profit sector, to ensure every Canadian has a safe and affordable place to call home.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply concerned that young families across Canada are giving up the dream of ever owning a home. Nowhere is this more true than metro Vancouver and the Fraser Valley, the epicentre of Canada's housing affordability crisis. People like Alison in my riding, who just in the last year saw house prices increase by more than the amount of money she and her partner were able to save up for a down payment, are falling further behind through no fault of their own.

When will the government get to work tackling the real problem: inflation?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every time we have brought a measure into the House to help Canadians through programs like the Canada housing benefit to help people with rent, the first-time homebuyer incentive, the rapid housing initiative and many other housing programs as part of the national housing strategy, every single time the Conservatives have voted against those measures, yet they stand here today pretending to care about affordable housing solutions for Canadians. We can see through their rhetoric. We will continue to work to make sure that we build on our record in-

vestments in housing and continue to make sure the national housing strategy succeeds for Canadians.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that minister's ability to revise history is absolutely remarkable. Housing prices are rising out of reach, especially for young people and new Canadians. Today, the average price across Canada is over \$720,000, with big city averages over \$1 million. The government's policies are causing record inflation and reducing the ability of working Canadians to save for a down payment.

Will the government put the brakes on its out-of-control spending, get serious about inflation and implement measures to make the dream of owning a home a reality?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is remarkable is the astronomical gap between the Conservatives' rhetoric and their voting record. They voted against every single measure to build more affordable housing, to put more money in the pockets of Canadian renters to help them pay their rent, to build more housing for the most vulnerable and, yes, to allow more young Canadians to access their dream of home ownership through the first-time homebuyer incentive. Instead of offering leadership, they vote against affordable housing policies every single time, yet get up in the House of Commons and pretend to care about housing. We see through their rhetoric and so do Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

SENIORS

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, right now, the government is cutting the guaranteed income supplement for seniors who legitimately collected CERB. Some seniors are not filling their prescriptions or having a hard time paying the rent. This despite the fact that, in December, the government admitted its mistakes and announced it would compensate the victims of this injustice, though not until May 2022.

Now that the government has admitted it was wrong to cut these people's GIS benefits, why is it still cutting people off in January, February, March and April?

[English]

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we can all agree on just how difficult and challenging this pandemic has been for seniors, particularly those most vulnerable. That is why we worked extremely hard to strengthen income security for seniors, including with increases to their GIS, which has helped over 900,000 low-income seniors. Last summer, we provided direct and immediate support for seniors and, as announced in the fiscal update, we will be delivering, as soon as possible, a one-time payment to those who received pandemic benefits in 2020 and saw a reduction. We have been there for seniors, and we will continue to have their backs.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at this very moment, some seniors are having to cut back on groceries because the federal government has taken away their guaranteed income supplement. The people who get the GIS are not rich. They do not have a bunch of credit cards they can max out while they wait for the federal apparatus to give their money back. They make sacrifices every day and have been doing so for eight months. The government told them it was wrong to cut them off for eight months, but they will have to put up with it for another four months. We knew the government had no backbone, but today it is clear it does not have a heart either.

How can the minister live with this?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have had the backs of seniors with the greatest needs since the day we formed government, and we will continue to help those low-income seniors make ends meet.

We recognize that some seniors who took pandemic benefits because they needed them are now facing difficulties. That is exactly why we will be delivering, as soon as possible, a one-time payment to those who received benefits in 2020 and saw a reduction. This automatic, one-time payment will help support affected seniors by compensating them for the full loss of their guaranteed income supplement. We will always be there to support seniors.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, applicants for the federal skilled worker program are not being invited to apply under express entry, even though foreign work permits, study permits and temporary resident visas continue to be processed. This is adding to the pain of the families who remain separated, a labour shortage that is hurting Canadian businesses and refugees who remain stranded and feel hopeless.

Will the minister stop patting himself on the back for a job well failed and apologize for the hardships his government has caused to the nearly two million applicants stuck in the mismanagement of this Liberal-made backlog?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the hon. member

Oral Questions

and what I would say is a ginned-up question and theatrical performance, our focus throughout this pandemic has been to use the immigration system to continue to meet the needs of the Canadian economy. At a time when our borders were closed to protect the public's health, we pivoted to a strategy that started welcoming more people who were already inside Canada so that our businesses could rely on access to the talent they need to succeed. What is the result? It is that 107% of the jobs that were lost during the pandemic have now been recovered compared with only 82% in the United States.

We will continue to leverage immigration to fulfill the needs of our economy, and I hope that member will work with me to achieve that outcome.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my office has been flooded with meetings, calls and emails about Immigration Canada and the buildup of almost two million applications that have not been processed. This has led to processing times of more than two years, and the applicants are running out of time. These delays are costly and highly stressful not only for the people applying but for many workplaces too.

We had a great reputation as a country for international students and those seeking citizenship and permanent residency. What is this government doing right now to stop victimizing some of the world's most vulnerable?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is rather timely given that, Monday of last week, I announced details of the \$85 million that was set aside in the recent economic and fiscal update to address processing capacity within the department. The money that we are going to be investing is going to improve processing times for work permits, for study permits and for permanent residency cards, improve the timelines for temporary visitors coming, and allow quicker processing of proof of citizenship. New measures are going to be coming online in the months ahead that will allow individual applicants to access information about their files through digital means.

The future looks bright when it comes to immigration to Canada and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Immigration Canada faces an unprecedented backlog under the Liberal government. Nearly two million applications are in the queue. My office receives dozens of calls every week. During a time of catastrophic labour shortages, thousands of foreign workers and Canadian employers are waiting years to get their applications processed.

Oral Questions

When will the Liberal government fix this Liberal-made immigration system and clear its historic backlog?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's outrage is manufactured at best. The reality of the situation is that the pandemic caused unprecedented pressures on our immigration system because we were trying to welcome a record number of newcomers at a time when our border was closed to protect the public's health and well-being against the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

By pivoting to an internal strategy to process more people, we were able to resettle more than 400,000 new permanent residents, an all-time record in Canada. Going forward, we are going to continue to make the investments necessary so that newcomers can arrive in Canada and make the kinds of contributions they have been making to our economy and our communities for generations.

* * *

• (1505)

[Translation]

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we want to welcome tourists from around the world back to Canada once it is safe to do so.

Tourists seeking incredible destinations and experiences and world-class events will find what they are looking for in Canada and my fantastic riding, Acadie—Bathurst. Furthermore, Canada has the highest vaccination rate of all countries.

Can the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance tell members about the measures we are taking to welcome tourists back to Canada?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Acadie—Bathurst is quite right. Canada has what tourists want right now: safe places to visit that offer unrivalled experiences and landscapes.

Destination Canada is promoting Canada to the world. To that end, our government gave Destination Canada \$100,000 over three years to expand its marketing campaigns and encourage more people to explore our magnificent country and everything it has to offer.

We are supporting the tourism sector, and we will continue to do so.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, white-collar criminals from around the globe love to launder their money in Canada. Experts say it is a billion-dollar-a-year industry and growing, and much of it ends up in our real estate, which drives up the cost of housing. In 2021, government agencies, including FINTRAC, reduced their real estate money laundering audits by 64%.

Does the government take money laundering seriously or are we telling global criminals that Canada is open for business?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government absolutely takes money laundering in Canada and foreign money in our real estate market very seriously. That is why in the budget that I tabled last April, we took action to put in place a beneficial ownership registry. That is a strong and firm commitment of our government.

I also want to point out that in legislation currently being debated in the House, we are imposing a tax on vacant property owned by non-residents. We are acting. I would like the Conservatives to support us.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, John, a constituent in my riding, has been a firearm owner for over 50 years. He served in the military and never had an issue related to the firearms he has owned. Many criminals in Canada purchase illegal handguns and commit crimes anywhere from armed robbery to murder and the government does nothing to stop them.

When will the Liberal government start punishing criminals instead of law-abiding citizens and remove the order in council so that John can sell his firearms?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have consistently introduced responsible legislation on firearms to make sure that the laws in place protect Canadians and that lawful firearms ownership is also protected, but that, like all forms of rights and freedoms in our society, comes with reasonable restrictions. Just as in any other element of life, that is what we do with firearms because our priority is the safety of Canadians and making sure that we do not let ideology get in the way of making decisions for public safety.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is time for the divisive Liberals to heal the wounds they have inflicted upon Canadians. The Prime Minister has led a campaign of hatred against those who do not agree with his edicts. He has called them unacceptable, misogynists and racist. It is his government that just last week, during Black History Month, refused to condemn the use of blackface.

Will the Prime Minister end his cruelty to Canadians who simply do not trust him? I ask him to end the mandates.

Oral Questions

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, we should reflect on “end the mandates” because, federally, the mandates that exist mean that, when people get onto an airplane, they have to be vaccinated to protect those around them. That is rooted in irrefutable science. When we look at our ICUs and how full they are with the unvaccinated, I am confused why the member opposite would be against mandates and against making sure that people are protected in public safety.

If we are talking about division, it seems playing games with science and not giving people clear information about public health is where the games are at. I would encourage the member to instead advise everybody to get vaccinated and help get us out of this pandemic.

* * *

● (1510)

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians with disabilities living in Ottawa are being disproportionately impacted by those occupying the downtown. Para Transpo is unable to reach residents. Individuals with mobility issues have been unable to leave their homes, and some are now fearing they will not be able to receive home care. People's lives and well-being are at stake, but instead of trying to help resolve the situation, the Conservatives are emboldening demonstrators. Leaked emails show their new leader does not want them to leave, as they want to continue making it a problem for political gain.

Could the Minister of Disability Inclusion please inform the House about what needs to be done to ensure persons with disabilities living in Ottawa are no longer held hostage in their own homes?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek has a really important question. These demonstrations have had a serious impact on the health and safety of Ottawa citizens with disabilities. Whether it is access to home care, other supports, food delivery or Para Transpo, this is serious. People are homebound and do not have food or access to their much needed supports.

I urge all members in the House from all parties to support our most vulnerable citizens and tell the demonstrators that it is time to go home.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, my NDP colleagues and I wrote a letter to the Minister of Environment about the Roberts Bank terminal 2 project on the Fraser River delta. We pointed out that critical information gathered by the minister's own scientists has been hidden from the public in the assessment process. The information showed that this project would result in irremediable damage to the local environment and endanger the species living there.

Would the minister stop muzzling scientists, make this information public and extend the consultation process?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague knows, this process has been an ongoing environmental assessment for the past number of years. It has proceeded through a whole range of different phases. It is now in the process of coming toward a decision.

Certainly we will be considering all of the science, including science with respect to migratory birds, the impacts of noise and other issues that have arisen throughout the course of the process and on which the panel has provided information.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage. Performing artists have contacted me about the seriousness of their situation during COVID. There is no fallback plan. This is their livelihoods. The arts community is an integral part of the economy and the additional funding is a positive step for sector resilience, but we are far from the end of this crisis.

Is the minister considering holding a national conference on the performing arts to ascertain the best course of action moving forward?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have said it, and I will say it once again. We will not leave anyone behind, especially our artists, creators or our arts and culture sector. Supporting them is my biggest priority. Last week we launched the Canada performing arts workers resilience fund. It is a \$60-million program tailor-made for the arts and culture sector. We have different programs for them, and we will always—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am having a hard time hearing the minister. I will have to ask him to start over so we can get the full answer.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we will not leave anyone behind, especially not our artists, creators or arts and culture workers. Supporting them, as I have said many times, is my biggest priority. We have launched the Canada performing arts workers resilience fund, a special fund that, coupled with others, is there to support artists. We will never leave anyone behind.

*Routine Proceedings**[Translation]***BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY**

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that the following members, representatives of the Conservative caucus, have been appointed as members of the Board of Internal Economy for the purposes and under the provisions of section 50 of the Parliament of Canada Act: Mr. John Brassard, replacing Mr. Gérard Del-
tell; and Mr. Blaine Calkins, replacing Mr. Blake Richards.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1515)

*[English]***ARAB HERITAGE MONTH ACT**

Hon. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-232, An Act respecting Arab Heritage Month.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour and a privilege to rise in the House of Commons to introduce my private member's bill, which would establish the month of April in Canada as Arab heritage month.

The first persons of Arab origin arrived in Canada in 1882 in the early years after Confederation some 140 years ago. Since then, the population of Arab Canadians has grown to well over one million and continues to flourish.

Arab Canadians from all walks of life have made important contributions to Canada's social, economic and political life and to the cultural fabric of Canada, including through literature, music, food and fashion.

This bill would recognize and celebrate the historic mark Arab Canadians have made and continue to make in building our wonderful Canadian society.

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

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*[Translation]***CRIMINAL CODE**

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-233, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Judges Act (violence against an intimate partner).

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is with immense gratitude that I introduce my very important bill to amend the Criminal Code and the Judges Act. I want to thank my colleague from Oakville North—Burlington for supporting it.

[English]

This bill would protect women against intimate partner violence. In Canada, a woman is murdered every two and a half days, and of the women murdered, 50% are killed by intimate partners.

[Translation]

Of those women, 22% are killed within 18 months of the separation.

[English]

This bill would amend the Criminal Code to require a justice to consider whether it is desirable to include as a condition, before making a release order, that the accused wear an electronic monitoring device when the offence they are charged with is against their intimate partner.

[Translation]

This bill would also amend the Judges Act to provide for continuing education seminars for judges on matters related to intimate partner violence and coercive control.

[English]

It is our duty to protect these vulnerable Canadians and allow them to feel safe.

I call on all parliamentarians to support this vital initiative and send the message that violence against women will not be tolerated.

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

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GREENHOUSE GAS POLLUTION PRICING ACT

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-234, An Act to amend the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise here today. I need to first thank the member for Foothills and the member for Northumberland—Peterborough South for their assistance with this bill.

I call this bill the fairness for farmers act. It would cut the carbon tax on the natural gas and propane used to dry grain, condition grain and heat livestock barns. For far too long, farmers have paid tens of thousands of dollars of carbon tax to provide food for Canadian families, and it is time to right that wrong.

We all know farmers are price takers. They are not price makers. They cannot pass these charges along to the consumer. They only take it out of their profit margin at the end of the year. It is time to change this.

The Liberals' plan is going to be a failure. It is not fair. It is not equitable. Farmers are always asked to be the line of credit, whether it is on HST, GST, AgriStability or any other farm program. They are going to be asked to be the line of credit on this as well, and it is not right.

Let us just do the right thing. Let us recognize the tremendous environmental actions and benefits farmers provide to Canadians. Let us support them. Let us do the right thing to get this passed through the Senate.

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

● (1520)

BUILDING A GREEN PRAIRIE ECONOMY ACT

Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-235, An Act respecting the building of a green economy in the Prairies.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with enthusiasm and hope that I introduce a private member's bill called "building a green prairie economy act".

Among the many lessons and reflections about battling COVID-19, one is that Canadians want their governments at all levels to work together toward a common goal. This bill captures that sentiment and mandates the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, along with colleagues, to build a framework that includes provincial and municipal governments, first nations and Métis governing bodies, the private sector and its employees, and leaders in civil society to work together building a green economy on the Prairies. This bill offers the scope and the challenge of uniting and inspiring us. I look forward to the debate.

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

* * *

VIA RAIL CANADA ACT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-236, An Act to continue VIA Rail Canada Inc. under the name VIA Rail Canada and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

She said: Mr. Speaker, as the title of the bill is uninspiring, let me take a few moments to share why this bill is so important.

The United States has its national railway system, Amtrak, which operates under a statute that makes it a priority and in fact gives a mandate to passenger rail to operate across the country, providing good service from coast to coast in the United States. In Canada, Via Rail has operated as a Crown corporation with no legislation at all. Previous MPs, including Olivia Chow and Irene Mathyssen, have tried to bring forward bills that would give Via Rail the proper mandate.

Right now, Via Rail operates at a very high level of success in the Windsor-to-Quebec corridor. In the rest of Canada, we essentially have an antique railway that would make a third world country somewhat ashamed of the service. It is terribly sad, because we have a wonderful railway with beautiful scenery, and it can be affordable for Canadians coast to coast. We have terrific workers, working hard as Via Rail employees and members of Unifor.

We need to give Via Rail a legislated mandate so that parts of it cannot be carved up and given away to private tourism enterprises. As a modern, industrialized, low-carbon country, we need to meet the expectations of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. We urgently need better bus service as well. We urgently need Via Rail to provide passenger rail service, reliably and affordably, coast to coast.

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

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● (1525)

[Translation]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS ACT

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-237, An Act to amend the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act and the Canada Health Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the bill I am introducing protects the provinces, especially Quebec, from the biggest threat to their autonomy. This threat is the so-called federal spending power.

First, under this bill, Quebec is exempt from any standards that the federal government imposes under the Canada Health Act, including the upcoming standards on long-term care homes.

Second, this bill amends the Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act. Quebec and any provinces that so desire will be able to withdraw, with full compensation, from federal programs in their exclusive areas of jurisdiction to regain their autonomy in the areas where they are meant to be autonomous.

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

* * *

AN ACT RESPECTING THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-238, An Act respecting the French language.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I introduce this bill, entitled an act respecting the French language. This bill will subject federally regulated businesses to the Charter of the French Language.

Members will recall that Quebec workers, except those who are federally regulated, are entitled to all the protections of Bill 101. In our opinion, that shortcoming must be corrected.

I am also proposing that adequate knowledge of the French language be a citizenship requirement for permanent residents who choose Quebec. Nations around the world, including Canada, choose the host language. The Quebec nation warmly welcomes new citizens in French.

I look forward to debating these measured and reasonable provisions with my colleagues from the other parties.

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

*Routine Proceedings***FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS ACT**

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-239, An Act to amend An Act to authorize the making of certain fiscal payments to provinces, and to authorize the entry into tax collection agreements with provinces.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is well known that Quebecers are the only ones who have to file two income tax returns come tax time. The desire for a single tax return administered by one specific government, in this case the Government of Quebec, is gaining traction. With this change, Quebecers would only have to file one tax return, and one government would be responsible for collecting the other government's taxes.

The idea of moving to a single tax collection system reached a pivotal point on May 15, 2018, when the Parti Québécois MNA for Sanguinet introduced a motion calling for a single tax return in the Quebec National Assembly. This motion was unanimously adopted.

Subsequent polls showed that more than 70% of Quebecers were in favour of a single tax return administered by the Government of Quebec.

Lastly, the Research Institute on Self-Determination of Peoples and National Independence conducted a study in 2020 that showed that a single tax return in Quebec would save more than \$425 million a year.

This bill would finally allow Quebecers to file a single return, which would be administered by the Government of Quebec.

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

* * *

● (1530)

[English]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-240, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (donations involving private corporation shares or real estate).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to introduce my private member's bill, the supporting Canadian charities act. This bill would help charities across Canada access up to \$200 million a year in additional donations.

During COVID-19, many charities have had to suspend or limit important services that they provide. Many Canadian charities are struggling to raise much-needed funds during this pandemic, leaving charities across Canada struggling. This bill would help charities by waiving the capital gains tax on an arm's-length sale of private shares or real estate when the proceeds of that sale are donated to a charity, in much the same way as donations of publicly traded shares are currently treated.

Many stakeholders have endorsed this bill, including Diabetes Canada, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and Imagine Canada, just to name a few.

To look at my private member's bill further, members are invited to visit the website for the bill, the supporting Canadian charities act.

The bottom line is that when charities are hurting, people are hurting. Let us all work together in the spirit of giving and help people by supporting the charitable sector.

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

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS**

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I move that the first report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, presented on Wednesday, February 2, 2022, be concurred in.

Last week, the committee tabled its report, which included a motion that was unanimously adopted by all committee members, including four Liberals, four Conservatives, one New Democrat and one Bloc Québécois member, me. I will read the motion for everyone to hear:

That the committee call upon the government to suspend the Public Health Agency of Canada's cellular data tender upon adoption of this motion, and that the tender shall not be re-offered until it the committee reports to the House that it is satisfied that the privacy of Canadians will not be affected, and that the committee report the adoption of this motion to the House at the earliest opportunity.

Let me repeat that this motion passed unanimously. This is important, because protecting Canadians' personal information and data is an issue that crosses partisan divides.

Last Tuesday, February 1, I walked across the floor of this House and handed the Minister of Health a letter asking him to comply with the motion adopted unanimously, I repeat, by the committee.

On Thursday, during question period here in the House, I twice asked the Minister of Health if he was prepared to suspend the RFP or at least comply with the motion put forward by the committee. Twice, the Minister of Health avoided responding.

A little later that day, I put the same question to him during his appearance before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, which met an hour later, and he once again avoided answering. As we all know, no answer is an answer.

On that occasion, the Minister of Health told us that the data he was using had been de-identified and was acceptable from a privacy protection point of view. When we asked him questions about where the data were from, things were less clear. The Minister of Health just repeated that the data were properly de-identified.

This morning, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, Daniel Therrien, appeared before the committee. Members asked him if the Public Health Agency of Canada had consulted him. He said the agency informed him of its plans. The agency did not seek his advice; it informed him. The commissioner offered to provide advisory services to the Public Health Agency, but his services were not retained. As is the agency's prerogative, it chose to use external legal advice. It was the agency's choice not to get involved, but the commissioner did seem a little rankled this morning. Given that the Privacy Commissioner represents an institution created by the government, one might think his advice would be welcomed by government entities. Not in this case.

For the purposes of the discussion, let us look at the facts. In March 2020, a private contract was concluded between the Public Health Agency of Canada and Telus, more specifically with its Data for Good program, a part of the organization that manages Telus data and offers that data to such entities as the Government of Canada. A private contract was signed—without a tendering process to be clear—to obtain tracked data.

In 2020, 33 million cellphones were monitored. That represents 87% of Canadians' cellphones in this case. No one knew about it. This was done with a total lack of transparency. On December 17, 2021, the Public Health Agency of Canada issued a request for proposals to select a data tracking provider. That RFP was brought to our attention by the National Post and Radio-Canada between December 18 and 22, with both news outlets questioning the ethics of this endeavour.

● (1535)

We took the time to do our homework, do some reading and take a look at what was happening. On December 23, the Bloc Québécois issued a press release to express its concerns about the RFP to renew an existing three-year contract allowing the data to be used beyond the pandemic.

It is funny, because last week I asked Canada's chief public health officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, when the pandemic would end. She obviously did not have an answer. I also asked her who would decide when the pandemic was over. She also did not have an answer to that and was surprised by the question.

Given this lack of answers, we realized that the tender could allow the data to be used indefinitely, since no one knew when the pandemic would end. Obviously I am still concerned. I want to note that I have no preconceived notions on the matter, but I really wanted to continue with this work.

During the Christmas break, the Bloc Québécois members of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics requested that a meeting be held, and our request was agreed to. In the new year, the committee met to evaluate the use of data and unanimously agreed to undertake a study. This study began last week with a view to determining whether there was a privacy

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breach. The Minister of Health and Dr. Tam appeared before the committee, and the study continued this morning with the appearance of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, Daniel Therrien, and a renowned researcher in this field. The work will continue until April.

The committee also adopted a motion, which I read out earlier, calling for the suspension of the RFP until the committee can examine the situation. I should note that the RFP deadline was January 22. As soon as the committee began its study, this deadline was extended to February 2. After another meeting to determine the committee's future business, it was extended to February 4. Last week, the minister announced that the RFP deadline would be extended to February 18.

The health crisis was often invoked as a reason the RFP cannot be suspended, but Dr. Tam nevertheless told the committee that the delay had little effect on the information obtained from the data in question, since the data would be retrospectively looked at. She did not seem concerned about the possibility of suspending the RFP, and she was not against it. We therefore moved a motion to suspend the RFP and this motion was passed unanimously so that the committee could get to the bottom of this matter.

That brings us to the meetings with the minister. I remind members that the only response to the committee members' many questions was that the data had been de-identified. When members asked questions about where the data had been obtained and who had had access to it, the only answers we got were vague and evasive, which I find demonstrates the minister's lack of accountability.

There is an old saying in philosophy that what cannot be done directly cannot be done indirectly. If the data used by the Public Health Agency of Canada was de-identified, we had to wonder who had access to the data and what kinds of protocols were used, if any. The committee did not get an answer.

Dr. Tam said that the data being used would not be very useful and that it would not be the end of the world if the RFP were suspended while the study is carried out.

Privacy is basically a question of ethics. Ethics is essentially about trying to figure out what to do in difficult circumstances, what the right thing to do is, what to do when you do not have all the information and you are not quite sure where you stand. The precautionary principle applies, obviously.

In its hearings so far, the committee has noted that the government is avoiding the issue, as it would prefer not to deal with it.

● (1540)

Facts are facts. The motion, which was adopted unanimously, called for the RFP to be suspended while the committee conducts its study. Here I am in the House a week later, seeking the House's consent to implement the motion.

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I might be a little naive on this subject, but it seems to me that governments should set an example. I know the interpreters hate it when I do this, but when we look at the Latin roots of the word “example”, it translates as “being able to do as I do”. In other words, the government should be able to do what all of us would do, namely make a reasonable decision.

Opacity, non-transparency, and layers of secrecy hiding behind every detail are the antithesis of transparency. The Privacy Commissioner told us this morning that there were best practices in this area. There is no reason to believe that they were violated. Beyond best practices, however, there was also transparency and the desire to do the right thing. These two aspects should have been demonstrated but are still missing here.

I have asked various experts, including the Privacy Commissioner, about this, and what really bothers me is that we all know it is impossible to obtain consent from 33 million people in this kind of situation. The government says this condition is fulfilled when people click on the “I agree” button, yet everyone knows as well as I do that it pretty much takes a master of laws degree to understand what we are actually agreeing to. It is also reasonable to believe that cellphone users did not consent to their data being used for purposes other than those required by the cellphone company to provide a service. It is impossible to conclude that presumed consent is the same as consent. Presumed consent is not consent.

This morning, the commissioner told us about the concept of “meaningful consent”. Meaningful consent is impossible to obtain. It may be impossible to obtain, but there is a spectrum between doing nothing and doing something impossible. All kinds of elements can be put into play so that at least things are out in the open. The government did not implement or put forward any of those elements.

What is the crux of this matter? When we talk about privacy, we expect that people will be able to provide information in good faith, believing in good faith that it will be used for the stated purposes. We are talking about trust. We are talking about a person's ability to trust their cellular service provider, let alone their government.

Properly defined, trust is the action of delegating one's future to someone else. When we delegate our future to the government, we expect it to act responsibly. We do not expect the government to potentially hide behind some obscure legal provision stating that, once the data is disaggregated, anonymized or any other such term that is incomprehensible to lay people, it can wash its hands of it. That is not right.

In such cases, opacity leads not to trust, but to distrust. Members know as well as I do that, in the end, distrust leads to defiance, the kind of defiance we can see outside Parliament.

I believe that the government is not being transparent, and that is the reason for our request. I believe that opacity reigns and that if we want to make sense of the government's actions, we have to be able to go further. Making sense of it means clearing the air, throwing light on the matter, but right now, we are lost in the fog.

Failing to suspend the RFP is to maintain all this opacity. Failing to suspend the RFP would be to perpetuate the mistake, or at the very least, the appearance of a mistake. Failing to suspend the

RFP is, above all, to show contempt for the committee's work. Failing to suspend the RFP is to disregard the unanimity of the committee. The government cannot simply wash its hands of such a situation by ignoring questions or trying to do indirectly what it cannot do directly.

It was disturbing to hear the Privacy Commissioner say this morning that he was informed but not consulted. He did not provide his opinion. In fact, he is investigating the matter now.

● (1545)

It is troubling that one of the most powerful officers of Parliament is not being asked to contribute. On the contrary, he has been sidelined. I therefore ask hon. members to support the committee's motion.

Let me reveal another small detail. A member of the committee asked me the other day, when I moved the motion, whether it was meant to undermine this. The answer is obviously no. It is not to undermine anything. Are we asking to suspend the RFP forever? The answer is no, it is not forever either.

The RFP needs to be suspended until the committee can shed light on the situation and bring the matter out of obscurity. What we are asking for is not malicious. On the contrary, it is to allow the government to demonstrate its good faith, if necessary, or to correct the situation, if necessary.

Ultimately, I will ask my colleagues to please support the motion at the end of the debate.

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois. I share his wish, as one of the members of that committee who participated in the unanimous vote, to press pause on this procurement, where I would suggest there is a lack of clarity in exactly what the government has requested and how this data has been handled.

My question to my colleague is this. When it comes to the specifics of that data, what are some of the concerns he has regarding the privacy of Canadians being put at risk because of the lack of clarity the government has given on this particular RFP and the greater revelations of mobility data being used over the course of the pandemic?

● (1550)

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. Those are very valid points, and my concerns are twofold. I am referring to the source and the end of the process.

First, at the source, there is not a modicum of user consent. Then, the point my colleague raises is very important. A number of experts have told us that once data has been de-identified, which is a new word I learned recently that means anonymized, the de-identified data can easily be reidentified, emphasis on the word easily. I am not making this up, it comes from a witness who will be testifying at committee shortly. If de-identified data can be reidentified, then honestly, we are in trouble when it comes to privacy, because there is no longer any protection.

Of course we want to ensure that the process has been done properly and that if it has, the data cannot be used for other purposes. For example, we want to ensure that it cannot be used after the pandemic.

I am not feeling at all reassured at this time. In fact, I am concerned. The origin of the data, the processing of the data and the manner in which the data will be used have me concerned.

[English]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to be in the House virtually today.

[Translation]

I am grateful to have the opportunity to rise in the House to speak to how the Government of Canada has started using mobility data and why a request for proposal—

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. Apparently, there is no translation.

Is the hon. parliamentary secretary starting his speech?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Yes.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are in questions and comments.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to what the member was saying. He made reference to some concerns he had with respect to the Privacy Commissioner.

My question to the member is this. Are there specific things that were expressed by the Privacy Commissioner, regarding the data or the agreement, that concern the member or the Bloc party? Would he be able to highlight something specific the Privacy Commissioner said, outside of being consulted?

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, outside of being consulted, the commissioner was uncomfortable.

He obviously could not comment on a large part of how the data was handled because of an ongoing investigation. However, I will say that he showed concern throughout his testimony. I asked him whether other countries had more effective protections than Canada does, and his answer was a sharp “yes”. I knew this already, having

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worked on these types of protections with the European community in the past.

The commissioner was concerned about how the data was disaggregated and reaggregated. A lot of technical terms were used, but in essence, he was saying that he was concerned and could not comment on some things because of the ongoing investigation.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is rare to have a subject matter expert to work with at committee. I know this was the member's past area of study and expertise, and he is in fact an author on it. I take special note of the member's perspective. He feels compelled to bring this critical issue to the House, and rightfully so, given the timelines we have on procurement.

What may be considered legal is not always ethical. Can the member expand on his concerns about the use of data in this way, and why he feels it necessary to allow the committee to fully explore this before the government moves forward with the procurement contract?

• (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

As he said, just because something is legal does not necessarily make it right. What may be considered legal is not always ethical. I tend to say that legality is the bare minimum. In this case, is the bare minimum enough?

Since there are many other places with harsher and more comprehensive privacy regulations, I felt concerned in light of the commissioner's response and the use of this data. I think this is a real problem. Data use is something that happens; it is not a major crime. However, we do need to reflect on this because this issue will come up again.

In previous reports, like his latest annual report, the commissioner said that the federal legislation was inadequate and called for it to be updated to reflect the new reality of big data, for example.

For these reasons, I remain concerned, since it seems as though the bare minimum is being done here.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières.

This is a very relevant issue. The government is using data to protect public health because of the pandemic. At the same time, protecting people's privacy is a major challenge. I think that the member is right in saying that it would be a good idea to examine this issue in committee.

I just want to say that I am not sure the government made a mistake. However, the issues are relevant and I think they are new.

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments.

Like her, I am not presuming that a mistake has been made. I am simply saying that it is important to shed some light on this issue.

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What happened is that the government had to make a very tough decision and find a balance between two difficult situations: protecting public health, which is very important, and protecting people's privacy. Those are both very important things. What we want to know is how the government reconciled these two needs.

Like my hon. colleague, I am definitely not presuming that a mistake was made, but we need to ask these questions. We are here to shed some light on the situation.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague.

It is interesting and really quite something to listen to an expert in this field, an ethicist who is well known in Quebec, Canada and around the world.

My question is quite simple. I am new to this field, but I think the process would have been more transparent if the government, whether it be the Minister of Health or his staff, had been clearer and more forthcoming in its explanations.

Why would the government want to continue keeping us in the dark?

In my colleague's view, what does the government stand to gain from the lack of transparency on this RFP?

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Opaqueness and transparency are two things that we talk a lot about in ethics. It is said that if something has to be opaque to succeed, it is probably less ethical than something that can stand up to transparency and light.

I do not know why the government is dragging things out because, honestly, in its place, I would follow the unanimous recommendation of the committee and shed some light on the situation and, if necessary, prove that everything was done properly. I want to reiterate that I am not presuming that a mistake was made. I would just like confirmation that everything was done properly.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, back home people say, "Be quiet around your phone. China might be listening", but it turns out that our own government happens to be listening.

I am just wondering this. What does the member have to say about the fact that, right here at home, we have to be worried about how our data is being used by our own government?

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Once again, I am not presuming that the government would misuse the data, but it is showing a lack of transparency and a desire to maintain that lack of transparency. As an ethicist, that concerns me.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to rise in the House to

talk about how the Government of Canada started using mobility data and the reasons why a request for proposal was issued.

[*English*]

Our government has seen that using health data to support an effective pandemic response has been a constant challenge. Stakeholders and experts have repeatedly stated that there is a data deficit needing to be filled to make evidence-based decisions in the public health system. They also state that public health data is "fragmented, outdated, not disaggregated, and not timely". The lack of a common, coherent approach for our health data across the country is contributing to lagging health outcomes for people in Canada, escalating sector costs, expanding health inequities and slowing innovation in Canada's health sector.

The ethical use of mobility data is one element needed to address this problem. During this pandemic, our researchers and infectious disease modellers have used the aggregated data to track the existing spread of the virus and estimate where it is most likely to surge. This has helped to inform our policy and public health responses in a positive way. We as a government are not unique in using de-identified population-level mobility data for this purpose. Countries around the world, and even local governments in Canada, are using mobility data to help guide their response to the pandemic.

The mobility data that our government uses does not include any personal information. It cannot identify individuals and the data cannot be re-engineered to identify any person. I want to be clear: We do not ask for, nor do we receive, any personal information as part of the mobility data we use. We contract for commercially available data that is de-identified and aggregated only. With only de-identified data, we have absolutely no way of knowing or following the actions of individual Canadians.

When people turn on or use their mobile or cellular phone, their phone connects with the closest cellphone tower. When a cellphone is moved, the tower is connecting with it and that can change. Their phone will always look for the closest tower to connect with. Telecommunications companies, as part of their day-to-day business operations, manage and collect this information in order to monitor and maintain their services for their customers. Telecommunications companies also have the ability to take this private business information and remove the information that would connect a phone to a person or to a personal address. The cellular companies' data is stripped down to only the signal or a signal location when moving. There is no personal data included. The data has been de-identified.

These de-identification and aggregation steps protect the privacy of individual Canadians. Companies sell this de-identified data to governments, scientists and researchers to support research and knowledge of how policies, trends and environmental changes impact people. Similarly, some companies make data collected from smart phone applications commercially available. Once again, every effort is made to make sure that the data is de-identified and aggregated so that users cannot be identified.

Once again, I would like to stress that when we purchase this data, it is de-identified and aggregated. We do not ask for and do not accept personal mobility information. The data we receive is in the form of a report. It is a table with percentages and proportions for geographic areas over a time period of 24 hours or more. There is no way to trace this back to individuals.

The Public Health Agency of Canada purchases this data to better understand how people are reacting to public health measures and how population-level movements affect the spread of COVID-19. Mobility data is a complementary data source that works alongside health, case and epidemiological data to support situational awareness. For example, when we analyze mobility data and outbreak data together, the agency can see trends of higher or lower mobility that can help us to predict future COVID cases. This helps us to evaluate the effectiveness of public health measures.

The Public Health Agency of Canada generates reports and summaries from this data, and we share them with Canadians and with provincial and territorial governments to empower everyone to make the best possible decisions during this very trying time. The Government of Canada has been transparently publishing mobility information as part of the COVIDTrends web page since December 2020. The site has seen more than 1.7 million visits and is easily accessed through the popular WeatherCAN app.

COVIDTrends data gives Canadians information they need to best manage their personal lives during the pandemic. It also gives them the ability to know what is happening where they live with respect to COVID-19. The Public Health Agency of Canada has also made announcements about this work on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, throughout the pandemic. Mobility data on the site shows changes in population movement from one week to the next in the selected area. This change in movement may help us understand the risks associated with COVID-19 transmission.

● (1605)

There are limitations to using this data, as it cannot determine if public health measures such as wearing a mask were followed while someone was moving. As I mentioned, the data, because it is completely de-identified, cannot consider population differences such as age, gender or income level.

Before I conclude, I want to take a minute to talk about the importance of privacy. The Government of Canada is committed to protecting the privacy of individuals with respect to the personal information that is under their control. We recognize that this is an essential element in maintaining public trust. The Public Health Agency of Canada requested data with no personal or identifying information. To further protect privacy, the agency also used a multibarrier approach with regard to the source of the data, along with the data pipeline, and prior to it being received. The Public

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Health Agency of Canada requires mobility data vendors to apply robust data and aggregation controls to ensure anonymity prior to them sending data so that the agency does not receive any identifying information. Any company selling data within Canada is subject to the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, which is consent-based legislation.

[*Translation*]

In this day and age, we are creating data every time we use our smart phones. It is only natural for people to be concerned about who is accessing that data and what they are using it for.

[*English*]

I want to assure Canadians that the mobility data the Public Health Agency of Canada is using does not contain their personal information or any personal information. The agency cannot link the data to any individuals.

