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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1000)

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

STATUS OF OPPOSITION PARTY—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the point of order raised on March 22, 2022, by the House leader of the official opposition concerning the status of the New Democratic Party as an opposition party. While I would have preferred for the Speaker himself to rule on this important matter upon his return, there is an immediate issue that needs to be addressed.

In his observations, the member alleged that the confidence and supply agreement between the New Democratic Party and the Liberal government is a coalition and that by supporting the government, the New Democratic members have ceased to form an opposition party. He argued that, as a result, the New Democratic Party should no longer have the same rights as the other opposition parties with regard to the proceedings of the House and its committees or to the related procedural and administrative rules.

In response, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby argued that there have already been supply and confidence agreements in a number of legislative assemblies in Canada, as well as in other countries. This type of agreement is very different from a coalition government, in which the members from two or more parties hold ministerial posts. Rather, it means that an opposition party agrees to support the government on certain issues in exchange for the implementation of that party's main priorities. He also added, as did the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, that when such agreements occurred, these parties remained in opposition, with all the privileges attached to that status.

[Translation]

As for the member for La Prairie, he said that he was primarily concerned about the agreement to have public servants share information with the New Democratic Party and a possible imbalance between the powers of government and the opposition's role to hold it accountable.

As members know, the Chair deals with procedural issues, not political ones. Fundamentally, the agreement in question is a political

one. It is not the Chair's role to interpret or give meaning to such agreements between parties.

The procedural issue therefore rests on the rights exercised in our proceedings by members of the opposition and those of the government.

Let us first look back at the basis of our political system. Members are elected to the House under the banner of a political party or as independents. The party that can obtain the confidence of the House forms the government. As such, it is the governing party and it consists of ministers, parliamentary secretaries and backbenchers who, without being members of the executive, are all part of the same political group. The other parties in the House and independent members constitute the opposition since they are not members of the governing party.

[English]

In a ruling of September 24, 2001, Speaker Milliken, dealing with the question of the identification of parties, specified at page 5491 of Debates:

...these are matters that the House has always left entirely to the discretion of MPs. They identify themselves as individuals and are free to identify themselves as a group. Their spokespersons are theirs to select. Neither the Speaker nor other members has a say in such matters.

[Translation]

It is clear to the Chair that there is no change in the status or designation of the members of the New Democratic Party, nor in that of their officers, as a result of this agreement.

• (1005)

[English]

The Chair wishes to point out that it is not unusual for opposition parties to form certain agreements with a minority government without thereby becoming members of that same government. As was mentioned, this has happened in a number of provincial and international legislatures. The House has also seen formal and informal agreements between the government and an opposition party, such as during the 29th Parliament from 1972 to 1974, among other examples. We also saw an example of a formal coalition in 1917, the only example in our federal Parliament's history.

[Translation]

In the current case, it is not for the Chair to determine if this agreement between the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party is a coalition.

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However, this agreement does not equate to the creation of a new government party or a new political caucus. No NDP member is holding a ministerial post. There has been no change in the representation of the parties in the House.

As a result, it seems obvious to the Chair that the NDP still forms a recognized opposition party, just like the Conservative Party of Canada and the Bloc Québécois.

[English]

The Chair is confident that the specific provisions of the agreement between the two parties, including those relating to the sharing of and access to information from public servants, will respect the rights and privileges of the House and all parliamentarians.

I thank all members for their attention.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) and subsection 18(1) of the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Government of Canada's emissions reduction plan entitled "2030 Emissions Reduction Plan: Canada's Next Steps for Clean Air and a Strong Economy".

* * *

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), and consistent with the current policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaties entitled "Acts of the Second Extraordinary Congress of the Universal Postal Union", done at Addis Ababa on September 7, 2018; "Acts of the Third Extraordinary Congress of the Universal Postal Union", done at Geneva on September 26, 2019; and "Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the French Republic Concerning the Deployment of In-Flight Security Officers", done at Paris on January 19, 2022.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, a report of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the first part of the 2022 ordinary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, or PACE, by video conference from January 24 to 28, 2022.

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology entitled "The Neo Lithium Acquisition: Canada's National Security Review Process in Action".

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs entitled "Main Estimates 2022-23: Vote 1 under Canadian High Arctic Research Station, Votes 1, 5, 10 and L15 under Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs and Votes 1, 5 and 10 under Department of Indigenous Services".

* * *

• (1010)

[English]

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-262, An Act respecting the corporate responsibility to prevent, address and remedy adverse impacts on human rights occurring in relation to business activities conducted abroad.

He said: Mr. Speaker, with slavery, torture, murder and systemic sexual violence, Canadian corporations overseas have sometimes been involved in the most egregious violations of human rights. Up until now, there has been utter and complete impunity for these appalling acts.

That is why today I am tabling the corporate responsibility to protect human rights act. I thank my seconder, the terrific member of Parliament for Edmonton Strathcona. This bill would oblige Canadian companies abroad to maintain due diligence on human rights at all times and would provide for the ability of victims to sue these companies for human rights violations abroad.

[Translation]

Corporate responsibility is everyone's responsibility. I hope all members of the House will support this important bill.

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

[English]

RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS CONDUCT ABROAD ACT

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-263, An Act to establish the Office of the Commissioner for Responsible Business Conduct Abroad and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to stand here today and table my private member's legislation, the responsible business conduct abroad bill. I want to thank the member for New Westminster—Burnaby for both agreeing to second my bill and being such a champion of human rights in Canada and around the world.

As elected representatives, we have an awesome responsibility. We have a responsibility to represent our constituents, and it is the honour of my life to represent the constituents of Edmonton Strathcona. However, we also have a responsibility to the greater good, to humanity as a whole and to our shared ambition of a healthy planet and prosperity and opportunity for all people around the world.

I am proud to be a Canadian because I believe Canada can and should be a leader in protecting human rights and promoting democratic values around the world. However, sadly, there is a stain on our reputation that we must both acknowledge and correct. For too long, companies headquartered in Canada, many mining and oil and gas companies, have undertaken business operations in developing countries, either directly or through subsidiaries, and in many countries with weak human rights protections, workers and communities are violated and abused.

The CORE ombudsperson has been operational for nearly three years, yet the Government of Canada failed to give it powers that were promised. This bill aims to fix what the government failed to provide. This bill aims to repair Canada's reputation in the world. This bill aims to protect indigenous people, women and girls, human rights defenders, activists and all those fighting for human rights and environmental sustainability in their communities and around the world.

I hope everyone in the House will support this legislation.

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

* * *

[Translation]

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-264, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (pension plans and group insurance plans).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured and proud to introduce this bill in the House. I feel compelled to say that I am reintroducing it, since I introduced a similar version in terms of the spirit and the letter in 2017, and again in 2020. This bill is just as necessary today to protect the pension funds of our retirees and our workers.

Of course, I would like to thank my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville, whom I greatly admire, for seconding this bill.

Routine Proceedings

I mentioned that I tabled a similar bill five years ago. We have had a few elections since then, but we have come a long way. We discussed the bill at the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology until all members reached a consensus in June 2021. Since committee members unanimously supported the bill, it was able to proceed through the legislative process.

I hope the bill will go even further this time, since it will affect several organizations in Quebec. It was inspired by what happened to Cliffs Natural Resources pensioners in my riding. We had 3.5 million supporters across Canada in the previous Parliament.

I would really love to see the bill go even further this time. I cannot stress enough how important it is to protect retirees' pension funds. The reality is that large multinationals have stolen their deferred wages. Pensions need to be protected once and for all.

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

* * *

● (1015)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC) moved that the third report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration presented on Thursday, March 3, 2022, be concurred in.

He said: Mr. Speaker, today we are asking the House to agree to the report from the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration recommending that Canada implement visa-free travel from Ukraine to Canada, including by the rapid issuance of electronic travel authorization and by increasing staff so that the existing immigration backlog is not further impacted by this crisis.

This motion was passed at committee with the support of all opposition members. I hope the government will support this necessary step, as it voted against it when we brought it up at committee.

I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

We are all horrified at the events unfolding in Ukraine. The unprovoked Russian invasion of a sovereign country and a friend of Canada is disgusting. In this time of need, Canadians across the country have organized to provide aid. They offer their homes to Ukrainians who come to Canada and they raise money to support people in refugee centres in Europe and those who arrive here with almost nothing. That is the generosity of Canadians. Ukrainians fleeing war are looking for safety and a place to work and live where their kids can be kids.

Routine Proceedings

Countries next to Ukraine, such as Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Moldova, have taken in millions of refugees. UNHCR estimates that the total number of refugees is now over 3.8 million, and over 6.5 million people are internally displaced in their own country. Poland is at a point where its infrastructure cannot take much more, yet these countries continue to open their homes and communities. They provide aid and military assistance to Ukraine, all while standing up for freedom against Russian aggression.

This refugee crisis is on a scale that the world has not seen since World War II. The gravity of the situation is not lost on anyone. We see the images of bombed-out cities, bodies of women and children lying on the street and the war crimes committed by a regime wanting to recreate the Soviet Union. Back in January, the member for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake and I wrote to the Minister of Immigration, asking him to prepare for the invasion and the refugee crisis. We reiterated the Conservatives' call for visa-free travel for Ukrainians and their families. I will note that the Bloc and the NDP support this measure and have been calling for it as well.

With all of the pain and suffering that Ukrainians are going through and the pressure building in neighbouring countries, the current immigration system and the pathway need to change. The Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel has not improved the situation for Ukrainians. It is no secret that people applying for a temporary resident visa through this program are still stuck in IRCC's historic Liberal-made backlog of almost two million applications. I am hearing stories from Ukrainians and their families who are completely frustrated by the red tape and bureaucracy affecting people hoping to come to Canada. The new program is based on the existing temporary resident visa program. That means people still need biometrics and need to apply for a visa online. In their time of need, the current government asks Ukrainians to meet the same standards as an immigrant coming to Canada from a country without war. People who do not have computers or access to the Internet or who have limited access to those things are not in a position to have to deal with IRCC and its bureaucracy.

Look at what happened in Afghanistan. When the government opened up special measures, people had to submit everything electronically. In the middle of the Taliban taking over, refugees had to go to an Internet café, pay, print out documents, fill them out, scan them and email them. After Kabul fell, NGOs such as Ark Salus set up safe houses for people to do this paperwork, but to date, thousands of Afghans who worked for the Government of Canada in Afghanistan or as interpreters with the Canadian Forces are still stranded and in harm's way.

The government's lack of foresight, planning and coordination was on full display in Afghanistan. In the letter to the minister, we asked him and the government to develop a response to Ukraine that coordinated with national defence and public safety. The government failed to plan for the fall of Kabul, and Ukrainians cannot afford to have the Liberals make the same mistake Canada made in Afghanistan. When the government finally released its new program for Ukrainians, I knew the minister did not listen. He did not listen to the official opposition, the Bloc, the NDP or even Ukrainians who are here in Canada.

Visa-free travel is a simple ask that we are all making. We knew that if IRCC left a bureaucratic process in place, it would be like watching August 2021 all over again.

• (1020)

Canada is home to over 1.4 million people with Ukrainian heritage. Thousands of Canadians have family who are or were living in Ukraine. Our country is home to the second-largest diaspora of Ukrainians in the world. That means many people who are escaping the war and want to come to Canada are friends and family of people already here.

When I moved the motion calling for visa-free travel from Ukraine, the Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration said no, giving security as the reason, but if Russian sympathizers or spies were trying to come to Canada, our biometric system would not catch them anyway. The minister said so himself at committee on March 3, 2022. The minister said that about 80% of applicants caught for criminality are caught because of biometrics. The member for Lac-Saint-Jean asked the minister if that means that 80% of pro-Russian Ukrainians are detected through biometrics, and the minister said, "No."

If biometrics are not as useful as the government wants everyone to believe, why force Ukrainians to go through the bureaucratic mess that the government created? Anyone coming into Canada who is not already a permanent resident or citizen still has their name checked against international and criminal databases. In addition, they still have to submit their passport to get an electronic travel authorization, and everyone entering Canada has to go through customs. That is not to mention that the vast majority of Ukrainians who have left the country are women, children and seniors who cannot stay and fight.