Mobility data is one of the many tools we are using to fill the data deficit that exists in Canada. It has helped us improve our response to COVID-19, saved the lives of Canadians and protected our health care system.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, there are a couple of issues we are dealing with here today, not the least of which is the request to put off the RFP. However, the real challenge is in this de-identified data being collected by telecom companies and the transfer of that information. It may be that when the Public Health Agency of Canada gets that information, it is aggregated and de-identified, but the challenge exists when those companies collect that data.

There is another challenge with this, and that is the consent of the users. There was no consent given by users to allow the telecom companies to collect this data. It is a challenge that we heard from the Privacy Commissioner this morning. There is a real risk to de-identifying this data. Given that consent was not given, we have to get to the bottom of what security measures and what protocols were put in place to ensure this data was protected.

Does the parliamentary secretary not see that as a concern, and not see it as a reason to hold off on the RFP until the ethics committee does its work and can be assured that the privacy of Canadians was protected?

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Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, like the member from Barrie—Innisfil, I have a smart phone. I have it here, as most people do. I use it for all sorts of things. Sometimes when I google a restaurant to see if it is open, it says the restaurant is a little busier than usual. Sometimes if I am driving in traffic and I check applications like Waze or Google Maps, those applications will tell me there is a better route because there are a lot of people on the highway. That information comes from cellphone data that is aggregated and de-identified. It is the same with every app, and it is commercially available to various agencies and organizations.

The member said that there is a privacy issue with respect to consent, but we all know that when we are using our cellphone and we put down a check mark, it is a contract in a sense, and that information is available for daily conveniences like Waze or going to a restaurant. Hopefully, we can—

• (1610)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to go to other questions.

The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has listed all the benefits of using data, and I have to admit that they are compelling. However, even if the end goal is commendable, part of the problem is that the parliamentary secretary is trivializing the issue. The committee members were unanimous in expressing concerns, and they are now confused. Why did the government not want to work with the Privacy Commissioner of Canada?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

[English]

I want to acknowledge that the member is an expert in this area. He is an author and probably has a lot to say that is above my level on this subject. However, I do want to say that the issue he has raised is a lot bigger than the usage of this data by the Public Health Agency. He is raising existential issues about using cellphone data, which is worthy of a study at committee. However, I do not think that it should preclude the useful gathering and use of this information to protect Canadians during this very difficult time.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree that the hon. member does have a lot to say. At committee, five Liberals voted unanimously to support his motion, so I will put a question to the hon. member, the parliamentary secretary, whose French has come a long way. Does he support the motion that was duly passed at committee? Will the department and ministry delay the procurement process until our study is complete, yes or no?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my friend from Hamilton Centre for the compliment. I do not have a vote on the committee, as my committee is currently under way, the health committee, so it is not up to me to determine whether this proceeds as such. Personally, I have no problem using my de-identified and aggregated data for this use right now. I have no problem having the procurement of this data go on while the committee

studies it. However, this is an issue for the committee to determine, and I welcome the findings of this study. That is what studies and committees are for.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary gives a much different account than the member for Peace River—Westlock did. The member for Peace River—Westlock said the government was listening to our conversations and recording everything we are doing.

An hon. member: Are they?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, as I say this, members from across the way, who wear tinfoil hats, are yelling, “Are they?” The parliamentary secretary made things very clear when he said that this was de-identified information that had been mined for commercial purposes and is used by other apps.

Can the member enlighten me as to why he might think the member for Peace River—Westlock wants to believe these trumped-up conspiracy theories that the government is monitoring everybody's individual conversations?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, it is because they are conspiracy theorists. Members on the opposite side are always trying to portray the government as having some kind of a conspiracy going on. It is something that I flatly refute and disagree with. I think it is irresponsible of members on the other side to continue to promote these types of ideals when they are actually impossible. It is not feasible. It is not something this government is interested in doing, and it is actually not even possible. I thank my colleague—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am going to interrupt the hon. member, as there is a point of order from the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I seek guidance from you on whether accusing a member of Parliament of being a conspiracy theorist is unparliamentary language.

• (1615)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I do not have a list of parliamentary language that would cover the accusation in question. However, I did react a bit when I heard it. I recommend that members be prudent in their usage of language in the House and try not to accuse each other of things that are difficult to deal with right now.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us talk about irresponsible. We hear members of the government say either we believe everything they say or we are with the conspiracy theorists. Might I suggest there is a healthy level of skepticism in between being a believer in conspiracy theories and trusting the government with everything.

There are a lot of Canadians who legitimately do not trust the government. A report came out last year saying that personal information belonging to 144,000 Canadians was mishandled. This was in an official report and included thousands of Canadians whose data was improperly used by the Canada Revenue Agency. We have over 100,000 verifiable Canadian cases of the government's misuse of data. Then we have the member saying anyone who questions the government on this is wearing a tinfoil hat.

What about the over 100,000 Canadians who are victims of this abuse of their data? Can the government show a little humility, apologize to the Canadians who have been affected and start being more respectful of those who are concerned?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, perhaps there is some confusion about what a conspiracy actually is. A conspiracy is a plot and some kind of a secret to do something unlawful and illegal. That is exactly what the member opposite suggested was going on, that there was some kind of a secret plot to listen to Canadians. That is completely impossible, as I said. It is beyond the pale to continue to promote these types of ideas.

A study on whether or not to use de-identified, aggregated data is completely within the rights of the committee. It is why committees exist. However, suggesting that the government is listening to Canadians—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Madam Speaker, I spent 25 years advising governments around the world, and this is the first time I have been called a conspiracy theorist. That is unacceptable.

The parliamentary secretary keeps telling us there is no problem, but denying the existence of a problem does not make it go away. Earlier, he said that all the information gathered was obtained on the basis of consent.

This morning, the commissioner told us it was impossible to obtain consent from 33 million people. Being impossible, it is actually not even desirable.

Was this information obtained on the basis of consent or not?

[English]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I would like to apologize to the member from the Bloc Québécois if I insinuated that I was referring to him as a conspiracy theorist. That was, indeed, not my objective. I was referring to the allegation that Canadians are being listened to. That is not something that the member from the Bloc Québécois said during his speech. I listened very attentively to his speech, and I did not hear any sort of conspiracies during it. My apologies if that was construed as an accusation.

As I said, a study on this matter is warranted. I welcome the findings of the study. I think we could all agree that the experience of the member opposite is a valuable contribution to democracy and this House of Commons.

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[Translation]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, before I begin, I would like to thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières for moving this motion in the House today.

Before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics did its study, I texted my colleague to say I was looking forward to hearing what he had to say about this because he had a lot of experience and knew the subject matter well. I would like to thank him.

[English]

We are really seized with this issue, as Canadians have been, since it was first identified in the month of December that the RFP had been issued. The RFP was to continue a practice that many Canadians, in the distraction of a pandemic, had no idea was going on. It was that their mobility data was being collected, in this case by Telus, without their consent or implied consent, and was being utilized to determine a public health response to the COVID-19 crisis.

We have, for the last several days, been studying the impacts of this at the ethics committee. I will say that there have been some very serious concerns that have been brought up by the experts we have been hearing from, including the Privacy Commissioner. That is why this is such an issue as it relates to the motion that we are dealing with today. We have not gotten to the bottom of the fact of whether this data has been protected in the manner that would be the gold standard for protecting the privacy and security of the data of Canadians. This is why we are focused on this study. During a pandemic, with all of the distractions that are going on, it would be very easy for this information to be utilized in a way that does not protect the privacy of Canadians. The RFP was originally to be finalized by January 21. It got pushed back to February 4, and now it has been pushed back even further.

At committee, when we dealt with the motion that was presented by my Bloc colleague, there were very solid arguments made as to why this RFP should be pushed back. In fact, the entire committee voted 10 to nothing to push this RFP off until we completed this study, so that not only parliamentarians but Canadians can be assured that the information that was gathered was, in fact, protecting the privacy of Canadians.

We heard at committee from members of the Liberal Party that the Prime Minister came out in 2020 or 2021 and talked about this information being gathered. It is not an issue of whether the information was gathered. There are governments around the world using data and information to inform their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but this one speaks to the fundamental tenet of democracy to make sure that we protect the privacy rights of Canadians. Parliamentarians wanted to get to the bottom of this to make sure that we were protecting those privacy rights.

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The story came out in December that this RFP was being proposed to be extended, and not just in the way it was designed in the first place, which was really for a couple of months, where it was a sole-source contract that was given to, as we found out, Telus. It was going to be extended for up to another five years and collect even more mobility data to determine, as they said in the RFP, the public health response and to determine trends to deal with public health issues going forward.

It was disturbing not only that this was happening without really the knowledge of Canadians who were distracted during this pandemic, without the consent of Canadians to have their mobility data tracked, but that this was going to go on for another five years. That is why it is important that we get to the bottom of this issue to really be sure and determine whether that mobility data was being protected on behalf of Canadians.

● (1620)

My colleague from the Bloc was talking about his initial concern when he saw the RFP. I saw the RFP just a couple of days before Christmas because it was reported in Blacklock's, which, by the way, does great work digging into government contracts. I know that maybe the government does not like the work that it does, but it does great work digging into these contracts. I would hope that if Conservatives were in government, we would be held to the same account on these types of contracts.

I saw the story and we had discussions among ourselves. As we were heading to the Christmas break, it was awfully difficult, because Canadians were distracted by Christmas, to really push this issue. I determined, as the newly appointed critic for ethics and accountable government, that we were going to wait until after Christmas before we called an emergency meeting of the ethics committee.

We did, the meeting was granted and, subsequent to that, the study was supported by all members of the committee to make sure that it looked at not just the RFP but another part of this too, which was an update to privacy laws. We heard from the Privacy Commissioner this morning that there does need to be an enhancement of privacy laws. We heard from an expert from the University of Ottawa as well that, as this data is collected, an enhancement of those privacy laws is needed to protect the privacy of Canadians for this data, which can be very useful but comes with some significant pitfalls and risks as well.

The issue that we are really dealing with is how this information was de-identified and aggregated. The minister was at committee last week and if we were playing the de-identified and aggregated drinking game, we would have been drunk very quickly because that was all we heard from the minister. We did not get any evidence of how this information was de-identified and aggregated. All we got were assurances. Assurances are not enough for the committee. This is why we are asking today that this RFP be cancelled until we find out exactly what is going on.

We have requested that the telecom companies come in, particularly Telus, to discuss how this information is de-identified and what security measures and protocols are put in place to assure us, as MPs, and Canadians that their information and privacy is being protected. I am looking forward to hearing from the telecom com-

panies, including Telus through its data for good program, how that is done. I am learning a lot about this, as members can imagine, but the information that they collect, as I understand it now, is definitely identifiable. The question that we have is what happens to that information when it is identified and what is the process to de-identify it.

I have heard from security experts and read reports from around the world. A New York Times report, whose reporters we have asked to come and speak to the ethics committee, talked about being one to two to four points of data away from having that information reidentified. It really is a fascinating subject, but, more importantly, it is important to find out and determine whether that information is being properly protected from the point that it is collected to the hands that it is being passed through.

We also found out in the course of our study, and it was the parliamentary secretary who wrote us a letter to tell us, no pun intended, just so I am clear, that there was a company that was consolidating all of this data and presenting that information to the government. The company is called BlueDot. My understanding is that it is coming to committee on Thursday and we are going to have a lot of interesting questions to ask.

As we can see, the information is being collected, de-identified, aggregated and passed on to other hands. If those security measures and protocols are not put in place, and again I am not an expert on this but I have been listening to experts, there is a real risk that information can be commercialized, monetized, reidentified and that personal identifiers and information from that data can be known. It is fairly simple to do.

● (1625)

Proposing, as the motion did, to suspend the RFP in my opinion is the right move to make until we find out more. I did not get any comfort from the presentation of the Privacy Commissioner when he appeared at committee today. If anything came out of that meeting today, it is that it really informs the need for us to do a deeper dive on this and suspend the RFP.

I pulled off some of the questions that were asked of the Privacy Commissioner, and if what the Privacy Commissioner said this morning does not concern the tin-foil hats on this side of the House, as the members of the government like to call us, or the conspiracy theorists, it should be worrisome to members of the government. I will read it into the record, because I think it is important for us to inform our decision in this debate as we vote on this motion when it does come to a vote. Daniel Therrien, who is the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, and the de facto standard by which privacy protection is utilized in this country, said today that:

In the case of PHAC's use of mobility data, we were informed of their intent to use data in a de-identified and aggregated way.

Okay, he was informed. He went on to say that:

We offered to review the technical means used to de-identify data and to provide advice, which PHAC declined.

PHAC declined the offer by the Privacy Commissioner of Canada to look at the methodology and to provide advice on how this data was being utilized or protected. He went on to say that:

The government relied on other experts to that end, which is their prerogative.

It is their prerogative, there is no question about it. My view, and I know the view of the members of our committee, because we spoke afterwards, is that regarding the de facto standard by which privacy legislation is defended and protected, the Privacy Commissioner of Canada should have at least been included in the process so that PHAC, which was accepting this data, and perhaps Telus and BlueDot would have known what proper privacy measures, protocols and security should have been put in place. It may cause a level of concern that his office was merely notified, "Oh, by the way, we're going to be doing this." "Do you want any help?" "No, we don't want any help." That is effectively what PHAC was telling the Privacy Commissioner.

I am not surprised that he also went on to say the following, given the reaction among Canadians and just how troubling this information is as it has become publicly known and people's attention has been given to it:

Now that we have received complaints alleging violations of privacy, we will turn our attention to the means chosen for de-identification and whether they were appropriate to safeguard against reidentification.

Since this is under investigation, he obviously was not able to provide us with intimate details of where that investigation lies at this point, but the Privacy Commissioner of Canada was not even notified. The government relied on other security experts and privacy experts. Who were they? I think that is a fair question. What qualifications do they have that are greater than the Privacy Commissioner of Canada's? It was really concerning.

The Privacy Commissioner went on to say, in this line of questioning from our committee, that, "This practice raises legitimate concerns by consumers, particularly when their personal information is used without their knowledge for purposes other than they expect."

We have heard from members on the other side about the ways of all the different apps, but the difference between that and what we are talking about is that the users provide consent to those applications to use the tracking of their mobility. In the case that we are talking about today, which involves anywhere from 14 million to 33 million users, it would be a hard argument to suggest that every one of those users provided consent. In fact, the Privacy Commissioner said today that it would be impossible for 33 million users to provide consent so that collection of their data could be used for the purposes that PHAC was dealing with. The issue of meaningful consent becomes a critical component of this.

• (1630)

I received a letter from OpenMedia.org talking about the ethics committee looking into this issue. The company suggested three

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fundamental questions, which we are trying to get to the bottom of, that are extremely important in this case.

Number one: How did Telus obtain meaningful consent for the collection, use and disclosure of this mobility data? I spoke about the importance of that earlier. OpenMedia suggested that when Telus comes to the committee, it needs to answer questions such as whether an individual who agreed to the sharing of their mobility data understood this use by the Public Health Agency of Canada. I suggest it would be impossible for 33 million people or fewer to really understand that this was being used by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The second most important question that needs to be asked is this. Does the consent that Telus relied upon extend to the context in which the Public Health Agency of Canada used this data? Privacy and consent, it says, are highly contextual. If we, as users, give limited permission to Telus to collect, use in a limited way, and disclose some of our mobility data, that cannot and should not be an open-ended carte blanche for Telus to be able to provide this data to other people, including the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The next is the most important question of all. I heard universally from security and privacy experts, not just here in Canada but around the world. They asked how exactly this data had been securely de-identified. There are really two issues here: first, de-identification and the risk associated with reidentifying this data; and second, user consent.

My office has received correspondence. We have heard from experts, and as I said earlier we heard from a University of Ottawa expert this morning, about the risks of de-identifying data. I want to read out what some of the security experts are saying in the context of this RFP, and why it is so important that the government hold off on it until we get the answers to the questions.

Dr. Ann Cavoukian, the former Ontario privacy commissioner, said that without a strong de-identification framework and without de-identification protocols one can reidentify this data. There is a whole collected literature on de-identification of data and the way to easily reidentify it. One has to go to great lengths to de-identify, and I am sure the government has not done this.

I go back to what we heard from the Privacy Commissioner today, who said that he was merely informed and not consulted, despite the fact that the Minister of Health last week said that the government were having biweekly meetings with the Privacy Commissioner on this issue. We found out this morning these were not related to the gathering of mobility data, but related to other things happening in the context of the pandemic response.

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Dr. Cavoukian went on to say that the government should be the greatest concern. Its ability to usurp our information, to tell us what to do and expect us to accept that, in my view, is due to the fact that it is seeking greater control.

If we want to connect the dots, and look at some of the patterns created as a result of this pandemic, Canadians are becoming increasingly concerned, and I would say they are concerned at this point, about the expansive overreach by the government. It is using the pandemic to curtail the rights and freedoms of Canadians. We saw the government, at the beginning of the pandemic and through the initial build, try to seize control and get spending and taxing power without parliamentary approval. We have seen this and other sole-sourced contracts that have gone out throughout the course of the pandemic to who I would call well-connected Liberal insiders and friends.

I am not suggesting that in this case, but when one starts connecting the dots with this expansive overreach, we can see a pattern with the government. It is causing me great concern, as it is many Canadians.

• (1635)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am fairly new to this discussion, but when we think of the de-identification of data, Telus has a vested interest. If it were to lose the confidence of its consumers, that would have a fairly profound, negative impact on it. The Government of Canada, through the Department of Health, is trying to get that de-identifiable data in order to provide good, sound policy decisions in a timely fashion. It seems that both Public Health and Telus have strongly vested interests.

Does the member feel that the Government of Canada, the Department of Health or Telus have violated any current laws?

• (1640)

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I cannot speak to that because we are simply not at the point of understanding how this data was collected, whether it was properly de-identified, what the risks of reidentification are, and why the Privacy Commissioner was not involved in the process and providing guidance to PHAC. The Privacy Commissioner would have provided guidance to Telus as well.

I have trouble understanding the actual risk, in the collection of this data, to the privacy rights of Canadians. The reason I am troubled by that is because there are other programs in place that the Public Health Agency of Canada could have utilized if it wanted to determine public health response, or even the future of public health response. It has access to data within its public health networks, provincially, territorially and municipally. It has hospitalization data. It could have used other government resources without risk to the privacy protections of Canadians by using this as a means, especially without enhanced privacy laws.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his enlightening remarks. Two problems

have been identified. The first is related to consent, the second to data anonymization. I will focus on the first.

We have been told over and over that anyone could consult the data on COVIDTrends. Telus users could opt out anytime because there was an opt-out function. Did users know they were supposed to check COVIDTrends, and did they know they could opt out?

Is it reasonable to believe that COVIDTrends was known to the public given that the Prime Minister mentioned its existence just one single time, back in March 2020?

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, my colleague posed a very important question.

[English]

We heard members at committee say that the Prime Minister made people aware this was going on and that the government was transparent about it, but it really boils down to the issue of consent. It can be as transparent as it wants, but the bottom line is that if users and Telus customers did not provide their consent for this information to be utilized in the manner in which PHAC did, that calls into question not an issue of transparency, but an issue of whether I am confident in my privacy rights being protected at a time when I should be consenting to that information. We heard from the Privacy Commissioner that there may be other circumstances that allow for privacy to be determined, but we have to increase those privacy laws. We have to enhance privacy laws in order to protect for the purposes that PHAC determined.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating my hon. colleague across the way in the Conservative Party for his recent ascension. I will be speaking with him a lot more in the future.

With respect to the debate we are having now, I wonder if he believes this. Can we expand the mandate the hon. member for Trois-Rivières suggested, which is to look at other ways in which privacy may be compromised during the pandemic?

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her kind words. Everybody was saying that this new position as opposition House leader is like drinking water from a fire hose, and as a former firefighter, I never drank water out of a firehose in the way I am today. It has been quite a day.

It is an important question, because what we want to be focusing on is not just how the data was collected and what security protocols and privacy protections were put in place; we also, as a committee, determined that we need to move forward, and the Privacy Commissioner was a very important part of this process this morning about enhancing privacy laws. In fact, at the beginning of this pandemic, the Privacy Commissioner wrote to the government and said that in the context of a pandemic, we not only have to make sure that our privacy laws are upgraded, for lack of a better term, but also that there has to be that enhancement in protecting privacy.

I am looking forward to the report of the committee, because I think we can present some forward-looking things to the government so that it can enhance those privacy laws in what is becoming an increasingly important part of data collection to determine health responses, but we have to be assured that privacy rights are upheld in the context of that information being gathered.

• (1645)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the work that he is doing on privacy. One of the things I want to ask him about is the limited use of this data.

When we had the Privacy Commissioner at committee before these vaccine passports were rolled out, he said it was very important that they had scientific proof that they worked. As the member knows, the vaccine passports were rolled out to stop the spread of COVID-19; in other words, the assumption was that vaccinated people would not spread COVID-19 and unvaccinated people would. Right now we are seeing that both vaccinated and unvaccinated people can spread the virus. The Privacy Commissioner said that once the information is no longer needed, it needs to be destroyed.

In the context of this cellphone tracking that may be linked to cellphones themselves, how much longer does the member think the government should be retaining this information, and should it be permanently destroyed afterward?

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I believe the information and the data that are collected do have to be destroyed, but I need assurance and members of the committee need assurance—and this is why we are here today—that the data is being collected in an appropriate manner, a secure manner, with proper security protocols in place, but more importantly, that the information is protected.

I would not go so far as to say that it needs to be destroyed. Without looking at that, we have to step back and ask if this was done in a proper manner with proper securities and protocols in place to protect the privacy of Canadians.

In the context of the vaccine passports, I have seen the same studies and reports as the hon. member has, and the Privacy Commissioner was quite clear in his statements that this information must be destroyed. We have to make sure that it is not commercialized, not monetized, and, more importantly, that it is not de-identified in a manner that offends the privacy rights of Canadians, which are a fundamental tenet of democracy.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, the situation is unbelievable. We are debating a serious matter, people's privacy. We have a parliamentary secretary who stated that he did not vote in committee and that all kinds of information is being collected from our phones anyway. That is worrisome.

I would like to congratulate my colleague for his speech because he raised several very pertinent points. What I wanted to ask him about was the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, a tool at the government's disposal to ensure it does not go wrong.

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Many governments around the world collect data about their citizens, and they all have good reasons for doing so. That is why we must be vigilant with respect to this issue. I would like my colleague to tell me why the Liberal government did not approach the Privacy Commissioner of Canada in this process. That is unbelievable.

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, it certainly is unbelievable.

[English]

They informed him, but they did not utilize his expertise in guiding them on how to properly do this.

On the issue of the parliamentary secretary, he is full of bluster. He stands up and he criticizes us, and we accept that. We know where it is coming from.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): 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 Langley—Aldergrove, Infrastructure; the hon. member for North Island—Powell River, Seniors; and the hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South, Government Priorities.

• (1650)

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I join the debate this afternoon in support of the concurrence motion moved by my hon. Bloc colleague from Trois-Rivières.

Our Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics unanimously adopted this motion:

That the committee call upon the government to suspend the Public Health Agency of Canada's cellular data tender upon adoption of this motion, and that the tender shall not be re-offered until the committee reports to the House that it is satisfied that the privacy of Canadians will not be affected, and that the committee report the adoption of this motion to the House at the earliest opportunity.

When we are dealing with issues of privacy, I believe it is critical that parliamentarians have the opportunity to be clear on what is being collected, how it is being utilized and what safeguards are in place. Not doing this would be an abdication of our responsibilities as legislators.

I believe the government members of our committee were acting in good faith with our committee's request to suspend the procurement under this contract. With the news that the government had tendered a contract for the collection of mobility data as a part of its COVID-19 response, many Canadians were rightly concerned about the protections in place to protect their privacy. The fact that many people learned about this program from news articles sets off alarm bells, and even if the process was unintentional, it demonstrates a lack of government transparency.

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To make matters worse, a PHAC spokesperson stated that the agency had consulted with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner before starting to collect mobility data, but the Office of the Privacy Commissioner stated that it was not consulted and had only been informed of the program in 2020. This discrepancy between “consulted” and “informed” is stark, and I believe it is prudent of the ethics committee to ask the government to press “pause” on any future requests for proposals for mobility data projects until parliamentarians have an opportunity to provide oversight.

Our committee has had an opportunity to hear from PHAC, departmental officials and the Privacy Commissioner, but it is very important that we have telecom industry representatives, and Telus in particular, appear before our committee to discuss how they are going to use our personal information and what steps they have taken to protect our privacy.

I look forward to these representatives appearing before our committee in the near future to explain how they obtain meaningful consent for the collection, use and disclosure of this mobility data; how the data is de-identified; and what the risk is of reidentification.

I think the study is also an opportunity to educate the public about the pervasiveness of the mobility data economy and, by updating our Canadian privacy laws, make meaningful progress towards reforming the actors that operate in this sector. I can only hope that this opportunity to bring Canada's law into the digital era and restore trust to Canadian citizens and consumers alike is not lost.

There has also been little discussion of PHAC's collection and use of data from these kinds of third parties, which tend to be advertising and data surveillance companies that consumers have no idea are collecting, repackaging and monetizing their personal information. The repurposing of Canadian cellular networks for things like pandemic mobility tracking without the knowledge of subscribers, though ostensibly with their consent vis-à-vis the largely unread terms of service, is a big deal.

The data that was provided to PHAC lacks demographic information and, as we have heard, provides crude assessments of population mobility. While the data might be of some value, there is still a question about whether or not Canadians are comfortable with their cellphone data being used in this way. I know many of my residents in Hamilton Centre have shared their deep concerns about the overall commodification of the tracking and sale of their personal information. This is not the only example of cellphone data being used for purposes that are wholly unrelated to the provision or management of cellular services. Cellphone companies themselves have developed surveillance tools, selling them on the basis that cellphones are trackable devices and warning customers who use their service that they should not expect cellphone privacy. In fact, I believe we heard that clearly from the government members of this debate this evening.

Given the massive amounts of cellphone data that are available through our cell towers, our cellphones and our cell service providers, the ability to track cellphones across time and space is completely unchecked.

• (1655)

Cellphone companies' refusal to encrypt important information about subscribers' locations has made it easier for cell sites and their owners to provide law enforcement authorities with cellphone data. Cellphone companies have made it possible for cellphones to be tracked even when they are turned off by means of cell-tower logs that track the cell numbers and locations of subscribers without their knowledge. By triangulating a cellphone user's geographical location, cell towers can enable the construction of a kind of cellphone user profile.

I think of the use by police of technologies such as stingrays and I cannot help but recall the revelations this past summer about major government overreach utilizing the private Israeli Pegasus spyware used to hack cellphones of journalists, activists and worldwide agencies through the NSO Group's spyware, which has been licensed by governments.

However, cellphone tracking capabilities are not the domain of only law enforcement or intelligence agencies; they can also be tracked by the cell tower owners, as we have discussed. This access could be used to determine where these phones go in the evening and leave cellphone providers with an ongoing level of pervasive tracking. This is problematic, because users are charged by cellphone providers based on their location data and where these phones spend their time. This is how they generate large amounts of their ad revenue.

Within the Canadian context, as is the case in the study for our Standing Committee on Ethics for which this concurrence debate has been called, cellphones are used to track cellphone users' and potentially citizens' mobilities for reasons having nothing whatsoever to do with their cellphone service provision.

The Privacy Commissioner was at the ethics committee earlier today. His brief stated that “this data sharing initiative is an example of the movement of data between the private and public sectors and demonstrates the need for both to be governed by common principles and rules. With these two sectors interacting ever more frequently it is imperative that they be held to similar standards. Ideally, our two federal privacy laws should also be updated concurrently.”

I agree, and I believe that Canadians all expect a certain level of privacy, especially when it comes to their cellphones. We need to take a closer look to see if our current laws and regulations are sufficient in our current age of big data. I plan to continue this work at the ethics committee to ensure that Canada has the gold standard for protecting people's data and their privacy.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for demonstrating that our work at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics is about much more than just this matter in connection with the Public Health Agency of Canada.

We need to establish exemplary standards, as other countries have done, so that Canadians are well protected. Does my colleague believe that we could draw on the General Data Protection Regulation currently in effect in the European Union to quickly implement certain provisions on consent?

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, I would share with the hon. member that the Privacy Commissioner stated an urgent need for law reform. It is incumbent on us to take a look at the ways in which big data is bought and sold and commodified and the need for our legislation to be updated, including having an arm's-length agency that is provided with the resources and staffing to ensure that there are proactive audits, which the Privacy Commissioner called for, of both private and public organizational interests.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, it certainly was fascinating to see the wide disparity of views between what the minister shared last week and what the Privacy Commissioner told the committee here this morning.

The parliamentary secretary implied earlier, in an answer to a question from the official opposition, that he did not feel it was important for the government to respect the will of the committee in terms of delaying the RFP. I would certainly value the thoughts of the member for Hamilton Centre on the comments that the parliamentary secretary made in that regard.

• (1700)

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, I think the heart of all of our committee work is being able to operate within good faith with the people who join us on our committees. I take it that the five Liberal members who voted to support this were acting in good faith when they supported this measure. I do not take it lightly that the parliamentary secretary just basically brushed off the committee's motion, which was duly passed unanimously.

It also speaks to a growing concern that not only members of the governing side, but also senior bureaucrats and those with corporate interests, may choose to try to brush off the ethics committee when we do our investigations and put forward recommendations in the House. It is not lost on me that we have to be before this House with a concurrence motion to simply get the government to do what its Liberal members already voted for us to do.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his balanced speech. He covered the issue in detail, and I would like to ask him the same question that I asked my Conservative colleague earlier.

We have a government that claims that there is no problem, that there is no need to worry because data is always being collected. This government does not want to acknowledge its members' vote in committee. That is quite troubling. What does my colleague

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think was the government's motivation for not involving the Privacy Commissioner of Canada when it was setting this policy?

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, I was troubled by that. In fact, I was a little agitated by the government's use of this idea that it was working with and being informed by the commissioner. I think there was a clear distinction made by the Privacy Commissioner on what it actually looks like to be in consultation with the privacy commissioner's office, at which, it is not also lost on me, there are now complaints.

I would put to the hon. members in the House debating that, had the government taken the opportunity to actually take up the Privacy Commissioner's offer, it might have avoided the privacy complaints that are now being launched against it.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague, and I do not know if he really has the answer. What does he think the rationale was for the government to ignore the will of the ethics commission with respect to protecting Canadians' privacy?

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, given that I have to state that I do not know what the government's motivations were, I will say I think that it is a dangerous precedent. The Privacy Commissioner provided the opportunity to look at the frameworks in place to ensure they met the standards set by the Privacy Commissioner. The fact that this was denied is very troubling for me.

We also understand that the Privacy Commissioner's office does not have the resources to check procurement on every single project that goes out there. However, on this particular one, if I understood the testimony today correctly, I think there was an ongoing effort by the Privacy Commissioner and there were multiple opportunities for the government to engage in the office's expertise, which is precisely what has put us before the House this evening.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we have been talking this afternoon, we have heard a lot of discussion about trust in the manner in which the information is being obtained. I wonder if the member can comment as to whether he believes there might be risks of government listening in on conversations, as we heard earlier from the Conservatives.

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, while I can appreciate where the hon. parliamentary secretary is trying to go on this, it is not lost on me that this is a government that allowed our military to spy on Black Lives Matter movement protests while simultaneously being out and actually participating in them.

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There is a long and storied history of the way in which government actively surveils citizens in the country, including the ways in which Bill C-51 allowed for the targeting and criminalization of indigenous land defenders, environmentalists, social justice folks and basic people out there trying to advocate for their own civil rights.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I think the work my colleague is doing is some of the most important that is being done in Canada right now, so I thank him very much. What I am hearing from constituents is concern. When this came out I got emails about the Government of Canada spying on Canadian citizens without consent. I have heard allegations that even now, when Canadians are putting health information on their cellphones in regard to a vaccine passport, when they cross the border coming back from the United States, they do not even have to show their passport anymore. Without their consent, the CBSA officers already know it.

Could the member comment on how important it is for him to do this work? What are the potential dangers of sharing our personal health information and our information internationally, if we do not get this right in Canada?

• (1705)

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, as somebody who has spent quite some time tackling the pervasive and, I would suggest, racist practice of racial profiling in street checks, we know that organizations like the CBSA, through CPIC, have a whole host of information on people that is shared not just domestically but internationally.

This begs the question about time limitations for information that is collected by government and shared with agencies. I know this is one of the questions that came up today. Will we actually delete this information, or will it be held in perpetuity and shared with agencies around the world?

I do hope that the use of CPIC and the sharing of this information more broadly is brought into this discussion because, again, it blurs the lines between public and private interests, and basic civil liberties.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to respond, first and foremost, to one of the issues that was raised, which is why the government is looking at mobility data. It is important for me to recognize that I really do value the contributions our standing committees make to the House of Commons. We often see that things coming out of our standing committees will ultimately end up on the floor for debate. Whether directly or indirectly, they contribute immensely to our institution, and I do want to thank those members who participated in this valuable study, no matter what political party they belong to.

I approach this debate feeling a bit mixed, in the sense that I was hoping we would be dealing with Bill C-8. What is interesting in talking about this particular report and asking for it to be concurred in is that the reason that collection was happening in the first place was coronavirus.

The government, including the Prime Minister, even when he was in opposition, has always talked about the importance of sci-

ence, and how important data and, in the case of the pandemic, health care experts are, as well as the role they played in making sure we minimized the negatives of the pandemic. That means that we need to gather information and data.

Maybe about a year ago, some data was released. It went onto the Internet through Google. It might have peaked for about two or three days. I thought it was really interesting. It was about cell-phone data, and it showed how people were travelling in communities, and not only in communities, but across the country and around the globe. I learned a lot from just seeing the snapshots of these little dots showing how mobile people are nowadays.

When I heard about the Public Health Agency of Canada looking at getting this mobile data, I was not overly concerned about it, given the fact that Canada's Public Health Agency has done an outstanding job. I would suggest they are second to no other government agency in the world when it comes to dealing with the pandemic. It has done it in a first-class way.

That does not mean it cannot or should not be held to account for the decisions they have made or the actions they have taken. I suspect that, over the coming days, weeks, months and years ahead, there is always going to be a reflection in terms of what it is that particular health agency did at a time when Canada needed that agency.

I would remind members of the House to reflect on not only the credibility of the Public Health Agency of Canada, a credibility that is recognized around the world. It is an agency that has the integrity and the expertise to make good, sound decisions. We have some vested interests there.

Telus is not a small company, as we all know. Telus is a huge corporation with a very large clientele. Telus could disappear fairly quickly in Canada, in terms of its footprint, if Canadians felt they were being betrayed or that it was giving out information it should not be giving out.

• (1710)

Health Canada as an agency is not new. As an agency it has been there for many years. If we had the health committee or another standing committee bring Health Canada before it, and I do not know this for a fact but I would speculate that Health Canada would say it is in constant need of information. It continues to look at ways in which it can bring in that information. I say that because I believe that within Health Canada there is a high level of expertise to deal with the issue of the privacy of Canadians.

I suspect that some in the opposition benches would say that is all fine and dandy, but there still is a need for us to be able to provide that sense of accountability to ensure that the rights of Canadians are in fact being protected. We do not have to be in the opposition benches in order to appreciate that.

When I was first elected, the Internet was around but not for the average consumer, that is for sure. In 1988, I had the little Apple with the 3.5-inch floppy when I was first elected, and I would punch in the phone number and hear the dial tone and it would click in. The point is that time goes on and we opened up a whole new window through this technology.

I remember talking to a business person who had his own data collection. Many of my colleagues might remember Paul Calandra and he would always talk about his pizza store examples. I actually have a pizza example where an individual business person was compiling his own data of customers with phone numbers and so forth. He said that if he ever changed companies or to be able to put out a special, he had a base that he could go to.

The same principles of the importance of data are there today. Take a look at what is happening with Google, Amazon and Netflix. There is a whole spectrum of exceptionally large Internet companies in particular that are gathering billions of pieces of data that could be associated with some form of identity.

My constituents, justifiably so, are very much concerned about it. Their primary concern is the issue of identity theft. Another concern is the issue of privacy and what the government is doing to ensure that privacy is protected. That is why I said at the beginning of my comments that I appreciate the fact that we have a standing committee that is dealing with the issue of privacy.

Where I have a bit of a problem today in terms of talking about this report is that all members will sit on committees and all committees will provide reports and all reports will ultimately be tabled here in the House. Unfortunately, if every report were to be debated, we would not have time to deal with not only government business but even opposition business.

I am wondering whether this would be better. If members of the ethics committee have some outstanding concerns, nothing prevents them from reconvening to go over the report and call before it ministers and others. I can appreciate the sensitivity of the issue, but as much as this report supplies a lot about mobility data, which is so important in order to be able to deal with the pandemic, I was hoping we were going to be debating Bill C-8 today, because—

Mr. Damien Kurek: What about the judges?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, we were hoping to deal with Bill C-8 and then hopefully deal with the judges after that legislation, Bill C-9.

• (1715)

My point is that, because of this particular concurrence motion, we are not able to deal with things such as the allocation of hundreds of millions of dollars for rapid testing or air ventilation for students in our schools. I do not want to take away from the importance of this particular report, but I can tell members that there are many reports that our standing committees are going to bring forward. I would hope that we would think in terms of the other possible venues in which they can be discussed.

The only advantage of the report coming here for concurrence is that I get to speak to it, and I appreciate that members want me to address the important issues of the day. Having said that, at the end

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of day when I hear some of the comments, such as “de-identification of data”, what is it? I think that for most Canadians there would have to be some sort of an explanation.

When I turn on my cellphone and make phone calls, I have a basic understanding of it. I make a phone call and my cellphone goes to the closest tower, and it is truly amazing how much information that tower collects, such as my name and where I live. There is all sorts of information no doubt at one tower. Now, if I happen to be driving at the time, and we should not talk on a cellphone when driving but maybe I am a passenger, and if I am going from one tower to the next, it starts to add up. They can track where I am. I can understand why some in society might be concerned about that, but what is done with that information is what the real concern should be.