Then the story changed. The minister said he did not do visa-free travel because it would take too long. He said:

I realized that certain regulatory changes would need to be made. ...The timeline to implement that would take 12 to 14 weeks, and I didn't think we had 12 to 14 weeks. We'll be able to stand up a new system much faster.

That statement has come back to bite the government, especially now. People applying for visas are waiting anywhere from three weeks to six months to get a biometrics appointment at a visa application centre in Europe, let alone have their application even processed.

Mike O'Leary, a Canadian expat, fled Ukraine with his family into Poland. He has been trying to bring his family back to Edmonton but cannot, because an overloaded system is holding up his application.

Tetiana is a former military interpreter who worked with the Canadian Forces before the war. She is in Poland and is waiting to do biometrics. She got the letter from IRCC with instructions on how to schedule an appointment. Still, she can find free spots in neighbouring countries only for July of 2022. Her friend applied on the first day the new program was opened and could only get an appointment for April 5, three weeks after she applied.

Konrad, a Ukrainian Canadian, contacted my office about his family in Ukraine. They were under siege in the south of the country. His family and their neighbours lost everything. His family managed to leave and get to Bucharest. They applied for the new program the day it opened and could only get an appointment for April 28, 2022, over a month from the day that they applied. He asked, “What is the meaning of ‘emergency’ in the title of this measure if the refugees have to use the same procedure as study permits, regular economic immigration, work permits and tourist visas?”

He has a point. Why are Ukrainians stuck in a system that is already nearly two million people deep in backlogs when they are just looking for safety from a war inflicted on them?

That is why I brought this motion to the immigration committee. That is why I stand here today asking that the government not leave our friends and family trapped in red tape. We need to have visa-free travel for Ukrainians fleeing war, and they need it now.

I want to thank the hon. members from the Bloc and the NDP who voted to pass this motion at committee. I urge all members in this House to do the right thing for people escaping the Russian invasion and vote in favour of visa-free travel.

• (1025)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what is taking place in Ukraine today is horrific. Many members, in a unified, solidarity fashion, have come out in support of Ukraine. Now a member of the official opposition is bringing forward an idea. He mentions that he brought it forward to the committee, and now we have it in a concurrence motion.

If the official opposition was as genuine as it is trying to say it is on the issue, why not bring this forward in an opposition day motion? That would have allowed for a longer debate, more members could have participated and there would have been an actual vote at the end of the day on that issue.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, this just goes to show that the government is not ready to act at all. Liberals want to debate more and drag this on while people are getting killed in Ukraine. People are trying to come here as soon as possible.

It was this government, when I tried to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): To both sides of the House, there is heckling going on or people are thinking out loud. I would ask that they keep it down, because I know that people will write to me or call me to complain that they cannot hear what is going on in the chamber and cannot hear the speaker because people are having side conversations or are heckling.

Routine Proceedings

The hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, it just goes to show that the Liberals are great at dragging their feet. When I sponsored a family from Afghanistan, it took the Liberal government four years, even though that family was fearful of their daughter being abducted, raped or forcibly married, and the Liberals dragged their feet then. It is because of the massive failures in Afghanistan that we have to bring this forward. If they did not jam up the immigration system and create backlogs like we have never seen before in almost two million applications, we would not have had to bring this motion forward. It is because of the government's failures that this needs to happen. They are dragging their feet again.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, yesterday, during question period, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship talked about everything the government had set up for Ukrainians arriving in Canada. She talked about all the services that have been made more accessible and all the assistance put in place to ease their arrival and make it as comfortable as possible.

As my colleague pointed out and as our colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean has been requesting for weeks now, there is still no air-lift to send humanitarian aid to Ukraine or to bring out the hundreds of thousands or even millions of Ukrainians looking for a safe place to stay until the war is over.

I would like my colleague to provide his thoughts on the matter. What is the logic behind preparing things here in Canada when nothing is being done to pick up the Ukrainians and the foreign nationals and bring them to Canada?

• (1030)

[English]

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Bloc for supporting our motion and the member for Lac-Saint-Jean for his advocacy for the Ukrainians. We had been asking before the invasion took place for all sorts of help, including humanitarian aid. As with every other issue, the Liberals keep dragging their feet. Opposition parties have been working together for the benefit of Ukrainians, but we do not see any help or support coming from the Liberal side, whether it is visa-free travel or more supports.

It is a good recommendation. I hope that the Liberals take this seriously and that we get things done for the Ukrainians.

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Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wonder if my colleague could speak more to the issue of backlogs and how when there is a crisis in one part of the world, it seems the government actually pulls resources away from another crisis. We should be able to address all the things going on at the same time.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, under the Liberal government, immigration is not working. We have a backlog of almost two million. It is proven that Liberals cannot walk and chew gum at the same time. It is sad to see that our immigration system under the government cannot do everyday business and handle a crisis at the same time. It is a massive failure in Afghanistan, and we are seeing the same type of failures happening in Ukraine.

Liberals need to get serious about immigration. Families are being separated and refugees cannot seek shelter here in Canada. Businesses are suffering under the government's immigration system and our economy is suffering because of all of that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be able to participate in the debate on this Conservative motion for concurrence to take a number of measures related to immigration required to support the people of Ukraine, and, in particular, to implement visa-free travel from Ukraine to Canada.

I will start by saying I recently joined the immigration committee. It has been a pleasure to work with colleagues from all sides on the immigration committee, especially the member for Calgary Forest Lawn, our shadow minister, who has so much passion in this area. As he mentioned in his speech, he was privately sponsoring refugees as a private citizen before he was elected to the House of Commons or anywhere close to that. We need more members who take this area very seriously and are able, independently of the spotlight and outside of their elected lives, to actually be willing to put their money where their mouths are.

Before I get into the immigration measures, I want to speak to the situation unfolding in Ukraine overall. There has been a great deal of debate in the House on this previously. It is important that we do not let up and allow it to drift out of the headlines. We cannot stop really thinking about the ongoing situation and conflict.

When I spoke earlier on the situation in Ukraine, I said that I believe Ukraine will either be Putin's Afghanistan or Putin's Czechoslovakia. Of course, we know the sad history of Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the Second World War when the world kind of just let it happen. It negotiated the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and allowed Hitler to take over Czechoslovakia. That was a step to further aggression and violence.

On the other hand, we also know the history of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, where, as a result of significant support from the west that allowed people within Afghanistan to fight back against the Soviet invasion and to have the equipment they needed, they were able to drive out the Soviet invaders. That ultimately played a critical role in changing the tide of history in the aggressive agenda that had been pursued by the Soviets up to that point.

It is up to us to look at this situation and ask if we are going to support the people of Ukraine, so Putin's experience in Ukraine will

be like the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, or are we going to allow the invasion to happen in the way similar to how the world kind of accepted the takeover of Czechoslovakia? That is the choice, and it requires our active engagement, our significant support for Ukrainians and our persistence in that enterprise.

Of course, we know that there is a lot of discussion in the news about possible negotiations and a possible back-and-forth dialogue happening. What is critical for us, as external actors, is to say that, regardless of negotiations taking place, we will not let up in sanctions and in holding Putin accountable unless he withdraws from all sovereign Ukrainian territory, respects the sovereignty of Ukraine's government, and respects the ability of Ukrainians to express themselves through democratic elections and make political choices about their future. Our role is to continue to apply significant sanctions. That is what we on the Conservative side have been saying is required, including significant increased lethal aid and other forms of tactical support to Ukrainians, tougher sanctions and, as our leader has called for, very importantly, air support for humanitarian corridors.

Speaking of those humanitarian corridors is a good transition point to talking about some of the immigration issues. While many Ukrainians are staying and fighting, heroically standing in the way of the Russian invasion, there are many people, such as women, children, the elderly and those who are not able to fight, who are desperate to get to safety. The UNHCR estimates that the number of Ukrainians who have fled the country is approaching four million. It is a very large number.

I want to congratulate Ukraine's neighbours, such as Poland, Latvia and other countries in the region. They have done incredible work. Everyday citizens of those countries are welcoming Ukrainians into their homes and stepping up to support Ukrainians in their hour of need. However, other countries that are farther away could play a greater role as well. Those of us here in Canada, with our large Ukrainian community and our close cultural and other ties, can play a critical role in welcoming those who are coming from Ukraine, many of whom, of course, hope to go back after the conflict is over. There is urgency to act now.

With respect to government action, the frustrating thing is that sometimes it seems like the government is solving problems but with such a delay and such a long time scale that things are ending, or past the point when they could best be solved, when the government is talking about it.

● (1035)

For example, it was announced that the government originally said that people coming from Ukraine could stay for two years; now, it is saying they can stay for three years. Obviously, three years is better than two years, but all of us are hoping this will be long over within two years and that people will have been able to go back within two years. We do not know.

It is hard to predict the future of how these kinds of things will unfold, but the government is making a promise about the far end, a time horizon, when what is really needed is to say how we can get people to be able to come more quickly right now, because right now is when we have the problem. I think we can make comparisons to other issues, such as COVID programs, where the government missed the boat and then, after the fact, would say, for example, that it was going to do ventilation in schools two years after this thing started. This is, I think, a problem with the way the government operates, sadly. It is not on top of issues, but then promises to do the thing we should have already done.

When it comes to immigration support for Ukrainians who are seeking to find a place to live and be in safety during this time, we are calling on the government to focus on the urgent immediate action now to help people get to a situation of safety. From this came a committee motion that was designed to really move this issue forward and emphasize to the government what needed to be done. A key part of that was the call for visa-free travel.

I do want to say that, while working on the immigration committee, the spirit of collaboration that exists has been really strong. It was a Conservative motion, but I think it is fair to say to my friends in the NDP and the Bloc that they were enthusiastic and keen about getting visa-free travel as part of this motion as well, and I am very hopeful we will see the same level of support and enthusiasm from other opposition parties, in terms of getting this motion adopted by the House of Commons. I hope, notwithstanding the fact that the Liberals voted against this motion at committee, that the Prime Minister, the immigration minister and the government will take seriously the will of the House of Commons in this respect. If a majority of the House of Commons votes in favour of saying we need visa-free travel, there is not a formal legal obligation on the government to implement the will of the House in this case, but I think there is a moral obligation in a democracy for the government to take seriously what the House of Commons is saying in this respect.

I do expect, given the positions taken by other opposition parties, this motion to pass, and I think it is a reasonable norm of democracy that, when a government that got a third of the popular vote is told by all of the rest of the parties in the House of Commons that it should take a certain action, the government actually takes that seriously and responds to it.

My colleague who spoke previously mentioned the arguments the government has used against bringing in visa-free travel. We saw them make some of these arguments at committee. They have said there are security issues that require a visa, and I think my colleague has demonstrated well, and the immigration minister sort of acknowledged this, that to whatever extent there may be individuals who are not actually sympathetic to the Ukrainian side who would try to use this program to get in, it could happen anyway with the provisions the government has put in place.

Moreover, I think the minister has said that it takes too long to pull back the visa requirement, which does not make a lot of sense to me. If the government is so slow in its operations that removing a requirement takes weeks and weeks of delay, that seems like a problem we should try to solve at a more fundamental level, because what we are calling for is not to add additional requirements

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to complicate the process; we are just asking the government to remove existing requirements. That should be a fairly simple, straightforward thing to do, and for the government to say that the imposition of this whole new program it has developed would somehow take less time than simply removing the visa requirement, I do not think that makes a lot of sense.

In any event, and I have sort of come back to this a few times in different contexts here this morning, I think we should ask and expect the Government of Canada to move faster during critical situations like this. I think we see this across the board with immigration. It is useful to think about how in the last year we had the situation in Afghanistan and now we have the situation in Ukraine. In both cases the government did not plan enough in advance and then told us it cannot move fast enough. It will say that it has all these papers it has to move around and things to sign, and that it is just going to take too long. The effect of accepting that somehow it is okay for these processes to take as long as the government is saying they will take is that it has real costs in human life and security.

• (1040)

The cost of government delays and inaction in the context of Afghanistan was that there were many people we should have gotten out that we did not. The cost in the case of the situation in Ukraine is, again, further delays, and more people being in harm's way for longer than necessary and longer than they should be.