We have legislation and we also have offices. The Privacy Commissioner's office is not just there for government but also for the private sector, so that if we find that there is a company out there that is inappropriately using the data being collected, then there is somewhere we can go to express the concerns we have. I would like to think I would be at the beginning of the line, whether it was Telus Canada, the Privacy Commissioner, the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Minister of Health or possibly members of the committee dealing with ethics and privacy-related issues. There are opportunities for us to ensure that the data being collected is not being abused, and there is a need.

I understand the Privacy Commissioner came before the committee and made a presentation. I am absolutely convinced that, on a one-on-one discussion with the Privacy Commissioner or anyone else who is affiliated, such as the critic from the Bloc who is an expert in this field, there is a need for us to take a look at the laws we currently have. I can appreciate that there is a need for change and amendments. Hopefully, there will be an opportunity where we will be able to bring in such legislation, and the same concerns that we are hearing here today and in committee would allow for that type of legislation to pass if, in fact, the opportunity is there to bring it forward.

Through technology, things change rather rapidly. I know there are members of the committee who are here today and if I am wrong in my assertion that the Privacy Commissioner does not believe that there is a need for some of those changes to occur, please let me know. However, I heard more than one member today talk about “consultation” versus being “informed”. Yes, I recognize that there is a difference. The Privacy Commissioner was informed of it and aware of it. If there were some outstanding concerns, directly or indirectly, those likely would have been expressed to the stakeholders who needed to know.

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● (1720)

I am not absolutely convinced that every action the government does has to go through the Privacy Commissioner. I have not heard that argument being made. I think there are certain situations where some departments, more than others, may have a higher need. Some departments may have a whole lot more expertise in that area, as I pointed out with the Health Canada agency. I would be very reluctant to make a general statement or to take a brush and apply it to every department and every situation where there is some information that is being drawn. Take a look at Stats Canada. I have received emails from Stats Canada. I am sure other members have also received emails from Stats Canada. There is all sorts of information being collected.

Would you apply the same principle of getting the Privacy Commissioner involved in every agency that the federal government has? Should we be expanding the Privacy Commissioner's office to take that into consideration? I am concerned about governments, whether they are provincial, municipal or federal, whatever they might be, and how they might be using that data, especially on issues of health care with everyone having a health card. All different provinces have that. There are driver's licences. There are endless examples, such as passports or you name it.

I am equally, if not more concerned, about this issue in the private sector. That is where I think we need to be spending more of our time and energy. I would like to think experts would acknowledge that.

When we talk about consent and getting a better indication or more clarity in terms of what consent really is, absolutely, but let us not be completely naive about it. I remember when we were talking about organ transplants in the province of Manitoba, talking about allowing MPI to have an opt-out, or to have it in some sort of a taxation policy, again I am going back to the province of Manitoba, and allow people to opt out without making an assumption. There are ways in which it can be done in a reasonable fashion.

I will go back to what I stated earlier, that Telus needs consumers more than consumers need Telus. If Telus were to violate in any way the privacy of Canadians, there would be a consequence to it, a very serious consequence. If Health Canada or the agency were to violate the privacy of Canadians, we would hear about it. I do not want the privacy of the constituents I represent to be violated, but I understand the importance of mobility data, among many other types of data sources out there.

What we are talking about is the coronavirus, COVID-19, and having a sense of mobility and of where people are going. We are not asking who people are and we are not listening to telephone conversations, which was pointed out, or anything of that nature. We are talking about raw data that will enable people who work in the sciences, the health experts and the health agency to ultimately make good, sound public policy. That is what Canadians expect.

● (1725)

At the end of day, I would have much preferred, which is hard to believe, to be debating Bill C-8 today so this issue could go back to the committee for further discussion.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am sorry to say that it is clear the member did not read the report or grasp what it contains. The report is very short. It contains one recommendation to the government that is timely. It cannot just go back to committee for more study. It is not that kind of a report. This is a report that calls upon the government to suspend an RFP, with a timeline on it.

We listened to a lengthy speech and did not really get the answer to the question that we are debating. Will the member concur in this report?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member is wrong to give the impression that the report cannot go back to a standing committee. A standing committee has the ability to review a report from its past, and this is in fact a report. It can be a very simple and straightforward report. For example, is there any negative consequence to the public by deferring this, and if so, what is that negative consequence? Is the member prepared to say there is absolutely no negative side to postponing this?

As I said, nothing prevents the committee from looking at the report again. It can have the minister come before it, and I recommend that it might want to consider doing this.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Winnipeg North for treating us to the pizza story. As an aside, I would like to acknowledge his unwavering loyalty to the Liberal Party.

I am half sorry. I know the member would have preferred to discuss Bill C-8, but the motion was moved and, like it or not, privacy is an important concern. Public and private companies should indeed be subject to the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. That much is certain.

I am not sure whether my colleague has had the chance to see the film *The Social Dilemma* on Netflix. The film explains a bit about the ins and outs of possible perversions of privacy. Shoshana Zuboff, the main subject in the film, is going to appear before the committee to talk about this. If the member for Winnipeg North has not seen the film, I invite him to attend the meeting. With Nobel Prize-worthy experts testifying, I think it is worth listening.

Is my hon. colleague asking whether Telus and the Public Health Agency of Canada are too big to fail?

● (1730)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I will have to review Hansard and pick up the name of that show on Netflix. I will do what I can to watch it.

Throughout this afternoon, I have heard members pay tribute to the member's expertise in this field, and I respect that. I did not catch the tail end of the question, whether it was because of translation or the member was cut off, but I recognize that when we talk about privacy, there are the public and private sectors and we should be concerned about both. I would like to see more emphasis put on the private sector, believing that aside from many of the government agencies, there are other forms of accountability for ensuring that privacy rights are being protected. That is why I fall a little more toward the need for privacy and am very much open to his other thoughts.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was a little disturbed when the parliamentary secretary said in his speech that the issue here is what the information is used for. I suggest that the real question is whether the government has the right to even collect it.

These are exceptional times, and I have heard concerns from my constituents with regard to this matter. One gentleman wrote me saying he was worried about the Chinese social credit system and about government tracking. We have heard the member himself say that it can get so much information from this tracking: who he is, where he is, what time he is there and who he is around. This is exceptional information and it should not be made normal.

What authority in law did the government use to put in this system of tracking? Was a privacy impact assessment done so that the Privacy Commissioner could have an idea that this was complying with Canada's privacy laws?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I will emphasize that what we are talking about is the de-identification of data. The government or Telus is not releasing information that says a person was here or there, nor any other personal information. It is just raw data that is used. My colleague across the way may have a better sense of this, but I do not know for a fact how some of the private companies use some of that raw data. I suspect that the Government of Canada is not the first one to use it.

This is not invasive. It is designed to better inform Canada's health agency so it can make good, sound public policies for the coronavirus.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of his intervention, the parliamentary secretary has been trying to diminish the importance of the issue. He tells us quite frankly that he is not an expert and that he does not know about these things.

He tells us that the government naturally needs to look after privacy, but that this is not a serious matter because the government will ensure that the data is used properly. In fact, no one really knows if that will happen.

That is precisely the problem: We do not know, and we want to know. I ask the member if his party will vote in favour of the motion to protect the privacy of our constituents.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I attempted to explain, from my perspective, what I see as an incredible health organiza-

tion, the Public Health Agency of Canada. It is world-renowned in terms of its capabilities. It is an organization that has required data in the past. To the best of my knowledge, and members can correct me if I am wrong, it has been respectful of people's privacy. As I indicated earlier, Telus, a corporation, needs consumers more than consumers need it.

I believe that at the end of the day, no private information associated with individuals is being released. From a personal perspective, I suggest that the committee continue to have a dialogue on this issue with others regarding privacy, because I know it is a concern of Canadians.

I would hope we would want to continue to debate bills like Bill C-8 and others dealing with COVID. That is really what this report comes down to, the issue of COVID. It is all about getting that data so we can provide good, sound public policy in combatting this pandemic.

• (1735)

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was the former chair of the access to information, privacy and ethics committee. One thing we learned there is that privacy is a big deal. Most of us in Canada believe that. However, apparently the member across the way does not think it is a big deal. He is saying it is no big deal and telling folks not to worry about it.

With the new quantum computing capacity, de-identified information can potentially be reidentified. This depends on who gets access to the information. My concern with the member across the way is that I wish he would respect our Privacy Commissioner and all the work he has done in the past and all the work we have done with the International Grand Committee involving half a billion people concerned about Canadians' privacy. I wish he shared my concerns, and the concerns of the opposition, that this is a big deal.

When is the government going to treat the privacy of Canadians with the effort it deserves?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have always supported and will continue to support the privacy rights of the people of Canada without any hesitation whatsoever. The member is wrong to assert that I do not care about privacy rights. As a Liberal who has a fundamental belief in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, I understand the importance of this at the end of the day and will continue to do what I can to ensure that we still get good, sound public policy respecting privacy. At the same, with the Privacy Commissioner, I have—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge.

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Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, following that speech, it is important that we really get focused on the actual motion and the actual report that has been tabled in Parliament. The previous speech seemed to assume that we were debating a larger issue around privacy and something that can continue to be studied. However, this is a very specific motion, and it is, in fact, a very short report.

First, Mr. Speaker, I will inform you that it is my intention to share my time with the member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

I am the chair of this committee, and it was a real pleasure to table this report last week. This report was the result of a motion that was moved by my Bloc colleague, the member for Trois-Rivières, and passed unanimously by the committee last Monday. It is a simple report. It is one of the shortest reports that I recall ever being associated with. It simply informs the House of the following:

That the [Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics] call upon the government to suspend the Public Health Agency of Canada's cellular data tender upon adoption of this motion, and that the tender shall not be re-offered until it the committee reports to the House that it is satisfied that the privacy of Canadians will not be affected....

That is it. I just read the entire report that was tabled. The committee is asking the government to suspend an RFP that has a deadline this month, which has just been moved again. This is timely. This is not something we should go back and restudy. We are calling upon the government to take concrete action about business that is under way right now.

As chair of the committee, it is my responsibility to ensure that members of the committee have an opportunity to be heard and that the rules of the committee are followed. It is not ordinarily my job to take a position on the motions moved at committee, other than to break ties, but it is my job to ensure that motions are dealt with properly and the privileges of committee members are respected.

In this case, the motion was debated at last Monday's meeting. Amendments were moved by both the governing party members and opposition members, and through a fairly lengthy debate on the amendments, the committee passed the amendments and the motion unanimously. In debating concurrence on this motion, it is therefore important that the House be made aware of the process that produced this short report. It was proposed by an opposition member, but in the end, and after improvement through debate, it was unanimously adopted.

The reason I have joined this debate, and taken time to walk members through the process of how this motion came to be adopted, is it is my sincere hope that the House will unanimously adopt this concurrence motion. I hope the House will concur in this report, perhaps with the full weight of a recorded vote, and that the government will take a unanimous committee report seriously and will actually suspend the request for proposal that is part of this motion.

Right after the House rose for the Christmas break, reports in the media broke stating that, unbeknownst to anybody, the Government of Canada had been secretly using mobility data from 33 million mobility devices. This is what was said in the reports that came out just after we broke. This news was shocking to many Canadians, but what was even more shocking was that the only reason this

came to the public's attention, seemingly, was a public tender for a new contract to extend the program for another five years. The deadline to respond to that request for proposal was the third week of January, meaning that this RFP would have opened and closed while Parliament was not sitting, and members of Parliament would not have had an opportunity to question the government about it.

The committee held an emergency meeting on the subject in mid-January and unanimously voted to study the entire subject. That study is under way at committee, which met this morning in furtherance of it. Curiously, the government extended the deadline for the RFP on the eve of the emergency meeting, and it further extended the deadline until later this month. In response to the committee, which is now earnestly studying the broader issue, we have called upon the government to further suspend the deadline until we prepare a report stating we are satisfied that privacy is not unduly at risk.

● (1740)

Some might ask why there is a need. In fact, the member for Winnipeg North hinted about whether or not we really needed to debate concurrence in this report. Surely the government knows that this recommendation came with unanimous support from parliamentarians representing all recognized parties, and we will follow this recommendation, right? The governing party members supported this recommendation, including the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, who in fact worked with and moved one of the amendments that was passed unanimously.

However, this does not seem to be the case. The Minister of Health appeared at our committee last Thursday, and when asked about this very motion and suspending the RFP, the minister refused to commit. He talked about how the RFP had been extended, but when he was questioned about why it was extended, he spoke about the need to give prospective bidders more time. In fact, it sounded like there were no bids and that perhaps there was a single contractor asking for more time.

Regardless, the minister did not acknowledge the real concerns about ensuring that the privacy of Canadians was protected. He made no indication that he was going to actually suspend the RFP pending the committee's report, which is what this motion and this report calls for.

Choosing not to respond to the substance of the report reminds one of an early promise the government made when it was first elected. It promised that it would listen to parliamentary committees, and yet the Liberal government has quite spectacularly failed to do so. The incredible lengths the government has gone to to ignore committees and even defy the will of the entire chamber is a matter of historic record. One recalls how less than eight months ago, the government dug in so deeply on its refusal to comply with the health committee's request for documents related to the Winnipeg virology lab that it prompted the incredible spectacle of a public servant being admonished by the Speaker of the House in the furtherance of the Liberal government's cover-up, a matter still unresolved.

The Liberal government also prorogued the House to prevent committees from getting to the bottom of conflicts of interest that were at the heart of the student job program contract with the WE organization. The government also said it would respect the independence of committees, yet at committee after committee in the last Parliament, we saw the repeated use of filibuster tactics to prevent motions from coming to a vote.

Fortunately, this has not been the case at the ethics committee. As I have said repeatedly, this report was supported unanimously. It should be supported by this House unanimously, yet the government has given no indication, including in the response to the direct question asked twice to the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, that it would in fact agree and concur with this report.

Therefore, I am not surprised that my Bloc colleague has moved this concurrence motion. I am sure he is very concerned that the government will ignore the will of this committee, but regardless of the outcome of this concurrence debate, I wonder if the government will note that this motion came not as an attempt by Conservatives to disrupt its parliamentary agenda. There were media reports last week saying that Liberals were looking for partners to ensure they could pass time allocation motions and things like that to avoid what they call Conservative obstruction. I hope the Liberals do not think my Bloc colleague is guilty of obstruction, because the government has given every indication that it plans to ignore a committee recommendation that was passed unanimously.

Perhaps the government would take note that when members of Parliament debate bills and motions in this House, they are actually doing their jobs. Our seats in this House are not here for us to be spectators; we are here to debate. We are here to use procedural tools that exist to ensure that the rights of members to represent their constituents can be used. Perhaps they would also note that all parties use these tools when it is necessary to do so.

In closing, I remain hopeful that all members of this House will join me in voting in concurrence with this report and add the weight of a vote in this House to the report to urge the government to do the right thing and suspend the RFP until the ethics committee has finished its report.

• (1745)

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

Routine Proceedings

Speaker, maybe the member can answer a very direct question from me on the issue. When will the committee have its report finished?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, we do not know just yet, and I can give him a direct answer. We spoke about this today. In committee, all members, including members of the government side, are in the process of compiling witnesses. Not all witnesses have been available, and there is often a lot of trouble coordinating these things.

This investigation is going to take a while. It is not going to be finished immediately, but in the meantime, the government should suspend this RFP because it is that important.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the chair of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, for raising very important points.

Indeed, this was done unanimously. Again, unanimity is not a flower worn on a lapel. It is a clear message that is sent to the House to say that all the parties agreed. The House should pay attention to that, especially when we say that it is very important and there can be no delay.

Dr. Tam told us that so far, the information that has been extracted from the data in question has not been spectacular, and she also said that delaying the RFP would not be so bad. That is Canada's expert telling us that.

Could my colleague remind us of some of Dr. Tam's messages?

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Trois-Rivières raised a really good point in talking about the case for urgency, which has not been made successfully at committee. We have heard from experts already, including Dr. Tam, the minister and the Privacy Commissioner, and so far the committee does not feel that there is a sense of urgency that would negate the importance of the recommendation contained in this report.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could my colleague elaborate more on his concerns on the differences in the testimony given by the Privacy Commissioner and the testimony given by public health?

• (1750)

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, yes, there is uncertainty around how much consultation, if any, occurred on this matter, which goes to part of the reason it is important to adopt this recommendation to suspend the RFP until the committee can actually get to the bottom of assuring Canadians that if this program is to continue, it will not adversely affect their privacy.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I would like to get his opinion on something.

Routine Proceedings

I have been listening to the debate for some time and I have heard government members tell us that it is no big deal, that everything is in order, there is no problem, no need to worry, and we need to act quickly because this is necessary and they will be careful.

I have some vague memories of the WE program. The government initially told us that everything was in order, that the program was a good one, and sorry, but it was the only company. We ultimately found out that the program had been designed for their buddies.

I am almost afraid that the Liberals might prorogue Parliament in a month or a week.

I do not know how my colleague can convince Liberal Party members that this is important. They are not being attacked. The motion moved by my colleague from Trois-Rivières does not presume anything, and he pointed this out a number of times in his speech this afternoon. He said that we are not presuming that a mistake has been made. We simply think we need to examine this issue more closely.

This affects all of Canada. Could we take this seriously and be careful with people's personal information? What does my colleague have to say about that?

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, he raises a good point. The government's track record on listening to committees or even following votes and orders of the House is not good.

He did not really have a question but asked for my opinion, and in my opinion, yes, this motion is necessary, given the track record of the government.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to be able to enter into debate on an important subject. Let me make a couple of quick observations before I get into the substance of this debate.

I find it very concerning that, whether it be through the parliamentary secretary to the House leader from Winnipeg or the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, there seems to be a great disregard in the government's attitude toward the democratic will represented by parliamentary committees and ultimately the Canadians those committee members represent, which is very concerning, and the fact that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health refused to commit or acknowledge that this RFP, should it be passed by the House, should be stopped.

Time and again they have used clever wordsmithing to simply delay discussion of the current RFP here, for purposes related to either competition or various other things. They seem to be going out of their way to counter the democratic will of, in this case, a parliamentary committee made up of members of Parliament who have been tasked to do important work. The ethics committee does important work, and it seems that the government is obsessed with avoiding accountability. That digs at the very heart of why I hear on a daily basis, and would be shocked if members in the governing Liberal Party did not hear on a daily basis, the concerns Canadians have with respect to the erosion of trust. They will stand up and say

that everything is great, that it is sunny ways, delivering the sort of rhetoric we have heard often from the Prime Minister across the way. It is incredibly concerning.

If you would indulge me for a quick moment, I want to share something that happened back in my constituency and is a bit unrelated to the subject at hand.

What we do in this place is incredibly important. I had the opportunity to judge 4-H public speaking this past weekend. Generally, an MP probably should not enter into a judging position and ultimately have to pick winners and losers, but let me simply say this: It was incredible to see.

As a former 4-H club member who was in 4-H woodworking as kid and participated in public speaking with what at the time was a pretty serious stammer, it was an absolute honour to be able to share that event with these young men and women from the Camrose 4-H Beef Club and to hear their speeches on a wide variety of subjects. In the coming years, it would not surprise me one bit if one of those who participated in the event the other day will one day be running for office as a result of the exceptional work that 4-H does generally in preparing the leaders of tomorrow. I also salute the folks involved in the 4-H public speaking event that I had the honour of attending and judging this past week, so let us give a great round of applause to all of those individuals.

I know that the chair of the committee, the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, highlighted what I would suggest is a concerning disparity. Last week the committee heard some testimony from the Minister of Health on the subject we are discussing. This morning we heard testimony from the Privacy Commissioner. I would like to highlight a couple of those differences.

The Minister of Health, who was not actually the Minister of Health at the time when some of these decisions were made, certainly made it sound as though his department had been thoroughly engaged with the Privacy Commissioner over the course of the pandemic, and he specifically referred to it, yet we learned that this simply was not the case from the testimony we heard from the Privacy Commissioner this morning.

● (1755)

It is things like that which call into serious question the credibility and the trust that this place certainly needs to have in the ministers of the Crown. I would suggest that the erosion of trust is a big part of the reason, and this is related specifically to the motion at hand, that we are willing to press pause on this RFP to make sure that Canadians can in fact trust that their government is in this case protecting the privacy rights of Canadians. The fact that there are some pretty serious differences is incredibly significant and cannot be understated. This motion seems to have been over-complicated by Liberal members who have entered into the debate, which I would note does not include Liberal members of the committee who actually voted for the motion.

The motion is very simple. It says that we should simply press pause so that Canadians can trust their government.

Routine Proceedings

I would note that one of the significant reasons for that, as I asked the Minister of Health and have brought up in the discussion related to the topic at hand, is that it is unclear exactly what the information that was provided to the Public Health Agency of Canada was. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, in quite an ironic twist, sent a letter to the ethics committee that outlined why it was not a big deal and should not be cause for concern. However, I would note that the company BlueDot of which a sample was provided along with the letter from the parliamentary secretary called into question whether or not the parliamentary secretary had even read the documentation that he had provided and, further, whether or not it was the extent of the information that was being provided.

The minister talked about anonymized, de-identified and segregated data, which is fair. There has been reference to cellphone use and mobility providers and all of the other aspects of the reality of living in the information age. Specifically, the Privacy Commissioner did note today, in addition to the specifics of this, that much of our privacy legislation is 40 years old and is way out of date, and I know that other members of the committee from different parties have also noted this.

What does that data look like? What information was provided to the government? Given the information and the sample report from BlueDot, there were striking inconsistencies. The information largely was incredibly general and, quite frankly, information that I would not have a problem with, but that information had to come from somewhere. It is unclear exactly what further was provided.

To simplify it specifically, does de-identified and anonymized mean that names, phone numbers and addresses were removed but maybe everything else was provided? The very evidence suggests that they tracked the specifics of whether or not somebody crossed a border. They talked about grouping together in one metric but not grouping together cellphones in another metric. In fact, if members can believe it, the members of the committee could not even verify the number of devices that were used in some of these questions.

As I come to the end of my speech, I would simply suggest that Canada is a democracy and a democracy can only function if its citizens trust their institutions in terms Parliament and their government, which in our parliamentary democracy Parliament gives authority to. This is a prudent and important step to ensure that we can help rebuild some of the trust that has been eroded, and it is incredibly important that this motion not only pass but that Canadians' privacy is respected.

• (1800)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I asked a very quick question of the chair of committee, and I am going to pose the same question. I asked what we can expect if it goes to committee in terms of the amount of time it would take to pass so that an RFP can be issued, and the chair implied that it could be quite a while. We all know that standing committees can actually do things virtually in two or three days, very substantive things. Why would we not want to give some sort of tangible indication of whether it would be a week, a month or six months? What is it?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, I think that question emphasizes the fundamental misunderstanding of what is being debated here. The actual motion that is being debated was one of two motions that the committee dealt with at an emergency meeting that took place just prior to Parliament being brought back. The first is the study that is ongoing, which the member for Winnipeg North seemed to insinuate when he asked the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge the question earlier. Now he is actually referring to the concurrence debate that is taking place now, which is incredibly simple and says we need to press pause until Parliament can affirm that the privacy of Canadians can be respected.

Those two fundamental differences speak to the great misunderstanding that comes from the members opposite, or perhaps they are intentionally playing politics once again on issues and hurting Canadians' trust in Parliament and the government.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank our opposition members who are very concerned about privacy. Again, as a former member of that committee, we did a lot of work around the world. Somebody mentioned Shoshana Zuboff and many of our other colleagues globally who care about this issue. This simple, nonchalant approach the government has with people's privacy and data is illustrated in the decisions it is making and not making. We talk about Huawei. We are calling over here to have a pause on Huawei in Canada, but the Liberals are just saying not to worry about it and that it is okay. It is a big deal for us.

Is the member confident that the government takes Canadians' privacy seriously?

• (1805)

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, the simple answer to that is no. I think we have seen that on display here, by how flippantly the Liberals are taking what is a very serious issue. We see it also with how they have dealt with the Huawei situation. Time and time again, not only do they not take the privacy of Canadians seriously, but it seems the Liberals do not take democracy in Canada seriously. It is an utter shame that we have seen an erosion of trust in our institutions that is hurting the ability of Canadians to be able to trust what goes on in this place and the institutions that make Canada an amazing country. We need to start rebuilding that trust, and this motion is one simple, small path forward to say democracy matters and we are going to press pause until Canadians can trust exactly what their government is doing.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, dialogue, in which two parties discuss an issue to find a way forward, is a fundamental tool when considering ethics. Based on what I have heard today from the other side of the House, this is unfortunately a one-sided conversation in response to the committee members' attempt to reach out.

We reached out and have gotten nothing in return. Does my colleague think that our colleagues on the other side will vote in favour of this motion?

*Speaker's Ruling**[English]*

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, from listening to the speeches I am not confident, and I find it tragic because in the context of committee this motion was passed unanimously, as was the motion to study the larger issue of the use of mobility data related to the pandemic. However, we see what appears to be a huge disconnect between the actions of the committee and the attitude of the government across the way. I would simply note that none of the Liberal members who were a part of that committee participated in this debate. It is unfortunate because they seemed to be willing to collaborate when it was in the committee context, but when it comes here and it does not fit their political interests, they seem to slam the door on discourse, dialogue, debate and what ultimately leads to good government.

I want to thank the member for the reference to discourse, because that is exactly why this place exists. Every square inch of this amazing country is represented here. We can have debates in this place, and that, fundamentally, is what the House of Commons, the house of the people, is meant to be. I am glad we have been able to demonstrate some of that through this discussion here today.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It has been a very long afternoon but a very important one. I just wonder if we could remind members to put their masks on. Some of us are immunocompromised and have family members who are immunocompromised, and we want to be able to continue with the debate.

The Speaker: That is a very good point. I want to remind the hon. members to put on their masks.

[Translation]

The question is on the motion.

[English]

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division, or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

• (1810)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we request a recorded vote.

The Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday November 25, 2021, the recorded division is deferred until Tuesday, February 8, 2022, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

PETITIONS

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to present a petition on behalf of petitioners who are very concerned that Canada honour the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly in the context of the conflict over the Coastal GasLink pipeline in British Columbia. The petitioners support the territorial concerns of the Wet'suwet'en people and wish for their concerns to be heard by the government and that the construction be suspended until there is, in fact, an agreement that respects territory and UNDRIP.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

COVID-19 PROTESTS

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that I have received notice of a request for an emergency debate. I invite the hon. member for Burnaby South to rise and make a brief intervention.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not be sharing time with her, but I am joined here by my daughter.

I want to propose an emergency debate today on the urgent situation facing our country as a consequence of the convoy protests, as well as the general state of the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to outline the impacts we have seen here in Ottawa, specifically on the people of Ottawa. It has been horrible.

They have been menaced on the streets. People have been harassed. There have been nights when people cannot sleep because of the honking and fireworks. It is targeting people as opposed to what normal protests do, which is target the government. They have harassed people. We have seen truck drivers in Coutts being detained or stopped, unable to cross the border for days without food, water or access to washrooms. We are now seeing something similar arising at the border crossing into Sarnia. There are protests and occupations across the country in Toronto, Quebec City, Winnipeg and Vancouver.

The situation has reached a crisis point. Yesterday, the City of Ottawa declared a state of emergency. Given the impact on people, the dire nature of the stress it has placed on people, and the fact that it is across the country and numerous people are being impacted by this, I believe this meets the bar of Standing Order 52 that the matter proposed be "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration".

Given the urgency of the situation related to the occupations here in Ottawa and the protests across the country, as well as the border blockades, I believe it is important to hold an emergency debate in Parliament today.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Burnaby South for his intervention. I am prepared to grant an emergency debate concerning COVID-19 protests. This debate will be held later today at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

• (1815)

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

There have been discussions among the parties and, if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, special order or usual practice of the House, during the debate tonight, pursuant to Standing Order 52, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

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

It is agreed.

[Translation]

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

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

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.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-8 does not provide any solutions to the problems people are facing. People across Canada and Quebec are having a hard time and struggling to put food on the table. The number of homeless people across the country is growing.

Does my colleague think that the government did everything it could to act and strengthen the health care system so that everyone in Canada has a roof over their heads and families that are struggling can put food on the table?

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

No, unfortunately, I do not think the government did everything it could to help people get through the pandemic. That was kind of the point of my speech.

There are blatantly obvious problems with the health care systems in Quebec and the provinces. Last week, the Council of the Federation, the ministers, once again put forward a unanimous request for more health care money and a 6% escalator. Now the three opposition parties in the House of Commons are calling for it, but the government is stubbornly refusing to grant that request.

Health transfers are not the only issue. I have also talked to people who are not getting their EI benefits and have been waiting for months because their account was hacked and is now blocked.

Government Orders

There are not enough investigators to deal with their files. This is deplorable, because these people deserve to be treated with dignity and should be getting their money. When people collect EI, it is because they need it.

To sum up, no, the government has not done enough.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech.

I would like to ask her to say more about money that must be earmarked for social housing. She just said the government has not done enough. The federal government's targets are pretty low, and it talks a lot about affordable housing, whereas we are talking about social housing.

Could she comment further on that?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the government is being rather half-hearted. We see the willingness and good intentions to invest in housing. My concern is that investment will focus on the large cities, where there seems to be a dire need for affordable housing and social housing, and the regions will be forgotten. These problems exist in the regions as well. The upside of the pandemic is that many people have moved to the Gaspé and the Lower St. Lawrence, and we even had positive net migration in 2020, but we need housing for those people. I think more effort needs to be made here.

• (1820)

[English]

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tonight we are debating Bill C-8 and another tax-and-spend bill by the current Liberal government, which does not seem to understand a lot of things. The Liberals do not seem to care about people's privacy. They do not seem to care that there is record inflation in our country. We hear the Deputy Prime Minister go on about it not being a big deal, and that it is not the government's fault. Blaming the world and blaming COVID is the typical go-to. The Liberals are blaming COVID for everything, but it is far more than that. We have an out-of-control-spending government.

We are at \$1.2 trillion in debt, and it is growing. A lot of Canadians may not know that a big part of the reason why we have that inflation is in the Parliamentary Budget Officer's fiscal update. Everybody out there would presume, based on the Liberals, that it is all COVID spending.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that over a period of seven years, from 2019-2027, the Liberals plan to spend \$541.9 billion. That is a lot of money. Of that, \$176.6 billion is not even COVID-related. Here we are, at a time when we are being hit with inflation, when Canadians are already being hit with massive increases in food prices, which I will give some examples of in a minute, and the Liberals are trying to say it is all COVID. Meanwhile, they are padding a whole bunch of projects and doing a bunch of things that are completely unrelated.

Government Orders

I would be remiss if I did not mention that we have the Peace River Bridge in my neck of the woods. It is the main artery on the Alaska Highway, and it is hugely at risk. It has been failing for the last 20 years and it has to be repaired. Workers are welding on it almost nightly. It needs to be replaced, but sadly we do not see any plans to replace such an important piece of infrastructure in this spending. However, we see spending going into a whole bunch of mysterious places. I guess we will find out more about that after we understand what was spent on COVID.

What I should do is illustrate some of the costs. We have heard that 4.8% is the number for inflation, but it really is a deceptive number because there are many things for which inflation is a lot higher than 4.8%.

An article from CTV says, "The biggest single increase was gasoline, rising 38.4 per cent over July of 2020." In one year, it had gone up by 38.4%. It was not the only double-digit increase that Canadian consumers faced either. The article states:

"There's always a lot of moving parts to the electricity market," said Rob Roach, deputy chief economist with ATB Financial. "But there certainly has been a lot of demand over the summer, and that just naturally pushes up prices."

Even electricity is affected, and this is in an age when we want electrification to happen, with electric cars and all the rest. The article continues:

Electricity is up 21.1 per cent, with natural gas up 30.9 per cent. The hot summer has been at least a partial driver of the increase, Roach said.

I have even seen that. I buy the odd groceries, such as bread and different things like that, and I have noticed quite a spike in prices. They have gone up quite dramatically. I have four adult children and a daughter who is just about to graduate, and this is hitting them broadside. They realize that by the end of the month the money has run out. They even have decent jobs. My daughter works at Dairy Queen. Normally the money lasts, but it is not lasting anymore. She has a vehicle that she has to buy gas for and buys food the odd time.

This is what is catching a lot of Canadians off-guard. They wonder why they are running out of money. What it comes down to is that a government that is as much of a spendthrift as the Liberals are drives up inflation, which makes that dollar last less than it used to.

Another example of the increases in food prices is from a CBC article from a month ago:

Kendra Sozinho, a manager at the Fiesta Farms grocery store in Toronto, says costs from suppliers are going up faster than she's ever seen.

This is while the minister across the way says that it is no big deal. It is not the Liberals. The article continues:

"We're seeing almost every single supplier increasing their pricing which then increases our pricing," [Kendra] told CBC News in an interview. "I've been here for 20 years and I've never seen a jump like this."

• (1825)

Here we go. We are seeing record amounts of inflation. I would say that our economy is at risk. People ask me if we are beyond the point of no return and I say, "No, we have hope in Canada."

In my neck of the woods, we develop our natural resources. We develop natural gas. A big part of the natural gas will make it to the

coast through a well-known pipeline from my riding. We have oil, forestry, agriculture and mining. We have so many things. If we started actually appreciating the natural resource sector in this country, really started developing those resources and fostering trade like we used to from 2011 to 2015, when I was here with the previous majority government, the revenue would come with it. Let us hope we get there again.

There is typical thinking that the Conservatives have to clean up all the Liberal misspending over the past number of decades. We will do it again, though, and it is possible. To say that the Liberal government is not going to take credit for that is just wrong.

This is what another colleague of mine, the member for Carleton, said, according to the same CBC article:

Conservative finance critic...placed the blame for high inflation squarely at the foot of the federal government, noting that as a country with abundant energy and food resources, Canada should have a built-in advantage when it comes to keeping a lid on prices.

He is right. Internally, we should be doing fine, but we have seen the spike in natural gas prices. We produce the stuff, and we do it the best in the world. In the article, my colleague from Carleton continued:

"The biggest increases for consumer products have been those that we source right here at home, not those that depend on foreign supply chains," he told reporters in Ottawa.

"Home price inflation is a home-grown problem," he went on, arguing that record government spending under...[the Prime Minister] is to blame for inflation. "The more he spends, the more things cost"...[he] said.

That is the long and the short of it. Despite what the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister try to say, the credit completely lands in their lap about inflation and where we are today as a country.

The Prime Minister has been the prime minister for the last six-plus years. If we continue to have a prime minister like this, who seems to have no end when it comes to spending, it becomes very concerning. I look at the future of our children, given that our national debt has doubled in just under eight years.

I will finish with something that I talk to my constituents about a lot. The debt obligations are already \$20 billion per year. That is just paying off the debt obligations, interest and the like to service the national debt. Those obligations will double within the next five years to \$40 billion. That seems to be a mystery. It is a big number.

The average Canadian wonders how it will impact them, but the way the government pays its bills is through taxes. The concern that we have, especially on this side of the House, is that the credit card bill the Prime Minister is racking up will end up in all of our mailboxes. They are talking about things like home equity taxes and taxing the sale of homes now. They will deny it, but I have seen where it is actually being talked about with the CMHC.

One thing with Ottawa is that usually, when rumours are floating around, there is usually some truth to them. My concern, anyway, is that the government is out of control. It does not know how to control its spending. Again, we see the evidence in the \$176 billion that is not related to COVID. It cannot just be placed at the lap of COVID.

We need a responsible government once again that manages its spending wisely. That will be a future Conservative government.

EMERGENCY DEBATE

● (1830)

[English]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely the COVID-19 protests.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP) moved:

That this House do now adjourn.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to lead the debate. I want to thank my colleague and member of Parliament for New Westminster—Burnaby for the support on this, as well as my entire caucus.

People around the world are looking at Canada right now, looking at Ottawa right now, and asking what is happening. Let me talk about the convoy protest and begin by talking about what it is not. This convoy protest is not a peaceful protest. There is an often-used saying that if people continue to show who they are then we have to start believing them. This is what the convoy has been about.

From the beginning, hateful symbols, such as the Nazi flag and the Confederate flag, have been displayed at this convoy. This has clearly made Jewish Canadians, Muslim Canadians and racialized Canadians scared of violence. We heard it clearly in the House, in eloquent words, what it means to a racialized person to see those flags.

We have seen the harassment of citizens. What is really unique about this is that, normally, protests target the government, its policies and its decisions. However, we see in this convoy that the targets of the vast majority of the harassing behaviour are citizens. They are harassing workers and citizens, including journalists.

Violence is commonplace. We saw an example of this violence with an attempted arson of a downtown apartment building, where people started a fire and taped the doors closed when they exited. I ask members to take a moment to think what that means. They had the forethought to set a fire and then tape the doors so no one could escape. This is not isolated. There are ongoing examples.

Health care workers, the people who have been saving our lives in a pandemic, the people who helped deliver my baby girl, are being targeted by intimidation. What protest targets health care workers to the point that security and police are saying to health care workers not to wear their scrubs or any clothing that identifies them

as a health care worker because they may be verbally or physically assaulted? That is the reality. That is happening right now.

It is certainly not peaceful. There are a number of complaints of harassment, violence and intimidation targeting citizens, families and kids. The honking, noise and fireworks are really disrupting the lives of families. Most of that activity happens at night when there is no one in Parliament, so they are clearly not targeting Parliament.

The convoy is certainly not about helping workers or small businesses hurt by the lockdowns. The behaviour and activity of this convoy have directly impacted workers. The blockade at the Coutts border crossing is directly impacting truckers. Truckers are being prevented from coming across the border. Canadian truckers cannot even get back home or bring goods into Canada because this convoy is blocking them from getting across the border.

I have spoken with truckers, and they are telling me the conditions are pretty dire at Coutts. There are no facilities for food, water or washrooms. They are running out of food and water, and they do not have the facilities to go to the washroom. Their trucks, while they were waiting for days, were running out of gas and battery because they were stopped from getting across the border.

Here in Ottawa, thousands of workers have lost wages because they are not able to work, in what many have described as some of the worst of the lockdowns. Convoy protesters who are talking about ending lockdowns have created some of the worst lockdowns, where businesses have been forced to shut down and workers could not get to their jobs.