I want to point out as well some of the statements being made by representatives of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress on immigration measures. For one, I think their position was actually misstated in committee. There was a member of the Liberal caucus who implied that somehow the Ukrainian Canadian Congress was not pushing for visa-free travel. The same day the Ukrainian Canadian Congress issued a statement clarifying that it does want visa-free travel. It also presented some concerns about the program the government has put in place, and maybe I will get to that in questions and comments.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am sure the member can appreciate the issue of numbers and the importance of Ottawa working with other jurisdictions, in particular our provinces, when we talk about resettlement. We also need to get a sense of what people will be going into. For example, in the province of Manitoba, there are individuals with homes, literally hundreds of homes, who have been identified, so there is a coordinating aspect to this whole project. This is to ensure that the people from Ukraine who are coming will be in a good position to settle, whether temporarily or potentially permanently.

I wonder if the member could provide his thoughts in terms of how important coordination is in this whole process.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Again, there is some heckling going on from the other side. I want to remind the members that I know the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan wants to be able to answer the question.

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The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I always appreciate the additional contribution from my friends over here.

This is sort of the third excuse we have been given. We heard the first excuse from Liberal members saying why they would not do visa-free travel. The minister then said that was not exactly right, but he had a new excuse. Now we have a third excuse from the member for Winnipeg North with the implication that we should not be doing visa-free travel because we need to coordinate and we need to know how many people are coming.

Well, there is a great flow here of people coming in and out who are free to do so because they are Canadian citizens living abroad. There are many countries from which people can come now with visa-free travel. They can come from the United States, the U.K. and from other places. Therefore, for people coming from Ukraine, I think Canadians are ready to step up and help those who come, and we can reasonably estimate the numbers that are going to come. I do not think having a visa requirement to know the number of people who are coming makes any sense whatsoever.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

• (1045)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): If the hon. parliamentary secretary has another question, he should wait until it is time for questions and comments.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for North Island—Powell River.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree with the member. I think we need to look at every pathway possible to get Ukrainians, who are fleeing violence that most of us can never imagine, to safety. The faster we can get them there the better.

Last weekend alone I met with many people in my riding who came together specifically to talk about how they can support having folks in their own homes, raising money and doing all of the important work that so many Canadians are dedicated to doing.

I would also remind the government that it does have contracts with settlement organizations across this country, and if it needs an organizing branch, they are already set up in those communities. If resources were allocated, I am sure that they would fundamentally be able to support a lot of the work that will need to be done.

I am wondering if the member could answer this question: Why is this government preventing pathways to support Ukrainians to come here, especially as this is Canada, a place that is, and has been, a beacon for so long for Ukrainians?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question from the NDP. Unfortunately, I think it is a question more for the government to answer than for me.

However, I will speculate that with a lot of its immigration measures, it seems the government is obsessed with control. It is capping private sponsorship, and the member for Winnipeg North is saying that we need to know exactly how many people are coming. It is all about government controlling the process.

I would say that individual Canadians who want to sponsor vulnerable refugees, who want to welcome Ukrainians who are fleeing, can step up, and they will do that. It is not for the government to try to control the precise number. In cases of a crisis like this, it should listen to and respond to Canadians' willingness to welcome those who are in a crisis situation.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for his excellent speech.

He will surely remember that the minister said that it would take 12 weeks before IRCC could lift the visa requirement and adapt its computer system. What does that say about that department and what does the member make of it?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question.

I think it is necessary to take this step now, and I think it is reasonable and easy to simply lift the visa requirement. However, if it is so difficult to do something so simple, that means there is a bigger problem in the functioning of this government.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to say that it is a pleasure to rise to address this issue, and to a certain extent it is, but I am somewhat disappointed with the Conservative Party because I believe it is using this issue as a way to frustrate the legislative process, and I do not say that lightly.

All members of the House have been very supportive of the people of Ukraine. They understand the situation and want to do what Canadians as a whole want us to do, and that is to support the Ukrainian people in this time of need. We have seen that in the form of take-note debates. I believe we have had two take-note debates, although maybe one was an emergency debate. I am not 100% clear on that. Members from all sides of the House recognized what is taking place in Ukraine.

It does not take very much to get an appreciation of what is happening. We can go to YouTube or check news channels and see the horrors of war taking place today in Ukraine. Cities are being completely demolished, and people are dying every day by the thousands. In Putin, we see a dictator who has seen fit to destroy the infrastructure of a country, but the people of Ukraine are resisting. That resistance and love for Ukrainian heritage are what are ultimately going to prevail. We know that and we see that.

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It was inspiring when President Zelenskyy addressed this chamber virtually and spoke to Canadians through the House of Commons. I believe, as I know my colleagues believe, that the Government of Canada needs to do whatever it can to support Ukraine and the people of Ukraine, and not use the political manoeuvres that I believe we are witnessing today to fit another agenda that is, really and truly, meant to frustrate the government.

If the Conservative Party really wants to have a debate about what is happening in Ukraine today and wants to talk about visitor visas or visa requirements, there are other opportunities. The Conservatives could have approached the government about having another take-note debate. They could have had their own opposition day and a very specific motion to deal with the topic they want to talk about today. They could have done that. There are other ways that the official opposition could have raised this very important issue. There is not one member of the Liberal caucus who would deny the fact that the issue being debated is, indeed, of critical importance. It is the timing of it.

Yesterday, for example, we were looking forward to Bill C-8 passing, but Conservative after Conservative stood and spoke. Bill C-8 is the fall economic statement that would provide pandemic relief and support for Canadians in all regions, but the Conservatives have made the determination that they do not want to see that bill pass.

Today we all know we are supposed to be debating Bill C-11: the modernization of the Broadcasting Act.

• (1050)

A great deal of effort has gone into that bill through input from Canadians, the work of the ministry and its department, and the work of the minister himself. It has been debated quite extensively thus far, and it was supposed to continue to be debated.

Again, we see the Conservatives bringing forward a concurrence motion. To the best of my knowledge, they did not approach the government House leader and ask for a take-note debate. To the best of my knowledge, we did not get to the rest of the orders of the day. Conservatives could have brought in an emergency debate on the issue. If they had waited an extra two minutes during House proceedings, we could have had an emergency debate.

I am sure members in the Conservative Party know that the type of debate they are encouraging right now is, in fact, limited to three hours. An emergency debate would have allowed more people to participate. A take-note debate would have allowed more people to participate. An opposition day motion would have not only allowed more people to participate, but it would have allowed the Conservative Party to frame a question to ultimately be put to the House and see whether that could have been supported.

That is the reason I say to the Conservative Party, and those who might be following this debate, that it is shameful of the official opposition to try to take an issue that is important to all Canadians and politicize it. I say shame on the Conservative Party of Canada for doing what it is doing: using manipulation to try to twist something so it can score some political points, or limit or cause more frustration on another piece of legislation.

For Conservatives to try to give the impression that Liberals do not want to contribute to the issue of refugees in Ukraine is absolutely ridiculous. As a government, we want to do whatever we can to support the people of Ukraine. Almost 3.9 million people have fled Ukraine to date. That is the most recent estimate I have heard. Almost four million people have fled Ukraine.

I talked at the beginning about those horrors. Let us take a look at the track record of this government. I will compare it with the record of Stephen Harper. In 2015, we had the election along with what was taking place in Syria. We had about 25,000 refugees to settle, and the Conservative Party was balking back then and asking how we were going to do that.

The Conservatives seemed to be in opposition to it, because I think their number was around 10,000. Do not quote me on it, but it was substantially less than what we said. Not only did we achieve 25,000, but from what I understand, we actually exceeded 50,000. That does not happen overnight. There is a process. To my friends across the way, I ask them to tell me another country, on a per capita basis in the western world, that had more refugees from Syria than Canada did.

Then we have Afghanistan, where the former foreign affairs minister said we would resettle 20,000 refugees, but then that doubled to 40,000. The Conservatives are already critical of some of the processes regarding processing those refugees. We will eventually get there. We understand the important role that Canada has to play when it comes to refugees.

When I was the critic for the Liberal Party of Canada dealing with immigration matters, we had Stephen Harper and the Conservative minister of immigration cutting back refugee settlement programs.

• (1055)

We do not need to take lessons from the Conservative Party on providing humanitarian support to refugees. I saw it first-hand when I was sitting in opposition and the Conservative Party had no respect for refugees or had minimal respect for providing the supports they required in order to settle in a healthier way here in Canada. Now the Conservative Party members have the tenacity to say that we could be doing better from a government perspective.

An hon. member: You could do something.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, we are doing something. Those who believe we are not are trying to espouse false information. The Prairies were built in good part because of—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order.

I want to remind all members that they will have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments not for five minutes but for 10 minutes. Therefore, I ask that all members wait their turn and not ask questions or make comments while the parliamentary secretary is giving his speech.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

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● (1100)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, someone made reference to the numbers. I think close to 1.4 million people who live in Canada today are of Ukrainian heritage. Taking a look at the prairie provinces, colleagues will find that many pioneers were of Ukrainian heritage. They helped build the Prairies to what they are today.

Winnipeg North, the riding I represent, is an area of Canada with historical meaning. It has deep roots in Ukrainian heritage. Take a look at the beautiful Ukrainian churches that we have and much of the infrastructure. There are 50-plus blocks that I will visit to talk to many individuals who still speak Ukrainian, with very little English, some of them being lovely seniors who will share their concerns and passion for Ukraine. One can see its rich heritage in things such as Folklorama's Spirit of Ukraine and the Kyiv Pavilion. Both pavilions have virtually sold-out audiences on many occasions. We value the contributions made by people of Ukrainian heritage for generations here in Canada. There is no surprise that when something happens in Ukraine it matters, whether it was back in 2014 or today when we see the horrors of war.

The expectation from not only the 1.4 million people of Ukrainian heritage but the population as a whole has been that the Government of Canada would step up. Not only the Government of Canada has stepped up, but we have had, I believe, three rallies at the Manitoba legislature with thousands of Manitobans of great diversity. They showed up at the front of the Manitoba legislature to show their support for the people of Ukraine. I had the opportunity to participate in a couple of those rallies. For people here in Canada, especially those of Ukrainian heritage, even though they may not be in Ukraine and may not even have been born in Ukraine, their caring attitude is there. It is real and it is tangible. We saw that in the tears and the flag-waving in front of the Manitoba legislature.

That was not unique. That is something that is taking place all over Canada as Canadians have stepped up, whether through prayers or donations. The Government of Canada has given considerable amounts, going into hundreds of millions of dollars, but the program I like to highlight is the one through the Red Cross. The reason I like to highlight it is that initially it was for \$10 million of matching donations, where the federal government would match up to \$10 million of Canadian donations through the Red Cross. That was used up in days. We more than tripled that in terms of those matching dollars. I say that because not only did Canadians as a whole offer their prayers, but they offered money and donations of all kinds. My daughter, who is an MLA, opened her office to receive some non-monetary donations right in her office.

● (1105)

People have responded. Part of that response has been to lobby members of Parliament, MLAs and others, to do what they can to help Ukraine at this time of need.

What has the Government of Canada done? One of the most important things we can do is contribute lethal weapons to support the people of Ukraine. Canada works very closely with our allied countries. In some areas, we have played a leadership role, more than other countries, within the allied forces. In other areas, another

country might play a leadership role, but from a financial point of view, even before the war got under way, we saw the Canadian government providing financial support to the people of Ukraine.

Those lethal weapons, along with the lethal weapons from other allied countries and friends of Ukraine, are what have enabled the heroes of Ukraine, those individuals who are staying in Ukraine and fighting the Russian soldiers and Putin. That lethal aid has proven to be successful, as we have seen parts of Ukraine being taken back because of the efforts of those heroes.

Canada is also there with humanitarian aid, going into the millions of dollars.

I want to address, specifically, the issue of those who are being displaced, the 3.9 million people today. I believe it is around that number. Canada has sped up and set into place a special process that enables us to be able to receive an unlimited, and let me underline the word "unlimited", number of people fleeing Ukraine. Yes, there is a process, a process that is, I believe, reasonable at this juncture and time. If we take a look at what Canada is ultimately providing and the way we are sourcing it, we will see tens of thousands of Ukrainians coming to Canada, whether on a three-year temporary basis or, in some cases, no doubt on a permanent basis.

We have put into place an expedited system that will enable people not only to come to Canada but also to work in Canada and to study in Canada. We have people in our communities who are opening their homes. We have a federal government that is working with provincial governments and other stakeholders to ensure there are settlement packages wherever possible to support those who are fleeing Ukraine. We will continue to be there.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech full of pats on the back for his government for a job well failed.

Look, he talked a lot about goals that are already in Canada, but he must appreciate the fact that the barriers and the delays by his government are the reason we cannot talk about those who are trying to come here. We see this, over and over again, whether it is Afghanistan and now Ukraine, or even refugees trying to flee. This is the actual problem. The backlog they have created is causing people to not be able to come here in time. I spoke to the Ukrainian ambassador last year who asked for visa-free travel. We agreed with it. The Conservative platform had it in the platform. Why did we need to do that? It is because of the backlogs.

Why does the government go against all of the opposition parties, Ukrainians who are here in Canada and the then ambassador of Ukraine who was, last year, asking for visa-free travel? All of the immigration minister's reasoning has been proven wrong already. What is left? What is holding them back?

• (1110)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, a number of years ago, when I was the immigration critic, we had a member of Parliament from Ukraine come to Canada. He explained to the immigration committee that Canada should have visa-free entry for those coming into Canada. However, Stephen Harper at that time said no and so did the Conservative government through the Prime Minister of Canada.

I believe the Conservative Party is playing politics on this issue and I find it shameful. I understand. Let us give the system we have in place the opportunity to demonstrate that we will bring in the thousands of people fleeing Ukraine who want to come to Canada. We have to give it the opportunity, and let us see what happens. I would like to think that a year from now we are going to see that tens of thousands of people have settled. When I say a year, it does not mean we have to wait a year—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I have a lot of people who want to ask questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Jonquière.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I see a definite pattern in the government's actions. Every time we point out its lack of initiative, every time we point out its turpitude, it behaves like a child who gets caught and says no, it is not their fault.

The member for Lac-Saint-Jean has been asking questions for two weeks. Will there be an airlift? Can the department keep its visa offices open beyond 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.? The government has not given answers, other than accusing the Bloc of picking fights and the Conservatives of using delay tactics.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary if he can answer these two simple questions. Do you have a strategy for keeping visa offices open beyond 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.? This is a serious humanitarian crisis. Have you considered setting up an airlift—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the member to address his questions and comments directly to the Chair and not to the government.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, there is a strategy, and that is to facilitate an unlimited number of people who are fleeing Ukraine to come to Canada, which is a safe haven, and allow them to work, to study and to be here while we go through this very difficult time. It is an unlimited number.

If we want to base this on a record, take a look at what took place in Syria. There was an initial commitment of 25,000 refugees and we had over 50,000. I believe the Government of Canada has demonstrated that it can and will have a process that will enable those who are fleeing and looking for a safe haven to come to Canada in a timely fashion.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree with the member. I have stood with people from my riding, like Sviatoslav and Stefan, who organized the Co-mox Valley Stands With Ukraine event, where hundreds of people

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showed up to stand in solidarity, ready to provide whatever supports they could. The sad part for me, as a person who before this worked in a settlement agency for eight years, is that I have never seen immigration as backlogged as it is today. We are dealing with so many files.

I am wondering if the member could talk about how the government is going to take action with such a big backlog. We are not seeing any clear commitments. Are there going to be clear pathways for government-sponsored refugees? Are there going to be more provisions for people who are coming here maybe for a shorter term but who cannot work? Those things have to be here so people can be received. We are still waiting.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, for the Ukraine file, a special stream has been created to help facilitate, in a very timely fashion, people who are fleeing Ukraine. As to the bigger picture, many different streams are there. With more time, Madam Speaker would allow me to provide fulsome answers to that, but I can assure the member that whether it is marriages, sponsors or family reunification—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have a point of order from the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston.

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, I think it is inappropriate for a member to suggest that the Speaker will not allow fulsome answers to questions. I see no evidence that this is true of this Speaker or any other occupant of the chair. I am sure that my colleague will want to reconsider that use of language.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I understood that he was looking more at the time frame, but I do appreciate the hon. member's point of order.

If the parliamentary secretary can, he should wrap it up so I can get a couple more questions in.

• (1115)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I meant no disrespect to you; it is more that I have a 20-minute answer for the question.

Suffice it to say that we are making progress. That is one of the reasons we have invested tens of millions of dollars in additional resources for immigration to speed up our processes.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, we rarely have the opportunity to draw attention to certain things, and I would like to do that now.

Earlier, my colleague from Jonquière asked two simple questions to my colleague from Winnipeg North, the same questions that our colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean has been asking for two weeks: Will the government commit to airlifting people and extending the operating hours of its office in Warsaw, Poland, which, at last report, has only been open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.?

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As my colleague from Jonquière pointed out earlier, my colleague from Winnipeg North continued to boast about a whole lot of vague actions his government has taken, instead of answering the questions. Can he answer these two simple questions?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, whether it is the Minister of Immigration, his department, the cabinet or caucus discussions, I would like to think that all things are on the table. We are looking to explore ways to ensure that Canada is able to maximize the number of people who are seeking a safe haven by opening our doors and putting into place policies that will support those who are coming to Canada, whether through settlement programs or through enabling them to have a job, to study or to be among friends. As we all know, there are hundreds of people, and ideally, if I could just wave a wand, we would have thousands of people coming into Canada every day. However, I do not have that wand to wave. I have faith in our minister and our system to ensure that we are able to maximize the numbers coming into Canada, because I know that providing a safe haven is important not only to me personally, but to all of my colleagues in the government.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, one thing that has been brought to my attention is the issue around biometrics and the fact that the government has not released that restriction or requirement for people coming into Canada. Is it not possible that they could do the biometric scan and tracking here in Canada once they are here and safe, as opposed to making them do that in problematic areas and places they have to travel to for quite some time? It is really quite impossible for them to get an appointment at an embassy, so would it not be better if they had that requirement here in Canada?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, one thing I know is that the government, through the Minister of Immigration, has put into place a team of individuals to ensure that we are able to maximize the number of people able to come to Canada, which is a safe haven. A number of things have been established to accommodate that. Part of the current requirement is the biometrics. I do not know, at the ground level, if or to what degree that is posing a serious problem in preventing individuals from being able to come to Canada. I am sure if it is, the Minister of Immigration will be looking at it.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I must admit that I am a bit surprised by the direction this debate has taken. Frankly, I was not expecting that there would be so much agreement on this motion. I listened to our Liberal colleague's passionate speech and I found myself wondering what, exactly, we disagree on. I took another look at the motion we are debating today.

It states, and I quote:

That the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration report the following to the House: We (a) condemn the unwarranted and unprovoked attack on Ukraine, which was ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin, a clear violation of international law....

Unless I am mistaken, we all appear to agree on this part, so that is clearly not where the issue is.

I will continue reading the motion, as follows:

(b) call on the Government of Canada to support Ukrainians and people residing in Ukraine who are impacted by this conflict and ensure that it is prepared to process immigration applications on an urgent basis without compromising needs in other areas....

It states, “on an urgent basis without compromising needs in other areas”. Perhaps this is where things start to become problematic, but it seems to me that the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration set out an important parameter in this second point, so I do not think that should be the case. What then do the Liberals have a problem with?

In the next point, it states:

(c) implement visa-free travel from Ukraine to Canada, including by the rapid issuance of an electronic travel authorization (eTA), and increase staffing resources so that the existing backlog for all immigration streams is not further impacted by this humanitarian crisis.

Before I comment on that, I would like to point out the extraordinary work that our colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean has done on this file. Unfortunately, he is unable to be with us today because he is being cautious, I would say.

I applaud his work. Point (c), which calls on the government to “implement visa-free travel from Ukraine to Canada”, was the initial proposal. My colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean and our Liberal colleagues, among others, added “including by the rapid issuance of an electronic travel authorization”. Rather than eliminate visas entirely, this at least maintains the requirement for an electronic travel authorization. That does not seem to be good enough for our Liberal friends, who were the only committee members to vote against the motion despite the requirement introduced by our colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean.

Point (c) goes on to say: “increase staffing resources so that the existing backlog for all immigration streams is not further impacted by this humanitarian crisis”.

Are we to understand, based on our colleague's fiery speech, that the Liberals have no intention of increasing resources? Are they saying that they think we have enough staff to handle this kind of situation?

If so, that is worrisome, to put it mildly. The outcome of the federal government's efforts to welcome Afghan refugees is a clear indication that performance has been underwhelming so far.

The Liberals promised to welcome 40,000 Afghan refugees. Fewer than 10,000 have made it to Canada so far. This means that, despite the best intentions, if the means and resources are not there, those intentions will not translate into concrete results.

We do not need to wait another three months to reach this conclusion. We already know that. We only have to look at what happened with the Afghan refugees to realize that not deploying the necessary resources means that we will not achieve the objectives set. Exactly the same thing is likely to happen with Ukrainian refugees.

What, then, is the government's problem? Is it related to the call for visa-free travel, while maintaining the compromise and fallback proposal made by my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean, namely, maintaining the requirement for electronic travel authorization?

Is that the problem on the Liberal side, or do they have a problem with the second part of point (c), that is, the call to “increase staffing resources so that the existing backlog for all immigration streams is not further impacted by this humanitarian crisis”? Frankly, if that is really the sticking point, then that worries me, to say the least.

● (1120)

The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the parliamentary secretary quite rightly recognized that my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean is working very hard with them on this file. He is our citizenship and immigration critic, and from the outset, he was prepared to find solutions, collaborate and co-operate.

The Liberals are not really used to that. The Prime Minister stated that things have been very tense in Parliament and that it is paralyzed, unresponsive and dysfunctional. However, what the Prime Minister may not have understood is that since the election, the Bloc Québécois has constantly repeated that it is willing to work constructively with the government. That is what motivated our colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean to respond proactively to the significant humanitarian crisis under way in Ukraine. He came up with proposals.

His first proposal was a three-year extension of the work and student visas of Ukrainians already in Canada. The government acted quickly on that point. We commend and applaud it. That is wonderful. This was a Bloc Québécois proposal that quickly received a favourable response from the government. When this government is determined to act and takes its head out of the sand, it can do things quickly.

The second proposal put forward by my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean was to drop the visa requirement. This suggestion did not go anywhere and quickly faced obstacles. We then realized that the government did not really want to drop this requirement.

As the leader of the Bloc Québécois pointed out, thousands of people are entering via Roxham Road without presenting any travel document, visa or biometric test whatsoever. During the entire pandemic, it was proven that it is possible to close off that route. The government has now decided to reopen the floodgates and has no security concerns about doing it. People are streaming in, no problem. The Prime Minister is rolling out the welcome mat for them.

However, the same does not seem to apply to the poor Ukrainians who are fleeing their country, which has been unjustly invaded by Russia. The government said it would speed up the process, but it took weeks just to announce that accelerated process, which, by all accounts, is not that much faster anyway.

Let us put ourselves in the shoes of these poor Ukrainian women, who are the most likely to have taken refuge in Poland, Moldova or Romania. They would love to come to Canada and get as far away from the conflict as possible.

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Canada is asking them to fill out an application for a temporary resident visa, which, according to experts, can take up to three hours for someone who is proficient in English or French. These people are unlikely to be proficient in English or French, but they are still required to fill out the form or else they will not be allowed in.

Then, these people need to set up a meeting at one of the visa application centres to submit their biometrics. I remind members that this is an emergency and we need to get a huge number of people here, but they are being asked to show up between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. or between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. if they want to be able to come over here.

On top of that, they are required to pay \$185 in fees, even though some are destitute. They are still being asked to cough up the money. The government says that it will refund the fees, but these people still need to pay up front without knowing when or how the money will be refunded.