We also heard multiple reports of retail workers being harassed for wearing masks, including young people. It is not even about truckers. I mentioned that the truckers were being stopped, but the vast majority of truckers are vaccinated. This is not a concern for them. The convoy does not represent their concerns.

Truckers do have concerns. The concerns of truckers, if one speaks to truckers and trucking associations, include wage theft. Often they are not getting paid the wages they are entitled to after work they have done.

Truckers are concerned about salaries in general and not having good pay. They are also concerned about not having safe work conditions. They are concerned about the cost of insurance. They are concerned about long driving hours that compromise their health and safety. Those are their concerns, and those concerns are not being raised.

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• (1835)

The organizers of this occupation have been very clear about their intention. They displayed it brazenly on their website with their MOU. They want to take over the streets of Ottawa and use intimidation to replace a democratically elected government. That was their stated intention. They stated it really clearly. They want to meet with the Senate and the Governor General, and put in place an unelected committee to make decisions, replacing the democratically elected officials in House of Commons.

What has been the response to this crisis and the reason for this emergency debate? We are in a crisis. We are seeing this crisis spread beyond Ottawa to cities like Quebec, Montreal, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Sarnia, the border crossings, as well as at Coutts, Alberta, on the border with Montana.

What has the response been from the official opposition of Canada? The Conservatives have encouraged it. They have emboldened those who are harassing and intimidating their fellow citizens. That has been their response. The so-called party of law and order has embraced lawlessness and mob rule in the hope of gaining political points.

Conservatives are seeking political advantage by endorsing the lawlessness and mob rule that are resulting in the harassment of people, families, children and citizens. They have excused every incidence of violence by claiming it is just a few bad apples or, unsurprisingly, in a very Trumpian term, that there are very good people on both sides. It is ludicrous.

The federal government has claimed that it is outraged. Ultimately, the Liberals' answer to this problem, like so many others, has been to say that it is not their job. I agree that they have offered help, but let us not ignore the fact that they have repeatedly said that it is not their jurisdiction.

For everyone out there who likes to talk about jurisdiction, of course, we have a Constitution that outlines the divisions of power and the responsibilities of different levels of government. However, in a crisis, no one, no real person who is living in the crisis, is interested. No real family who is struggling with the honking day and night, no one who has children who cannot get to school, no one with a small business that had to be unfortunately shut down and no real trucker who is worried about legitimate issues not represented by this convoy is interested. Real people are not interested in arguments over jurisdiction.

I want that to be clear. Normal humans, real people in Canada, are not worried about jurisdiction. They want to see solutions. They want to see help. They want to see the problem fixed. That is what people want. They do not want to see people searching for excuses. They want to see leaders finding solutions. That is what I believe. I believe a leader is someone who looks for a solution and does not try to find an excuse.

At the same time, the Liberal cabinet ministers and MPs were claiming that they had done everything they could and that the City of Ottawa, in this case, had everything it needed, while the City of Ottawa officials were pleading for more help. Effectively, all three levels of government have essentially told Canadians, and people in Ottawa particularly, that they are on their own. The only progress in

getting some real change in this occupation of Ottawa came from a court injunction won by a 21-year-old resident of Ottawa with the help of her lawyers.

I am going to outline some of the things that we can and must do at the federal level. These are things that members of Parliament can and must do, not only to end this occupation but also to help Canadians get to the other side of the pandemic. First, the federal government has to stop using jurisdiction as an excuse for inaction. It is simply wrong.

Today we have heard that there has been an attempt, an offer or a start of discussions, between three levels of government. The federal government will work with municipal and provincial levels of government. Today, after almost 10 days of occupation.

The Prime Minister should have been working on this from the beginning, bringing all levels of government together immediately, once we saw the level of this crisis. Once we saw the severity of this, that step should have been taken right away.

• (1840)

Clearly, this situation was not well handled, and it should not have taken this long to realize that. The convoy organizers were clear about their intent from the beginning. They were allowed to do exactly what they said they would do. Ottawa and other communities are asking for help, and it is not time to argue; it is time to deliver the help. We want the federal government to step up and provide the help necessary to these municipalities. The Prime Minister should be meeting with mayors and the impacted municipalities and providing proactive help.

Second, the federal government needs to use its authority, and all the laws and tools it has, to shut down the funding of this occupation. Canadians are demanding answers about who funded this and who is encouraging it, and so are we. The same forces that fed divisions, intolerance and violence in the United States, those who supported Donald Trump, are now trying to interfere with our democracy. It is very clear that the intent of this convoy was to undermine democracy, and foreign dollars are funding it. There is political interference coming from the United States, and the federal government has to use its tools to stop that funding.

Third, we need a plan. Canadians need to know what the plan is to get us to the other side of this pandemic. The vast majority of Canadians have been vaccinated. They have done their part. They have worn masks and have continued to follow health care guidelines and public health guidelines. However, they are asking what is next. How do we get past this pandemic? How do we get to the other side? What now do we need to do? People need a plan. They need a clear plan, and we are asking the federal government to work with the provinces, territories and public health officials to develop that plan.

People have done everything. They have been vaccinated, they have missed time with friends and family, they have put off celebrations and they have endured the loss of loved ones. Now we owe it to Canadians to lay out a plan for how we get to the other side of this. This plan is going to require testing to make sure we know if people are sick so they can prevent the spread. It is also going to mean that we continue to help people get vaccinated. This is not just here in Canada but around the world, because we know that the government cannot keep putting the mega profits of pharmaceutical companies ahead of the health of everyone else. It is clear this virus will continue to keep mutating and new waves will keep coming until we make sure that vaccines are available to everyone, so we need to do everything we can to make sure that vaccines are available to everyone.

We also need an emergency rescue mission for our health care system and for the people who have been worked to exhaustion: health care workers and nurses. The folks who put their lives on the line and protected and cared for us need help. Our health care system has been pushed to the brink and it is, frankly, inexcusable that two years into the pandemic, every outbreak, every new wave, pushes our health care system to the brink again and again. We need sustainable, long-lasting funding to make sure our health care system is adequately resourced to deal with the pressures and demands.

On top of that, people are paying the price of this pandemic with their lives. Cancer diagnoses and other serious illnesses are getting worse because people cannot get access to the care they need. Many people are living in pain because surgeries have been cancelled, and people living with disabilities and those who are more likely to get sick and die from COVID-19 are terrified. They are terrified that if public health restrictions are lifted, it is their health and safety that will be sacrificed.

Canadians are angry, and rightfully so. They are angry because they have seen that keeping profits flowing to millionaires and billionaires is more important than keeping schools open. Many times in this pandemic big box stores were open but kids could not go to school. They are angry that food costs more and that grocery store owners make bigger and bigger profits, while frontline workers get their pay cut. People are angry that so many of the cracks exposed by this pandemic still have no solution, like in long-term care or in indigenous communities, where a lack of decent housing and clean drinking water has meant the pandemic has hit them harder. People are angry and scared that the climate crisis is threatening their homes and livelihoods with more extreme weather like floods and fires. We need to have a plan to respond to that.

• (1845)

We need to work together to deal with the issues facing Canadians. We were sent here just six months ago, elected to a minority Parliament, to get to work for people. We need to meet the real anger and frustration that people are experiencing right now with a clear vision about how to make life better. This starts by addressing the things that have clearly gotten worse in this pandemic, like finding a place to call home. It is simply impossible for so many Canadians to get a roof over their head and a home that is in their budget. That has to be fixed.

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Life is getting harder: People cannot afford their groceries and cannot pay their bills. However, it is not getting harder for everyone. The rich and powerful have gotten more rich and powerful throughout this pandemic. We have seen their wealth increase. We need to restore the promise to Canadians that we can all share in a good future.

Canadians sent us here not even six months ago to work for them and to deliver the solutions they need. We are committed to that, and we need to be committed to getting them through the pandemic and rebuilding this country in a way that is good for everyone. That is what we have to do now, and it is all of us in the House.

[*Translation*]

As I was saying, this is truly a tough situation. We are in the middle of a crisis with what has happened and is still happening in Ottawa. It is a crisis because citizens, workers and families are being targeted. This type of protest is going on across the country. We saw the same thing happen in Quebec City, where protesters said they would come back.

The federal government failed to show leadership during this crisis and I propose four solutions.

First, the federal government, and more specifically the Prime Minister, has to meet with the mayors affected by the convoy protests. The federal government has to stop making excuses and start finding solutions to the problem.

Second, it is clear that there has been foreign interference in this convoy. A lot of money has come from abroad, specifically the United States. We need to use all available federal tools to stop this funding.

Third, there has to be a plan. People have done everything they had to: They got vaccinated and followed health measures and public health guidance. At this point, however, they do not know if there is a plan to get out of the pandemic or what that plan is. People deserve to have a clear plan. The federal government must work with the provinces and territories, public health professionals and experts to provide a clear plan for getting through this pandemic. This plan must include an increase in health care funding, because it is inexcusable and unacceptable that after two years of a pandemic, our health care system runs the risk of crashing with every new wave of COVID-19.

Fourth, we have to work together to solve the problems people are facing, namely the housing crisis and the increase in the cost of living. We have to solve these problems.

S. O. 52

• (1850)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I listened quite intently to the leader of the NDP's discussion in this debate, and I thank him for initiating it tonight. He talked about the actions that have been going on outside and said he condemns the behaviour. I agree with him that certainly a lot has been happening, and it is more than just a few bad apples, as he rightly pointed out. We are seeing instance after instance, and it is not just about one or two bad apples here or there.

He indicated that he was pleased to see the three levels of government coming together. Where does he see that discussion happening? What suggestions does he have for that group? Certainly, he would not suggest that they negotiate, given what is going on and his previous comments. What possible solutions would he recommend that those three levels of government should be discussing?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, it is the four things I have outlined. We need to see the federal government stop looking for excuses, show leadership and say that it is here to help, it is going to do everything possible to help, it is not going to hide behind excuses and it is going to be proactive and look for solutions.

We also need to see a clear plan to get us out of this pandemic. We have been up against significant problems for the past two years and we need to see some real solutions. Our health care system cannot be in a position where it is at the brink of collapse every time there is an additional wave of COVID-19. We need sustainable, long-term funding and increased funding for our health care system. We need to solve those problems.

We also need to make sure the money that is funding this occupation is stopped. We know there is a significant amount of foreign funding, particularly from the United States, and that has to stop.

Finally, there are a lot of frustrations that people feel in general. Canadians have been angry for a while now because they have done everything they can to get through this pandemic but things have gotten worse. It is harder to own a home. It is harder to pay the bills. We need to work together in the House to provide solutions to those problems to give people hope as an answer to the hate that we see rising. We need to give people hope as a way forward.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the NDP leader to be a compassionate man. I also believe that the NDP, with vigilance, fights for the marginalized. That is why I am bit surprised and would like his comments.

His party must be hearing about the damage that has been done to children and seniors in isolation and about job losses. The NDP is traditionally the party standing up for workers. We have seen workers lose their jobs because of their personal health choices. We have seen significant damage done to children, teenagers and the mental health of the nation. Alcohol and drug dependency has gone up. We can go on and on about the impacts that Canadians have felt as a result of government actions to address the pandemic, and I think what is happening outside is a result of the trauma that Canadians have experienced.

I would like the member's comments on that. I would like to hear some compassion for the eruption of trauma that we are seeing outside and across the country.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear about who I stand with. I stand with the health care workers. I am compassionate toward the people who have given so much to us. I denounce the fact that they have been made afraid to walk down the streets. I am compassionate toward the families in Ottawa that want to send their kids to school but have been kept awake all night by people who want to overthrow the government. I am compassionate toward workers in the downtown core who get harassed and intimidated by members of the convoy. I am compassionate toward young people who have been harassed and verbally assaulted. I am compassionate toward racialized people who see symbols of hate. I am compassionate toward Jewish people who saw swastikas and Nazi flags flying. I am compassionate toward racialized people and Black people who saw Confederate flags. I ask how this is happening in our country.

That is who we are standing with. We are standing with the people and saying this is not Canada. This is not what we represent, this hate, with the desecration of war memorials and the vandalizing of the Terry Fox memorial. This is not Canada. This is not who we stand for. I want to stand with people who are saying this is wrong. I want to stand with the truckers who are saying this convoy does not represent them. They are worried about their wages being lost, wage theft and work conditions. Some 90% of them are vaccinated and they do not care about what the convoy is talking about. It does not represent their concerns.

I am standing with those people. I am standing with the workers. I am standing with families. I am standing with health care workers. I am standing with people who have been terrorized by the convoy. I am saying to them that I am going to fight for them; I am going to stand up for them. I understand that people in Canada are frustrated, but we have to respond to that frustration with a real plan to get us through the pandemic and with real hope to deal with the problems that people are faced with, and we can do it.

• (1855)

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech and for the motion he moved so we could discuss the matter this evening. It is about time we addressed this elephant in the room.

When I ask my Liberal colleagues what their responsibility is in all this, I am told that it is not really a national concern and it does not really have anything to do with the federal government. I am told that this is happening in Ottawa and should be handled by the Ottawa police and the mayor of Ottawa. They tell me that they do not have much to do with it, that it is not their responsibility.

I find it very hard to understand this. I do think this is a federal issue. People have been calling out the federal government from the outset, and the feds certainly bear some responsibility.

I would like to hear my colleague comment on how much of the responsibility lies with the federal government.

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

I completely agree. It is that lack of leadership that I want to criticize, specifically the fact that the federal government kept on saying that this was not its responsibility or within its jurisdiction.

Nevertheless, when there is a crisis in our nation's capital, it is vital that the federal government take action and that the Prime Minister take what is happening seriously and state that, as the leader, he will look for solutions to help and recognize that there still are provincial and territorial jurisdictions. It is always important to recognize that.

In a crisis, a real leader is someone who says they want to help, finds solutions and does everything they can to help people going through difficult times.

That is exactly what I suggest we do here, in Ottawa, and also for Quebec, because there are threats of other protests in a few weeks. We have to provide assistance to municipalities in a proactive manner to help them.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Burnaby South for his leadership in successfully pushing for this important emergency debate tonight that all Canadians can tune in to and see the important issues that need to be discussed. Many people have been saying that the federal government has been missing in action, and it is so important to have this debate tonight.

I would like to ask the member for Burnaby South two questions. What would he say and what is his message to health care workers who have, for the last two years, as he said so eloquently, been struggling to make sure that Canadians are taken care of despite the devastating health care cuts we have seen over the course of the last few years? What is his message to the Canadians who see ever-growing food bank lineups, are often in precarious situations or have become homeless and see the increasing inequality in our country that has been exacerbated during this crisis? What is his message to those Canadians tonight?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, I would say to health care workers that they are the ones who have saved our lives. They put their lives on the line to care for us. At a minimum, we need to make sure they are safe, and I am deeply offended that the people who have cared for us have been made a target by this convoy, that those who have put their lives on the line to keep us healthy are now at risk of violence if they wear clothing that identifies them. I want health care workers to know that this is wrong, that I stand with them and will continue to fight to make sure they are respected for their work, but more importantly that they are properly resourced so that they can do the work they want to do. I have met nurses with tears in their eyes because they are underfunded, understaffed and overworked. I want them to know I am going to fight to

make sure there is proper funding for a publicly delivered health care system and that the federal government does its part.

To the people dealing with inequality, which has become worse with the pandemic, we see a rigged system whereby those at the top continue to make massive profits while everyone else suffers. That is exactly why we need to provide solutions that speak to people. We need to put people at the heart of everything. That means making sure workers have fair wages. That means housing that is affordable and accessible to everyone. That means people should not have to rely on a food bank but be able to provide for themselves and their families with dignity and have the supports necessary to live a life of dignity. That is what we are fighting for. They are who we are fighting for, and we are going to stand with them every step of the way.

● (1900)

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I would like to indicate that I will be sharing my time with the Prime Minister.

I want to thank the member for Burnaby South for his motion, and all of my colleagues who are participating in this important debate tonight.

The situation in Ottawa began as an interruption and has now become a sustained convoy and blockade. During the course of the last number of days, we have seen far too many examples of intimidation, harassment, violence and hate. The residents here have effectively been held hostage in their own city, and many of them, especially young women, feel unsafe. They have been blockaded by an angry, loud, intolerant and often violent crowd.

Of course all members in this House support the right to peaceful protest, and it is indeed one of the pillars of our democracy, but peaceful protests do not make people afraid to leave their homes. This convoy has done that, and in doing so has crossed the line.

[Translation]

From day one, the federal government has been there to support the City of Ottawa and the OPS. As the situation evolved, the RCMP approved the successive requests for additional resources. Based on my calls with Mayor Watson last week and today, I can confirm that the RCMP received and approved a request for additional officers.

More officers were made available after another request was made this weekend. Since Saturday, more than 275 RCMP members have been mobilized to serve under the command of the Ottawa Police Service, or OPS. The RCMP is in talks with the OPS, as well as the Ontario Provincial Police, or OPP, and other law enforcement partners. It will assess and adapt its support as the situation evolves.

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I insist on receiving operational updates throughout the day, on top of daily briefings with the commissioner and my representatives to ensure that we end this convoy and restore law and order. I am speaking with my provincial and municipal counterparts and have spoken with Minister Jones, the Solicitor General of Ontario, and, of course, with Mr. Watson, the mayor of Ottawa.

[English]

While the situation remains very concerning on the ground, we have seen progress made over the last number of hours. We have seen charges laid. We have seen investigations ongoing. We have seen the cutting off of propane and fuel to participants in the convoy. We are seeing structures removed. We are seeing the dispersing of crowds safely and respectfully with the excellent performance of our law enforcement. Hundreds of charges will continue to be laid where appropriate, and those decisions will be made independently by our police services.

In the weeks that follow, we will need to be very clear that we cannot find ourselves in a similar situation again. We must also be clear that we cannot expect to yield to the reckless forces that are outside as a way of imposing reckless change in public policy through disruptive activities like the blockades we are seeing, the bringing in of heavy equipment and scaring and intimidating tactics.

For now, however, we must continue to work together and assess what needs to be done. I have been asking for operational updates through the day, as well as daily updates, to make sure that my partners and I are doing everything we can to help restore the rule of law. I am confident that today's announcement of a table being convened between all levels of government will help to make sure those on the ground have all the tools and resources they need to get the job done and see the situation defuse.

Colleagues, the pandemic is approaching its second anniversary in Canada, and I want to assure every member in this House and all Canadians that we all want to get back to normal life. That day is coming. Canadians have been united and have persevered through it all. Our government has taken a responsible, evidenced-based approach, using science and using good-faith efforts day in, day out to protect one another. It is because Canadians have chosen this path that thousands of lives have been saved.

• (1905)

We cannot allow an angry crowd to reverse the course that is saving lives in this final stretch. This should never be a precedent for how to make policy or law in Canada.

We believe in peace, order and good government. The stories that are coming from communities from coast to coast are of people who are looking out for one another, who are sticking up for each other, who are giving back despite the fatigue. Throughout the course of the pandemic, the story has been a narrative of the resilience and unyielding spirit of Canadians. Now more than ever, we need to support one another and we need to work side by side, regardless of the level of government or party stripe, to take care of one another.

Canadians deserve to feel safe in their communities, and I know that all members will join me in that spirit.

Before yielding the floor, I will just go on to say that I know this is a particularly difficult moment for the residents of Ottawa. I know that businesses have had to shut, that families have not been able to take their kids to day care, that seniors have not been able to get around, that disabled persons have not had access to public transportation, that people do not feel safe, that the reports of intimidation and harassment and violence and the images that we have seen over the course of the last number of days have been very disconcerting to all of us.

Those of us who respect the rule of law, those of us who expect that while we can hold disagreements, disagreements are certainly never a justification to cross the line and not respect other Canadians and break the law. That is why I am very proud that the government, since the very beginning of this convoy, has done everything that it can to give resources and support to our police services locally, including the provision of some 275 Mounties who have now been deputized and who are now able to enforce the law locally. I want to take a moment to thank the members of the RCMP who are assisting the OPS in dealing with this very challenging situation.

I will say, given the great length of time that has passed since the beginning of the pandemic, that of course everyone will feel a degree of fatigue, and we obviously share that sentiment right across the country. However, we should not confuse the sharing of that emotion and the sense of wanting to get back to life as normal with a lack of respect for the law. That is where we must draw the line. That is where we will draw the line.

We do this because this is the shared sense of values on which our country is built. We do it out of respect for those who have worked so hard to see those values and those principles enshrined in our charter, to ensure they are not just words on a page, to ensure that there is a sense of unity and common ground that sees itself manifested in our daily lives.

We have not seen that in the past number of days in Ottawa. I would hope that all members would recognize that it does us no good to yield to perhaps some of the darker angels of our nature. We need to be listening to the better angels of our nature, especially when those values are tested, especially when we have vigorous disagreements around the pandemic. Those disagreements can never be a justification for the kind of conduct and the kind of behaviour we have seen here in Ottawa.

That is why I am calling, and indeed I hope all members are calling, on the convoy to go home—to contribute to the debate, but not to break the law, not to make those who live here in Ottawa feel unsafe. That is what Canadians do. Canadians respect the law. No one is above the law.

We will get through this together.

● (1910)

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am having a flashback as I am listening to the member's comments. I was elected in 2015. Shortly thereafter we had protests regarding the Wet'suwet'en. All across Canada, billions of dollars were lost, and here I am hearing words like, "this is enshrined in Parliament" and "rule of law". I can appreciate that. We do not support radicalism, but it is extremely rich for him to make these types of comments.

I have two questions. One, has he gone out and talked to some of these people? Also, yes, there are people who are taking it way too far, but what responsibility would he and the government take for agitating and calling them racist and just marginalizing millions of Canadians?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, with due respect to my colleague, it is ironic that he says he and the members of his party respect the values of the charter, but then we see the member for Carleton and others of his colleagues around some of the individuals who have been breaking the law, and who have been intimidating, harassing and causing great disruption to ordinary folks who just want to go about their daily lives. If my colleague cannot appreciate the distinction between having a vigorous debate about the way we are going to get through this pandemic, and crossing the line and using that disagreement as a justification for the very flagrant disregard for the law, as we have seen in Ottawa, then that is something he and his party need to reflect on very carefully.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for being here this evening. I appreciate it.

When I ask questions in the House, he often tells me that my question falls under the jurisdiction of the City of Ottawa and that Ottawa police are in charge of the situation. He has sent in new RCMP officers, which we were pleased to hear. However, the Ottawa city council adopted a motion this morning officially asking for help from the federal and provincial governments.

What will he tell the City of Ottawa? Will he offer assistance on top of simply sending more RCMP officers?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, the matter of jurisdictions and operational decisions is very clear. The Ottawa Police Service is responsible for making decisions on the ground. We need to respect that because it is a principle and value of our democracy.

Earlier today, I spoke with Mayor Watson, and we had a good conversation about what he needs. We have already offered him the services of more than 275 additional RCMP officers, who are now working on the ground to assist the Ottawa Police Service. With their help, progress has been made today, but that needs to continue. We need to put an end to the convoy's activities out of respect for Ottawa residents.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe that the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie would like to ask a question.

S. O. 52

● (1915)

The Speaker: The member's hand is not raised, and he said no. I see him on my screen, but I do not think he wants to ask a question.

I would remind members to rise or to let me know if they want to speak. I would like to thank the two hon. members for their help. The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands for a brief question.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, very briefly, one of the arguments we continue to hear out there is that it is just a bad apple in the bunch, yet we are seeing incident after incident where there are many bad apples in this bunch that the Conservatives are embracing time and again.

I am curious. Can the minister provide his thoughts on that argument we seem to hear quite a bit?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague's very thoughtful question underlines a pattern we have seen from the Conservative Party in an effort to minimize the harm, the intimidation, the violence and the expressions of hate. I heard one of my colleagues say earlier tonight, in the context of this take note debate, that we have to understand there are certain boundaries we do not cross as Canadians. The flying of Confederate flags and the demonstration of swastikas on our Parliament Hill are not only affronts to our values, which are articulated in the charter, but they are affronts to everyone who has survived the Holocaust and has experienced racism, and they are affronts to who we are as Canadians.

These are not isolated incidents. It has been rampant, and that is why it is critically important that we rely on our law enforcement to disperse this convoy, so that we can get back to life as normal.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tonight we are here because Parliament is working. We are here to do our job as the government, as parliamentarians, because our democracy is working.

Just a short time ago, we had an election in this country in which we asked Canadians how they wanted to keep fighting this pandemic. Their answer was clear. Canadians chose vaccines. They chose science. They chose to protect one another. Canadians know that is how we get back to the things we love.

[Translation]

Over the past few weeks, there have been protests in various places across the country, particularly here in Ottawa. Of course, people have the right to protest, to disagree with the government and to make their voices heard. That is a basic right that we as a democracy will always cherish and protect.

That being said, people do not have the right to illegally block the streets, to harass their fellow citizens who are trying to get to work or school, or to insult people who choose to wear masks, get vaccinated and be there for one another.

S. O. 52

[English]

Individuals are trying to blockade our economy, our democracy and our fellow citizens' daily lives. It has to stop. The people of Ottawa do not deserve to be harassed in their own neighbourhoods. They do not deserve to be confronted with the inherent violence of a swastika flying on a street corner, or a Confederate flag, or with insults and jeers just because they are wearing masks.

That is not who Canadians are. That is not what Canadians demonstrated over the past two years of consistently, continually being there for each other. The people of Ottawa, and indeed people across the country, deserve to have their safety respected and deserve to get their lives back.

From the beginning of this demonstration, our government has been in close contact with the mayor of Ottawa, and with municipal and provincial officials. The RCMP has so far mobilized nearly 300 officers to support the Ottawa Police Service, and is ready to do more. Yesterday, the City of Ottawa declared a state of emergency. We are convening a table with the relevant federal and municipal partners to further strengthen our response. The federal government will be there with whatever resources the province and the city need in this situation.

• (1920)

[Translation]

The Minister of Transport is also working with his provincial counterparts to ensure that people who break the law suffer the consequences.

[English]

This blockade, and these protesters, are not the story of this pandemic. They are not the story of Canadians in this pandemic. From the very beginning, Canadians stepped up to be there for one another, to support their neighbours, to support the elderly and to support our frontline workers by doing the right things: by wearing masks, by getting vaccinated and by following public health restrictions. We are all tired of this pandemic. We are frustrated. We are worn down, none more than our frontline health care workers who have been going flat out for two years.

Everyone is tired of having to wear masks and having to follow public health restrictions. Families that test positive, just like mine last week, have to follow public health rules and isolate themselves. Nobody wants to do that. I do not know how many conversations parents have had to have with kids about not going to birthday parties or getting to have sleepovers. This pandemic has sucked for all Canadians, but Canadians know that the way to get through it is by continuing to listen to science, to lean on each other and to be there for each other.

[Translation]

People who yell at others for wearing a mask are not the majority of Canadians, not the vast majority of our country. The majority of Canadians are the millions who got vaccinated, 90,000 of them today alone. They are the tens of thousands who, week after week, have gotten their first dose.

[English]

Every day across the country, Canadians step up to get their first doses of the vaccine. That is the story of the country: people who have been there for each other. Everyone is tired of COVID, but these protests are not the way to get through it.

[Translation]

We should not be fighting one another; we should be coming together to fight the virus.

[English]

This is not a fight against one another. It is a fight against the virus, and Canadians know that the tools to get through it are science, vaccinations and continuing to do what people have done from the very beginning, which is to step up for one another and make difficult choices. More than ever, Canadians need to continue to be there for each other and to be united.

Members of the opposition have called for an end to the blockades. I salute that. This is the time to put national interests ahead of partisan interests. This is the time for responsible leadership. Democracy in Canada did not happen by accident, and it will not continue without effort. It was a deliberate choice made decades ago to come together, to respect one another and to be there for each other. In every generation, every decade and every day, Canadians continue to live that by choosing to support each other and choosing to do what is necessary to get through another long winter night, to get through another difficult season, and to get through a pandemic.

We have in this country a set of rules, laws and principles that we live by. They keep us safe and protect us. Over the past two years, we have seen measures brought in to keep us safe and measures loosened when things got better. We will continue to follow public health advice, and we will continue to trust science as Canadians work to get through this. That is what people expect.

I know people are tired. We have seen it through the various waves and their receding over the past months. These pandemic restrictions are not forever, but we have to make sure that our shared values and the idea of Canadians being there for each other, supporting one another and respecting each other, have to be here to stay. That is what we are all continuing to stand for.

• (1925)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for participating and being part of this debate.

I look at our country and I have never seen it as divided as it is now under this Prime Minister. Whether it is regional lines, whether it is ethnic lines or whether it is people's health care choices, this country is more divided than ever. The Prime Minister talks about things like respecting each other and that we are not fighting against each other but we are fighting a virus. I have two very simple questions for him.

When the Prime Minister decided to introduce the vaccine mandate, he believed it was the right thing to do. Does he regret calling people names who did not take the vaccine? Does he regret calling people misogynist and racist, just escalating and poking sticks at them and being so divisive to individual Canadians that he might not disagree with but he might have thought were wrong? Does he regret that, and will he agree to meet with the leaders here, the other opposition leaders and me, so that we can talk about a solution in a way that he has described?

We are in uncharted territory. We are at a crisis point not only with what is going on out the doors and across the country, but in the country overall. So much of it is because of the things that he has said and done. Does he regret his words, and will he work with us so that we can find some resolution?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I think people watching expect me to disagree with the leader of the official opposition. I just did not think it would be about something so fundamental. She is telling people tonight that Canada has never been so divided, never been so angry, with one region against another, and I disagree. What we have seen over these past two years has been Canadians stepping up for each other in extraordinary ways.

Canada has one of the highest vaccination rates of our peer countries around the world. Why? It is not because Canadians love getting needles. It is because Canadians trust science. Canadians trust each other to do the right thing. It is in our national psyche of being able to be there for our neighbours, being able to push a car out of a snowbank for a perfect stranger and being able to lean on each other. These are the things that define Canadians. What we saw through these past two years were people stepping up for our front-line health workers, stepping up for our grocery store clerks, leaning on each other, supporting our seniors, supporting our young people and young people stepping up to do what they could around the house to help out while their parents worked while they were all locked down. This is a story of a country that got through this pandemic by being united, and a few people shouting and waving swastikas does not define who Canadians are.

• (1930)

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for being here this evening. We appreciate it.

To be honest, we were looking forward to seeing him. We were wondering where he was. I realize he was affected by COVID-19, so I am happy to see that he is well, but still, when there is a crisis, people expect a leader to be there, to send a strong, clear message. Unfortunately, that is not what happened over the past few days.

In the absence of a message, the protesters are getting the message that it is okay if they stay as long as they want, because nobody is saying anything and nobody is saying there will be consequences.

Does he not think this evening would have been a perfect opportunity to send the protesters a truly strong, clear message about what is going to happen next?

S. O. 52

We all agree that people have a right to protest, but the way this particular protest has gained unbelievable momentum is stripping it of all legitimacy. What message should he have sent them this evening?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for being here tonight and for her question.

The reality is that we have been clear from the beginning of this protest. People have a right to protest, but they do not have a right to try to harass and obstruct our Parliament and our democracy. They do not have a right to disturb the residents of a community to such an extent. We have also made it very clear from the beginning that we are here to support the Ottawa police, the City of Ottawa, which is doing its job, and the province if necessary.

We are here with resources to help bring this to an end. We will remain steadfastly committed to the democracy that elected this government to keep Canadians safe. That is the message I have been sending from the beginning, and that is the message we will continue to send.

The Speaker: The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, we know very well that in debates like the one we are having tonight, time is divided amongst the parties. Every party has an opportunity to ask questions, and I know the hon. member for Burnaby South has been waiting to ask the Prime Minister a question.

The Speaker: The rules are the rules, and we have limited time, so there is not much we can do.

If the hon. member would like to see the rules change, perhaps he could speak up when changes are being made in the House. I do not have much to add.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby, very briefly.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, since we are all gathered here, I seek unanimous consent to give two minutes to the member for Burnaby South so that he may ask a question.

The Speaker: I wish to confirm that according to the motion adopted earlier, there is no way to propose new motions or new changes.

I am sorry, but that is the rule the House adopted, and I must stay within those parameters.

The hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

S. O. 52

I am very glad to be speaking about this pressing issue that really has Canadians glued to their television sets. The convoy has been all over Ottawa and across every major city in Canada. We have even seen it spread to other countries around the world. I am very glad that after two long years of division on COVID that we are finally beginning to debate this important matter in this historic House of democracy.

I did want to begin my speech by talking about what kind of politician one has to be to make a difference in this place. I think every MP in the House has a bit of a different style. When I first arrived, I wanted to be a bridge builder. That really came from where I grew up and where I went to university. I grew up in a small farming community in rural Manitoba to four generations of Canadian farmers, so I had a very entrenched rural, Prairie upbringing and values. Then I went to McGill University in Montreal, a very prestigious, elite, liberal university. I met kids from all over the world with all different political views and world views and really got an incredible experience learning about how other people think about the world.

I have found that often, although parties will disagree, and someone will say I am a staunch Liberal or Conservative or NDP, there is actually a lot more that we have in common. Something I believe that all parties at their core have in common is a belief that all Canadians and all people of this world deserve to be treated with dignity, compassion and respect. That is how I approach these divisive issues that we, as MPs, encounter all the time. They are never easy to talk about. They are very difficult issues. I look to try to build a bridge so that we can come together as Canadians and agree on a peaceful path forward. That is how I have been trying to look at the very divisive situation in Ottawa right now.

What I would really like to see is a Prime Minister who calls for national unity. Last week, I spoke in the House about a lot of the division that we are seeing in the country between east versus west and rural versus urban, particularly now during the pandemic. We have heard so much trauma from our constituents. If there is any member in the House who does not believe that Canadians have been through trauma these past two years, they clearly have not been doing their jobs and listening to their constituents.

It has been horrific, the things that I have heard. We hear about young children who are so depressed they do not want to eat. Eating disorders are through the roof. We have heard about seniors and elderly in our care homes who have opted for medical assistance in dying, rather than live one more month through isolation in care homes. I have had widowed, elderly women call and cry to me on the phone about how lonely they are and they do not want to go on. I have had grown men who have called me crying because their businesses are falling apart. Divorces, abuse at home, alcohol dependency and drug dependency, all of these terrible things are up in our country because people are just trying to cope and are breaking down.

From that perspective, I do not really see what is going on across the country as all that surprising. To me, it seems like an eruption of pain, trauma and frustration that has been simmering for two long years and governments have not been listening to that pain and trauma. Despite having rapid tests, vaccines and all the different types of tools and scientific knowledge, governments have repeat-

edly relied on harsh lockdown measures and divisive mandates to control this virus.

Meanwhile, we see the Prime Minister who today got up in the House and again othered Canadians who do not agree with him. This is the man who, for six years, has said that diversity is our strength, but if anybody does not agree with everything he says, they are in his bad books and they will not get a chance to be heard; they do not have a right to be heard.

Last week, I brought to the floor of the House of Commons remarks he had said during that \$600-million unnecessary election. He said so many times before he called that election that there were vaccines for “all those who want it”, and it was a choice. He said that repeatedly. He must have said it a thousand times. Then, within days of calling that election, he was yelling into a microphone at a Liberal rally that people have the right not to get vaccinated, but they don't have the right to sit next to someone who is. In his remarks today he said, “This is not a fight against one another. It is a fight against the virus”. Those remarks suggest something very different.

● (1935)

When it comes to an election, scoring political points and winning votes, the Prime Minister is very happy to divide Canadians and pitch them against each other for their different personal health views. I, for one, am sick and tired of seeing politicians use this as an evil wedge tool to rip Canadian families apart.

I cannot tell members how much anger and tears I saw in the last election six months ago. Now it is even worse. Neighbours will not talk to each other. With respect to Christmas family dinners, even if there were no lockdowns during Christmas, it is almost a nightmare to get families in the same room now if there is one person who does not share their views. It is a nightmare.

With respect to colleagues at work, last week I shared a story of a social worker, a young mom I met on her front step during the pandemic. She was sharing with me a story that she had received a hero of the year award last year. This year she went above and beyond to help people during a pandemic before there were vaccines. She stepped up as hero of the year for her job, and now, she said, no one would talk to her and she was going to get fired because of one personal health choice she made. As much as others have tried, there was no convincing this woman otherwise. I do not know how public health officials and public officials get behind policies that do that to Canadians.

We are one of the most vaccinated countries in the world, and the current government continues to use that to bludgeon people to submit to its policies. I never thought when entering politics two and a half years ago at a federal level that we would see a government that was so keen to divide Canadians on something so deeply personal.

As I have said before and will say again, I denounce any hateful and violent acts outside and whoever is up to no good. I say “Shame on you” to whoever is up to that kind of mischief and hateful rhetoric and actions, but what I am seeing across the country is people mobilizing because their governments have not listened to them for two years. They have been experiencing trauma for two years and no one is listening to them, so what choice do they have left?

These people have all emailed their MPs. They have called them and they have been turned down by their MPs. I am sure there are members of the public from Papineau, from the Prime Minister's riding, who have reached out because they have a different perspective on this issue and have been traumatized and fired from their jobs for a personal health choice. There are millions of Canadian, millions, who have been deeply ostracized from society, and when we do not listen to those people, they mobilize. We have seen protests across this country for over a century, and rightly so, as we have a right to peaceful protest. I would ask the protesters outside to do their best to stay vigilant and stay peaceful.

We are seeing other governments around the world with lower vaccination rates step up to say that they have heard their citizens say they have been traumatized and are moving forward with a deadline and a plan to have no more mandates, no more masks and no more distancing. They are allowing them to travel, to live their lives and to hug each other again. They have provided them with a date, a plan and a threshold. We have had absolutely none of that in Canada from the Prime Minister. People have been traumatized and are mobilizing because they need some hope. They need somebody in this House of privilege to come down from our ivory towers and say to the little people that we hear them, that we apologize that we traumatized them for two years. We need somebody to step up and give them some hope and a deadline.

The member opposite is laughing. The people in this House are incredibly privileged. That member has kept his job. Thousands of Canadians have lost their jobs, and he is laughing about his own privilege. What has he done to serve members who are marginalized during this pandemic in his community except laugh at them in this House of Commons? Shame on that member.

I asked the government two years ago in the House, and I would ask it again, to do everything it can, to go to other countries to see what they are doing and what their best practices are. How is it that other highly advanced, developed nations like the U.K., Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States, which have all the same tools we have, all the economic resources we have, whose citizens have done all of the work and made all the sacrifices, have a plan for hope as to when they will get back to normal and get their lives back?

Do members think the people outside want to be here? Those people do not want to be here. They want to be working, but that right was taken away from them. When is there going to be a plan from the current Prime Minister? When is there going to be compassionate leadership to say that Canadians have done the work, that we have the tools and that we are moving forward? Our public health doctors have told us as well that it is time to move forward, that it is time to revisit these harsh mandates and divisive policies.

S. O. 52

• (1940)

I will end on this. I am very passionate about this issue, and I think we all are, from our different perspectives. I will continue to be a bridge-builder to reach out and try to understand where others are coming from. It would just be incredible if we could see members of the Liberal Party and the Prime Minister do the same. It is time to build a bridge.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Burnaby South for instigating this debate tonight and for his remarks.

The member for Kildonan—St. Paul knows that the interim Conservative leader, the member for Portage—Lisgar, encouraged her party to not discourage protesters from leaving but rather to encourage them to stay and make the occupation the Prime Minister's problem. Shortly afterward, when confronted with the horrific and violent deeds of the occupiers, her interim leader recycled Donald Trump's hateful and disgusting turn of phrase that there were good people on both sides.

Even tonight, in this very House in this very debate, that same interim leader tried to stoke the fires of division when asking the Prime Minister questions. Perhaps the next thing the interim leader will say is to tell the occupiers to stand back and stand down.

The behaviour of some of the members on the member for Kildonan—St. Paul's side of the House has been as repugnant as the behaviour of those out on the street. I would like to ask the member how in the world she believes the actions of her leader and her colleagues will help to end this unthinkable and un-Canadian disaster unfolding outside of these very doors.

• (1945)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member who laughed when I said that members of Parliament in the House have extraordinary privilege. We have been able to keep our jobs.

I am very proud of our leader for stepping forward today and putting forward a call to action of the Prime Minister. She asked him today if he will meet with members of the other parties. Will they get together, sit at the table and say this is an unprecedented demonstration in Canadian history, it is time to get together, put partisanship aside and work together to see how we are going to have a peaceful resolution to this.

As the shadow minister for public safety for Canada, I have grown increasingly concerned that without a peaceful resolution and compassionate leadership from the Prime Minister and that member of Parliament, that we are going to see this escalate. The Liberals are stoking the fires, pouring diesel on it, so to speak, and raising the temperature with their mean language and name-calling when they should be responsible and lowering the temperature. I would like to see from Liberal members of Parliament and from the Prime Minister some compassionate leadership. It is time to get together at the same table and talk about solutions.

S. O. 52

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I walk through this occupation, I often reflect as the veterans' spokesperson for the NDP on the people who fought for us, who fought for other countries, stand up and speak out against any kind of oppression of the people who fought for the freedom to have a protest in this country.

I read an article today which spoke about a veteran who was so upset to see people parking on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He went there to take pictures of those licence plates to make sure that they were removed and that those people would be held accountable.

Right now in our nation's capital, both that monument and the aboriginal monument are surrounded by fences to protect those monuments for the very people who fought for us to have the privilege to stand in the House.

I am wondering if the member could talk about where the line is to stand up against people who are causing concerning violence and doing things that we should all be appalled by.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is incumbent upon all members of Parliament to stand up against violence, bullying and divisive rhetoric. I have seen that repeatedly.

I have done that repeatedly particularly when again we see a Prime Minister of this country who for over a year and a half said that vaccines for all those who want them and then within days of called a \$600 million unnecessary election that further divided and wounded traumatized Canadians within days from saying vaccine is a choice. He said that people have the right not to get vaccinated, but they have no right to sit next to someone who is. That is the kind of dehumanizing language that incites people and gets their temperature up and mobilizing. That is the type of language that is irresponsible that we need to bring down. The Prime Minister should not be saying things like that.

I am from rural Manitoba and we supported the NDP for decades. Why? Because it was the NDP who stood up for the marginalized, people who did not have a voice in this privileged House of Commons. Where has their voice been from the thousands of workers who have lost their jobs? Where is the voice for the social worker who is too afraid to get a vaccine and lost her job? Where is their advocacy for them? I do not know, I have not seen it.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech.

This evening, for the Prime Minister's first official public appearance since the protest currently happening on Parliament Hill began, I would have expected him to announce something. I would have expected the Prime Minister to tell us what he plans to do to find a peaceful solution to this situation that has been going on for far too long already, that has been here far too long for the people of the Ottawa region, and that has been here for far too long for all Canadians. I would have expected the Prime Minister to tell us his plan.

I figured that once the Prime Minister came out of hiding, he would tell Canadians the next steps for dealing with this pandemic and tell us how we will safely, slowly and objectively lift the health measures that have been imposed on Canadians for two years now. I am not talking about all Canadians. I am only talking about those who fall under federal jurisdiction, under his responsibility. I was not even asking him to go further, but I would have expected him to point out that 86% of Canadians are vaccinated, 80% of Canadians have received one dose, and the most vulnerable Canadians are getting a third dose. We are in an enviable position compared to the rest of the world, so I would have expected Prime Minister to tell us what we are going to do now, in the coming weeks and months, to finally get back to normal.

The provinces did it. They are doing it. Other countries are in the process of doing it. They are announcing that restrictions are being lifted because the illness we are currently facing is very different than the one we dealt with at the outset. Above all, the tools we currently have are much better than what we had at the start of the pandemic. At the start, we did not know what the virus was, we did not have a vaccine and we were not testing for the virus. The only option was to shut down while waiting for the scientists to tell us what we could do. That is what we did, Canadians did it and we were proud to support measures to ensure that Canadians could stay at home.

Two years later, the vaccination rate is 86%. That is what was asked of us. We were asked to get vaccinated, and we did it. Two years later, we have been vaccinated, but the Prime Minister, who must be the only first minister in the whole country to say so, is telling us to keep getting vaccinated because there is no plan to lift the health measures.

I will say one thing. Yes, people need to continue getting vaccinated. We have been in favour of vaccination from the beginning. The Conservatives were the first to stand up in the House to demand that the government make agreements with pharmaceutical companies so that we would have enough vaccines for everyone. I remember that very clearly because I was there. The government was very slow to take action. It was also slow to close the borders and to recognize that there was a pandemic. However, it was quick to shut down the disease intelligence task force. It seems this government has always been one step behind from the start. Unfortunately, right now, Canadians need to hear something different, a more positive message.

How does the Prime Minister plan to recover from the crisis? That is what we want to know, and that is what we would have liked to hear from the Prime Minister this evening. That is what I would like to hear from my Liberal colleagues instead of hearing them repeat, in the media and everywhere, all kinds of falsehoods about the position of the people on this side of the House. That is the reality.

It is easy. The Liberals are not fulfilling their responsibilities. They have been in hiding all this time, waiting in the hopes that perhaps someone else will resolve the problem. Meanwhile, the problem is not getting solved.

• (1950)

I heard the mayor of Ottawa cry for help and ask someone to intervene. I saw police services ask for help, ask someone somewhere to do something to end the situation. People are in dire need of leadership.

Mayor Watson cannot change what is happening across Canada. He is doing his best to look after his municipality. He has too much on his plate. He is asking the Prime Minister to help, but the Prime Minister is not doing anything, saying anything or announcing anything. He is sitting this one out, hiding somewhere. He popped out this evening to deliver a totally meaningless speech. That is the fact of the matter, and Canadians are done with it.

In the early days, here is how we learned about the virus: We knew someone who knew someone who had had COVID-19. There were degrees of separation, but we were afraid because we did not know anything about it.

Now, though, I can say that I had COVID-19 over the holidays. My children, my wife and my neighbour also had COVID-19. The thing is, we are still living with the same rules we had at the start of the pandemic. Actually, it is worse, because the government wants to make more rules for truckers and interprovincial transportation. I can think of no way to describe the government's current response but to say that it is adding fuel to the fire.

Today, the leader of the Conservative Party, the official opposition, asked the Prime Minister to commit to a process that could lead to a peaceful resolution of the dispute. She wrote a letter and sent a copy to the leaders of the two other opposition parties.

In her letter, the leader asks for a meeting of the leaders of these four parties to find solutions to de-escalate the protests, calm the situation and allow the people of Ottawa to get back to their lives and their normal activities. To those watching, the proposal sent to the party leaders today came from the Conservative leader.

In her letter, the leader states that Canadians want and need a peaceful resolution to this impasse. I feel that people back home, and indeed people everywhere, are fed up. They are exhausted and cannot take it anymore. They need a real leader to stand up and give them hope and a plan to get through this crisis. I am not talking about a light at the end of the tunnel because that turn of phrase did not work for the Premier of Quebec, François Legault.

The letter suggests that it is time to depoliticize the response to the pandemic. Canadians across the country have come together, made sacrifices and done what is necessary to keep their families and communities safe. They were even encouraged to hear Dr. Tam say that we need to find a more sustainable way of dealing with the pandemic and recommending that all existing public health policies be re-examined with the provinces and territories so that we can back to some normalcy.

Dr. Tam is saying that we have to lay out a plan for moving back to normality and begin living with the variant, the virus, COVID-19. Canadians' health comprises mental health as well as physical health. At some point, we must start balancing the two, and I believe that we are at that point now.

S. O. 52

The leader of the official opposition believes, and this is very important, that the leaders of the federal parties have a responsibility to help our country and our frustrated citizens. She sincerely hopes that the leaders of the four main parties can show leadership by coming together to talk about solutions and to follow the science rather than the politics when it comes to mandates.

This appeal was made to the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. We hope that the leaders of the four parties will meet to discuss and find a solution to this crisis and put a peaceful end to the protests in Ottawa, as well as those in Quebec City, Toronto, Alberta and across the country.

It is possible to listen to and talk with one another, but, above all, it is possible to give Canadians hope. Let us do so by asking our four party leaders to meet and try to find a solution together.

• (1955)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight. Days ago, an email is leaked in which the leader of the official opposition stated that the Conservatives should not ask the protesters to leave and should instead make this the Prime Minister's problem. However, now we are led to believe by the member that the Leader of the Opposition is suddenly the one bringing everybody together to come up with a solution. Is that what the member is trying to say?

• (2000)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I am not trying; I am saying it. The Leader of the Opposition is trying to do something good for Canadians, and I will support her 100% with that.

It is true that the Prime Minister has a responsibility to deal with what we are facing right now. I stand with that, because he was hiding for more than a week instead of addressing this urgent and very disastrous matter.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from the start of this emergency debate, we have heard many of the Conservative members stand up and speak out against the government's lack of proactivity, and rightly so. We agree with them on that.

However, one thing is unclear. What is the Conservatives' actual position? Where exactly do they stand in all of this?

My partner works in the health care industry. She is a nurse and, every day, she has to call people who contracted COVID-19 to tell them what they need to do so they do not spread it to other people. She is frustrated that the situation has not been resolved. She is worried that the health care system will end up in a worse predicament than it is in now.

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In that respect, we see that the Conservatives seem to want to get political mileage out of the fact that people are fed up with the public health measures. I would really like to understand what message the Conservatives have for the people who are protesting outside right now.

Are they telling them to stay? Are they telling them to go home? Are they telling them to follow the health measures?

I would like to understand how the Conservatives want to get through the pandemic and what message they have for the protesters.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I am an opposition member. On Friday, I asked the House a clear question. I said that it was time to put an end to the protest. I also said that it was time to put an end to the restrictions that sparked the protest.

I did not get any answer from the government. That is the problem. The government is trying to make this crisis someone else's, anyone else's, responsibility, even though it is the one that started it by choosing to divide Canadians. It chose to call an election after imposing the vaccine mandate. That is the reality. The one who is playing politics with COVID-19 is the one who has been hiding for the past 10 days.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech. I agree with him on one point: The Liberal government bears some responsibility and leadership is lacking at the moment. That is why this protest, this siege or occupation of Ottawa, has unfortunately been dragging on for 10 days.

I would also like to point out the cacophony of noise coming from the Conservative Party at the moment. This convoy announced from the outset that it wanted to overthrow a democratically elected government and replace it with some kind of committee with the Senate and the Governor General. This is a fiercely undemocratic position, which has been supported by the leader of the Conservative Party and the member for Carleton. Those are the facts.

As the convoy protesters entered the city centre and intimidated, harassed and spat on residents, several Conservative MPs had their pictures taken with these people, who are acting like thugs. What is the current position of the Conservative Party?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable has 30 seconds to answer.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I will try to keep it to 30 seconds, so I will focus on one very important aspect.

The acts of hate and racism are abhorrent and we denounce them wholeheartedly. These types of actions have no place in a democracy, no matter what is being protested.

However, the right to protest is entrenched in Canada. I have often seen my colleague protesting in Montreal for all kinds of causes, in all sorts of protests that have sometimes ended in violence. That does not mean that the protesters' original cause was not worthwhile. It means that some individuals hijacked the cause.

I am saying that we must denounce the acts of racism and hate, but we must allow people to express themselves. People have dealt

with too much over the past two years and need to be able to express themselves. If it does not happen on Parliament Hill, it will happen everywhere across Canada.

• (2005)

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be here this evening. Let me start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member for Saint-Jean.

I thank the NDP for proposing this emergency debate. As I said earlier, it is high time we talked about the elephant in the room: the occupation of Ottawa. What is happening is unbelievable. Since the protest began, protesters have kept on protesting and parliamentarians have kept on sitting. We are like two solitudes. Neither group is talking to the other. Most importantly, the government is not talking to the protesters, so we are at an impasse.

This protest against mandatory vaccination for truckers who have to cross the Canada-U.S. border quickly got out of control. We are not just talking about a minority of truckers anymore. We often hear about how 90% of truckers are vaccinated. That means the ones here are a small minority making demands primarily about this measure, but also about other things, such as the public health measures imposed by the Legault government and other measures imposed by the Liberal government. The whole thing is now bigger than anyone thought possible.

There are people who are saying dangerous things and making claims that are all over the map. There are people who are intimidating journalists and some Ottawa residents. There are people who are being disrespectful and who enjoy blocking public roadways. We agree that protesting is entirely legitimate and perfectly legal. In this case, it is how protesters are going about it that is not so legitimate. It is more than just disruptive; it has become illegal. No one has the right to park their vehicle in the middle of the street and think there will be no consequences.

The movement quickly drew in conspiracy theorists, anti-vaccine activists, far-right groups and people who are simply against health measures.

Let us turn back the clock a bit. Protesters converged in Ottawa on January 29 and brought downtown to a standstill on Wellington Street. A number of incidents occurred, such as a protester carrying a German Nazi flag, others with Confederate flags, motorists parking on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and other protesters urinating on it. Some protesters put their signs on the Terry Fox statue and on other statues. Others also went looking for meals at a local homeless shelter.

The incessant noise from the protesters and the inconvenience caused by the fact that many streets are blocked has caused a lot of friction with residents. Some residents even organized counter-protests. Businesses have lost a lot of money because of disruptions resulting from the occupation of the downtown.

Some people were unable to make it to medical appointments because of the traffic. That is what happened to a four-year-old boy from Gatineau who is receiving cancer treatment but was unable to get to his appointment because of the traffic in downtown Ottawa. Protesters threw rocks and hurled racist insults at paramedics. They also built shelters for themselves and set up a well-organized system for getting gas and especially diesel supplies.

In short, this has gotten out of control. We understand that people are fed up with the pandemic and fed up with public health measures. We are all in the same boat. We are all really fed up. However, there is a way to express one's displeasure. Even though I do not agree at all with the protesters' demands, I have to say that the protesters in Quebec City behaved a lot better than those in Ottawa. Were the protesters in Quebec City more civilized? It is a valid question, but I think that things went more smoothly because the Quebec government was better prepared.

The federal government knew that there might be fallout if it put that restriction in place at the border. I think that the government should have been better prepared. When it found out that thousands of protesters were physically and even financially preparing, to the tune of millions of dollars, to come to the capital and protest in front of the Parliament buildings, I think the federal government should have been a little more concerned.

Jean Baillargeon, someone I really admire, wrote about this in *Le Soleil* today, and his headline is quite telling. It said, "Managing the Trucker Crisis: Ottawa failed and Quebec took responsibility". Mr. Baillargeon wrote the following:

Successfully managing a crisis requires two fundamental elements, preparation and leadership. Clearly, in the trucker crisis, the City of Ottawa failed miserably while Quebec City took responsibility and contained its protest.

From the outset, when the Minister of Public Safety was asked a question about this, he answered that it was not his role to tell the police what to do. We understand that it is not his role, but he could show leadership, work with the police and create a game plan, at the very least. The protesters are directing their message to the federal government, not the police.

● (2010)

In times of crisis, a real leader would normally travel to the site and take charge. In this case, the Prime Minister has been nowhere to be found. We recognize that he was forced to isolate because of COVID-19, but he was healthy enough to participate virtually in activities like question period and hold press conferences from his home. The only statement he made was to tell the protesters to stop whining. Telling people who do not want to get vaccinated to go get vaccinated does not do any good.

The federal government appeared weak to the protesters. I think that is what emboldened them to keep up the civil disturbance in the name of their own freedom, but at the expense of the freedom of Ottawa residents.

Let me get back to the comparison to the protest in Quebec City, for which the Quebec government showed leadership. The Government of Quebec started by clearly stating that it would not tolerate any unlawful behaviour. The mayor and police officers worked together to ensure that the protest would be calm and respectful, and

that is what happened. They did not let the protesters settle in, so they all left on Sunday evening. The protesters are still here in Ottawa and plan to stay, since no one is keeping them from staying.

It should be the role of the Prime Minister and the role of the Minister of Public Safety to send a clear message that the federal government will not tolerate this, that it will provide the necessary support to the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa police, and that it will be sure to stay in communication with the Government of Ontario, the Ontario police and the RCMP.

Earlier last week, we proposed convening a crisis task force to take the lead, provide updates to the public, open a dialogue with protesters, and at least give the impression that something is being done. However, the Minister of Public Safety clearly said in the House on Friday, in response to a question from the leader of the Bloc Québécois, that the federal government has never tried to talk to the various protest spokespeople and is offloading all responsibility for negotiations onto the police. However, the protesters came here to talk to the federal government.

I agree that the protesters should never have been allowed to settle in, but now that they seem to be here for good, what do we do? Obviously, the City of Ottawa is at the end of its rope, as are residents and police officers. Yesterday, the City of Ottawa declared a state of emergency to get more support from other levels of government, particularly the federal government, since the municipality feels helpless given that the protesters' demands target the federal government. The City of Ottawa said so itself and is begging for help. This morning, Ottawa city council voted in favour of a motion to officially request help from the federal and provincial governments.

The message could not be clearer. We have been saying so since last week, since the beginning of the protests or siege. The City of Ottawa is being dragged in, and police are saying that they do not have enough officers. What more will it take for the federal government to take action?

The minister sent an additional 275 RCMP officers to help out, and that is great. We are happy about that, but he keeps saying that the ball is in the city's court. I agree, to a certain extent, but I think that the government has a responsibility here, and it is obviously not living up to that responsibility.

This evening we heard Liberal members, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety, say their piece. They used their speaking time to denounce abusive behaviour, as we all have been doing over the past week in the media and here in the House. However, this evening, we wanted to hear them talk about the game plan. It is good that the government has sent more RCMP officers, but what else is it going to do? Nothing more was said about that. What mandate were these officers given? Will they continue to carry out monitoring and security duties, or will they actually put an end to the siege happening in the streets?

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The Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety missed a golden opportunity to send a strong, clear message, to show that they are in control of the situation and that they will not let the situation deteriorate. We have seen abusive behaviour, and we do not want to see any more, but we are not sheltered from that with what is going on outside.

What we have seen this evening is unfortunate. I will no doubt receive tons of hateful messages for what I said this evening, because, once again, I took a position against the protest. It is also unfortunate to see our society so divided, but I am doing my job, and it is high time the federal government did its job too.

● (2015)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the primary request that is being made by the leaders of the convoy is that the Governor General dissolve this Parliament and appoint the Senate and the Governor General to form a “citizens of Canada” committee. Does this seem to the member like a group that we can enter into negotiations with effectively?

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I would like to correct him. The initial demand that sparked this protest had to do with the federal government's rule that truckers had to be vaccinated to cross the Canada-U.S. border. Since the beginning of the protest, I have not seen the federal government try to initiate a dialogue or even send a message to the protesters.

Of course, the situation has deteriorated. I have already spoken about that. Some demands are incoherent, while others are more legitimate. There is a collective sense of frustration, and that is what people want to tell us. I do not think it is going to help the situation if the government does not say anything back or if it just tells the protesters to stop complaining and go get vaccinated. That is not what is going to get truckers to get back in their cabs tomorrow morning and leave Parliament Hill.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her sincere desire to find a solution and work together. I am upset with the Liberals' lines of questioning, which are adversarial.

We know the Prime Minister, instead of coming out to end the vaccine mandates, as the member said, was name-calling and demonizing and dehumanizing these Canadians. He has infringed on their charter rights and freedoms. In order to continue that, he needs to show it is demonstrably justified.

Today the CDC recognizes natural immunity. The WHO scientists recommend dropping mobility restrictions. Johns Hopkins says that restrictions and lockdowns do not work. Dr. Fauci and The Lancet say that both vaccinated and unvaccinated people have transmitted the virus equally since the delta variant. The science says we could come out with a plan to stop the restrictions and get back to normal.

Would the member support the opposition leaders and the government getting together to let these demonstrators know there is a plan, there is a solution and there is an end? Let us end this together.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

That is basically what the Bloc Québécois has been proposing from the start: to create a crisis task force for stakeholders directly involved on the ground. Of course, we are open to the government discussing this with the opposition parties because we have some ideas.

We are all fed up with the public health measures, but most of the measures that my colleague was talking about were put in the place by the provinces and Quebec. The federal government cannot remove lockdown restrictions it did not impose.

There are certainly discussions to be had. I agree with my colleague that everyone wants to know what is going to happen next and whether there is a plan. We understand that it is difficult for the government to know what the future holds. Will there be a new variant? Will the population be sufficiently protected?

However, we should have a plan to follow, like the Government of Quebec, which has a step-by-step reopening plan. If the federal government had a similar plan for the measures it is responsible for, that might make everyone feel better.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to me it looks like this crisis has everyone going around in circles.

People are going around in circles because, on the one hand, we have a government that has decided not to govern, not to assume its responsibilities, and now it is getting too late. On the other hand, we have an official opposition, the Conservatives, that has suddenly abandoned its traditional passion for law and order. Parking a 53-foot tractor trailer in the middle of the road is illegal.

Can my colleague tell me if maybe the desire for short-term political gain is exacerbating this conflict?

● (2020)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question.

Yes, unfortunately a lot of people and organizations will exploit all this to achieve political gains and connect with a base they lost touch with early on, because everyone has had it up to here. We are all fed up, but one segment of the population likes to be more vocal about it than others.

I am looking forward to all elected representatives working together, setting an example and calling for unity and solidarity so we can get through this crisis.

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Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to start by saying that I am quite pleased to rise to speak on the situation we are discussing this evening. Unfortunately, that is not the case. I would have preferred it if we did not have to do this at all. However, it is necessary.

I will not go back over everything that has happened or the many regrettable incidents caused by the ongoing occupation, as my colleague has done that brilliantly. Instead, I want to focus on the less emotional elements, such as the missed opportunities and the fact that the situation has been allowed to escalate.

There are parties in the House that inherently have to disagree with one another. That is part of politics. However, we have lost sight of the fact that, despite this, we are probably all closer to a common position than we are at odds. This is unfortunately what is happening with the current situation. We have been polarized because of the circumstances.

In fact, the worst part is not that we lost control of the situation, but rather that the situation took control of us. We allowed ourselves to become polarized rather than having an intelligent conversation about what to do next and how to get through it. We have become so polarized that we have even somehow managed to forget how disgusted we all are collectively with COVID-19. We ended up ignoring that part.

From the beginning, those who criticized the more radical forms of protest were almost accused of rejoicing in the misfortunes of others. They were told that they were against the protesters, so they must be in favour of closing restaurants and perfectly fine with people losing their jobs. That is not how anyone feels, of course, and yet that is the discourse that has taken hold. We have even heard that anyone opposed to people protesting in the street must be against freedom of speech. Having taken part in a number of protests in my youth, which was not all that long ago, I can guarantee that that is not the case for me.

The problem is that the Prime Minister missed a chance to prevent the situation from getting to that point. By virtue of his role as leader, he should have helped de-escalate the situation, but that is not what he did. It started when he called some individuals racist or extremist. He indirectly undermined those who were much more moderate by tarring them with the same brush. The result was that the people who were inclined to be more measured may not have wanted to personally condemn some others who were protesting with them.

This therefore contributed to a certain polarization, which ultimately served no one. Consequently, people were no longer open to discussing the issues, although many had been ready to do so. I am thinking of certain groups of people. The first group consists of our friends, our neighbours, our family, and here I am using “our” to refer to all MPs.

These people were speaking to us. Unless we live under a rock, we could all see that something was happening. These people, our friends and neighbours were telling us on their own that they had taken their daughter to watch the trucks from the overpass, that it was good to see people mobilizing because they were really sick and tired of COVID-19. When we take the time to speak to these

people, we realize that we were on the same wavelength on some points.

Many people were willing to have their say peacefully. However, the government let the situation drag on and the Ottawa gathering became a sort of manifestation of our collective frustration, taken over by ill-intentioned people who told themselves that they had the support of almost two-thirds of the population. The message was thus hijacked.

When we speak to these people, friends, neighbours and families, and we tell them that, from the beginning of the protest some individuals were calling for parliamentarians to be doxed so that people could harass them, they respond that that is not okay and it is not the right way to go about it, even though they are tired of lockdowns and lots of other things. They say they want to talk.

● (2025)

As soon as we took the time to talk to these people we could see that we were closer than not, in terms of what they were looking for and what they were thinking.

Some protesters showed up in their cars or on foot, and we were able to talk with them, which is something that I did. Sometime around day three of the protest I was waiting to charge my car behind another car with a Quebec flag. Since Saint-Jean-Baptiste is still a ways away, I figured that they must be protesters. I asked them how much longer they would be so I could find another place to charge if necessary.

They told me that it would only take about 10 more minutes and then asked me if I was there for the protest. I simply told them that, no, I was an MP and I worked on the Hill. We started talking. It went well because they were open to discussion. We talked about a number of issues, for example, the reason why they were there. They were there to speak out against the fact that truckers had to be vaccinated to cross the border. I asked them whether they were aware that it worked both ways because the United States imposed a vaccine mandate on truckers too, and they replied that they did not know that.

I asked them what they thought about the fact that the occupation was resulting in lost income for the very restaurant owners they were advocating for by asking for public health measures to be lifted, and they said they had not thought about that. In the end, we talked for a lot longer than it took to charge the vehicle because our conversation was quite interesting. We parted ways by wishing each other a good evening and thanking each other for the discussion.

Unfortunately, the fact that the Prime Minister cut the lines of communication was a missed opportunity to tell parliamentarians to take the time to talk to these people who might think the same way they do.

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The third group of people who have been robbed of the opportunity to speak intelligently because the situation was allowed to get so toxic is us. We let ourselves get so polarized that we had to wonder if intelligent discussion was even a possibility anymore. We got so polarized that we ended up feeling obligated to state whether we were for or against the occupiers. That did not happen in Quebec City. There was a protest there on the weekend. Everyone clearly thought it was fine. Nothing got out of control. Nobody felt obligated to take sides because it was all very civilized.

We got to the point where some were accusing people of condoning racist, violent acts, and others were saying that anyone against the protest was against freedom of expression, even though that is not what is at issue at all.

We got so caught up in what was happening here on the Hill that we lost sight of the fact that, had we chosen to waive vaccine patents, for example, we might not be where we are now because the virus would not have mutated. We are hardly even talking about all the frontline hospital workers taking care of the sick. That is the issue. We are in lockdown because hospitals are maxed out and we have to minimize our contacts to reduce the number of infections as much as possible. Ultimately, that is all that matters. We have lost sight of the fact that none of this would have happened had the federal government not decreased health care funding in the past. Lockdowns are a direct consequence of underfunding.

I think it is sad that we have reached this point today because we missed an opportunity to have an intelligent conversation about how to find a way out of this. We have become polarized. I hope tonight's debate will serve as a bit of an olive branch extended amongst all parliamentarians so we can remember why we are here, the end goal that everyone aspires to, namely the end of this pandemic.

• (2030)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Saint-Jean for her intervention today. I certainly learned a lot from what she had to say. I really appreciated the personal account she shared about interacting with some of the protesters. I think she makes a really good point, quite frankly, and I think I can learn something from it, such as the fact that there are many different people out there with many different objectives and motivations. Indeed, the member is absolutely right that there are people who have come to this protest quite innocently. I myself have seen families out there walking the streets. It is important to recognize that, and I thank her for that.

The problem for me was when I went to the drugstore and saw somebody confront the store clerk and put a camera in the clerk's face, saying, "You can't force me to wear a mask in here. I have rights", and blah-blah. Where do we draw the line? How do we figure out how to appease the people who are legitimately not trying to create problems versus those who are overtly trying to do that? I wonder if the member could share her thoughts on that.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands for his question.

People have done certain things, as he described. We have seen it happen from the beginning of the crisis. However, people have been doing these things individually, and they are often called out by others around them or shamed on social media.

The problem is that we let these people join forces. They have assumed the mantle of legitimacy because other, more measured people have joined them, and we have allowed this hot mess to fester. That is the difference.

If the occupation had been brought under control sooner, we might still be dealing with isolated acts, but they would be much easier to denounce than something so organized, which has managed to garner some sympathy because it is so vaguely defined. Instead, we let it define itself.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I will just give a reminder to members to keep their questions and answers short so that we can give everybody an opportunity.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. She provided some interesting angles and perspectives, but I would like to come back to something that was said earlier by her colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

She said that the Liberals were hiding behind jurisdiction to explain their lack of responsibility and leadership. She even mentioned that since this is happening in Ottawa, they say that it is up to the Ottawa police and the mayor of Ottawa to manage the situation, that their hands are tied because this does not fall under their jurisdiction.

I would like to know whether she agrees with her Bloc Québécois colleague that in times of crisis, jurisdictions are important, but they are not a reason to not take action.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, nor should they be a reason to encroach on the jurisdictions of others. I imagine that is what my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie was hoping I would say, but I would certainly not say that to him.

However, they do not prevent collaboration and that is what we have wanted from the start.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague who spoke extremely well this evening and did a good job describing both sides of the situation.

This is unfortunate, but at the same time, we are happy. There are many people watching CPAC this evening. Since I started my speech, my Twitter account has blown up with hateful messages.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about the fact that people are using this situation to be divisive and insulting. It is truly deplorable. Personally, I can hardly believe it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Jean has 32 seconds to respond.

• (2035)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I will be quick.

I obviously do find this deplorable, and I too can see my phone blowing up out of the corner of my eye. It is unfortunate, because we probably would not have reached this point if the situation had been brought under control quickly.

I am guessing the members of the Quebec National Assembly did not receive as many hateful messages after last weekend's protest, since the protest was not as polarizing and was much more cordial.

As I pointed out, we have more in common with the protesters than not. We have let this protest polarize us.

[English]

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on this very important issue in this very important debate. As members know, I represent the riding of Ottawa Centre. The House of Commons, where most members are sitting as I sit in my home, is located in Ottawa Centre.

What we are seeing outside and what we have been talking about for the last 11 days is happening right in the heart of my community. Although Parliament Hill is located in downtown Ottawa, many people forget, and perhaps these occupiers have forgotten, that a block in all directions from Parliament Hill are residences. There are people who call downtown their home. There are seniors, people with disabilities, young people and families who live in downtown Ottawa.

I am now really at a loss for words for how I can describe what my community is going through, so I thought I would start my remarks today by reading to members a few of the emails I have been receiving, just to give people a glimpse of the pain and agony people have been going through over the last 11 days.

I could spend a full 20 minutes reading emails because there are so many, but I do want to talk a bit about solutions in my remarks.

The first email reads, "I am one of the Ottawa residents in your riding. I feel the need to raise my concerns with you so you may escalate them through the appropriate channels. The members of the convoy who are occupying the city have been causing damage and mayhem across downtown, and I strongly disagree with the police action, or rather the inaction of the police, up to this point.

"These people from the convoy have stolen from homeless shelters, vandalized and damaged houses and businesses that display pride flags, assaulted and harassed residents for wearing masks during the pandemic, desecrated our memorials, launched illegal fireworks, and most recently have been caught attempting to set an apartment building on fire while taping the doors closed."

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These are just some of the inexcusable actions that these people have done to our city and to the residents of our city.

The second email reads, "I have been a resident of Ottawa for over 40 years. Never before have I seen such prolonged, aggressive and unlawful behaviour in our community. Constant truck horns blaring, diesel fumes, engines revving and shouting at all hours have become insufferable. I am horrified by the racist and anti-Semitic symbols I have recently seen in my neighbourhood, which are unacceptable and have no place in Canada."

The third email reads, "It should be well understood two years into this pandemic that disabled folks are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19. We fall into many groups. There are those like me who are vaccinated but who face a higher risk of adverse outcomes should we get infected. Others are immunocompromised and get less protection from the vaccine and will be less able to fight off an infection. Others still are medically ineligible for a vaccine.

"Public health measures requiring mask wearing and vaccine passports have kept the disabled community safe. They are our first line of defence. Disabled Ottawans have been placed at serious risk over the past 10 days, given the flagrant disregard for mask wearing and vaccine passports by occupiers.

"Places like the Rideau Centre as well as small businesses have closed because they were unable to keep customers and their employees safe."

• (2040)

The fourth email reads, "We are constituents of Ottawa Centre and fortunately live in the Glebe. Our daughter, however, is in Centretown. She was first impacted by the current crisis when, a week ago last Friday, she was trying to do an online presentation from home with a background of air horns. She moved in with us nine days ago. Others have not been so lucky and have had to remain confined to their homes in the red zone. On one of our daughter's visits to check on her home, all she could smell on the first two floors was diesel fuel. Imagine trying to take care of kids in this situation. One of our daughter's neighbours has downloaded an app that measures decibels. Sixty-six is the maximum before hearing begins to be impaired. The neighbour's app was reading 72 inside her home."

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The fifth email reads, “I feel unsafe buying groceries as people are in the store without wearing masks and behaving aggressively. Like many other businesses, Massine's Independent Grocer on Bank Street is dealing with the protest noise and aggression from the public, as well as possible increased exposure to COVID-19 omicron from those not wearing masks while taking on the costs of hiring extra security. I feel bad for the cashiers and security staff who have remained patient and calm under these dire conditions. I am exhausted. While the last 23 months of the pandemic have certainly been challenging, working from home during the week with all the noise from the protest has become aggravating, while not being able to enjoy a short walk or a quiet afternoon indoors over the last two weekends has truly become depressing.”

I could go on. I could read five, 10, 15, 20 or 100 more emails from people pleading for peace. These are people who are peace-loving, people who understand that we live in the nation's capital and that peaceful protest is part of our democracy, but not something of this nature, not something that is nothing short of an occupation, not something that is unlawful and definitely not peaceful.

What people in my community have been asking is whether people have forgotten that we are still living through a global pandemic. In fact we are still going through a fifth wave with restrictions around us to ensure that we do not get ill and that we do not overburden our health care system and our health care workers. Sometimes I wonder, when I hear some of the debate and the arguments in the House, especially coming from the official opposition, if the COVID-19 pandemic even happened, if maybe somehow things are normal and we all just decided to change the rules.

We have all gone through a very difficult time. It has not been easy for any one of us, especially those who are vulnerable or marginalized. We need to have a conversation around what lies ahead, about how we end this pandemic, how we get to a place where it becomes an endemic and how our lives would be impacted by that. However, that debate does not take place in the form that is happening right now outside the House of Commons. That is not a debate. That is just holding a community hostage. That is not how to engage in a meaningful or respectful conversation.

I am not interested in speaking with somebody who waves a swastika or a Confederate flag. I have members of racialized and Jewish communities in my riding who are, and I have used this word before, rattled. They are scared. They are retraumatized. They are victimized. None of us believes we are actually seeing those images in our hometown, our nation's capital.

I urge all members of the House, all respectable good people with the right motivation to serve their communities to build a better country, to please come together and ask these occupiers to leave my community alone and restore peace to my community. If they want to engage in a conversation, then have a conversation, but we cannot have a conversation when a whole set of neighbourhoods have been held hostage over the last 11 days.

● (2045)

This protest, this occupation, this civil unrest, has to come to an end. It has to come to an end for the sake of the people who live in this community and for the businesses who have suffered so much, who were looking forward to opening on January 31 when the

provincial lockdown measures were being lifted. They are unable to do any business. They are closed. Have we thought about the impact on them and their families? How are they going to make ends meet?

I am grateful to my colleagues, ministers and the member for Ottawa—Vanier, who is also the President of the Treasury Board, who are working closely with me so that we can find ways to support our businesses, which have now had a double hit to them as a result of this occupation.

In my limited time, I want to focus on what we can do. How can we get out of this? I am already pleading for us to all to work together, to speak with one voice, to be the rational people that we are, to ask these occupiers to please leave and then engage in a process where they work with their elected representatives, or where they perhaps run for office themselves if they feel so strongly that we need better laws and better policies. In a democratic society, that is what we do.

In the moment we are living right now, we need to make sure this occupation ends. One of the ways we can do this is by ensuring that the laws are being enforced. The Ottawa police have been working hard and they are responsible for providing the safety and security of the residents of Ottawa. That is their job. By law, that is what they are required to do and it is important for them to enforce the law.

Municipal laws, provincial laws and federal laws, all three of them have been broken. I am a lawyer by profession. I have been the former attorney general of Ontario. I can give an entire list of laws that have not been followed. We need to make sure that enforcement is there. If resources are needed, as have been requested, as the federal government has been providing since day one, we will continue to provide them.