● (1125)

These are the documents that the government requires: bank statement, official ID, passport and travel insurance. However, I am not sure that people took the time, especially if their house was destroyed, to collect all their documents thinking that the Canadian government might ask for them. Will these people take the time to search through the rubble of their homes for their passports and bank statements? What the government is asking the Ukrainian refugees to produce so they can access the fast-track procedure is not necessarily possible.

I will point out that, to date, of the 40,000 Afghans we promised to take in, we have only welcomed 8,580 so far. There is therefore cause to worry about this fast-track procedure when it comes to visas because, in any case, it has not worked that well so far, whatever the measures implemented by the government.

As for visa-free travel, there seems to be a security concern eating away at the government: It is afraid that some nasty Russians could sneak in. I figure that those who sneak in will not be on site to fight the Ukrainians, but that is another story.

The government is very concerned about security. However, no fewer than 91 countries are allowing Ukrainians to cross their borders without a visa. I guess these 91 countries do not have the same security concerns as Canada.

Also, the government told us that it could not really lift the visa requirement because it would take 12 weeks to adapt the IRCC's computer system. The IRCC minister said that himself. Perhaps if it had started earlier, it would be about ready to remove the visa requirement.

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I would like to point out that, like Canada, Ireland normally does not authorize Ukrainian nationals to enter the country without a visa. However, Ireland was able to lift the requirement in a few hours, rather than a few days or weeks. How is it that Ireland can do in a few hours what Canada can only do in 12 weeks?

Rather than working on allowing visa-free travel, IRCC has worked very hard for weeks to implement the fast-track process I just described. Perhaps it should have gotten off its butt and worked on immediately lifting the visa requirement? I think that would have been the right thing to do.

The government seems to be paralyzed by the security issue, so we proposed another approach. Since the government thinks the biometrics are absolutely necessary for security reasons, we wondered whether we could avoid doing the biometric scans over there, quickly and safely bring the refugees to Canada, and then do the biometrics here. This still seems to be too complicated, though, since the government flatly opposed this other proposal from my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean.

Since the Bloc is always in solution mode, we proposed a humanitarian airlift. We figured that we could ask Canadian airlines for help and they would be only too happy to oblige. For instance, Air Transat has already raised its hand and said it was prepared to send planes if the Government of Canada was interested.

● (1130)

The Minister of International Development told us that his government wants to charter flights for medical assistance, instead of using Canadian Armed Forces planes. Air Transat raised its hand and asked what it could do. We do not know what the holdup is, but we are still looking for the answer. There is no holdup anymore, since Air Transat is prepared to volunteer. It said so publicly. The government has not yet understood that Air Transat is prepared to do it, free of charge, believe it or not.

However, there seems to be some issue with the idea of arranging a humanitarian airlift by chartering planes to Poland and flying them back full of Ukrainian refugees who could quickly find refuge and safety in Canada and Quebec.

I guess some people are wondering whether the planes are going to fly there empty. It would be expensive for them to fly there empty and return to Canada with people aboard.

My colleague from Drummond had a brilliant idea. He said that we did not have to fly the planes empty because the Ukrainian Canadian Congress is working like mad to collect essential supplies. It has gathered tons of supplies from all over the place, and it is running out of room to store them. We are asking that it charter flights to ship the items to Poland and neighbouring countries.

We could organize a humanitarian airlift by filling the planes with the supplies gathered thanks to the generosity of Canadians and Quebecers. We could fill these planes up, send them to Poland and bring them back full of people. We could fill them with Ukrainian refugees. However, apparently, that is still too complicated. This was another proposal made by my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean, and it got a flat no.

So far, the Canadian government has ignored the proposal to set up a humanitarian airlift, yet I find this proposal extremely reasonable.

The government is losing nothing by waiting, since my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean is still looking for positive proposals. It can rest assured that he will continue to make proposals in the coming days and weeks. He will not give up in the face of the government's indolence. I had the opportunity to chat with him before coming here, and I know that he is looking for new solutions, that he is not done suggesting ideas.

I am having a hard time understanding our colleague's inflamed, even incensed, response to the Conservatives' proposal. All in all, it is a very reasonable proposal. Personally, I see it as the Conservatives making an effort to reach across the aisle. The Bloc Québécois is always reaching across the aisle.

How can there be a partisan debate on a motion like this one? It is just bad faith to play partisan politics with this issue and reproach the Conservatives for having dared to ask that the House concur in the report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The Liberals see it as heresy, but it is no such thing. I read out the motion. Unless our colleague is saying that he does not want to condemn the unjustified attack or that he does not want to support the Ukrainians, we can only conclude that the problem is that we are asking the government to waive visas, while maintaining the requirement for an electronic travel authorization, which was a compromise, an alternative solution, proposed by my colleague from Lac-Saint-Jean. The government is unwilling to add more staff to process applications. That is the government's real problem. That is why it reacted in such an inflamed and incensed manner to the Conservatives' perfectly reasonable motion. The Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of the motion.

● (1135)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, whether it is expanding services in communities such as Poland or expanding the biometrics that have taken place, the government's intent is to be there in a tangible way to ensure that we can deliver for the many people who are fleeing Ukraine and who want to come to Canada in an unlimited fashion.

One of the concerns, no doubt, is that as they come into Canada there needs to be support. There are two issues I would ask the member to reflect on, in terms of a provincial perspective. For example, we want Ukrainian refugees to be able to study. Does the member believe, as I believe, that they should not be charged international student rates?

There is also the issue of health care. Does the member believe, as I believe, that the provinces should allow universal access to our health care system? Could the member provide his thoughts on those two points?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sure that the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan will have an opportunity to ask questions and make comments. I would ask him to hold off.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Montarville.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I am insulted that the federal government is using whataboutism and refusing to answer questions or explain its own failings in this matter.

Instead, it is passing the buck to the Quebec and provincial governments by saying that it has no problem taking in refugees, but that it needs to know whether the provinces will be able to accommodate them. The federal government says that it would not want refugees to get here only to find out that no one can take them in. Until it gets assurances that the provinces can take them in, the federal government prefers to leave the refugees where they are.

Such rhetoric is frankly indecent. I would like to remind the federal government that, at the very outset, the Quebec government said that it was prepared to take in Ukrainian refugees. It set up a system to welcome Ukrainian refugees. We are ready and waiting.

With respect to providing them with health care, I would like to remind my colleagues that the provinces have long been giving health care to refugees the federal government took in without consulting the provinces at all.

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member's speech was very much on point. The Liberals always claim that other people are being partisan when they do not want to support an obviously good idea that has the support of the rest of the House and the support of Canadians. It is important that we bring forward a substantive issue at a critical time and it is too bad that it sounds like the government is not going to support it.

I was struck by the last question from the member for Winnipeg North, in that he implied that more support should be offered by provinces and by universities when in fact the federal government has been criticized for not stepping up to provide basic assistance for those coming from Ukraine. Those who are coming are not technically considered refugees under the refugee category, which means they do not have access to federal programs that normally exist for people in that situation.

I wonder if the member from the Bloc wants to comment on the fact that the government has been heavily criticized by the Canadian Ukrainian Congress and others for not offering support to those who come from Ukraine, and then the member is using the needs for support as an excuse for not allowing visa-free travel. The government should be offering that support, but why not let people come through the visa-free travel channel since the government is not currently offering that support as it is?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I touched on that a little in the answer I just gave my Liberal colleague.

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It is obvious to us that the federal government cannot hide behind the intake mechanisms of Quebec and the provinces to explain its own indolence in this matter. If, as my colleague so aptly suggested, the federal government feels that it cannot bring in Ukrainian refugees if they do not have the necessary support to come here, then it should give them that support. After all, the government spent two years loosening the purse strings for anything and everything.

Why is the government being so stingy when it comes to Ukrainian refugees? Rather than loosening the purse strings again, why is the government asking the provinces and Quebec to cover the cost of welcoming these refugees? If the federal government will not do it, then, as I said before, Quebec will.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague for his speech and for the points he made. He clearly showed that the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives are reaching out to help the government but that, unfortunately, the government is refusing that help.

Is it because the good ideas are coming from the opposition and not the government that the government is failing to take action?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question.

I had the privilege of being a member of Quebec's National Assembly, in addition to having the opportunity, the pleasure and the honour of being a member of this House for several years. One of the things I soon learned is that it appears to be part of the general culture of the House that an idea is necessarily bad if it comes from the opposition. Even if the opposition's idea is good, the government will reject it and then do a little cut and paste so it can propose the exact same thing. The government is unable to admit that the opposition can come up with a good idea, because it thinks all good ideas come from the government.

At the National Assembly, we begin with the premise that a government is rarely elected by the majority of the population and that good ideas can come from all sides. As a result, anyone can make a positive contribution. This point of view appears to be totally foreign to the political culture of this House, and I am very disappointed about that.

• (1145)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, who am I to deny the Bloc staking claim to the idea?

I can tell the member that the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and others have talked about having no visa requirements for Ukraine for many years. The discussion has been heightened because of the war, obviously, and the idea has been floated around now for many weeks. I would not want to take away from those individuals who have the idea.

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As I indicated, there is a streamlined process to ensure we can expedite and ultimately allow individuals who are fleeing and looking for a safe place to come to Canada and let them know that Canada is in fact open to them.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I do not know how to answer my colleague.

He appears to think that if he just keeps repeating his claim that Canada is wide open, we will end up believing him.

However, sincerity cannot be judged based on words, but rather on actions. I am sorry to say that the federal government does not walk the talk. It says one thing but does not follow through when it comes time to put words into action.

I am sorry to say it, but you are not offering Ukrainians a safe haven from the conflict, because you have not implemented the necessary measures or conditions for Ukrainian refugees to come here.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would like to remind the hon. member that he must address his remarks to the Chair and not directly to the government.

[English]

The hon. member for Brandon—Souris has time for a brief question.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague's answer just now is along the lines that if one repeats, repeats and repeats, Canadians will start to believe it sooner or later. The member who just asked the question of him also followed on the previous environment minister from Ottawa's comments that if one yells it louder, as he did in his speech, people will get it even more.

I am wondering if you could reply to the fact that Liberals already have a poor track record in regard to what happened in Afghanistan. There have been great ideas by the opposition here. Can you just expand on their poor record?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That was not a brief question.

I want to remind the member as well that he is to address questions and comments through the Chair.

We will have a very brief response from the member for Montarville, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I would simply like to reiterate that this government claims that it has a mechanism in place to quickly take in a large number of refugees.

First off, the word “quickly” is inaccurate, since there is nothing quick about it. As for “large numbers”, we have only to look at what happened in Afghanistan, since history tends to repeat itself. The government promised to take in 40,000 Afghan refugees, but fewer than 10,000 have made it here so far.

[English]

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise in this House today to speak to this concurrence motion on the grave situation before us in Ukraine. My constituents in Saskatoon West know that I sit on the House of Commons immigration committee. On this committee, we have been focused on several issues of importance, but none more so than the horrid war in eastern Europe and the humanitarian crisis being caused by Putin's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

The motion we are debating today is very simple. The immigration committee came together under the leadership of my colleague, the Conservative shadow minister of immigration, and asked the government to take in Ukrainians visa-free. That is simple enough, right? Unfortunately, every single Liberal on that committee voted against the motion. I hope today that the Liberals will change their minds and support this motion now that it is in front of the entire House of Commons.

This motion was born out of the experience of government failures since August 15 of last year to help Afghan refugees fleeing the Taliban. We do not want to see a repeat of what happened with Afghanistan replayed here with Ukraine, and indeed the two issues are very much intertwined. Before I get into detail about Ukraine, I must bring out some context about Afghanistan.

None of us in this House asked for the Taliban to wipe out the legitimate government of Afghanistan last August when Joe Biden removed the last of the U.S. troops from that country, just as none of us in this House asked for Vladimir Putin to invade and wage war in Ukraine, creating the greatest mass exodus of people in Europe since the end of World War II, yet here we are.

As one of the most fortunate and blessed countries on the planet, Canada has a role to play and must step up to the plate. If we listen to the government, we would hear that Canada's response, in the words of the foreign affairs minister, would be for Canada to be a convenor of meetings. We would send over a few World II bazookas and set up a couple of meetings in Ukraine. Of course, that pales in comparison to the Liberal response to the Taliban, a banned terrorist organization in Canada, conquering Kabul last year. Maryam Monsef, then Liberal leader for women's rights, no less, welcomed the Taliban as “our brothers”.