I have been involved in this from the moment the protest started. I have been working with the Minister of Public Safety, working with the Minister of Emergency Preparedness, including the Prime Minister, who has been engaged, who has taken the time to speak with me about this issue. We have been there for the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Police Service to give them the resources they need so that the laws can be enforced.

We saw some enhanced law enforcement starting last night. I really hope that enhanced enforcement remains sustained, so that peace can be returned back to our community and we can ensure that the members of my community can go back to living the way they lived. We need to enforce the law. That is what the members of our community are asking for. We need to ensure there is a plan and that this occupation is put to an end.

There is no doubt that there are going to be conversations that are going to take place after this occupation has ended. It will come to an end. We will do as we always have, rightly so, which is to learn from incidents like these, from mistakes made, from things done well and things done not so well. We shall do so in this circumstance as well.

• (2050)

As one can imagine, as the member for Ottawa Centre, I am already starting to think about how we can do things differently, and at an appropriate time I will present ideas that we need to consider so that we can protect our democratic institutions, find ways to promote peaceful protests, as is our democratic right, but also safeguard the right of the residents of downtown Ottawa, the constituents that I am so honoured to serve, to live peacefully.

One of the ideas that I will be suggesting to members and the House is perhaps an evaluation of the parliamentary precinct. Right now we define the parliamentary precinct as Parliament Hill and some of the buildings located on Wellington Street and Sparks Street. Maybe we need to study increasing the boundary of the parliamentary precinct so that we can have better and more robust safety protocols in place. This is not to take away lawful, peaceful protests, which are critical to a democracy, but to ensure that we do not run into the kinds of circumstance we are in. I will indulge in a conversation with members, my colleagues, where we analyze and study whether the parliamentary precinct needs a bigger footprint with better protocols in place so that we can ensure that the whole of downtown is not held hostage.

I hope members have been able to see the challenge that I have, but most importantly, I hope that I have been able to channel some of the emotions of my constituents. Sometimes it is hard to express in words what my community is going through. Sometimes it is really difficult to hear the other side. I have always said that I want to listen to the other side, but not legitimize this occupation as something civil or peaceful when people are suffering. They have had a rough time over the last two years because of the pandemic and this has made their lives unbearable.

I urge all members of the House to stand together by the end of this debate and collectively ask for these people to leave. We can engage in a civil conversation. We can hear each other and agree to disagree, but this is not the way to do it. I implore and urge the protesters to please leave our community alone, to please let the people in Ottawa Centre and downtown Ottawa live peacefully.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise on behalf of the residents of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo on this important topic.

The hon. parliamentary secretary made two points that I wish to follow up on with him. They are both relatively brief.

The first is that he said we should work together. I note that the leader of the official opposition tonight sent a letter to the Prime Minister and all party leaders to work together. Based on that, would the hon. parliamentary secretary be prepared to advise the Prime Minister to do just what he said we should be doing?

The second is that the hon. parliamentary secretary said the police should be enforcing the laws. Does he view it as the Prime Minister's job to tell the police what to do in this situation?

• (2055)

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, I will address the second question first. I think the member opposite knows quite well that, in our system of democracy, politicians do not tell police officials how to enforce the law. There is a very important, significant and healthy

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distinction and differentiation between the two. I had the honour of serving as the solicitor general of Ontario. I very much know that we cannot tell the police how to operate. I would be very careful in suggesting that somehow the Prime Minister should tell the Ottawa Police Service, or any police service for that matter, how it should apply the law.

As for working together, of course we should work together and I look forward to reading the letter, but I think the member opposite should also listen to the medical experts as to why it is important that people get vaccinated and put an end to this pandemic.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his engaging and moving speech and appreciated the focus on his constituents. We cannot help but empathize. Mr. Speaker, if you had not told me, I would never have guessed that my colleague was a member of the party in power.

I started counting the number of concrete solutions he proposed, but I did not get past zero. Where is the crisis table with the police forces, as suggested by former justice minister Allan Rock? It does not exist. Where is the transparency? Where is the daily press conference with the Minister of Public Safety? The minister has not held a single one.

The Liberals need to understand that Quebeckers and Canadians gave them a minority mandate in the last election. The Liberals need to stop speaking and listening to themselves and start listening to solutions.

[English]

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite is trying to say that somehow this is a political problem. We are living through a pandemic. We have a health care challenge at the moment. This is a global pandemic. Canada is not alone in fighting this pandemic. This is happening across the world. I do not understand the suggestion that the way to deal with the protests outside is to hold daily press conferences. How will that put an end to this crisis?

What is needed is to ensure that the laws that we have created, which we are all part of, are properly enforced. If somebody breaks the law, then they should face the consequences. That is what is required in Ottawa at this moment. I am on the ground. I am out there trying to find solutions. We need to make sure the laws are enforced. This is an unlawful protest that needs to end.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I talk to constituents, they are tired, frustrated and disheartened that we are still in this pandemic, but the vast majority of them are following public health guidelines. They are tired and fed up with people who refuse to wear masks, who refuse to follow public health orders and who are putting others at risk.

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People in Ottawa, as the member mentioned, are beyond tired and fed up. They are experiencing harassment and assault, and witnessing anti-Semitic and fascist symbols. Women are being threatened with rape, and residents from racialized and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities are having discriminatory slurs hurled at them. Canadians are also concerned at hearing reports of an attempted arson in the lobby of a residential apartment building. It is terrifying.

Does the member agree that it should not have taken this long for the Prime Minister to start talking to municipal and provincial governments? The convoy organizers were clear about their intent. They were allowed to do exactly what they said they would do. Does the member understand why Ottawa residents are tired and fed up with the Liberal government?

• (2100)

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member on the point that Canadians have made a lot of sacrifices. They are following the public health guidelines. They are getting vaccinated. They are wearing masks. They are socially distancing themselves. It is amazing. I have two young children. It is amazing to see the kinds of habits our kids have developed. They are good habits for good hygiene, as a result of this pandemic. A lot has been done.

I also want to assure the member that, since the beginning of this crisis, the Prime Minister has been fully engaged. I have had conversations with him. He is being briefed, but the Prime Minister, as the head of government, has no power to tell police how to deal with the situation.

Our law is absolutely clear, nor do we want in our system of democracy to have politicians telling police what laws they should be enforcing and how. It is our job to create the law and the role of the independent police is to enforce the law. In fact, an independent judiciary should arbitrate whether the application of the law is correct or not. I can assure all members that the Prime Minister has been engaged. The Prime Minister is fully informed, briefed and making sure that this crisis is over as quickly as possible.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to tell the member for Ottawa Centre that my heart is breaking for him and for his constituents. It is hard to imagine taking what is happening here in Ottawa and putting it in Halifax, a city that I love as much as he loves his city, and seeing this terrorizing of neighbourhoods, damage to property and the illegality going on. It just must be so incredibly heartbreaking, and so many of our hearts go out to them now.

The member is in a very unique position, being the member of Parliament for the most directly impacted part of the city, but also as a former attorney general for the Province of Ontario. He alluded to some of the proposals for changes that he will be bringing forward in due course. I would love if he could bring us a sneak preview on the flavour of some of those.

He mentioned changes to the parliamentary precinct, including the elimination of vehicles on Wellington Street and the pedestrianization of that street, which would be a remarkable innovation. He mentioned changes to the operating procedures of this House to better manage some of the activities of members. I would be very interested to hear that.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is right. I, along with the member for Ottawa—Vanier, am in the heart of this crisis. As I mentioned, the community's suffering is unbearable. I am starting to run out of words to explain it.

That is why, as soon as this crisis is over, we need to start engaging and thinking about the future. We need to think of how to prevent things like that by ensuring that we create an environment where we have peaceful protests, which are, I want to stress, a democratic right.

One of the interesting things about Ottawa, as everybody can imagine, are the multiple jurisdictions. We have the Parliament of Canada, which is the Government of Canada, and then we have municipal services too. From street to street, jurisdictions can change. A park is owned by one federal entity and a street next to it is a provincial or a municipal street. What we need to look at are the boundaries of the parliamentary precinct so we can perhaps better coordinate.

The member just said something that has been a deep desire of mine. We need to look at finding ways to convert Wellington Street to a more pedestrian street, to beautify it and make it green, so more people can enjoy the beauty of Parliament Hill as opposed to being able to drive their cars along it, and perhaps even occupy it, as we have seen in this instance.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Canadians have the right to protest. Protest has long been part of our democracy. It is so important that we enshrined it in the Constitution, in the four fundamental freedoms enumerated in section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

All Canadians have the fundamental freedoms of conscience and religion, free speech and expression, association, and peaceful assembly. The freedom to protest in the public square, whether on a sidewalk, in front of a legislature or in a public park, is a fundamental freedom. If Canadians want to, individually or in groups, protest by walking up and down Wellington Street or by standing around the centennial flame in front of Parliament, they are free to do so.

Millions of Canadians over many decades have exercised this fundamental freedom, but what Canadians do not have the right to do is to blockade. There is no right to blockade. There is no right to blockade a street. There is no right to blockade a highway. There is no right to blockade an international border crossing. There is no right to blockade the construction of a new pipeline, nor is there a right to blockade a rail line. There is simply no right to blockade.

Canadians do not have the right to harm other people or to interfere with the freedoms of their fellow citizens. While freedoms are fundamental, they are not unlimited. Freedoms are limited by what harm they do to other people, and freedoms are limited by how they interfere with other people's freedoms.

We are a nation rent asunder: west against east; rural against urban; the unvaccinated against the vaccinated. We are a nation divided because of a lack of leadership, leadership that begins at the top. The Prime Minister needs to reflect on the language and rhetoric he has used over the past six months, which has so divided this country.

He has used rhetoric that has referred to over three million unvaccinated Canadians in disparaging terms, rhetoric that suggests that those who disagree with him are not Canadian. This rhetoric has poured rhetorical fuel on the fires of division that are pitting one Canadian against another: friends against friends; family members against family members; the unvaccinated against the vaccinated; those in favour of mandates against those opposed; and those calling for an end to restrictions against those in favour of restrictions.

While many have fanned the flames of division in this country, they are not the head of government. They are not the prime minister of a G7 country. The Prime Minister's rhetoric in the last six months is unbecoming the high office of this land that he holds. Instead of bridging divides and reducing tensions and lowering the temperature, he has demonized the other.

It is time for the protesters to end the blockade in Ottawa and the blockade at the border crossing in western Canada. It is time for the protesters to go home to their families and their communities. We have heard their concerns. We have met with some of them, and it is now time for them to go home. Their concerns have been heard loud and clear. No doubt, in the coming weeks, their concerns will be debated here on the floor of this democratically elected legislature.

Canada is a country founded on the trinity of a belief in freedom, democracy and the rule of law. In a free and democratic society, the rule of law must be upheld. In this case, the governments in this country have delegated the enforcement of the law against blockades to the police. I encourage the protesters blockading here in Ottawa and at our international border crossing to follow the direction of the police.

● (2105)

In a democracy, only the state is authorized to use force, including lethal force, to uphold these fundamental freedoms that we enjoy and to uphold the rule of law. We have delegated this use of force to law enforcement. In our democracy, citizens are not entitled to use force. As citizens, we settle our differences through the ballot box or through the court system. We do not settle them through force.

We all bear responsibility for the current divisions in this country. We all have a responsibility to reflect on how we got here. I grieve for my country. Instead of peace, order and good government, we have chaos, disorder and poor government. While many democracies are under pressure, both from domestic and foreign forces, Canada has been particularly buffeted by an inability to respond.

The pandemic has laid bare the state of our institutions, and they are weak and ineffective. For most of the last year, we did not have a Governor General because of scandal. Eight of the most senior

members of the Canadian military were forced out in scandal. The former clerk of the Privy Council resigned in scandal.

We have a military procurement system that cannot procure, and we have payroll systems that cannot pay. We have a Parliament that cannot do its job, because the government defied four orders of the House and its committee for the production of documents.

We have a debates commission that, in the last two elections, ran what are almost universally acclaimed as the two worst sets of election debates since election debates were first held in this country, in 1968. The People's Republic of China interfered in the last federal election and spread disinformation through proxies, leading to the defeat of several candidates, and nothing has been done.

We have some of the highest levels of household indebtedness in the world, and governments in this country are not far behind. Less than two years ago, some provinces in this federation had trouble raising cash on debt capital markets to pay police officers and nurses, and the federal government had to step in to bail them out. We have the second-worst health care system among leading economies of the OECD, according to the Commonwealth Fund.

Greenhouse gases have continued to rise each and every year that the current government has been in power to a record high level in 2019, the last year for which we have data. In the early months of this year, it looks like we will once again break through records with record-high levels of emissions. We have not met our NATO commitments in decades, and now Russia is about to invade a democracy in eastern Europe. Now, we have a national capital in paralysis and the seizure of an international border crossing, which is the hallmark of a sovereign state.

We have gotten to this place because we have not been serious. We have not been serious about the rule of law. We have not been serious about ensuring our democratic institutions reflect the diversity of views in this country. We have not been serious about domestic policy. We have not been serious about foreign policy. It is time we got serious.

● (2110)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member a question relating to vaccine mandates. Given the fact that rates of hospitalization continue to be a challenge in Canada, how does the member feel about vaccine mandates?

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Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we should encourage all Canadians to get vaccinated. Vaccines are a miracle of modern medicine. They are safe and effective, and they are a critical tool for emerging out of this pandemic. We should encourage Canadians to get vaccinated through nudges and encouragement, not by demonizing them and singling them out. I think that is the leadership we need from the current government as we go forward to emerge from this pandemic.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to go back to the first part of my colleague's speech.

I, too, support the right to protest and freedom. However, people who believe freedom means financing illegal activities with foreign money, throwing rocks at an ambulance, preventing a child from receiving cancer treatment, setting off fireworks in densely populated areas, or setting fire to the home of someone who has filed a noise complaint, those people are not defenders of freedom, and they are not democrats.

I am very pleased to hear my colleague recognize that tyranny occurs when certain people believe that their freedom has no limits, and that their freedom is unlimited. I hope that everyone in this House recognizes this, because it is the first step to resolving the crisis we are currently dealing with.

• (2115)

[English]

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question and comment.

[Translation]

I believe that it is very important for everyone to obey the law. This responsibility is incumbent upon all citizens of Canada, because all Canadians are subject to the law. The police are responsible for enforcing the law. If someone does not obey the law, the provincial and federal governments also have the authority to make people obey the law. That is a hallmark of our democracy.

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, listening to my colleague, I cannot help but think of a quote by Desmond Tutu. He said, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." Can the member explain how he can stand by silently, ignoring citizens who are being harassed and assaulted in their communities?

How can he stand silently while displays of racism and anti-Semitism are waved in the streets of Ottawa, paralyzing a community with hate and fear? Can the member share when he will begin standing up for those who are oppressed and experiencing hate and racism?

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, quite simply, I believe that the blockades are illegal. I believe that the blockades here in Ottawa and at the international border crossing in Coutts, Alberta, are illegal. I believe that it is up to law enforcement to uphold the law and ensure that these blockades are taken down at a time and choosing of law enforcement.

Governments and cabinets in this country do not direct law enforcement as to their actions. We empower them with delegated authorities to enforce the law. Whether it is arson, harassment or violence, we have to ensure that law enforcement has the tools and resources necessary to do the job. I have confidence in the premier of the Province of Ontario. I have confidence that the law enforcement agencies and the institutions of the federal government will do their jobs and put an end to this crisis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak to the House tonight about the ongoing convoy protest movement that is happening across the country, as well as about the federal mandates that have spawned this response.

Let me say at the outset that when people have disagreements about important public issues, I think it is so important that they take the time to talk to each other and try to understand each other's perspectives. If there is a particular challenge in doing that in Canada, it is because we are such a vast country. People in different regions with different kinds of experiences or perspectives that are informed by their region may have a harder time engaging in that dialogue with people who live very far away. This may be further challenged by the fact that we are a bilingual country, so sometimes it is harder to have those conversations across those experiential, regional or linguistic divides.

However, there is something about this convoy movement that has suddenly shrunk those geographic divisions, because people have come from all across the country to be in Ottawa to express the significant concerns they have. Members of Parliament now have an opportunity to go out and talk to some of the people who are here, ask them why they are here, look at what signs and symbols they are waving or not waving and take that opportunity to engage in that dialogue. What is incredible to me is that, by all indications, there are many members of Parliament who will participate in this debate tonight who do not seem to have taken the opportunity to look around, to try to talk to people and try to understand.

I would challenge any member who has not done it to go outside, tonight or tomorrow, and ask the people right in front of this building what their experiences are. Did they lose a job? Did they have family that lost a job, or did they lose a business? Was someone they care about affected by this in some way, or do they know someone who has experienced suicidal ideation for the first time because of lost opportunity or social isolation that came about as a result of the pandemic? What are the experiences in their lives that have led them to come and take this fairly drastic step?

There are many people I know here who are protesting for the very first time, so let us try to understand and ask those questions.

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I got the call at about 6:45 from Sebastien in our lobby, who does great work for us on the Conservative side, telling me that I would have an opportunity to speak tonight, so I was thinking through what I would do to prepare. Usually I sit in my office, look things up and work in front of my computer, but instead I decided to go out and talk to people. I had done a bit of this before, but I tried to be intentional about asking people what had brought them here and what things they were maybe seeing reflected in the conversation that were not represented or were represented. I think, again, it is important for us as members of Parliament to take that opportunity to try to understand, and many people told me they came here because they were deeply concerned about mandate policies.

They believe in the core principle of individual autonomy, and in individuals' ability to make choices about their own health without being threatened with job loss as a result of it. I think it is objectively the case that Canada's approach, when it comes to vaccine mandates, is far more draconian than many other countries around the world. For instance, countries in Europe have an alternative that is based on natural immunity, yet Canada does not seem to recognize that. It is interesting for me, because we could say, "This is the science. We are not including natural immunity because it is the science." However, it is the same science in Europe, or it should be. It is the same virus, so these are legitimate questions.

Why do we not have the option to consider natural immunity and rapid tests that would allow people leeway, especially truckers who are working alone and public servants who are working from home? Why are there not reasonable accommodations, when an individual wants to exercise autonomy over themselves and their own bodies? I think those are reasonable questions.

I had a lot of conversations with different people when I was out talking with the people who were there. I met a young man who actually voted NDP in the last election. I do not know if he will again after some of the things that have been said. I talked to people a bit about some of the questions raised in the media about hateful symbols, because we have certainly seen some of those photos.

I was told that in the very small number of instances where people put forward symbols of hate, they were actively told by other protesters to put them away, that they did not want to see those here and that they were not representative of what they were doing. Objectively, if someone walks up and down Wellington Street, what they will see is people waving Canadian flags and people with various signs expressing messages about mandates.

I will tell members that my grandmother was a Holocaust survivor, so I think, particularly for my family, the fact that one person or maybe two people were walking around with swastikas is incredibly offensive, and obviously that strikes something in me that is different from other members who do not have that same family experience.

• (2120)

The reality is that these individuals were told to leave by other protesters. They were told that they were not welcomed there and that their message was not the message that other people were trying to present.

I spoke with a young man who was at the protest who told me he was gay. He told me that he brought a pride flag with him, and he was not bothered by anyone. Nobody had a critical comment about that. I spoke with many people, including visible minorities and a number of Jewish gentlemen who had come from Montreal to see the protest. There is this representation in the media and in the comments of other members that this is just a sea of people waving Confederate flags or something, and that is not happening. Whatever side one is on, that is objectively not what is happening.

Let us start by looking around and listening to the objective facts on the ground and try to understand what the source of the concerns are. Maybe we could recognize the people who have lost their jobs, who are being told they cannot work alone by themselves in their truck, who cannot work from home as a public servant, who cannot travel in the context of a family emergency or whatever the case may be, who are affected by these mandates and who are prepared to take other precautions, like get a rapid test. They may have a point. I think they do have a point. I agree with them in saying that these federal mandates should end. We should end the federal mandates not because of the protests, but because it is the right thing to do. The federal mandates simply do not make sense as policies when it comes to vaccination.

We talked about the impacts that these vaccinations have had on other people, and our party has consistently taken a very reasonable approach in saying that employers should take appropriate measures to secure the safety of their workplaces. If those in the public service, for example, choose to exercise their autonomy not to get vaccinated, they should take a rapid test if they are coming into the office. A lot of people are still working from home, but testing is a good alternative. In fact, we know there are many breakthrough infections even for those who are vaccinated, so getting regular rapid tests is a pretty good idea. I think it would be reasonable under the circumstances of the omicron variant, for example, to say that rather than having a vaccine mandate for air travel, everybody simply has a rapid test before they fly.

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Now, we have had problems with the availability of rapid tests, because the government only discovered rapid tests, it seems, about two years into this process. Now it wants to be congratulated for procuring rapid tests two years later. Two years from now we will be having better ventilation in schools. Well, folks, it is just too late. We should have been talking about rapid tests right out of the gate and deploying a system of widely available rapid tests before the vaccine was even available. Then we would be ahead. We could be where other countries are. Many other countries and many other jurisdictions around the world are now lifting their restrictions completely, yet the government is continually talking about ways to further tighten mandates, to further squeeze the very small portion of the population that is not vaccinated.

The fact is, the vast majority of Canadians have been vaccinated. For the small minority who have chosen not to get vaccinated, I think it is fair to assume at this point that they will probably not get vaccinated. At this point, it is time to say that with the reality of COVID, which is going to be with us, most people are going to choose to get vaccinated but some people are going to choose not to. We believe in this principle of individual freedom of autonomy, and we cannot function very well as a country if the government continually wants to fire and otherwise penalize people who exercise their autonomy. I would say that it is time to lift the mandates and it is time to work toward getting back to normal.

Of course, we can continue to take appropriate precautions in response to events that come up, but the level of restrictions on individual freedom and the level of coercion are not something that I think any of us would have thought possible in this country two years ago. These were supposed to be temporary measures, and now it very clearly is time to move on. It is time to look to the future, because continually finding new ways to squeeze that small minority of the population that is not vaccinated is not going to change anything. It is not going to move us forward and it is not going to allow us to get out of this.

• (2125)

People who have never protested before are coming here to say that they want to be able to work. They do not want to be fired from their job for exercising personal autonomy. They do not want to be seeing empty grocery store shelves. They do not want long delays to access immigration services because people are being laid off because of these mandates. Let us end the mandates because it is the right thing to do.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in debate, obviously we exchange points of view. Here is a point of view I want to quote. It reads as follows: "I spent the week undergoing the Siege of Ottawa.... I ask that we clear the streets and that we stop this occupation controlled by radicals and anarchist groups." Those are the words of the Conservative Party's previous shadow critic for public safety, a member of the House.

Does the member opposite agree with his colleague or not?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I think I made my views very clear in my speech. This member should take the opportunity to go out and engage in dialogue, and try to come to an understanding of what the significant concerns here are.

What I really focused on in my remarks is the fact that we should be ending mandates and ending the continual squeezing of that minority who have chosen not to get vaccinated and all the impact that is having on access to services. We are seeing significant backlogs in immigration services in our offices and backlogs in accessing other services. When we put people who are working from home on unpaid leave and do not allow them to provide the services they have been providing, we cannot pretend that is not going to have an impact. When we take trucks providing essential services off the roads, that is going to have an impact. These mandates are having a severe impact on vaccinated and unvaccinated people alike, and they need to end.

• (2130)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things that I disagree with my colleague about, but we agree on one thing. It is important to get out and talk to our constituents.

I have talked to many of my constituents in many municipalities in my riding. Initially, these people supported the convoy enthusiastically. When I talk to them today, however, they realize that this might not have been the right solution and that breaking the law with impunity is perhaps not the way to solve problems.

Does my colleague agree with me on that at least?

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I do want to be clear. I did not mention this specifically, but I think it is critically important that people are able to protest and that we minimize the negative impact on the lives of people in this city. There should be effective dialogue, between protesters and the city, that allows necessary access and transportation to occur. I think that dialogue can take place if the Prime Minister plays a constructive role in bringing down the temperature.

This is the national capital and people should be able to protest here. There has to be a space, at the same time, for that to happen in a way that is respectful. There are many people who want to see those kinds of accommodations happen through dialogue. They can happen, but that is different from saying that people should not be allowed here and demonizing the importance of the message they are presenting.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I found the member's speech not just bizarre, but deeply concerning. First off, there was a minimization of the hate and violence we have heard of over the last number days. The member went on to talk about the people he spoke to, making it sound like it is a group of Boy Scouts.

Everybody has talked about the occupation that our nation's capital is under. It is international news. What Canadians expect is leadership from their politicians. We must call on these folks to leave and allow for these people to live their lives free of hate and the lack of safety they face. What is deeply concerning is the number of Conservatives who are insisting on shifting the conversation to talk about vaccine mandates. This debate is about calling for an end to the occupation, and also condemning the foreign money, American money, fuelled by Trump supporters, that is supporting this occupation.

Will the member condemn the use of foreign funds to fuel a hateful and violent occupation in our nation's capital?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, to hear that the member found my speech bizarre is a high compliment indeed.

The member raised the issue of foreign money. I will take this opportunity to say to the member that I would love to see a consistent approach taken by parties opposite when it comes to foreign funding and foreign influence in our democracy. Let us have that debate. Let us see that legislation come forward. I know the member could take a bit of a stronger position when it comes to the interference of the Chinese government in Canadian affairs. I would like to see that member take a stronger position when it comes to issues like the Uighur genocide and other cases of foreign interference happening here in this country.

Let us talk about addressing foreign interference. I would love to see a stronger and consistent policy on that issue.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time this evening with the member for Parkdale—High Park. Even though the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan would like me to speak for 20 minutes, unfortunately it will only be 10 minutes this evening. I note he still has not invited me on the podcast he touts so much when he is in the House. I am still waiting for my invitation. Do not worry. I am not checking my email three or four times a day looking for it or anything.

I am very glad to participate in tonight's debate and am going to take the opportunity to present some facts, because I think facts are extremely important. There is a lot of misinformation out there, and it would be beneficial to put on the record some of the facts.

It has been said once tonight, but I will expand on it slightly, that 90% of truckers have been vaccinated. I drive from Kingston to Ottawa and back to be here, and on both occasions of making that trip since this protest began, I have seen countless truckers working. They are working right now as we speak, travelling up and down the 401, or whatever major highway in the country they might happen to be on, to move goods around our country. Some 90% of truckers are vaccinated.

I believe this protest, this convoy, probably started from a place that was genuinely about truckers and the concerns they had. Unfortunately, we have seen this morph into something else as it has been hijacked by other groups. As was so well pointed out by one of my Conservative colleagues in a tweet over the weekend, whatever the objective was, it has been lost by those who have hijacked

the protest. Unfortunately, that is the reality of the situation we are in.

I heard the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan and a number of Conservatives talk about these mandates this evening. His words were that these mandates need to end. The mandates that relate to proof of vaccination and the mandates that relate to hospital workers are all provincial mandates. It is ironic that opposition members would encourage protesters in front of this building to protest something that at least in Ontario belongs in Queen's Park, but they do it anyway. As a matter of fact, the only mandate the federal government has in place says that people who cross the border into Canada, including truckers, need to show proof of vaccination. Guess what? The United States of America has the exact same mandate. Before someone has to present their proof of vaccination to a Canadian border officer on their way into Canada, they will need to show it on their way into the United States when leaving Canada. That is the irony of this.

That is the mandate the federal government has in relation to this particular protest. It is where all this angst began, and my concern is that the opposition continues to throw fuel on the fire. The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan kept saying “these mandates”. He knows full well that the mandate for truckers crossing the border applies to the U.S. just as much as it applies to Canada.

I heard someone from across the way ask why we should do it. That is the whole point of working with our G7 partners. It is the whole point of working with the United States. It is so we have fairness and equality in relation to what the rules are to move back and forth. That is what makes this work so well.

An hon. member: It's kind of like the rules for your electric car.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, the member brought up my electric car. If he wants, we can talk about that for a while too, but I am not sure why a Conservative would want to do that when we are talking about such an important debate about truckers specifically and what we are seeing out there.

• (2135)

What we are seeing are a number of people who are hijacking this protest. The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan said something earlier that I think was a really good comment. He asked why more members of Parliament are not getting out there to talk to those people. He was trying to show an open door. The problem is that this particular protest, although I have no doubt there are some well-intentioned individuals participating in it, has attracted a lot of behaviour that we all would agree is extremely problematic and extremely troubling. Quite frankly, it is behaviour that we do not accept as being Canadian. As an example—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (2140)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am having a really hard time hearing the member. The member does speak very loudly but I am having trouble hearing him. Keep it down, be respectful and we will continue on.

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The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, where I was going with this is that although there might be some well-meaning and well-intentioned individuals out there, I cannot help but remember that just the other day, when I was in the Rexall at the corner of Metcalfe and O'Connor, I saw an individual who I assume was a protester shove a camera in front of the clerk's face, saying, "You can't make me put on a mask. I have a right not to wear a mask. Who do you think you are?" They brought this fight to the people of Ottawa, to a store clerk who was just working there and doing her job. I could not help but say to the gentleman as I was leaving, "Why are you bringing this fight to her? Your fight is not with her. She is just doing her job." I trust that my Conservative colleagues and any member of this House would do the exact same thing.

That brings me to the last point that I want to bring up in relation to this particular issue.

For some reason, the protesters do not realize that the people they are affecting the most with this behaviour are the people who live in downtown Ottawa. Listen. I do not know if we should tell them this, but we cannot hear the honking in here. As a matter of fact, someone walking here early in the morning will not hear a single thing. It was the same last week too. We do not hear a single thing in here. We do not. We could almost forget what is happening until we leave, go outside, and see and hear it again.

Meanwhile, all of these activities have been going on. Then on the weekends, when the vast majority of members are not even in Ottawa, these events continue to go on and on.

It is impacting the people who live here. Most protests seek to get more people on board by delivering a message. They seek to find more supporters to come and join their cause. Most protests that come to Ottawa here on the front lawn or the Centennial Flame or Wellington Street do so in a way that is meant to develop a following on the way. Instead, this protest has come here and completely made the people who live here irate over what is going on.

I believe that it is time for this to end. I believe it is time for the protesters to recognize that they have made their point and that it is now time to dispense with the activities and go home.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will quote the Charter of Rights and Freedoms:

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

My colleague talked about the science and the availability of these mandates that the Liberal government has put in, especially infringing upon Canadians' mobility rights. The rationale for restricting Canadians' charter rights with these mobility restrictions is that vaccinated people do not spread COVID and unvaccinated people do spread COVID. That was the belief before, but the updated science spoken about by Dr. Fauci and research published in The Lancet show that vaccinated and unvaccinated persons will transmit the virus equally. The CDC recognizes natural immunity. Could the member please present the scientific rationale for continuing these mandates?

Let us get on with it. Let us solve the problem that we are faced with today.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, if the member feels as though charter rights are being infringed upon, there is a building about 200 metres from where I stand where he could argue that case. That is where he should take his issue of charter rights being infringed upon, instead of encouraging people to continue honking their horns on the street and shooting off fireworks in the middle of the night in a downtown, heavily urbanized area. He should go to the Supreme Court and fight the case there. That is how we do it in a democracy, not by occupying the downtown core of a nation's capital.

• (2145)

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague opposite's speech.

I was pleased to hear him say that some people who went to protest were well-meaning and well-intentioned. Since the beginning of this crisis, I have had quite the opposite impression, namely that the government did not want to recognize, hear or see that there were people with things to say, that people were fed up with the health measures and were finding them hard to deal with, and that some people needed to express that.

Instead, the Prime Minister said they were whiners, which added fuel to the fire. It was almost as though he wanted the situation to deteriorate so that he could demonize those opposed to the rules. I am wondering why he could not have shown some leadership in this situation.

We have a government here in Ottawa that talked a big game but failed to take action. By contrast, the Government of Quebec did not really say much but actually did something.

Did my colleague learn any lessons from that?

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed to hear a member from the Bloc Québécois suggest that we should try to open up dialogue with individuals who have been associated with people who are spreading hate, people who are waving flags with swastikas on them, people who are raiding soup kitchens to feed themselves because somehow they are entitled to that food, people who have been desecrating a war memorial statue, people who have been dressing up Terry Fox's statue. It is not one bad apple but a whole host of problems, and here we have a member from the Bloc Québécois asking why we are not sitting down and talking to these people. They are literally waving flags around that say, "F—" and the Prime Minister's name.

Come on. The member must know that there are starting points to negotiations and to sitting down with people. There are lines that can be crossed, and several lines have been crossed in that regard.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just need to revisit an important comment of my colleague from Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

There is a sinister component to this illegal occupation that involves hate, foreign money and influence in our democracy. Will the government take this seriously and address with integrity the sinister and dangerous factors these past 11 days have exposed?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I would love to find out the answers to some of the questions the member asked. I would love to see some form of investigation into where the money came from, where the activities were generated and where they started. They are very important, but I am not going to presuppose that I know the answers to those in advance, because that would just make me a conspiracy theorist, which I believe we are seeing quite a bit of from across the way.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member who just spoke said blatantly on the record tonight that members on this side are conspiracy theorists. That is a pretty significant claim. We are here representing Canadians. He is calling what we have said conspiracy theories. Can he point to one example of our being conspiracy theorists?

The Deputy Speaker: That is descending into debate.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: I am going to stand here for just a few moments until people cool down just a little. This is a long debate, and we are a little over halfway through. I know there is tremendous respect here, and we need to make sure that each person who has something to say has the opportunity to say it. Let us try to not be inflammatory or accuse people of things. Let us try our best to talk about the emotions and instances that we are hearing about.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development.

• (2150)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to participate in tonight's very important debate about a very pressing issue and a very important event that is occurring right outside this chamber and has been occurring for the last eight days or so. I want to thank the member for Burnaby South for bringing in and initiating this emergency debate.

As somebody who came to this chamber as a practising lawyer who had worked in the area of constitutional law and human rights for 15 years prior to first getting elected, let me start by saying that the right of protest in any democracy is sacrosanct. It is fundamental in any democracy. It is protected under section 2(b) of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, with good reason. The issue of speech and protected speech is at its apex when talking about political speech. That is the form of speech and it deserves the highest amount of protection. That is entrenched in Supreme Court jurisprudence.

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What is problematic, however, is when speech, demonstrations and protest veer into hatred. I do not want to overstate the case. We know that there have been some instances of hatred. Perhaps not all of the protesters are engaging in this, but it does taint and flavour and characterize what we are seeing when we see it on a repeated basis.

What have we seen? We have seen swastikas and we have seen the Confederate flag.

What do those mean? The swastika is obviously a symbol of the Third Reich. It harkens back to Nazi Germany. It is a very vilifying and detestable manifestation of what that regime represented and what it did to Jewish people, all sorts of minorities, racialized persons, religious minorities, LGBTQ2 communities and people who were Roma, etc. The Confederate flag obviously represents the institution of slavery. We heard very eloquently from the member for Hull—Aylmer how that feels for a person of Black skin, for a person who is racialized. We know how that feels for a person like me, a brown-skinned Muslim man, who takes his place in this House. Those are symbols we do not need here.

It means that what it has devolved into for the people of Ottawa, for even the people who work here in Ottawa, such as me, as we have heard repeatedly this evening, is starting to look a lot more like an occupation than a protest. When protesters destabilize people, when they disturb them intentionally and when they honk horns just to aggravate people, as the member for Kingston and the Islands indicated, the fight has been taken not to the government but to the people and the residents of this city.

That is problematic because it starts to affect people's behaviour. Perhaps that is what is intended here. Perhaps the intent is to put a chill on people's behaviour. It is problematic when a storekeeper cannot open their storefront and a cashier is worried about working at Rexall, and it is problematic even for members of Parliament, for my colleagues and, dare I admit it, for myself. When I went home after the Ukraine emergency debate one week ago, I was concerned for the first time in my seven-year parliamentary career about whom I might encounter at 10:30 at night on the streets of Ottawa. That is not a pleasant place to be in, and that is what, unfortunately, this has been driven to.

The next point I want to make is that it is always important to take issue with policy positions. That is what a democracy is all about. That is a good thing. I have been thankful that at least in the protest outside, some people had the good sense to carve out a lane of traffic for emergency vehicles. That is also a good thing. However, what I have still seen and what I saw last summer, this past fall, this winter and even just yesterday is that the people who drive those emergency vehicles are being targeted. They are being targeted with acts of hatred, acts of violence and acts of harassment. People should not fear wearing their uniform. We talk about the people in uniform who are keeping us safe, and they deserve to be credited.

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There are other people wearing uniforms, uniforms that are called scrubs. People who are cautioned about wearing their scrubs in public are the people who have been keeping us safe. They are the people who swear the Hippocratic oath to keep everyone safe, no matter how heinous their attitudes, no matter how vile their positions. The people who keep everyone safe, both the people who are vaccinated and the people who are unvaccinated, deserve our respect, appreciation and gratitude. What some people are foisting upon them right now is exactly the opposite. I am not saying all people, but some people. That has to be stopped in its tracks.

I want to inject a third aspect into this discussion, which is about the notion of trucks being filled with gasoline being parked 50 metres from a legislative building such as the House of Commons I am speaking from. We know, I know, and Muslims know that trucks have been used as instruments of death and terror around the planet. What I am saying here is that we have to question things such as unconscious bias in terms of how we approach parked vehicles loaded with gasoline very proximate to a legislative building. I do not think it is vast speculation or venturing a guess here to say that if those were Black protesters, indigenous protesters—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

• (2155)

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, my thanks to the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, but I would like to finish.

If those were Muslim protesters calling for peace in the Middle East, I venture a guess that perhaps the reaction of law enforcement would not be to let trucks idle, filled with gasoline, for eight straight days outside of the Parliament Buildings. That is some food for thought to inject into this debate.

The last point I want to make, and again I guess I have to speak over the people opposite because they do not want to listen, is that I find that there is an inherent illogic in a lot of these protests—

The Deputy Speaker: I have asked a couple times here already to hear people out. You will all have the opportunity to ask questions. You will all have the opportunity to get on the speaking list. I see that some of you are all ready to go. Let us take the opportunity to listen and make comments and ask questions when we have that opportunity.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the inherent illogic in terms of what is going on outside, I have about six points I am going to make and I will make them quickly.