I first want to put some context to this debate on Ukraine today. That context is Afghanistan. When Kabul was falling to the Taliban, our Prime Minister called a vanity election, hoping to get his sought-after pandemic majority. On that day, the world was in crisis, and all the Prime Minister could see in the mirror was his own vain image. Thousands of Canadian Forces members served in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014, with the solemn loss of 159 Canadians and military personnel. These brave women and men fought to secure basic human rights, such as girls not being sold into sexual slavery and instead going to school. They also fought to eliminate the threat the Taliban posed to world peace. Of course, it was the Taliban that gave material aid and support to al Qaeda in planning and executing the 9/11 attack.

Thoroughly embarrassed, the Liberals did promise to bring in 40,000 Afghan refugees. This included those who helped our armed forces while they were in the country, but the program established to bring them over to Canada has been a dismal failure. In eight months, the program has brought in less than 20% of the eligible number, and most of those brought in are in Canada because of private refugee sponsorship, not through the clumsy, overly bureaucratic IRCC process.

Last night, I attended the Afghan committee and listened to painful stories from Afghanistan. The Taliban hard-liners are turning back the clock. Girls have been banned from schools after the sixth grade and women cannot even travel on a plane without a male chaperone, yet Canada cannot get its act together.

Here is one example. Friha Rezayee from the Women Leaders of Tomorrow works with elite women athletes. She has 15 female Afghan athletes who have been given full-ride scholarships to respected Canadian universities. The Liberals have denied them student visas because they are afraid that these women might stay in Canada in the long term. The Liberals will not allow elite women athletes to study in Canada because they might not return to a regressive Taliban. I guarantee that we will not see that headline on *CBC News*.

Today many potential new refugees are currently in Europe, waiting for their go-ahead from IRCC and a plane ticket, but it is not happening. Indeed Greece, Crete and other EU nations are getting increasingly impatient with Canada as they bear the cost of housing and feeding these refugees who are meant for our country.

● (1150)

As an MP and deputy shadow minister for immigration, I am fortunate enough to have been able to meet with many ambassadors, high commissioners and consuls general from other regions to discuss Canada's response to the refugee crisis. I had very fruitful discussions with President Biden's consul general, Boris Johnson's deputy in Ottawa and the Belgian ambassador. I have also met with the high commissioners from India, Ajay Bisaria, and Bangladesh, Dr. Rahman, to discuss these issues. I hear one unifying message from the diplomatic corps here in Ottawa: Get on with the job and get those refugees settled in Canada.

I want to turn to the specific motion we are debating today. Earlier this month, our committee, led by the Conservatives and supported by the other opposition parties, passed this motion calling upon the government to implement visa-free travel for Ukrainians fleeing

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Putin's war machine. Unfortunately, Liberal members voted against this motion, going on record with their opposition to allowing Ukrainians coming into Canada. Indeed, the Liberal member for Surrey—Newton summed up Liberal opposition to this at the March 1 committee meeting when we were discussing this. He said:

...Liberal members who are concerned about the security...concerned about bad people coming to Canada if there is a visa-free entry.

...This is not going to go well, so please consider that and do not support this motion.

Let us remember that we are talking about women and children. Men are not even allowed to leave Ukraine.

Honestly, this is just a smokescreen for the government to slow down the process and keep people out. I know this, because I asked the Minister of Immigration directly about security concerns for Ukrainians coming into Canada when he came to the committee at the following meeting. Specifically, I asked him if the biosecurity checks that are being done at our embassy in Warsaw, Poland, would add extra processing time to the applications. His answer was that it takes only a few days and added negligible time to the processing of Ukrainians. This is simply not true. The reality is that it is adding up to six weeks to the process.

It is so bad, in fact, that the *Toronto Star* reported that the Polish prime minister had to take Canadian media aside during our Prime Minister's trip to Poland to underscore his frustration that these refugees were not being cleared through our embassy in Warsaw. When the Polish prime minister needs to complain about the lousy job the Liberals are doing, something is clearly wrong.

The Conservative solution is simple: Do the security checks when these individuals arrive in Canada. These are women and children; the risk is very low.

What would our Conservative solution accomplish? First and foremost, it would allow the people fleeing the war zone the opportunity to come to Canada in an expedited manner. Back in Saskatoon, as I talk to people who have family on the ground in Ukraine, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia or wherever they may be in Europe, the stories they are telling me are of massive delays at Canadian embassies and consulates to get paperwork done, and that paperwork is for visas. It is to get the so-called biometrics done. Basically, it is fingerprinting and criminal record checking but on a larger scale and against a global database. Conservatives absolutely understand the need to keep undesirables out of Canada. However, we can do these criminal checks in Canada. Let us remember that we are talking about women and children. Canada can do better.

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On Thursday of last week, the Minister of Immigration appeared at our immigration committee. I asked him about the dichotomy between the treatment of Afghans and Ukrainians coming into Canada. I wanted to know why only 9,500 of the promised 40,000 Afghan refugees have arrived in Canada after eight months. I wanted to know why he was also bragging about bringing in over 10,000 white Ukrainians to Canada in only three months. The minister said back to me, “the vast majority of people who want to seek safe haven in Canada actually [will] return to Ukraine.” Regarding Afghans, he said, “I hate to admit that the likelihood that people who are coming here are going to be able to return is just not there.”

He believes that Afghans will stay in Canada permanently. On the other hand, he has every confidence that white Ukrainians will have no problem exiting Canada when the time is right. This boggles my mind. He basically admitted to his own systemic biases in gauging people by their skin colour.

I am not the only person who caught this either. On Friday last week, *The Globe and Mail* did an entire news story on my exchange with the minister. This was its analysis:

Opposition parties say the Liberal government’s streamlined immigration program for Ukrainians creates a two-tiered, racialized system that prioritizes Ukrainian immigrants over refugees from other conflict zones, including Afghanistan....

[The immigration minister] added that the government opted to offer streamlined immigration measures to Ukrainians, rather than a dedicated refugee program, because European counterparts and the Ukrainian Canadian community have indicated that most Ukrainians who come to Canada will want to eventually return home. This is not the case with people coming from Afghanistan, he said, hence the need for a refugee program.

I can assure my constituents in Saskatoon West and indeed all Canadians that they can read between these lines and see that the minister is basically waving the white flag to the Taliban and saying that, unlike white Europeans, Afghans do not have the drive, desire or love of their homeland and would not return if conditions improve.

• (1155)

I have managed many people over the years, and I have learned that the vast majority want to do a good job. I am sure that the hard-working staff at IRCC want to make Canada proud and do the best job that they can, but there are clear problems. Both Afghans and Ukrainians are being stalled by bureaucracy and piles of rules that effectively stop good people from coming to Canada. These types of problems fall firmly at the feet of leadership: the minister and his senior staff. I urge the minister to review this bureaucracy and make immediate changes so that those at IRCC can do the work they want to do and make Canada proud.

Marcel, from Saskatoon West, wrote to me after that *Globe and Mail* article was published. I want members to know what he said, because it is relevant to today’s debate. He said, “Thank you for raising this issue...I complained...at election time that it was criminal that getting Afghans who helped the Canadian Forces had been delayed by the Bureaucrats and the Liberals.... Today’s paper states about half of those approved are still being kept out. We should charter planes to bring them here and do the paperwork later. All those who helped the Canadians can be identified by past and present members of the forces.”

Marcel’s point was that the Afghans we are trying to get out helped us through the two-decade war. Canada was in that war because we are part of NATO, and the U.S. invoked article 5, which ensures mutual defence. When one NATO member is attacked, we are all attacked.

What is happening in Ukraine has a lot of people talking about NATO and Canada’s role in NATO. People in Saskatoon West are asking me what I believe should be done for our defence posture in our budget. To that end, I put a motion on notice in the House just last week. Motion No. 55 reads as follows:

That, given the ongoing war of aggression in Ukraine and the possibility of the war spilling over into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) defended territory, in the opinion of the House, the government should:

- (a) make at minimum the NATO requirement of defence spending investments of 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) in budget 2022 to bring the budget of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) into line with NATO requirements;
- (b) focus this funding on expanding Canada’s war fighting capabilities;
- (c) authorize the departments of Public Works and Government Services and National Defence to make capital purchases for the CAF on an urgent basis using national security grounds and waving bureaucratic red tape; and
- (d) immediately enter into an agreement with the United States of America to use Canadian territory for the deployment of its ballistic missile system and provide funding and operational personnel for such a system based within its territory.

The first and second parts of the motion are pretty straightforward. When our Prime Minister was in Brussels last week, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters that all member nations have until June to provide their plans to him to reach the NATO target of 2% of GDP for defence spending. Our defence minister immediately left that meeting and shot that idea down. The government’s coalition partner, the NDP, has said that it will veto any increased defence spending, so it looks like Canada will once again miss this target.

The third part of the motion to cut red tape and authorize the purchase of military equipment on national security grounds is something that has not happened since Prime Minister Harper. When Canada needed tanks or new heavy-lift airplanes for the war in Afghanistan, the government invoked the national security clause and the equipment arrived within months. Today, when we look at what we can provide for the war on Ukraine, we do not have much. Our military cupboard is nearly bare.

When our governments go to buy helicopters, fighter jets or new naval vessels, it takes decades. The process to start building the new naval frigates started in the early 2000s, and not one plank has been laid. The process to buy the fighter jets started at the same time, and only yesterday did the government announce that it would begin the process to buy the planes that Harper wanted to buy in 2006. What about those helicopters? Yes, they are the ones that Brian Mulroney ordered in the 1980s and were cancelled by Jean Chrétien. Then they were reordered and finally arrived only a few years ago. Unfortunately, they are all out of service because of cracks in the airframe, but, hey, that is the government's red-tape military procurement system.

The final section I have in there is on Canada joining the U.S. ballistic missile defence system. Do members know that Canada is the only NATO country not protected against Russian nuclear attack? The technology in this system is proven to shoot down incoming ICBMs. It would not catch all of the nuclear warheads, but it would certainly limit the damage. Why is Canada not a member? The Americans were willing to pay and man the system after all, and all we needed to do was allow them to set up some stations in our Arctic territories. However, under the Paul Martin Liberals in 2005, Canada told President Bush that we thought Putin was a nice guy and would never harm a fly. What I am proposing is that we get back to the Americans, tell them Canada made a mistake, and that if we need to pay and man the stations in the Arctic, a real partnership with the U.S.A., we will do it.

Even with the war in Ukraine, I am not under any delusion that the NDP-Liberal government will support this motion, but I want my constituents back in Saskatoon West to know that I am putting these ideas forward for them.

• (1200)

Saskatoon has one of the highest Ukrainian diaspora populations on the planet. After Ukraine and Russia, the Canadian Prairies are home to the world's third-largest Ukrainian population. I grew up behind the garlic curtain in Yorkton, Saskatchewan. The Yorkton area has a very large Ukrainian population, which is why I thought that garlic was one of the food groups. Borscht, perogy, holopchi, I ate very well in Yorkton.

I recently learned that my own ancestry is tied to Ukraine. My heritage is Mennonite. My Mennonites started out in the Netherlands; then they moved to Prussia, and then they were enticed to move to Russia by Catherine the Great. She offered them freedom in exchange for their work in developing vast farms, because they were known as great farmers. My grandfather always called himself Russian and labelled his town of birth as Schönfeld, Russia. However, what I recently learned was that my grandfather was actually born in Ukraine. His birthplace, while called Russia at the time, was actually very near Zaporizhzhia, the heart of the current fighting in southern Ukraine. I finally understood my love of Ukrainian food and of Ukrainian people.

Many Ukrainians also live in Saskatoon West. Their families came here when our province was first settled, and the government was providing land to be farmed. Many others had grandparents and parents flee to Canada during the Holodomor, Stalin's holocaust and mass starvation of the Ukrainian people. Even today,

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there are many Ukrainians who are immigrating right now. The Ukrainian language is very much alive and well in Saskatoon.