First of all, the number of federal lockdowns that have been issued in this country in the last two years is exactly zero. They are a provincial jurisdiction. That is the first point.

The second point is that if someone is that concerned about trucking mandates, they might want to take notice of the fact that those mandates are applied across the continent. As the member for Kingston and the Islands rightfully pointed out, there is one that applies to get into the United States, and now there is one that applies to those coming back from the United States.

The third point is that it seems puzzling to this lawyer's mind that if someone's intense philosophical position is that lockdowns are problematic and should be eschewed, then why would someone be

causing a lockdown in downtown Ottawa, and by virtue of those actions, preventing the storekeepers from places like Sparks Street, Wellington and the Rideau Centre from opening? It is inherently illogical.

The fourth point is that I find it puzzling that the party of supposed law and order, the party opposite, Her Majesty's official opposition, is doing exactly the opposite in terms of maintaining law and order in this country. What we have seen instead, and I know they are going to start talking because maybe they do not like what I am about to say, is that their interim leader has said to not tell the protesters to go home but to instead make the Prime Minister wear this one. Instead of encouraging law and order and enforcement of the law, they are encouraging exactly the opposite.

What I also find puzzling is that the official opposition prides itself on being the party of fiscal prudence. By the last tally I heard, this "protest" is costing the good people of Ottawa, the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Police Service about \$800,000 a day. In terms of fiscal prudence, that is not fiscal wisdom.

I am very impressed that a member, no less a physician, is seeking to heckle me from across the way because he is not happy with what I am talking about.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not know why we have descended into this. We have had great debate up until now. For some reason, we have descended into a lot of heckling. I would appreciate it if we let the member finish up. He only has two minutes and 21 seconds left, and the members will have the opportunity to ask wonderful questions.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, what I would point out, in terms of a fifth inconsistency, is that the members opposite like to pride themselves on constantly eschewing foreign interference. We have heard this come up in the last 30 minutes.

What I recollect, even prior to my time in politics, was a lot of concern about things such as foreign money flowing into this country with respect to environmental protesters, particularly with respect to the Alberta oil sands. I do find it puzzling and a little inconsistent that there is much less concern about foreign money that has been declared to be flowing into this country right now in support of what these people are calling a protest. That is money coming from Florida and money coming from Texas. I do find that inconsistency a bit puzzling, and it weakens the position of my friends opposite.

Let us get back to maybe some place where we can find a meeting ground. There is some discontent, clearly. Some of that discontent has been fomented in the form of hatred, which thankfully everyone has eschewed in this chamber. I think we could be doing that a little more forcefully.

What I do think we need to do is to get to the stage where we understand that the point has been made and that the notion of taking a city hostage and occupying it, and taking your concern with, perhaps, my government or this side of the aisle and manifesting it and fomenting that kind of protest against a cashier at Rexall, against a storekeeper at the Rideau Centre or against the people in the city who are just trying to go about their daily business and get some rest, has gone too far.

That is when the protest loses credibility and, exactly like the member for Kingston and the Islands put it, normally protesters want to gather momentum. What these protesters have done is exactly the opposite. They have created people who do not see them as credible, who do not see as legitimate and who want them to leave.

The point has been made. I think the time for the convoy is over so that we can get down to the business of producing better policies and better politics within this chamber for this entire nation.

• (2200)

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise on this very important topic.

I really find it fascinating that the member opposite would suggest that somebody over here drove those trucks there. That is really quite fascinating that we are somehow responsible for this and that we are responsible for ending it. I believe that this evening our leader actually sent a letter to the Prime Minister imploring him to join the leaders of the other parties such that we can urgently come to a peaceful conclusion to this. The other thing that is interesting is that, my hon. colleague who spoke earlier—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite was not here to hear his speech in which he said very clearly that we agreed with law and order and that—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I will let the member ask a question, but members cannot refer to someone being here or not being here.

The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry for saying that the member was not here. I really apologize for saying that he was not here. That is unfortunate—

The Deputy Speaker: Whether someone is here or not is irrelevant.

The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry for saying those things that I said previously, over and over again. I apologize for that.

The unfortunate thing is that, when we have these debates, perhaps everybody should pay very close attention to what is happening and that would make the debate much better.

Will you get your Prime Minister out there to talk to these people?

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The Deputy Speaker: To the member for Cumberland—Colchester, when asking a question, ask it through the Chair and not directly to a member.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I have three quick responses. The first is that no one accused the member opposite or his colleagues of driving the trucks outside.

The second point is that attempting to resurrect his interim leader in terms of what she may have said today does not eviscerate what she said last Monday, which is that they should take political advantage of the situation, not discourage people to leave and make the Prime Minister wear this as his problem. That is a matter of record that has been reported by multiple media outlets.

Thirdly, I actually find it quite puzzling that the member opposite, given his vocation as a medical doctor, is not appreciating the simple fact that if people of his ilk are afraid to wear scrubs in public and are being told by law enforcement not to wear scrubs in public because they might be targeted, we have a problem generally and we have a problem for those in his profession, whom I hope he would stand up for.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, it is quite possible that I do not know the rules, but I am quite sure that “ilk” is really not a favourable term that I should be called in this great House of Commons.

The Deputy Speaker: We are descending into debate a bit.

The hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, earlier my colleague mentioned statements by the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan. Those statements rubbed me the wrong way too. The member challenged us to go talk to the protesters and learn about their experience.

Does he think we spent the last two years as MPs not talking to our constituents, not talking to people at local businesses that were struggling or had to close their doors? Does he think we have never talked to people who disagree with public health measures?

Over the past two years, we have seen it all. We talk to our constituents, and they tell us all those things. There is nothing wrong with expressing discontent. What we disagree with is how that is being done right now.

Does my colleague agree? Does he think it is not just up to the police or the City of Ottawa to manage the situation? Does he think the federal government needs to shoulder some of the responsibility?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out that all three levels of government in this country, municipal, provincial and federal, have their responsibilities.

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The actions we took and the policies we implemented were always based on science and on what experts and doctors told us. That is what informs everything. We will continue to follow their advice in this situation.

• (2205)

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Qujannamiik, Uqaqtittiji.* I want to thank the member for acknowledging that the NDP have a great leader in our member for Burnaby South. Unfortunately, I cannot share the same sense of acknowledgement for the Liberal leadership. The Liberal government has shown a history of either inaction or responding to issues too slowly, some of which include its promises to address indigenous housing and to flow funds for housing so there is less overcrowding, and of course the extremist activities on the Hill.

Can the member commit to ensuring the implementation of the four-point solution put forward by the member for Burnaby South when he asked for this emergency debate to calm the situation on the Hill and ensure there is a strategy for Canadians to move toward a sense of normalcy? We must ensure the Prime Minister meets with the municipal leaders, that he addresses the interference of funds from foreign states and ensures that provinces and territories have the—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary with a very short answer.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I would simply say to the member opposite that yesterday we had an announcement from the Prime Minister that a table is being struck with respect to leadership from all three levels of government. That is exactly the type of co-operation we need, because we are seeing a situation that is very concerning for the city of Ottawa, all Ontarians and all Canadians.

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

I am glad we are having this debate this evening. It is a very important issue, and it is necessary to address the growing sentiment that exists right here across this great country. Canadians are frustrated. They are sick and tired. Constant shutdowns, lockdowns, restrictions and mandates are having a terrible toll on our country's population. This toll is now going far beyond that of COVID-19 itself.

After two years, we know that COVID-19 is not going away. That is why we have to use all the tools at our disposal for Canadians to live healthy normal lives and for businesses to reopen. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has failed in its handling of the pandemic, and now it is failing to provide Canadians with a credible plan to get life back to normal.

Even as countries around the world drop their restrictions and mandates, even as they put forward plans to help their citizens learn to live with COVID, the federal Liberal government persists with policies and practices here in Canada that no longer make sense. Over 90% of the population has been vaccinated already, and we know that vaccines have limited utility in preventing the transmission of the omicron variant. Instead of putting forth a credible plan, the Liberals continue to sow division and resentment among Cana-

dians. They ignore the widening gap between those on guaranteed government salaries like themselves and those who are only able to work if the government lets them.

There is a widening gap between those who live in rural Canada and everyone else, a gap between low-income workers and those at the very top, between home owners and renters, and between the haves and the have-nots. It is no wonder Canadians are angry and frustrated. It is no wonder that after two years that frustration has led to one of the most significant protests Parliament Hill has ever seen.

The “freedom convoy” of trucks and other vehicles are assembled outside from coast to coast. They are here at Parliament, as is their right, protesting the policies of the federal government. They are doing this outside the federal building and protesting provincial policies outside legislative buildings across the country.

I would note that this is the appropriate place to do that. They are not outside private homes, or cottages of MPs or premiers' homes. The Prime Minister may not want to speak to those protesters, but I have. I have spoken to many of them. I have read their signs and listened to what they are saying and one thing is abundantly clear. It is not just the protesters outside in the provincial capitals across the country who have these so-called unacceptable views. These views are not held by some fringe minority. I have heard these opinions from my own constituents.

Canadians from all walks of life have real concerns about how the Liberals have handled this pandemic. They want to know what the government is doing to put COVID-19 behind us. Instead of addressing these concerns, the Prime Minister, his government and some in the mainstream media have labelled them as racist, misogynist and extremist just to avoid scrutiny for the Liberal government's numerous failures.

Unlike the Prime Minister, I believe the most important job I have as an elected representative is to listen to the residents of my community, just as it is his job to listen to the citizens of this great country.

Over the past few weeks, I have heard from the owner of a local gym in Bradford, 9Round. She was in tears. She has been shut down so many times she cannot even count. She now owes thousands of dollars in rent with no relief available to her and no confidence that anything will be changing any time soon.

I have heard from an elderly man in Keswick who was eligible for no COVID-19 support and has been forced to eat Kraft Dinner five days a week for supper because he cannot afford to buy proper groceries as inflation continues to rise. He told me he never thought his retirement would look like this.

I have heard from a couple in Jacksons Point who returned from a cruise near Egypt, only to be locked up in a quarantine hotel for days on end with no clothes and no access to life-saving medication.

• (2210)

I have heard from families in Mount Albert who have experienced the pain of losing a loved one to COVID-19, and from seniors in Sutton who have been isolated in long-term care homes and other facilities for the past two years without the ability to see their families or the outside world. I have heard from an expectant single mother in Holland Landing who provided for her family through her job in a federally regulated industry but was fired because she made the decision to wait to get vaccinated after she had her child. I have heard from parents in Bond Head whose son has not been to school in 18 months.

Every single one of these people have real stories and valid concerns about where our country is after two years of COVID-19. Many Canadians are hurting right now. Many have lost their jobs, friends or family members, and they have lost faith in their government and institutions. They deserve to be heard.

My constituents in York—Simcoe, and Canadians across the country, have diligently followed public health advice, made sacrifices and done what is necessary to keep their families and communities safe throughout this pandemic. They have done their part, now it is time for the Liberal government to do its part. It is time for a re-examination of the government's COVID-19 response in a more sustainable path that gets life back to normal and gives Canadians hope for the future.

What does that path look like? It is clear that more must be done to ensure that those most vulnerable are protected as best we can from the coronavirus, but that can be done without devastating, ineffective lockdowns and mandates that cripple the economy and impact the lives and livelihoods of Canadians.

I spent most of my life working as a restaurateur, and I know the challenges and triumphs that exist in the industry. It can be hard to make ends meet and keep the doors open in the best of times, but when the government shuts them down and prevents patrons from coming in, it is no wonder many have closed their doors for good. Instead, we need to be looking at alternative policy approaches that will keep Canadians safe while strengthening our economy and respecting individuals' freedoms.

In the summer of 2020, my colleagues and I in the Ontario Conservative caucus were criticized by state media, the Liberals and the NDP for examining an innovative rapid test that Health Canada had not approved after months of delays, despite it being available in the U.S. and across Europe. We were looking for solutions and to hold the government to account so that it could be the best it could be, but instead of addressing the long delays at Health Canada, and instead of looking at best practices of other countries, government members opted to criticize, ridicule and ignore. That is why it is no surprise that those same rapid tests, and many like them, are still hard to come by for most Canadians today, two years later.

However, it is not just rapid tests. We need better medical approaches that focus on treating those who are suffering from COVID and not just fruitlessly trying to stop its transmission. Right now, we have some of the worst health care capacity in the G7, and our system will remain strained because of delayed surgeries and other procedures. Where is the plan for that? Where is the funding for the provinces?

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No matter what is done to specifically address COVID-19 going forward, one fact remains: Most of us hate to see the country in the state it is in today. It is hurt, and it has divided us. That is why it is important that we restore a sense of unity in Canada and a shared commitment to one another. It is time to put aside the divisive rhetoric and policies and politics that drive wedges between neighbours, family members and friends. There needs to be a recognition that we are all in this together as we look towards a future.

This is what our country needs, and it requires the right kind of leadership to make this happen. Canadians are telling us that they want this Parliament, and they want it to work together while representing every part of this country and the people who live here. They are telling us that they want to see a government that is committed to collaboration, accommodation and a willingness to listen. I hope the Prime Minister is listening.

• (2215)

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members will forgive me if they thought I was sitting in Queen's Park, as the hon. colleague for York—Simcoe opposite highlighted school closures, the gym that was facing troubles and, of course, businesses. I presume he will not be voting for Doug Ford in the upcoming election in Ontario, because that is the government that is imposing those elements. However, I will agree with the member opposite that we do need to transition beyond COVID. Dr. Theresa Tam is talking about that right now, as are other chief medical health officers.

Going back to the protest, in February 2020, the member highlighted the Wet'suwet'en protest and the economic cost that those blockades represented. He said that in committee, and it is on the blues for the record. My questions to him today are these: Is the member not concerned about the economic cost of the blockades that we are seeing in Ottawa, and indeed in other places, and why has he not spoken up for these protesters to go back home?

Mr. Scot Davidson: Mr. Speaker, he is pointing out the provincial lockdowns. I am trying to show the government that the people who are outside right now are hurting. This is what has all led to this. This is the frustration that people have. People are crying in their businesses right now. They are literally crying.

The gym owner I talked about, who the member alluded to, owes \$40,000. She showed me that her payment is \$831, but she has \$600 in her account and she is shut. She cannot make money, and she is sitting there crying in front of me. This is the frustration out there on the streets right now, and I wish my hon. colleague would go out to talk to some of these people and listen to them.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I appreciated his tone, and I thought he did a nice job evaluating the situation that many of his constituents are going through.

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However, I do not get the impression that we are finding a solution to the current crisis. This evening, I am hearing politicians throwing the ball back and forth in the House because we all have different visions. I am talking about us, but I am also talking about our constituents. Everyone has a different vision of what measures should be in place and how we should deal with the situation.

In the short term, I think the fact that politicians are using the crisis to their advantage will not send the trucks away tomorrow morning. I would like my colleague's opinion on this. Does he think that seeing politicians capitalize on this crisis may have added fuel to the fire?

[English]

Mr. Scot Davidson: Mr. Speaker, no one should be making political games of this. Again, and I spoke to it in my speech, we are in a minority Parliament. Canadians have sent us here to work together and come up with a solution for this. Today, our leader put forth a suggestion to the Prime Minister that we should go out and meet with these people.

Canadians do not want to see these convoys anymore. These are the conversations about new government policy and mandates we all have to have together. The government will keep alluding to 92% of Canadians being vaccinated and 90% of truckers being vaccinated. People will ask the question, and it is okay to ask that question now. Why are people being put in a corner? If it is 90%, why are there mandates? The Liberals keep alluding to the United States. I do not take my marching orders from the U.S.

● (2220)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member says he does not take his marching orders from the United States. With the convoy, what we are understanding is that there is a lot of money coming from the United States.

Does he agree that should be stopped? In fact, this is going to be brought up at committee as an issue from the NDP. Would he agree that funding from the United States should not be going to the convoy and that it should be stopped?

Mr. Scot Davidson: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that this is being studied at this time and being looked at.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a heightened awareness of just how divided Canadians have become.

This emergency debate is predicated on that very reality. A lot of people are angry right now. On any given day, I hear from people who think that we have too many restrictions, and I also hear from those who want further restrictions imposed. In all my years in politics, I have never seen such heated debates. They have caused a lot of tension in families and in communities throughout Canada.

To clear up any misunderstanding, I am vaccinated. I believe vaccines are safe and have helped to reduce hospitalizations. I believe they have saved lives, particularly of those who are older and those who have underlying health conditions. I have also encouraged others to get vaccinated.

However, I want to be able to question the Liberal government's COVID policies without being labelled anti-science and anti-vacci-

nation, and without being discredited because I have the audacity to criticize government policies. For too long we have been given a false choice that either we acquiesce to every government measure or we are only lending credibility to those who spread false information. The one thing I know for sure is that the political environment we now find ourselves in is directly related to this mindset. Without a doubt, COVID-19 has been hard on all of us. Families have lost loved ones, and many individuals have suffered or are suffering illness.

Families in my constituency have been prevented from driving across the border to be with loved ones. University students have been unable to set foot in a real classroom to take advantage of a full educational experience. Health care staff, in particular, have been pressing on for two years to care for those with COVID and all other health care concerns. They provide an essential service, and we are grateful for their commitment and sacrifices on behalf of their fellow Canadians.

To those who think that protesting in front of hospitals is a good idea, I can assure them it is not. The doctors and nurses working in those hospitals are busy saving lives, not setting government policy. The last thing they should have to deal with, when coming off a long shift, is the sight of angry placards or shouting protesters.

Grocery store staff immediately come to mind, as do all those involved in our supply chain, including truckers. It may seem thankless to work in these positions during a time like this, but I hope every single one of them knows how critical they have been.

It was on this understanding that governments made a point of underscoring which workers were essential at various times throughout the pandemic. We all understand that we owe a debt of gratitude to these workers. We all want them to know how their contributions have helped all of us through this time, yet here we are today.

After two years of truckers being deemed essential workers, the Liberals decided they no longer were. After two years of praising their efforts of doing what they do best, delivering the goods we rely on, the Liberals decided truckers were really not essential after all. The obvious question is: Why? What changed? I get the fact that many do not understand why a certain percentage of truckers do not want to get vaccinated. I get the argument that the vast majority of other Canadians have gotten vaccinated, so why would the others not?

Regardless of the frustration with those who would not get vaccinated, we all must have compassion and try to understand that no matter the mandate imposed upon them, they simply will not. At this stage of the pandemic, we must ask ourselves what reasonable benefit society and our economy could attain from the trucker mandate. The Liberals have failed to give any rationale whatsoever for the decision. If they are holding on to data indicating that the truckers have been responsible for COVID outbreaks, they have never shared it with Canadians. This lack of transparency is unfortunate.

Canadians deserve to know whether the mandate on truckers is justified. They deserve to know whether the benefit of taking truckers off the road outweighs the impact to our economy. Worse yet, the government either has no framework for lifting mandates, or if it does, it sure has a funny way of communicating it to the public.

● (2225)

We can all appreciate that this situation is fluid, but the government should be able to explain what metrics it is using to determine the scope and speed for removing mandates. On what basis is it making its decisions? There is nothing strange about Canadians wanting transparency from their government.

In fact, had the government been more open with us with its federal response, perhaps we would not have seen the same levels of angst among Canadians. Perhaps we would not have seen the same levels of frustration from millions of Canadians who were eagerly awaiting an end to lockdowns and restrictions.

It should go without saying at this point, but people are tired. People are frustrated. After two years of personal sacrifices, many are looking to the government to explain the path forward, but to date it seems like they are waiting in vain.

Many Canadian public health officials are signalling they want to make a shift in policy. B.C.'s chief medical officer has indicated that the province's COVID response is transitioning to become "much more like how we manage influenza". She stated:

We cannot eliminate all risk.... And I think that's something that we need to understand and accept. As this virus has changed, it's become part of what we will be living with for years to come.

In reply to the last question asked of my colleague, Ontario's chief medical officer also said something similar when he stated:

I absolutely think we have to start to learn to live with this virus and we've let our lives be controlled for the last two years in a significant amount of fear.

As well, Canada's top doctor is noting the need "to be able to address the ongoing presence of COVID-19 in a more sustainable way."

Looking around the world, we see that many countries are removing restrictions or laying out their framework to do so. In the United Kingdom, vaccine passports have been dropped. This has been mentioned in the House many times today. Sweden is removing entry restrictions and domestic rules. Denmark ended its COVID restrictions last week.

A recent Angus Reid poll showed that a majority of Canadians now say it is time to remove restrictions and let Canadians manage their own level of risk.

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If the Prime Minister disagrees with most Canadians, then it is incumbent upon him to explain his rationale. I doubt the Prime Minister wants to unfairly label millions of Canadians as quickly as he labelled those who partook in the convoy as it made its way through Canada.

Protests are occurring in communities across the country, but none is more pronounced than what we have seen outside this very place. The Prime Minister is painting every protester with a broad brush, name-calling and dismissing even the most genuine concerns about his government's actions over the last two years.

There were literally thousands of people lined up on highways in support of the convoys. The only message they are hearing from the Prime Minister is that because they are supporting the convoy, they, too, must be beyond redemption.

Make no mistake: I denounce all symbols of hate and have zero tolerance for illegal behaviour. Anyone who participated in that manner should be ashamed of themselves. Moreover, everyone outside should immediately minimize their impact on those who live downtown here in Ottawa.

My message to both the government and to the protesters is to turn down the rhetoric. Turn down the heat. We must remember we are all citizens and will remain so after this. We cannot continue to just talk past each other. We will get nowhere if we continue this.

The leader of the official opposition has requested a meeting with the Prime Minister and other party leaders so we can come together, depoliticize the response to the pandemic and talk about where we go from here. Canadians need leadership. They need to see a plan. They need hope.

On this side of the House, we are prepared to work together to end this protest and help families and communities return to their normal lives. I hope all parties will join in this effort.

● (2230)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.):

Madam Speaker, a little over an hour ago, one of the member's Conservative colleagues, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, gave a very passionate speech in the House. Though I did not agree with everything he said, he made it very clear that the blockade going on outside is illegal. As a matter of fact, he posted the video of his speech, and on Twitter he has already received well over a thousand retweets and likes of that.

The approach to the issue being taken by the member for Wellington—Halton Hills is very different from what we have seen from the vast majority of Conservatives. I would like to ask this member how he feels about what the member for Wellington—Halton Hills said about this blockade being illegal.

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Does he agree that it is illegal?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, the fine constituents of Brandon—Souris believe that these peaceful protests are allowable, but the occupation of downtown Ottawa has been going on for some time. The reason it has been, let us face it, is because the Prime Minister will not go out and talk to the protesters.

If the member wants to bring up questions about who said what, all I will say is that it is in the Prime Minister's hands. Our interim leader today has written a letter to the Prime Minister, and in the questions to the Prime Minister here this evening asked him to come together with all political party leaders to find common ground to end the situation taking place not just here on Parliament Hill and in Ottawa, but across Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague from Brandon—Souris that it is our role as opposition members to criticize the government's policies. We must do that. It is also our role to convey the suffering of our constituents, who have paid a high price during this crisis.

I commend the fact that my colleague is openly saying today that protests have to be peaceful and legal. However, we are here this evening because the protests outside are neither peaceful nor legal.

I would like to ask my colleague if tolerating behaviour like this is not a way of abandoning our work as opposition members, if only implicitly, since we are here to speak for our constituents, not for those blockading the streets.

[English]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague that there needs to be a solution to this protest that has been taking place. I have been involved in many debates on Parliament Hill, and as a lobbyist in my time as a farm leader I came to Ottawa many times to make my point, but we made it and went home.

The situation here is exactly what I said in the first paragraph of my presentation tonight. It is that I rise with a heightened awareness of just how divided Canadians have become. Why is that? It is because the Prime Minister decided to put mandates on truckers in Canada after they had been deemed to be essential for 22 months since the beginning of COVID.

• (2235)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Brandon—Souris for his delineation between the real issues that are facing our country. On one hand is division, of course, and I believe we both condemn the hate speech and the hate symbolism that has been flaunted in our nation's capital and across the country.

On the other hand, the member talked about the pandemic and issues with the pandemic. I am so encouraged to hear the member encouraging members of his constituency to get vaccinated. The question for the member is this. Considering my home province of Alberta has some of the highest numbers of COVID-19, and ICUs are still in surge capacity, would he agree that provinces also have a role to play in making sure that we can handle the pandemic but al-

so in bringing forward a plan? The member talks about freezing restrictions, but that time is not now. Would the member agree?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Madam Speaker, the latest news that I heard over the weekend was that Alberta had 91% vaccinations, and 87% of its population was vaccinated with two vaccines. I think the member needs to catch up on the reality that it is at least tied or maybe ahead of the rest of Canada in regard to vaccinations in Alberta now.

The member has a little catching up to do, but that is not the point here. It is the fact that we need to be able to make sure that goods and services are delivered across the country, and that the Prime Minister has been dividing the country.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an absolute privilege to rise virtually to give remarks in this emergency debate on a topic that I think is very important to our country and indeed to the people in Ottawa, particularly given what we have seen with the protests to date. I would be remiss if I did not mention that I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague from Vaughan—Woodbridge.

I had the opportunity about a week ago to present in the House for 10 minutes on the reply to the Speech from the Throne. I used it as an opportunity to articulate what I was seeing vis-à-vis the protests in Ottawa. Since then, seven days have transpired, and this has given me an opportunity to refine my thoughts on what we have seen. Members have talked about MPs and the opportunity to engage. I have seen that. I have had the opportunity to walk through and engage with people on my way back and forth to my hotel. I will take this opportunity to opine on what I have seen.

Let me give a synopsis on what my remarks detailed about a week ago. I explained to my colleagues that my father was a truck driver, and that one element I think is extremely important, and perhaps a silver lining of the pandemic, has been a reflection and recognition of the important role that our essential workers play, who sometimes can be unsung heroes in their own right. As I did a week ago, I will go on record to thank all those men and women who get up and make an honest living while serving society in an invaluable way. Hopefully all Canadians are able to reflect on what they are able to bring to the table, whether it be truck drivers, nurses or other professionals on the front lines of this pandemic. They are doing important work and deserve to be recognized.

I reminded the House why some of the provincial and territorial measures are in place, including the measures that the Government of Canada has introduced. I would agree with my colleagues that yes, we are all tired, and yes, we want to be able to move away from COVID, and I take notice that other jurisdictions around the world are moving in that direction. However, the reality is that we are moving in this direction on some of the protocols we have in place because a disproportionate number of unvaccinated Canadians represent the ICU cases in Canadian hospitals from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia. I gave a statistic, and I take notice that it may shift on a daily basis, but last week, for example, 44% of ICU cases in Nova Scotia were from the 9% of Nova Scotians who are unvaccinated.

It becomes a debate, and we have heard members go through it, of individual freedoms versus collective freedoms. I will refer members back to my speech from a week ago. There was a tension. Frankly, every parliamentarian, and indeed every Canadian, is going to have a different ideological bend on where exactly that line should be. I gave the example of Mark Clarke, a dedicated volunteer in my community. Some members might have heard the S.O. 31 I gave in the House last week that was, unfortunately, about his passing. His surgery was delayed for three weeks, the open-heart surgery he needed, because there were not enough beds in the health care system in Nova Scotia to accommodate him.

We can certainly reflect back and talk about the challenges that have existed in the health care system. Our government has provided supports. The provincial and territorial governments are working hard to make sure the system does not collapse. It speaks to some of the fragility that exists, but that is the situation we are in. That is why we are imposing these measures as we try to reduce the spread. We are trying to avoid situations, like Mark Clarke's situation, where people are not able to access surgeries and they unfortunately pass away as a result. There is a spectrum there in terms of individual freedoms and protection versus harm and what the line should be. Every member in the House is going to have a perspective on that, but the reality is that this is driving decision-making at this point.

I also highlighted the fact that no Canadian in the country is required to take the vaccine. Again, we can weigh the consequences of the freedom to choose to vaccinate or not to vaccinate, and decide if the repercussions of such are fair and equitable. I think that is all fair game in the House. However, the idea that individuals do not have the freedom to choose whether they want a vaccine is a fallacy.

• (2240)

Frankly, I want to be mindful of the importance of colleagues in the House in the tone and measures we set. As we have heard from colleagues who have spoken on this tonight, it is important to bring down the rhetoric. I think all parliamentarians, all 338 of us, have a role, as do elected colleagues in other places of the country. It is not one individual or one side of the House. We all have a role to play, and it is important to be mindful of that in the days ahead.

I want to move to the protest in question, because that is the nexus. That is what we are talking about today. Yes, I take notice that perhaps there are very well-intentioned people. In fact, as I

went through some of the protests in the last week, I saw individuals who would perhaps be reflective of people who live in my riding, individuals who had certain concerns and wanted to bring them forward. I also saw a very sinister crowd. We saw Confederate flags and swastikas. We have seen windows shattered in businesses, individuals flying pride flags in Ottawa being terrorized and individuals being shoved to the ground. I could go on and on with instances.

While there may be well-intentioned individuals, and I trust there are, there are also individuals who want to do harm not just to parliamentarians or individuals, but to Canadian democracy. They are calling for the overthrow of governments and suggesting that they can go to the Governor General to dissolve Parliament. It is, frankly, insanity. Some members cannot call it what it is, but they need to do so.

This brings me to my point. If people protesting here in Ottawa or elsewhere in the country fashion themselves as well-intentioned individuals who want to exercise their right to protest under subsection 2(b) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that is fine. However, they should recognize that their voices are being drowned out right now by individuals who are far more sinister and have far more sinister views. The point has been made. As other parliamentarians have said in the House, to those who are the good ones, it is time to go home. It is time to leave and let the people of Ottawa have their rights and freedoms back, their ability to go to work unhindered, their ability to go on with their lives without fireworks and horns and the whole circus that we have seen here in Ottawa.

I have to be careful with my own words, but I hope everyone senses my passion. To the good ones who are watching today, it is time to go home. Indeed, members of Parliament will stand in the House, as we have seen here tonight, to continue to debate the issues that matter to them. That is what we do in a democracy. We as members of Parliament bring information back from constituents who we hear from. We bring their messages and debate them on the floor of the House of Commons. We do not clog up streets.

I want to talk about the Wet'suwet'en protests that we saw in 2020. At that time, there were Conservative members of the House rightfully calling for an end to the blockade. It was disrupting the economic prosperity of the country. People were shutting down critical infrastructure. I have noticed that some Conservative members, particularly in the last few days, have started to break away and talk about that, but on the whole, there has been hypocrisy from the Conservative Party of Canada. It has not used the same language and same principle.

I stand here as a member of Parliament saying that regardless of how we view the issue and regardless of what our issue may be, we do not have the right to shut down critical infrastructure in this country. We do not have the right to do what people are doing. If people want to come to Parliament Hill and protest, that is their right. It is a constitutionally protected one. However, to create the disruption and harm going on right now is not right, and every single member of the House should be calling for the same thing: for individuals to go home.

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Where do we go from here? Individuals have suggested the Prime Minister should negotiate or talk with protesters. Who does he negotiate with? It is mob rule right now. To the members who have suggested that here tonight, who would they suggest the Prime Minister speak to in that group? It is not clear to me who the leadership of this group is, and even those who are seemingly leading have a much more sinister view. It is time, as the ministers have indicated, for the police to use their discretion to make sure that this protest is wound down so we can carry on with the business of the nation and members of Parliament can articulate in the House what needs to be debated.

● (2245)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would put it to the member that it is not about negotiating, but about listening. It is about listening to the fact that there are tens of thousands of people across the country who are protesting in different ways. Some of them are driving their trucks places and going home and some of them are staying put. The point is that people are concerned about losing their jobs over mandates that need to end.

I want to put a specific question to the member, and it is about the discussion around foreign funding. Many members have raised this issue, saying foreigners are donating money to this rally. The Conservatives have been talking for a very long time about the need for tough new laws to address foreign interference and address foreign funding, and that is constantly dismissed by the other parties when it comes to all kinds of other causes, including election interference.

Will the member's government put forward legislation to address concerns about foreign interference in our democracy across the board? We cannot complain about it in one case and then let it go in other cases. If the government is going to put forward good-faith legislation that addresses foreign dollars coming into Canadian political debates across the board, I think there would be a lot of support for that in the House. Would the member put forward that legislation?

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I would like to address my colleague's first point about individuals who are choosing to protest. I have no issue with individuals who want to protest. I have an issue with people who are blockading highways in Alberta and people who are blockading the downtown of Ottawa. The member may be suggesting that governments should acquiesce to individuals who protest, and I understand governments need to listen and to take them into account. However, that does not always mean they have to agree. If the member opposite thinks a government should just acquiesce and do what individuals are suggesting is wrong, and that this is the way we should run our democracy in this country, that is a very poor view.

In relation to the aspect of financing, I absolutely agree that if we are going to move on a law to address foreign interference, it should apply to all individuals and through all causes, if that is the true desire of where the government and parliamentarians want to go.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I agree with his point that people have the right to protest, but that the methods are somewhat questionable.

What I hear from him this evening is a heartfelt message asking protesters to go home. I do not think the protesters will all of a sudden agree to go home.

The federal government should have sent a clear message from the beginning that it would not let the protesters settle in. It should have worked with police, the Government of Ontario and the City of Ottawa to come up with a game plan from the beginning. Now, things have gotten bad. They have gone too far. No one knows how to get out of this situation.

What does my colleague suggest? How should his government put an end to all this once and for all?

● (2250)

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Of course, the federal government's role with regard to policing matters is to be in favour of increasing the number of officers on the ground.

I think that the role of the Government of Canada is to work with the City of Ottawa and the Province of Ontario to find solutions and help people on the ground.

Ultimately, it is up to the Ottawa Police Service or the RCMP to find the best way to intervene in order to stop the protesters.

[*English*]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to speak to a point the member for Burnaby South brought up at the beginning of this debate, that is, the emergency rescue for the health care system, and want to ask the member about our health care system. Does the member agree that this starts with funding it properly? Will the government answer the calls of the premiers to increase health care transfers to the provinces?

Mr. Kody Blois: Madam Speaker, I think important investments need to be made in our health care system. However, I do not know if I necessarily agree that they should be transfers without strings from the Government of Canada to ensure that outcomes are being delivered. I do not speak for the Government of Canada. I am a member of Parliament who happens to be in the governing caucus, so I will let our cabinet speak on that issue. What I will say is that there are opportunities for private delivery, still under a single-payer model and the public model, to deliver outcomes. It is not just about money. It is about how we can have better management in health care systems as well.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, before I begin my formal remarks, I would like to comment on the way I look at the situation we are facing in this wonderful, blessed country that we all call home and that we, as 338 parliamentarians, have the privilege to serve through each of those residents who live in our ridings.

We come here to do our best and put forward what I would call reasonable leadership to debate the issues and reasonable leadership to do what is right for our constituents, to do what is right in recommendations for public safety and public health, and to do what is right to exit this pandemic so that we can all return to what I would call a new normal but a normal that we would want to see. We are in winter now, but spring and summer will come. The days are getting longer, hopefully soon it will be getting warmer and we will want to be at a barbecue with our friends, travelling and enjoying all of what Canada has to offer, and we can do that in a number of ways.

For the last two years, Canadians, including the most wonderful residents in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge, have been resilient, but they are tired. We are all tired of COVID-19 and we are all tired of talking about it. However, when I think about the best way to exit this pandemic, it is through vaccinations. It is through Canadians doing the right thing, and they have and they are. We ask them to continue to do that. We are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel but we have to be patient.

That is one aspect of what Canadians are going through. They are getting back to work. Kids in the province of Ontario are back in school physically. Universities are opening up for in-person classes. It is great to see. Our manufacturing businesses continue to run. Our frontline workers continue to do the great job they do, day in and day out, and they have my utmost respect. At the same time, we still have work to do and we need to remain focused on the ball.

We have this occupation and this protest that is going on here in the city of Ottawa, our nation's capital. As I said last week on a panel with some of my colleagues, it needs to come to an end. It is disruptive. It is disrupting people's lives, preventing them from earning a living for all those businesses along Sparks Street and the downtown core. It has made people feel very unsafe and it is not about a trucking mandate. Ninety-five per cent of truckers in Canada are vaccinated. The same rule applies in the United States for going into the United States as coming into Canada. People need to be vaccinated. There is no disagreement there. We know that vaccines save lives.

My colleagues on the other side are saying that truckers are by themselves. No, truckers go home to family members and see their friends, and we need them to get vaccinated. They have, in overwhelming numbers, but there are Canadians out here whom I have the utmost respect for, a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian, who would disagree and not want to be vaccinated. They do not believe in that collective responsibility that we all need to have. As citizens of this beautiful country, we have a collective responsibility to exit COVID-19. We need to work together, and Canadians in an overwhelming majority have.

In the province of Ontario, the lockdowns that many of these folks outside are protesting against, are provincial lockdowns,

provincial measures, which are now being lifted. Today, I read that in the city of Toronto this summer Luminato and Caribana will be in-person events, so we are returning to seeing some normalcy. We are starting to get that back, but it is coming incrementally.

I walked through the protest, as many of my colleagues have, and looked at some of the signs and stuff. It is a hodgepodge of a lot of different issues. They want to overthrow a democratically elected government. Would members sit down with someone who wants to overthrow a democratically elected government? Is that who we are supposed to speak to? I do not think so. That is not reasonable leadership at all.

For many of my colleagues on the opposite side and on my own side, I am not a partisan MP. I want to debate the issues. I want to do what is right for the residents of my riding to make sure that we have a prosperous future. We have recovered more than 100% of our jobs. Our economy is bigger than it was prepandemic. We have done the right things. We have shown reasonable leadership, and we continue to show reasonable leadership. Canadians do not expect perfection from all 338 MPs. They expect us to do our best. They expect us to do what is right.