I have had a chance to meet with many constituents of Ukrainian descent over the past several years and to talk about issues common to all Canadians. We talk about taxes and government spending. Inflation is a hot topic right now. We talk about health care, the pandemic, crime and everything in between. It has only been recently, though, that we have begun talking about the old country and their relations and ties back in Ukraine. It is heartbreaking to listen to the stories they relay from the front lines. It is also heartwarming to know that many of them are prepared to do everything possible to support Ukraine against Putin's war of aggression. Even in Saskatoon, I have spoken with young men who could not wait to find a flight to get back to Ukraine to help fight against Putin.

Oleksandr from my riding wrote to me and said the following: "Hi Brad. I am Ukrainian immigrant. I am in Saskatoon since 2006...I am glad to meet with you (though I am just a journeyman welder in Canada, former Ukrainian engineer. Resident of Saskatoon. I am not a leader of a community or anything like this, so you don't really need me other than to learn from me about this ridiculous fact of this old vicious attack against Ukraine".

Oleksandr's letter told me that he wanted to send a money wire transfer back to his family, but because of the policies of the Liberal government in Ottawa, he was barred from doing so. This is just another example of the Liberals making bureaucracy a priority over the people of Ukraine. What I will tell Oleksandr and all my constituents is that I am in Ottawa and I will continue to fight for you and will continue to stand up against this incompetent Liberal government to ensure that the concerns of Ukrainians are heard.

I do not know what the future holds for Ukraine and Afghanistan. I fear that in both instances it will not be good. Democracy and human rights may once again prevail in both countries, but the human cost will be high.

What is Canada's responsibility to make sure peace happens? We fought a war in Afghanistan and a lot of Canadian blood was spilled and treasure spent. In Ukraine, the stakes are even higher. Reports put daily military casualties higher than the entire wars in Iraq and Afghanistan inflicted on U.S.A. and NATO allies in two decades. The belligerents of Russia and Belarus directly border NATO countries, while NATO supply lines of military equipment into Ukraine have become legitimate targets for attack. President Biden said the following, "Direct conflict between NATO and Russia is World War III, something we must strive to prevent." Those are scary words, for sure.

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Let me finish with these inspirational words from Ukrainian President Zelenskyy when he addressed this Parliament two weeks ago: “We are not asking for much. We are asking for justice, for real support, which will help us to prevail, to defend, to save lives, to save life all over the world.... Please expand your efforts to bring back peace to our peaceful country. I believe that you can do it and I know that you can do it.”

These are inspirational words. Let's heed them. Peace to Ukraine. *Slava Ukraini*.

• (1205)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to emphasize that there has been a team Canada approach to dealing with the crisis we are seeing in Europe today, and in particular in Ukraine. Canadians and provinces such as Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta are all talking about supporting refugees. Other discussions are ongoing. To that extent, it is really quite encouraging.

It is also important that we put out, as much as possible, accurate information. For example, the member made reference to a six-week processing time. We know the average is actually two weeks. That is a substantial difference. For the people who might be following this debate, this is to highlight the fact that Canada has done exceptionally well.

In fact, in 2020, I believe we resettled a third of all refugees worldwide here in Canada. We have demonstrated leadership in the past. I believe we will continue to demonstrate that leadership, and it is important for us all to recognize that it is two weeks. It is not six weeks.

• (1210)

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his statement. There may be a number somewhere that says two weeks, but my information comes directly from people we have talked to: people I have talked to and our office has talked to.

It is actually quite fascinating. I was in my office last week and my office manager was speaking with a woman in Canada who is Ukrainian. She was speaking with her family. As we were conversing here, she was texting her sister who was in Poland. It just amazed me that we had the ability to communicate directly with people on the front lines of this conflict.

When I say it is six weeks, that number is coming from those people. This is real information that I have from people I have talked to. The government may say one thing, but the information that I have seen and that I have heard from people in my constituency and from people fleeing the area is that it is many more than two weeks.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Winnipeg North just said it is important to present the facts. Earlier, my colleague from Montarville presented numerous facts.

We did not get a response from the government about the possibility of setting up an airlift. As for waiving visas, we have seen

some countries do this in a matter of hours, but the government says it could take 12 weeks and the offices are open from 8 to 4.

Does my colleague agree that, when it comes to Ukrainian refugees, this government is sorely lacking in the initiative department?

[English]

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Madam Speaker, that question points out the reality that is being faced right now. I have heard many stories of people who are wanting to get biometrics done, for example, and these biometrics are supposed to take a short time. When they call the office, they do not even have the ability to book an appointment because they are all booked for the next six-plus weeks.

There is a tremendous problem with the immediacy of this issue. My colleague suggested getting some planes over there and dealing with the paperwork once people come here. As I said in my speech, these are women and children. Men are not even allowed to leave Ukraine because they are needed in the war effort.

The risk to Canada is extremely low. I strongly believe that we can do things to get people out of the country, get them to a safe spot and then deal with paperwork and biometrics to figure out if they are terrorists or not.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the comments around biometrics. I am hearing the same thing in my riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam. Many families cannot get appointments to get biometrics done. The NDP condemns these attacks in all measures. This is a terrible humanitarian crisis.

Does the member believe that there are sufficient resources in our immigration system to deal with this crisis without impacting other crises that are happening around the world? If not, can he provide some additional examples of how that has impacted his constituents?

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Madam Speaker, that question is one that we have asked multiple times at the immigration committee. I hear it from people every day.

The simple reality is that when one has finite resources and one adds more work to the pile, something will not get done. That is just reality. All of us who have been in the real world have experienced that. We experience that in our own homes: If there is too much to do, something does not get done. All of us have to-do lists we have not gotten to. That is the case here also.

I have heard many cases of other streams of immigration. I spoke a lot about Afghanistan. I think that one is falling by the wayside a bit. Certainly, in the normal stream of immigration, I can recall a man in my riding who was not able to see his wife and kids for two and a half years because he was waiting for paperwork. Those are the kinds of cases that I believe are going to suffer because of this. There are not enough resources to do all of this work at the same time. The good news is that I believe there could be more resources, if the will was there. Ultimately, we have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. We have to be able to deal with a crisis while we continue maintaining the regular work that has to be done.

• (1215)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to praise my colleague for his excellent presentation and speech in the House on this matter.

One of the things we have to face is this. There was the example last August, which came to a peak in the election campaign, of how poorly the government did regarding the immigration of Afghan supporters and refugees into Canada at that time. The parallel here is we are in a war again, in Ukraine.

My colleague just answered a bit of this in a question with regard to resources. When we are in a war situation such as this and we have the reasonable presentation, as we have today, of an opposition day motion to open the visa process to get people here and then deal with the situation so that they can find as much comfort with their families as they can here in Canada, can he draw a parallel between the issue of why we need more resources and whether they would be available? The government has made funds available for a lot of other things. We have just gone through COVID. We know that government services staff are busy.

Can he expand his thoughts on how we would deal with an increase in government service opportunities to get these people here?

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. First, according to the current government, money does not seem to be an object for anything, so I do not think we can say that money is an object. The Liberals have found ways to print money. I am not suggesting that is a good thing, but it seems to be the mode the Liberals operate in, so I would be surprised if they said that money was an object. We also have a very large civil service, so I would think we would have the ability to do this. I believe the minister has the authority to authorize special permits for people to escape if needed. I think it has been done before, so I think we have the tools and the resources we need to make this happen. If we do not have enough resources, I am quite certain we could add what we need to get it done. We have to be able to accomplish these things.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech.

He issued a passionate appeal to get this motion passed and have the government put an end to this bureaucratic war on Ukrainian women, children and seniors who want to seek temporary refuge in Canada.

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I think these wait times are a total failure. Can Canada remove its visa requirement as 91 other countries have done? I think it can, but I would like to know what my colleague thinks.

[English]

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Madam Speaker, I want to comment on a couple of things the member raised. One is that the current government's history is that if an idea comes from the opposition, it is not a good idea. The previous speaker mentioned the same thing. I am pleading with the governing Liberals to see that this is a good idea. May they please take it and use it. We are willing to give it to them and let them do whatever they want with it.

The other issue the member mentioned was with respect to women. I want to highlight that also. Right now, this is primarily about women and children. We need to protect these women. We need to give them a place to live and a safe place to be. This is hugely traumatic for them and for their kids. We need to be here for them at this time, and I believe Canada can do that right now.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Vancouver East. I want to start by giving everyone in the House a picture of what the conflict in Ukraine has meant for the people of my constituency of Edmonton Strathcona.

As many will know, Alberta is the homeland of many Ukrainian-Canadians who chose to settle in our country. Edmonton Strathcona is the home of many incredible Ukrainians and also many Canadians who are not of Ukrainian descent, but who desperately want to help the people of Ukraine right now and feel a deep connection to the Ukrainian people.

It has been said many times in the House that Canadians have a special relationship with the people of Ukraine. We are the country where more people from Ukraine have settled than anywhere outside of Ukraine and Russia. I have seen that impact in my community over the last several weeks. I have seen it in the commitment from all sorts of Edmontonians to help Ukraine. At a tattoo shop in my riding, if someone gets a tattoo the shop makes a donation to Ukraine. At a garden shop, if someone buys a plant a donation is given in support of the people of Ukraine.

The support we have seen has been unparalleled. I am so proud of two Albertans: former premier Ed Stelmach and former MLA Thomas Lukaszuk, who chartered a Polish Airlines plane to go to Poland and assist Ukrainian refugees fleeing violence to come here. The efforts that Albertans have put forward to help the people of Ukraine warms my heart.

As all of us are horrified by the war crimes being committed by Vladimir Putin, crimes against humanity that are being committed against the Ukrainian people through no fault of their own, I think it is important that we take a moment in this place to recognize the kindness, generosity and beauty that we have seen from the Canadian people as they push to support Ukraine and Ukrainians.

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I can say as well that, as parliamentarians and as the government, we need to do everything we can to help the people of Ukraine right now. On February 24, the world changed. We need to respond to that. The New Democratic Party has been calling for things such as humanitarian aid. I have been calling for immediate and long-term humanitarian aid, because we will have to help Ukraine rebuild when this conflict is finally over. We have been calling for complete sanctions to be properly enforced and to do everything we can, as fast as we can, to make Putin feel the pain of the actions he has taken. We have talked about the need for us, as Canadians, to give Ukrainians the tools they need to defend themselves. We need to assist them as they try to protect their sovereign country.

What we are talking about a bit more today is that we need to help Ukrainians come to Canada. We need to help Ukrainians flee the violence in their country. I have heard many times today that the people fleeing Ukraine right now are seniors, women and children. Just a few weeks ago, I was able to go to the Polish border. I was able to meet with some of these seniors, women and children who have been fleeing the violence in Ukraine. Colleagues will not be surprised to hear that it was utterly heartbreaking. It was utterly horrific to hear the stories of what has been done to the Ukrainian people.

I have a son who is 14 years old. I have told this story before, but I want to tell the people of the House about meeting this young boy who was 11 years old. He was with his two younger sisters and his mother. He was trying to explain in broken English, and with some help in translation, how he was going to take care of his family because his father had told him that he was the man of the house now and he needed to take care of his mother and sisters.

● (1220)

He was 11, and he was holding a stuffed animal. I struggle not to break down when I think about that, when I think about what it would be like if my son had to be in charge of taking care of his family and was not given the tools to do that, nor the help from the global community to do that.

We know we need visa-free travel. We know we need to do everything we can to help the people of Ukraine as they are fleeing violence right now. Visa-free travel is a big piece of that.

In 2018, the person who represented Edmonton Strathcona before me, Linda Duncan, called on the government to implement visa-free travel for Ukrainians. Let all of us in the House think about what the scenario would be for people trying to flee violence in Ukraine if the government had listened to the New Democratic Party in 2018 and had put in place visa-free travel in 2018 for our very special friends in Ukraine. We would not be in a situation where we have to argue about biometrics. We would not be in a situation where we have to say what is possible and what is not possible. We would be able to help the women, children and seniors in Ukraine get to Canada faster and more effectively right now. However, we did not do that. We did not do that in 2018, so we have to do it now. We have to take the action now that we should have done before. We have to move faster. We have to do more.