● (2255)

Meeting with protesters who want to overthrow a democratically elected government is not what is right. I know many of the opposition members in the loyal opposition agree with that. Many have commented on their Twitter and social media platforms that the occupation must end. If people want to protest up and down the sidewalks and hold placards and hand out information pamphlets, God bless them. That is their right. That is their sacred right. I believe in civil liberties, but I also believe very much in collective responsibility for doing what is right for one's neighbour, just like Canadians in an overwhelming majority across this country in every province, in every city, rural or urban, have done.

Thirty-four thousand Canadians have died because of COVID. The government has had the backs of Canadians for two years. It has invested \$500 billion to support Canadian businesses, families and workers and to buy rapid tests and secure vaccines. The Conservatives at one time said we would not get vaccines until 2025 or 2028. They are here in abundance, and we are actually helping out the rest of the world now. That is what Canada is about.

When I think of the protesters, although I have the utmost respect for them, they need to go home. They need to bring this to an end. The citizens of Ottawa deserve that respect. They deserve to have their lives back. The shopkeepers who invest their heart and soul into their businesses that are now shut down deserve that. There is no one to talk to because that is just not the right thing to do, plain and simple.

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When I think about reasonable leadership, I say this: The blockades must end. That is reasonable leadership. We must continue to do what is right. I agree that we need to continue this. I believe in science; absolutely. I think all of our 338 MPs should believe in science. I have faith in it. It may not be perfect, but if the science says we need to transition, we transition, but let us do it prudently. Let us do it judiciously. Let us do it in a safe manner that gets us there. Let us not see what happened in Ontario, where we opened up, filled the stadiums full of people, and then had to shut down because our hospitals were over capacity again, and then we had to cancel tens of thousands of surgeries. We have people waiting literally months to years for the surgeries they need. That is not responsible leadership. We, as the government, are showing responsible leadership.

I plead to my colleagues. I listened to some of the debate earlier on. Being respectful is who we are as a people—not polite, respectful. That is, we can debate and we can scream, but we need to be respectful. I hope to see that all the time when I come into the House of Commons, into this cradle of democracy, if we want to call it that. We need to do that.

I did have some formal notes. I will read some of them, but what I really want to reiterate is that this occupation and these protests need to come to an end. This is not about trucking mandates. It is not about that. We need to exit COVID-19. That is our focus, not anything else. We need to keep Canadians safe. That is what we should all be doing, not meeting with protesters who hold up awful placards that we all know about and we do not need to discuss again, who do not respect the rule of law, who do not respect the need of the citizens of Ottawa to get a good night's sleep or their need for their families to be safe and feel safe.

The protests against vaccine mandates are gripping the city of Ottawa as well as other parts of this country. All the members know that the COVID-19 pandemic has cost us dearly, with a loss of life and livelihood. Not one of us has been untouched. It goes without saying that this period has been long and extremely challenging for all Canadians. The provinces and territories have legislative authority to implement and execute the pandemic response actions that are appropriate for their jurisdiction, including implementing and easing public health restrictions. I will be the first one who really wants to go to a big wedding or my daughter's communion in a couple of months and invite all of our relatives.

Madam Speaker is asking me to wrap it up, so I will stop there and just say it is nice to see everyone this evening. I hope they and their families are keeping safe. I cannot wait to see all of my colleagues in this place together, hopefully soon.

• (2300)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member, as well as his predecessor in the speech before his, indicated that they did not know who they should go and talk to in the trucking organizations or among the individuals who are out on the streets here and across Canada.

First, they would have to make the offer. We know there are organizers in this cavalcade. They did not come all the way across Canada by just telephoning each other and saying they were going to move across the country and end up in Ottawa. There are orga-

nizers. The government has failed to even ask who that would be. I am sure if they put an olive branch out to those people, they would get a meeting in an hour.

Our interim leader indicated to the Prime Minister that he should do that and sit down with all of the leaders of the parties in the House to come up with a common solution to end this blockade.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, our government put in place a measure to help protect Canadians, including, in this instance, truckers.

I spoke with a president of a trucking company in the region I represent, with 1,300 employees and 3,000 trailers, and 95% of his truckers are vaccinated. He operates in York Region and in the Midwest, in Chicago. He said to me, “Francesco, it is the right thing to do. All my employees who cross that border are vaccinated.”

That is what I believe in. We gave the industry a long runway to prepare for this measure. We spoke with the Canadian Trucking Alliance and they support us. They support this stance. That is what we need to do.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, the theme of my colleague's speech today was responsible leadership. However, in order for the leadership to be responsible, there has to be some leadership in the first place.

Today, I would like us to talk about perceptions. In a country that is greatly divided, people seem to be unanimous in agreeing that the government was irresponsible, did not show leadership and did not do its job, and that led to the current crisis.

This evening, it seems like the government just keeps repeating that the truckers need to leave, in hopes that that will suddenly make them decide to get up and go.

Can my colleague explain to me why all those who think there is a serious lack of leadership in this government are wrong and where that perception came from?

• (2305)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I would like my Bloc Québécois colleague to know that leadership is very important for us.

[English]

We have shown leadership in working with the Ottawa Police Service and the City of Ottawa, in collaborating with them and sending them resources from the beginning of the convoy up to date. We have shown leadership in providing the resources they require.

Again, I wish to reiterate, how can we go and negotiate with individuals who want to overthrow the democratically elected government that Canadians voted for in the last election? To me, that is preposterous and it is wrong. We cannot go and negotiate with entities that want everything for themselves and have no desire to co-operate, and, in fact, are not following public health guidelines so that we could finally exit this pandemic.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Qujannamiik, Uqaqtittiji.* I want to thank the member for his comments. I just need to express that I disagree that a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian. The extremist activities have shown that this is not the fact and this is not the case. Law enforcement has reacted very differently to this extremist activity compared to how law enforcement reacts to first nations, Métis and Inuit who have defended their lands.

Having said that, I do want to ask the member a question because he was talking about responsible leadership. Does he not agree that it is important that the Prime Minister meets immediately with municipal leaders as a way to begin moving forward towards ending the pandemic?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, the lines of communication between the federal government and the City of Ottawa and the Ottawa Police Service have been constantly open, and they have been constantly there.

We are collaborating. We are assisting them with resources, from RCMP officers to intelligence gathering. Anything they need, we are obviously there. We do not direct the policy force to do anything or to undertake any sort of activity. They are independent, and there is a reason for that, of course.

I would say to my hon. colleague that we are in constant contact with the City of Ottawa, their mayor and the Ottawa Police Service for the resources they require in this situation.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am always honoured to rise here in the House. I want to make it clear that I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

At the current time, the interim leader of Canada's opposition has reached out to Canada's Prime Minister to ensure a peaceful and urgent end to a very difficult situation, and the question that needs to be answered is this: Will the Prime Minister respond?

What has become very clear in Canada is that the mood of Canadians is moving toward the beginning of the end of the pandemic. We realize that the health of Canadians is not only influenced by their physical health but also their financial, social and mental health.

I can clearly recall, in the early days of the pandemic, holding the hand of someone about to die from COVID-19 who was there without his family and the only way of communicating with them was through an iPad. Some small redemption in those early days with respect to this person was that I had known him previously and he had shared with me his journey in life as a young person, how he had documented a bicycle trip across southern England, how he had been essential to the development of a hospital in Cape Breton, how his wife had died and how he ended up living in the small town of Truro, Nova Scotia. Indeed, to watch this 90-something-year-old

male die without his family will forever have a profound impact on my view of the COVID-19 pandemic. Canadians have suffered.

It is also important to reflect on the grave concern we should all now have with respect to the mental health of children and adolescents. Indeed, my own son has missed out on his high school graduation and the wonderful social times that many of us have experienced in the first two years of university. Getting our own place to live, solving our own problems, meeting new friends and learning how generally to be an adult all on our own are things that have been severely dampened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The unfortunate part of the pandemic and the associated isolation is that many people live in their own echo chambers. We have become isolated from the views of the others who would often surround us and engage us in exciting debate and discourse, which sometimes of course led us to agree to disagree, but other times led us to truly engage in conversation that would allow us to see another point of view and perhaps indeed change our own point of view.

Another example of not seeing other points of view is our inability to travel. We need to better understand other cultures, how they solve problems, how they communicate and how they live. It is important that we do these things. This leaves us with a need to question those things that are important to us and help us better understand how we need to help our fellow human beings. As we have these multitude of different experiences, they can help us grow as individuals, understand other cultures, learn new languages and be more resilient to take on our everyday lives. That is not to say that travel is an essential part of being a Canadian. It is simply to say that there are many things that can potentially make us more tolerant of others, which we have deeply missed during this pandemic.

For many others, it has led to the tragic end of a business that they worked so hard for and spent their entire life savings trying to build. The travel sector of course has been particularly hard hit, as has the hospitality sector. Restaurants are essential to our communities and the socialization that happens therein has suffered under this unbearable yoke. We all know that Canadians love to have a beer or a coffee and catch up with their friends, to see their expressions, to understand their burdens, to help shoulder the load and to share a great laugh. Sadly, this too has been transformed by COVID-19, with no customers, no socialization and all of us living in our own echo chambers.

Moreover, Canadians and indeed people around the world have suffered with increased levels of anxiety. They have lost trust. They have lost hope for the future. They have lost their security. What is hope? One might define it as a feeling of expectation and a desire for a certain thing to happen. Unfortunately, there's been no certainty and the ability to plan for the future has been lost.

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● (2310)

We do know there are several things that can benefit the health of our human species, such as good sleep, meaningful employment, doing something purely for the benefit of another, important relationships and physical activity. Essentially all of those things have been disrupted by the COVID pandemic.

As we are all aware, many, if not most, of the provincial medical officers of health are calling for the end of mandates. Countries such as the United Kingdom, with 64% vaccination rates, and Denmark, with 80% vaccination rates, compared with the over 86% that we have here in Canada, are removing mandates for masks, vaccines and passports.

We need to begin to recognize that the time to move forward is now, and that Canadians cannot be expected to live their lives in this perpetual state of uncertainty and without hope as we go forward. To be very blunt, there are many people out there who do not have many years left. I am a 53-year-old man. Realistically, I may have perhaps 15 vigorous years left. Prior to the pandemic, it would have been 17. Do I want to continue my life not seeing the joy of smiles on faces, not being able to travel, not being able to have social events with constituents, limiting my gatherings with family on special occasions such as Christmas and Thanksgiving, and having birthdays that are drive-bys with horns honking from neighbours with signs on their lawns? This, my friends and colleagues, is not living.

It is also very clear from recent studies that lockdowns are not effective. We now know how much the poor federal health care funding in Canada and the lack of surge capacity have perpetuated this pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, in my small town with 100 beds in our hospital, we perpetually worked at between 90% and 130% capacity. Our intensive care beds in Canada per 100,000 people are half of those available in the United States and one-third of those available in Germany.

Now, sadly, we have an unimaginable tsunami in terms of the backlog of cases for diagnostic imaging, laboratory and specialist appointments and missed treatments. How is this perpetual underfunding ever going to allow this catch-up to happen with an overburdened infrastructure and a tired, exhausted, burned-out human health resource of physicians, nurses and other allied health care providers?

How does this all end? Do we simply trudge forward, one foot in front of the next, without any hope, or is this a defining moment in humanity where those around the globe begin to realize that, unfortunately and sadly, sometimes there can be a fate worse than death?

How do we begin to move forward? One great way is to look at the legendary Colin Powell's legacy, the 13 rules of leadership. General Powell was arguably one of the most influential writers on leadership in the western world in modern times.

As he would suggest:

- 1) It ain't as bad as you think! It will look better in the morning.
- 2) Get mad then get over it.
- 3) Avoid having your ego so close to your position that when your position falls, your ego goes with it.
- 4) It can be done.

5) Be careful what you choose. You may get it.

6) Don't let adverse facts stand in the way of a good decision.

7) You can't make someone else's choices. You shouldn't let someone else make yours.

8) Check small things.

9) Share credit.

10) Remain calm. Be kind.

11) Have a vision. Be demanding.

12) Don't take counsel of your fears or naysayers.

13) Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.

These rules of leadership are not perfect. Leadership is not perfect. One of these things that we also must know about great leaders is that we must try. We must care. In the immortal words of John F. Kennedy, "We do these things not because they are easy, but because they are hard."

I implore the Prime Minister to check the ego, check the position and meet with leaders of the other parties and bring this situation to a peaceful and urgent end.

● (2315)

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Cumberland—Colchester for his comments and also I want to extend my condolences for the passing of your friend.

I appreciate a lot of what you said. I would like to hear from you in particular around, since we are talking about it, the protest convoy in front of the Hill right now. You did not mention it at all in your address, and I am curious about your opinions and your thoughts on this.

We see, for example, swastikas. We see hate speech and illegal acts, such as arson. You did not have any comments on this. I am curious what your thoughts are on these acts, on these flags, etc.?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the hon. member to ensure that he addresses all questions and comments through the Chair and not to the member directly.

The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, my speech tonight was an attempt to turn the temperature down here. This is a very volatile and unfortunate situation. It is really important that we understand that members on both sides of this House have continued to say that those acts are deplorable and despicable. I find it unfortunate if my colleague opposite wants to continue to perpetuate the idea that it is something that anybody in this House would stand for. That is very, very unfortunate. It is inflammatory. It is for those exact reasons that I chose not to talk about those things in my speech but to emphasize that we need to begin to get to the end of this very volatile situation.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, which I very much enjoyed. It is true that people have become anxious and cynical and that a small minority of people, not everyone, have lost their trust in our institutions. As my colleague said, all of this comes from the fact that these people are living in their own echo chamber. I understand what he was getting at. I also liked the rules of leadership that he mentioned.

Unfortunately, I find that the federal government may not have followed those rules. What my colleague and his party are proposing is a good idea, namely, that the leaders of the various parties should meet to try to find solutions to the crisis. However, does he not think it would be even more productive if the federal government met with the Ottawa Police Service, the City of Ottawa, the Government of Ontario and all of the stakeholders on the ground to find a solution to the crisis?

● (2320)

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, I think there is a time for meetings and a time for action. The government talks a lot about meetings, but the time has come to take action, to set a direction and to establish a plan for the future, not only for the occupation, but for our country, Canada.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to start by acknowledging what the member said in his intervention: that people are suffering, that COVID-19 has been terrible, that people have died, that people have lost so much and that it has been very difficult.

He talked today to my colleague from the other party about turning the temperature down. Last week, I had to ask my staff person not to come to work. She is a young Muslim woman, and I was afraid for her safety. I have another colleague working in my office who is taking a sick day because she has not been able to sleep and she is deeply traumatized.

How can members of the Conservative Party of Canada continue to create a public relations campaign out of the occupation of our national capital by posing with protesters, posting messages of support and fuelling further divisions with their own party and across this nation?

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Madam Speaker, that is exactly the thing that we are trying to avoid here this evening. We think it is very important, even with respect to the audacity of the members opposite, that we need to turn the temperature down and we need to get the occupation finished and be able to move forward and get back to the great things that we have to offer here in Canada.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members to please be respectful when someone has the floor. There is opportunity to ask questions and to comment at the proper time.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the resi-

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dents of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, especially on a topic as important as this one.

I will be direct. I would love to see an end to what is going on outside, a peaceful end, and that end begins with the Prime Minister. COVID has been a difficult situation for everybody. Obviously, everybody in the House denounces any violence and any racialized gestures or symbols that have been displayed over the last two weeks. I rose in the House seven days ago as the shadow minister for veteran affairs to raise that very point when it came to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and I have no regrets on that point.

COVID has left us with a very fluid situation. Initially, people were unsure whether to wear a mask. Then people donned masks at the request of government. We waited for a vaccine, and then we had a vaccine. Then we had our second dose of the vaccine, and then we had our boosters. I personally did all of these things as quickly as possible, and I encourage those around me to consider doing the same.

Canadians have been asked to give, and they have given a lot throughout this pandemic. Earlier today, I was reflecting that one of my young children would not remember a period prepandemic. The point is this: We all want to get to normal. The people outside want to get back to normal. The people of Ottawa, living and working in the surrounding area, want to get back to normal. I want the people outside to get back to normal. I want the people living and working in the downtown area to get back to normal. I would love to see the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo get back to normal, and I want to see all Canadians get back to normal.

One thing we have repeatedly heard is the Prime Minister say that he has Canadians' backs. I prefer to take a different approach, though. It is Canadians who have had one another's backs. It is the doctors who have had our backs. It is the grocery store workers keeping groceries available for us. It is the pharmacists filling our prescriptions. It is the respiratory therapists helping us, and the nurses, doctors and truckers. These are the people who have had one another's backs, and I am thankful to live in a country like Canada, where we can make that claim.

In my view, a prime minister is a prime minister to all or a prime minister to none. There is no middle ground. My hon. colleague from Nunavut mentioned, when addressing my colleague from Vaughan—Woodbridge, the phrase “a Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian”, which, in my recollection, was a reference to when the Prime Minister opposed stripping the citizenship of people convicted of a terrorism offense. We should not forget that the Prime Minister knelt with protesters within the last two years in breach of COVID protocols, yet here we have a prime minister who is dividing Canadians.

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I have great trouble when I hear the Prime Minister blame unvaccinated people, calling them names and adjectives like fringe, racist and misogynist. At the most basic level, if one wants to encourage another to do something like get vaccinated, the best way to do it is not to call them a name. It is to encourage them to answer the question. If anything, those types of divisive tactics will alienate, rather than resonate with people who are unvaccinated. At the most basic level, the Prime Minister's job is to unite, as is everybody's job in the House. Unfortunately, I am seeing a prime minister who is choosing to divide, which is genuinely unfortunate.

• (2325)

In my capacity as member of Parliament for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, I have had many discussions with people, both vaccinated and unvaccinated. The Prime Minister may not appreciate this, but I have had reasonable discussions with people on all sides of the debate. Some people I would call hesitant. They have questions. That is why I share with them my experience, tell them what I have done and why I did it, and invite and encourage them to do the same. However, I cannot force or compel a health care decision, which leads me to the point of leadership and how we go from today, Monday, to tomorrow, Tuesday.

This is the time to resolve what is happening outside. I walked around today to and from Parliament Hill two or three times. I probably heard one or two horns all day, which, for those who have been here for the past couple weeks, is anomalous. That is likely due to the recent civil injunction. I noticed something; the tone felt different. It was quieter. Now is the time for a peaceful end. We do not have 5,000 people outside. We have a few hundred people remaining.

If I could speak to the Prime Minister, I would tell him that today he brought his partisan hat to the chamber and that tomorrow he should take that partisan hat off. I would say today the Prime Minister took an us-versus-them approach and that tomorrow he should meet with the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the leader of the New Democratic Party, who arranged and requested this emergency debate. Today, the Prime Minister's approach was to look at other people as different, but tomorrow I encourage him to see all Canadians and their desire to move on from the current impasse.

The past two years have been hard enough and difficult enough, so I would say to the Prime Minister to please be a prime minister to all and help end this impasse.

• (2330)

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member said in his speech that the Prime Minister's job is to unite, as is everyone's in this place. Over the past two years we have seen 34,000 Canadians die from COVID and five million across the world. People in Ottawa have had to file injunctions, as the member said himself, in order to get a bit of peace and quiet. When we see members from the opposite side going and joining this occupation of Ottawa, which is disturbing the residents and the peace of Ottawa, does the member not think that he has a responsibility to do the right thing, be democratic and stand up for the values of democracy of our great nation?

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Speaker, I feel that is what I am doing right now. I am discussing all Canadians, not just some Canadians. I implore a peaceful resolution to what is happening right now, but when we talk about democracy and a peaceful resolution, we are about two weeks in now. Where has the Prime Minister been the last two weeks? That is really the big question, but let us not focus just on where he has been the last two weeks. Let us focus on where he is going to be tomorrow and the next day after that in bringing a resolution to what is happening.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech, and I very much enjoyed its tone. His tone was different from the one we heard from the Prime Minister and some government members, who used a very combative tone, one that we obviously do not support.

I sensed some goodwill on the part of my colleague, who said he himself had been vaccinated and was explaining to people why he had chosen to do so. I also sensed a concern on his part about making the right decisions from a health standpoint and about bringing people together so that we can move forward and end both this occupation and the pandemic.

Since we want to de-escalate the current crisis, I was wondering if he and other members of his party would be willing to meet with the protesters or occupiers to encourage them to leave Parliament Hill and make sure we can put an end to this occupation.

[English]

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his helpful remarks and for his comments.

At this point, I feel a lot of what we can do has really been exhausted. If I can put it bluntly, the ball is in the Prime Minister's court. He is the head of state of Canada. I endorse what the Leader of the Opposition has suggested, which is a meeting between the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the Bloc and the leader of the NDP. These are the leaders of the four official parties in the House of Commons. Who better to hit the ground running to put a peaceful end to this protest, to listen to the people who are outside and to hopefully move forward in all necessary facets?

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, others have said it today and I will say it as well: My father was a trucker. My dad, Duke McPherson, was a trucker. He is worried about truckers. I am worried about truckers.

When the member talks about doing the right thing, listening and helping out, why did the Conservatives, if they really wanted to help truckers, reliably vote against improving safety regulations and enforcement, vote against better working conditions, vote against increased ability and support for unionizations and vote against improving workers' rights? That is their legacy in the House of Commons.

If Conservatives actually want to support truckers, why do they constantly vote against truckers' best interests?

• (2335)

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Speaker, I am not sure what particular legislation she is referring to, so it is very difficult for me to answer a question about general legislation. As Conservatives, and like all people in this House, we want what is best for Canadians, and I am prepared to fight for that, as are all Conservatives.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Mount Royal.

I never thought that I would be in the House having an emergency debate like this with our city of Ottawa under siege and in a state of emergency. We have heard so much today from many members, in particular the hon. member for Ottawa Centre, my good friend, who talked about what is happening just metres away from the House of Commons. He talked about what is happening to the citizens and the desecration of our national monuments, including the National War Memorial. He talked about the incessant noise and how it is impacting children, children with autism, people with dementia and people who have to live in the residential districts around downtown. We have heard about the assaults, the verbal assaults, the threats and the way in which people wearing masks and the people working downtown are being treated. We have heard that all evening.

I would like to talk today about the impact on my constituents. My riding is only 15 minutes from downtown, and many of my constituents work downtown. Many of them have not been able to go to work, whether on Bank Street or at the Rideau Centre. They have not been able to collect a paycheque for the last 10 days, and those who have had the opportunity to go to work are terrified. They are being threatened and harassed. I had a man write to me to tell me that he works at a church and this weekend, while at work inside a church, he had to call the police because he was that threatened. I have mothers whose daughters live downtown who have said that their daughters and their friends are facing threats of murder and threats of sexual assault. This is not something that we should be living in the capital city of our country.

I was heartbroken when I heard from Jewish mothers in my riding who were asking how they would explain to their children about the people who are wearing the yellow star and the people who are flying the swastika. What do they say to their children? This is at a moment when, in one of the neighbourhoods in my riding where we have a large Jewish population, there were trucks driving around with vile symbols. This is what is happening in our city right now.

When trucks were going down Carling Avenue for hours honking their horns, a mother whose child has autism said that she was taking him to the emergency, because there was no other way to get away from the noise. Yes, it is having an impact.

I have a coffee hour with my constituents every Friday, which is virtual now, and there was a young racialized man who said to me that he did not understand. It is almost a loss of innocence. How can it be that he cannot go downtown in his own city because of the colour of his skin? What was really important about that coffee

hour was that people were listening to each other. We actually had some people who were at the protest attend the coffee hour and hear the impact that it is having on some of the racialized, LGBT and other members of our society. I think that people need to listen to one another more and be decent again, because what is happening out there right now is not decent. It is not peaceful. When violence is threatened, it is not peaceful.

The impact goes even beyond what is happening downtown. The Queensway Carleton Hospital in my riding has not been able to get their nurses and the frontline health care workers from Gatineau on the other side of the bridge to come to work. People in my constituency are not able to get help when they are sick. Worse yet, the children's hospital, CHEO, is having trouble. This is the impact that the protest is having.

It is not about political speech anymore. Maybe it started out to be about that, but now it is about mob rule. It is about intimidation. It is about bullying, and it has absolutely no place in our city or in our country. To anybody who is saying that this is a peaceful protest or that it is somehow about expressing political opinions, that is not what this is. Anybody who has seen the impact on people, how this is hurting people and how it is unleashing hate, should not be out there posing for pictures and giving out coffee.

• (2340)

I have worked in parts of the world where politicians thought they could draw that line, that they could toy with these forces of hatred and somehow use them for political gain, and we have seen what happened. I have worked in Sarajevo, Kosovo and the Congo. We cannot put those forces back in. We have to denounce them. We have to denounce them every single time. We cannot stop those forces once they are unleashed. We cannot control them anymore.

People ask why we are not talking to them. I do not think we want to tell other Canadians that if they were to come with large trucks, make lots of noise, threaten people, cause the kind of terror that has been caused to people in Ottawa and scare people, they can be rewarded, heard and listened to. Who are they? They are not the truckers, because 90% of the truckers are vaccinated and most of them are doing their job.

All of us are tired of COVID. We are all tired of the measures and the lockdowns. However, it is not even about that anymore. There are people a few feet from the House of Commons calling for the overthrow of our government and for harm to come to members of Parliament. That is an attack on the institutions of our democracy, and they want people to lose faith in our institutions. That is something we absolutely cannot condone.

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People have asked what we are doing about it. The federal government has met every single request from the City of Ottawa. We have 300 RCMP officers, tactical and logistical support, joint intelligence and operations teams and community liaison teams, and we are coordinating among all levels of law enforcement. However, politicians do not direct the police. This weekend and prior, I have been talking to other levels of government. I have been communicating with the mayor and the MPP. The Prime Minister has been doing that, as well as the public safety minister, from the beginning. We have also talked to parliamentarians about solutions to this. Maybe we need to be looking at the financing of these movements. We need to ban symbols like the swastika and the Confederate flag. The member for Hull—Aylmer articulated perfectly the impact that the flag has on Black Canadians. We need to look at social media and how it propagates hate speech. We need to support the businesses and workers who have not been able to go to work this week.

As I come to my final words, I want to leave with one thing: Most people are good. Canadians are not as divided as people think they are. The fact is that 90% of Canadians are wearing masks, getting vaccinated and making sure they are protecting their neighbours. As we have seen this week, the Shepherds of Good Hope, which is the homeless shelter where protesters were trying to get food, and some of the women's shelters are getting more donations than they have ever gotten, as are the Legion and the Terry Fox Foundation. There are people living in the neighbourhood around the hospital who are saying that workers who cannot get home and back safely can stay in their spare rooms. There are truckers who continue to deliver goods. These are the good people. These are decent, good people. Living through and seeing all of this starts to affect us and makes us wonder about humanity. However, we need to see that the vast majority of Canadians are good.

I will conclude with a quote from the doctors and nurses in Ottawa, who wrote a statement. They said, "We will not cower. We will not hide. We will wear our scrubs in public, without fear, knowing that you—Canadians—have our backs." That is exactly what we have.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for shining a light on the voices that have not yet been heard tonight. Do members know who else has not been heard? It is the nurses and health care workers the member just spoke of, who are working in hospitals tonight caring for people. I raise my hands to the health care workers and nurses experiencing violence on their way to work. I see them and offer them all of my gratitude and that of the people of Port Moody—Coquitlam.

• (2345)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Speaker, I think we all share that same sentiment. The nurses, doctors and frontline health care workers are there every single day caring for us. Whether we take their medical advice or not about getting vaccinated, they are there and going to work. They say they are not heroes, but we know they are the people we need to support. It is why we have made it illegal for anybody to harass health care workers on their way into a hospital. That is happening right now in Ottawa. I want to applaud, along

with all members here, the courage and incredible sacrifice of those workers.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her compassionate speech. It is important to represent the voice of these people who are suffering because of what is happening right now.

It is true that some extremely inappropriate and unacceptable symbols have been brandished in this protest. No member of the House has inadvertently or unwittingly taken a photo next to these symbols. It is unacceptable.

We are being told that the government listened to all the demands of the City of Ottawa and the police services. Nonetheless, we sense the lack of leadership and we have tangible proof of it this evening, a few metres from here. Why was it not enough? What more does the government need to do?

[English]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Speaker, in fact, we just announced today that we are going to have a trilateral meeting among the different levels of government.

We know that people do not want to hear us say that it is about jurisdiction, but the fact is that politicians do not direct the police. What we need to be doing, as politicians and the federal government, is providing all the resources so that the police, who have jurisdiction, have everything they need to uphold the law and to be able to do their jobs.

I would say that from the very start, before the time that the convoy reached Ottawa, we have been having that coordination. We have been talking with law enforcement. At every single level, political leaders have been talking.

As I mentioned, when the convoy was being routed through residential neighbourhoods in my constituency, I talked to the mayor and the provincial MPP to make sure that the convoy was not being welcomed and sent down Woodroffe Avenue.

Every single day, these conversations are happening. They have been happening with the municipal councillors right up to the Prime Minister. We need to keep doing that. After this is over, I believe we will have lessons to learn. We will need to sit back and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We want to allow for one quick question. I was trying to give the hon. member a sign to wrap it up.

The hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my colleague why the Prime Minister has put all of his eggs in one basket and will not go out and speak to the truckers.

The truckers have given him an option. The associations I have spoken to in the trucking industry have said that if they had had a test available, they would have taken a test and if that proved they were negative, they would go to work. If they were positive, they would isolate like anyone else.

Could the member elaborate on why we did not have enough rapid test kits in Canada from the middle of December until the middle of January, at least, so that could not be done? If they are available now, as the Prime Minister says, why would that not be allowed?

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Madam Speaker, just this month we have actually procured 140 million rapid tests. However, these are not the truckers. The trucking associations signed a joint statement with the minister saying that they supported the vaccine mandate, and 90% of truckers are vaccinated. That is not who is out there on the lawn right now.

[Translation]

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the leader of the NDP for proposing this debate.

• (2350)

[English]

I want to start by saying how sorry I am to the people of Ottawa and the businesses of Ottawa for what they have experienced over the last 10 days. Nobody deserves to experience what they have experienced.

There are those who say this convoy is about freedom. I certainly agree that after two years of a pandemic, most Canadians yearn for freedom, but most Canadians also agree that freedom comes with obligations. Those obligations include protecting the most vulnerable in our society. This means we all need to get vaccinated, because without getting vaccinated, new variants will continue to emerge and our hospitals will be overburdened. This means we need to wear masks indoors, because we know that the virus spreads more quickly in poorly ventilated or crowded indoor settings.

When someone calls for all mandates to be terminated, they are going against science, but it does not mean that other restrictions should not be constantly reconsidered. There are many in this country who are double-vaccinated and boosted. They have done everything right over the last two years and believed they were seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. Then omicron hit us in December. Our health care system, which lacks adequate surge capacity, was about to be overwhelmed, and politicians had to act.

These restrictions involved a travel advisory and added testing upon return at the federal level, but the vast majority of these restrictions were imposed by provinces, including by Conservative provincial governments. Everybody was trying to do their best, using their best judgment, but that does not mean everyone agreed with the decisions, and they all merit debate.

I can fully understand why parents are confused and upset when their kids are having their schools closed and the kids' mental health is being so deeply impacted. I can understand why some business owners cannot understand why their businesses are closed while other comparable businesses are open. I have a friend who runs a gym and a friend who runs an adult basketball league. They have been constantly closed over the last two years. Given how important working out is to physical and mental health, it is hard for me to explain to them why this is the case.

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Believe me, I get it. There need to be reasonable conversations about why vaccinated people and business owners are subject to restrictions, and we need a plan that provinces and the federal government agree upon to talk about how other restrictions will be relaxed.

Let me be clear that these frustrated Canadians are not represented by the protests currently going on in Ottawa and other cities. Demonstrations are important expressions whereby citizens make their views known. They typically involve local residents receiving a municipal permit, making their case and then leaving after a reasonable period of time. They involve a careful choice of location, and normally organizers go out of their way to not disrupt the lives of people and businesses. This is a constitutionally protected right that we need to respect, whether or not we agree with the cause.

While legal, peaceful assembly is a constitutionally protected right, a blockade of a city is not. The rule of law still exists in Canada. Honking all night long and keeping people awake, setting off fireworks and refusing to follow local rules related to wearing masks in indoor settings are not part of a normal, peaceful protest. Harassing citizens and journalists is not part of a normal, peaceful protest. Desecrating monuments is not part of a normal, peaceful protest. Targeting health care workers is not part of normal, peaceful protest. Stealing from food banks is not part of a normal, peaceful protest.

Let me say loudly and clearly that flying Confederate flags is not part of a normal, peaceful protest. Waving swastikas, wearing yellow stars and having the nerve to compare one's situation to Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust is not part of a normal, peaceful protest.

My colleague from Hull—Aylmer spoke beautifully about what it meant to him as a Black Canadian to see people waving the Confederate flag. As a proud Jewish Canadian, seeing some fellow Canadians waving flags with Nazi symbols and wearing and selling the Star of David that Jews were forced to wear to separate them from the rest of society in the Nazi era made me more sad and angry than I have ever been as a parliamentarian.

I heard from constituents of mine who are Holocaust survivors, and the pain and anguish this has caused them cannot even be described in words. What kind of people would do this? The organizers of the convoy have made clear what their goal is: Their goal is the removal of the duly elected government. Their goal is the abolition of all mandates and restrictions, whether scientifically validated or not. The convoy has some organizers who have social media histories of white nationalism and bigotry.

Who is supporting the convoy? Well, it is supported by Donald Trump, Ron DeSantis, Ted Cruz, Matt Gaetz, Paul Gosar and Marjorie Taylor Greene. I think my colleagues know that I believe we can disagree without personalizing things, but these politicians are different because they are actually attacking American democracy.

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The hallmark of democracy is that the loser concedes an election, but in this case, these politicians have propagated the false and laughable claim that Donald Trump won the 2020 election, even though these claims were laughed out of almost every court to which they were brought. Indeed, Trump's lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, had his law licence suspended for communicating demonstrably false comments to courts in his capacity as Trump's lawyer.

I personally have no issue with Americans commenting on Canadian politics, in the same way that I reserve my right to complain about laws in U.S. states that make it more difficult for minorities to vote and that stop women from having safe and accessible abortions. However, what we do not need is further disinformation in Canada. People already have enough disinformation about vaccines. The last thing they need is disinformation about our democracy. The presence of Trump 2024 signs at this blockade is of deep concern.

What do we need to happen? People are frustrated and they want action. I want to thank the men and women of the Ottawa Police and the Parliamentary Protective Service, as well as the OPP, the RCMP and other forces who have done their best. Even though this is under the jurisdiction of the City of Ottawa, nobody wants to hear about jurisdiction.

We have a huge problem. Citizens' lives are being disrupted. They do not want to hear excuses from others that this is not their jurisdiction. They want all governments to work together to have this convoy leave Ottawa. They want a safe, peaceful and respectful end to this blockade.

I was very pleased to hear the announcement today that all levels of government will work together. May I suggest that they also need to communicate together? All of us need to see a daily press conference with all three levels of government and the operational leaders at the police level so Canadians know exactly what is being done to protect the rule of law and re-establish order in this city. We need to solve this issue and end these blockades.

Once that is accomplished, what do we need to do?

We need to have a parliamentary committee study exactly what happened with this convoy. How did a convoy end up being allowed to park trucks across from Parliament Hill? What security changes are needed? What legislative changes are needed to ensure that local police forces can request federal assistance more easily? Should there be federal responsibility for policing in downtown Ottawa that currently does not exist?

We need to understand how this convoy was financed, and whether there are countries seeking to cause trouble in Canada by financing illegality. It is one thing to receive donations from the United States, but if U.S. donations can come in this case, it would be equally easy for our adversaries, such as Russia and China, to send funds. What legislative changes, if any, are required to protect our democracy?

The member for New Westminster—Burnaby has brought forward a private member's bill to make the use of racist symbols and emblems, such as the swastika and Confederate flag criminal, subject to carve-outs. This is indeed a subject we need to tackle quickly.

While this has been a very unhappy experience, I encourage members to learn from what happened and use the experience to ensure that this cannot happen again. We must take steps to enhance and protect our democracy.

● (2355)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have just two quick questions for my colleagues. Both are from constituents.

One is from a female police officer in my riding who got her first vaccine, but unfortunately had an adverse reaction and is scared. Now she is mad at the Prime Minister, who is calling her a misogynist and racist for having health concerns.

The second question is from a fully vaccinated health professional in my riding who is seeing other countries around the world with less vaccination uptake that are opening up and lowering their federal equivalent mandates and restrictions. They want to know when the federal government is going to lift the restrictions here in Canada.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, first, if somebody had an adverse reaction to the vaccine, there is an exemption they can procure to not be fully vaccinated. I do not know the situation exactly of the member's constituent, but if she truly had a negative reaction to the vaccine and her physician advises her against it, then she can procure an exemption in most provinces.

Second, as I stated, I believe that vaccine mandates are important. I believe that public health rules, such as wearing masks indoors, still have to be followed, but that does not mean that we do not have to look at all restrictions for vaccinated people. This includes, for example, whether we still need a travel advisory, and whether we need more testing in addition to PCR testing when people leave their destination and more testing when they arrive. All of these need to be reconsidered in the light of new facts. We all need to do that at the provincial and federal levels.

● (2400)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I agree with him on several points. There has been abusive behaviour, it was reported, and that is the right thing to do.

We are holding an emergency debate. This is the last speech of the evening, and I am probably overly optimistic, but I was hoping that something would come of the debate. That rarely happens when we have emergency debates such as this one.

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At least it gives us a chance to debate and propose solutions, although I was surprised to hear my colleague say that we could create a parliamentary committee on the issue to understand what happened. At this point, we need to find a solution to what is happening outside. When we leave, the trucks and vehicles will still be there.

What does my colleague suggest doing in the short term?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more with my hon. colleague.

In my speech, I suggested, as did she, that we not only have a liaison between the three levels of government, but that these three levels hold daily briefings where they would communicate about

what actions they are taking with police to bring this situation to an end.

These people must leave Ottawa as soon as possible, and we must work together to make that happen.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being midnight, I declare the motion carried.

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until later this day at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

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