There is another thing we have to do for Ukrainians, who have been traumatized by war, have fled their country, have had to witness things they should never have had to see and have had to leave

their fathers, husbands or brothers behind and do not know if they will ever see those people again. We need to support them once they get here.

When Ukrainian refugees come to Canada, they do not have access to health care supports in this country. Right now, Poland has accepted 2.3 million refugees from Ukraine. Poland does not have the size or the financial ability of Canada. It has accepted vastly more refugees than Canada has, and it is providing resources for Ukrainian refugees to access health care. Let me repeat that. Poland is taking in 2.3 million Ukrainian refugees and offering them limited health care supports. Canada is not doing that. Canada is blocking the ability for Ukrainians to come here and is not protecting them and not helping them as we should be once they get here.

That is shameful. That does not reflect the relationship we have with Ukraine. That does not reflect the words we hear from our Prime Minister, who says we are doing everything we can for Ukraine. Clearly we are not doing everything we can for Ukraine. Clearly there is more we could do.

I ask this to all of us in the House, in the government and in opposition: How can we work together? How can we find solutions not just to help the people of Ukraine, but to help the people of Ukraine who are trying to flee the violence, to help the people of Afghanistan who are trying to flee the violence and to help the people of all countries in the world who need help from Canada right now? How can we work together to be the country that we strive to be, to be the country that protects human rights, that protects people's lives and that helps people come to our country and contribute to our society?

● (1225)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do believe there is always more we can do. I also believe it is important to recognize that this is not just about the federal government alone. The member made reference, for example, to Poland providing health services. Three provinces, Quebec, B.C. and Alberta, have now said they want refugees to come and they will have access to health care. Canadians as a whole, many of them, some in Winnipeg North, have opened their homes. There does need to be a team Canada approach.

The processing time today is two weeks. It is a system that has just been put in place. We are talking about visa-free travel and the member made reference to 2018. I remember sitting in committee in 2014 with a Ukrainian member of Parliament talking about making travel visa-free. This is something that could be on the horizon, but right now we have to work with what we have and it is important that we work as a team. What are the member's thoughts on that?

● (1230)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, of course I think it is important that we work as a team. It is something I called for in my speech. Canadians can be proud of the efforts that parliamentarians have taken to work collaboratively and together to find ways to move things forward, but my role is to hold the government to account when I feel it is not moving far enough and fast enough. That is certainly the case with the situation in immigration.

Our immigration system was deeply broken before we got into this situation. Every single one of the 338 members of Parliament in the House knows that we hear time and time again from our constituents about how the system was broken before this crisis. That is something we can all work together on going forward.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, does my colleague not realize that her record on immigration is the government's record on immigration with the deal that the NDP made with the Liberals last week?

When they made this secret deal and signed it in the back rooms in Ottawa, did a portion of that deal have to do with immigration and getting rid of the backlog of 1.8 million? For the next three years, her record is the Liberal government's record, so she will not be holding the Liberal government to account. She will be supporting it and backing it up on this failed policy.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, I enjoy spending time with my colleague across the aisle. We have had many good conversations in the past, and perhaps we can have a conversation in the lobby afterward so I can explain to him how governance in the Westminster system works, because clearly he does not understand it.

What I can say is that as a member of an opposition party, the New Democratic Party, I am so excited that Canadians are going to have dental care, pharmacare, support for workers and support for seniors, and all because of the work that my leader, the member for Burnaby South, has done on our behalf.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. She did a good job explaining the problems we are having, and she called for collaboration.

My constituents are asking me what is going on in Ottawa, why we cannot be more nimble and create the humanitarian capacity needed so that women, children and seniors can come to Canada. People are ready to welcome them. I get a lot of calls to that effect.

From the beginning, I have been telling them that we are working together collaboratively. However, it is no longer working.

The parliamentary secretary just said that this is a new program and that we need to give it time. However, we do not have the luxury of time. Would my colleague agree that time is running out and that refugees cannot wait any longer?

They want to come here, and we have the capacity to welcome them.

What are the limits of this collaboration, considering the government's dismal failure?

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Madam Speaker, I am sorry, but I will answer in English.

Absolutely we have been moving too slowly. This has been on the horizon for some time. Even long before the invasion, we were calling for more supports to be put in place. Canada has to contribute more to humanitarian aid. We have to do more, but let us

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take as a silver lining Canadians' interest in reaching out and supporting Ukraine right now.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very happy to enter this debate today.

As we know, the situation in Ukraine is absolutely horrendous. This unprovoked, illegal war that Putin has waged against Ukraine has shocked the world, and we are all standing united to support Ukraine.

Here we are in Canada, and the question is, what can we do and what are we doing to help the people of Ukraine? I will say that the government is trying. It is trying to do something, but there are lots of issues with the measures it has put forward.

The issue my colleague, the member for Edmonton Strathcona, brought forward is in fact one that the New Democrats had brought forward as far back as 2018. We called on the government then to ensure there would be visa-free travel for Ukraine. The government ignored this recommendation and did not move forward on it, and here we are in this situation. Just imagine what it would have been like if that was in place or even if the government took the time to implement it now, or as early as January, when the Minister of Immigration said the government was moving forward with immigration measures to expedite bringing Ukrainians to Canada. Even if it had done it then, in early January, we would be close to having visa-free travel for Ukraine, but it did not do that.

I urge and call on the government to work expeditiously to bring forward visa-free travel for Ukraine. It is absolutely necessary, even with the special immigration measures in place right now.

I will take a moment to talk a bit about the special immigration measures the government has brought in. I welcomed them when it made the announcement, although I had suggestions on how they could be done better and some questions on how they would be implemented. Here is how they are hitting on the ground: As predicted, the requirements are causing delay after delay after delay.

Just a moment ago, I got an email from a constituent who is trying to help bring his 82-year-old mother to Canada. He flew to Poland and met up with her. She took a bus on her own and left Ukraine for Poland, and they have been stuck there ever since. They went on the portal to make the application and could not get through the process to put forward that his mother has what is called an "internal passport". It is an older identification document that is more or less equivalent to a citizenship card here in Canada. She is 82 years old, so members can imagine that the document is not new and is, rather, a much older document. On the portal there is zero recognition for those with these internal passports, even though the government's website says it would recognize other national identity documents.

He then sent in a web form, phoned the emergency number and contacted our office. He was told not to worry because the application would be processed, and if his mother qualified, she would be issued a single-use travel document. He was also told not to worry because biometrics would be included in that process.

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Guess what? Just now I got an email from him that says the IR-CC is telling them they now have to go and get an international travel passport. What gives? They were just told not to worry and that within two weeks they would get that single-use travel document with biometrics. Now they are being told they need to apply for a passport. By the way, with the lineups in the biometric centres, people cannot even get in edgewise to make an appointment. It is taking longer than a month to get processed. That is the reality of what people are faced with.

I get it when the government says that this is all new, it kind of does not know and it is doing the best it can, but guess what? It is not good enough. People's lives hang in the balance. They desperately need our government to get this right. That is what we need to do, and I am more than willing to work with the government.

• (1235)

I wrote to the minister highlighting these issues. I brought it to the minister's attention in question period. He said that he would address these issues, that they would get it right. Why not ensure that the portal immediately takes people with older internal passports to the portal where one can apply for a single travel document? Why not have a space to recognize internal documents? Most of the people who are coming and wanting to get to safety are women, children and seniors. The government needs to facilitate the process so they can get to safety. It needs to fix these problems. That is what is required.

I also want to touch on the issue of people having arrived from Ukraine. The Ukrainian Canadian Congress, along with over 500 immigrant-serving agencies across the country, is calling on the government to provide supportive services and resettlement services to Ukrainians. Allowing them to get a work permit is good, but not everyone will be able to work. Allowing them to get a study permit is good, but not everyone will be studying.

They need to survive when they are here. That means they will need health care support, day care support, housing, financial support and so on. I am joining the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and over 500 immigrant-serving agencies across the country in calling on the government to provide exactly that, to support the people of Ukraine here in Canada during this very difficult time.

I know government members will say that they are doing it, that they are trying to negotiate with the provinces, and so on and so forth. How about making sure health care is immediately available through using the interim federal health measure? We do that for refugees. We should be doing that for Ukrainians. The minister has the authority to authorize that right now.

I would also like to add, for Ukrainians who are struggling, that Canadians here want to help. I am sure every MP has received a litany of offers from Canadians who want to help, offering housing, support and so on. The government needs to set up a coordinated system to harness the kindness and support of Canadians. I suggest it create a phone line for people to phone in and say they have a house in Vancouver, or Saskatoon, or wherever the case may be, and that they can house people.

There are people who want to employ Ukrainians, who are saying that they have job offers available for them, but they do not

know where to go. They have nowhere to share this information. The government should set up a system so people can register and make themselves available, so their kindness and their compassionate and humanitarian support are put to use, instead of the floundering around they are doing at this time to figure out what to do.

We can also utilize non-profits and the strength of non-profits on the ground and help them coordinate this effort, but they cannot do it without support from the government. This was brought to the minister's attention. He said they are working on it. I hope that the government will actually act.

I also want to raise this point: The minister announced he would be providing extended family sponsorship to Ukrainians, yet I see nothing on the government's website and we have had crickets since he made that announcement. Where is it? I was at an event last weekend at church praying for, supporting and sending Ukrainians strength and our support, and people there were asking me where it was and if the government had announced it. They want to sponsor their cousin, their niece, their nephew, or whoever it may be who they want to bring over. So far there is nothing there. That too is something we need to get on with.

The extended family sponsorship program works. The government does not have to wait and see how it goes. I am a product of that. My family immigrated to Canada under the extended family sponsorship. My aunt sponsored us to come to Canada in 1976. The program works. We can actually get on with it and proceed with this.

I will close by saying that the government also needs to extend these special immigration measures to Afghans and to those in other regions in conflict as well.

• (1240)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the incredible number of people we have working within the department of immigration and the civil service, for they have accomplished a great deal. When we think of 2020, one-third of all refugees around the world who were settled were actually settled here in Canada. Last year over a half million permanent residents settled here. The Ukraine crisis has come up, and we have already received over 10,000 Ukrainians. That number continues to grow.

As the member brings up some thoughts and ideas, I would encourage her to continue to work with the ministry and share those thoughts. Settlement is very important. We have announced settlement packages. We continue to work with the different stakeholders, whether they are non-profits or other levels of government.

In trying to facilitate a potentially endless number coming to Canada for safe haven, does the member have anything else she would like to express at this point? This is an open-ended question.

• (1245)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, I do, actually. First off, I just wish the government would stop saying how well they have done. It is as though that is an excuse to say that it does not need to do better. Second, what the government could do immediately would be to waive the refugee determination requirement for people in Afghanistan and other countries. It is impossible for them to get refugee determination right now, because UNHCR offices do not exist there.

If we truly wanted to help people in crisis, people who are absolutely desperate to get to safety and flee the Taliban, we will make that happen. Finally, we must ensure the measures are not just restricted to people who are in a third country. We need to allow for people to make those applications within Afghanistan, because if that does not happen, lives will be at risk.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Vancouver East on her speech.

Let me tell the House about Sylvain, a constituent of the riding I represent. His wife Viktoriia hid out in the basement of the school where she taught in the small town of Nizhyn, a little north of Kyiv. After three weeks, she was finally able to leave Ukraine and seek refuge in Poland. It was an extremely traumatic experience. She is currently in Poland, but she is running up against some truly appalling constraints, encountering every obstacle imaginable while trying to reach Canada.

I have often asked the government the following question, but I only get very vague answers. That is why I will ask my opposition colleague the question. Can my colleague explain why it is taking so long to facilitate the arrival of Ukrainian nationals in Canada? Why is it taking so long to call in private airlines to set up an airlift, which would help in sending essential goods over there and bringing Ukrainians here?

I would like my colleague's opinion, since the government is not providing any response on the matter.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, I cannot explain why the government cannot get it right. I cannot explain why the government cannot move forward in a more expeditious way. People's lives are literally at risk. They are desperate for help, and there are better ways to do it. In the spirit of collaboration, I am offering my ideas and suggestions on how the government can do better and how it can make the system work far more efficiently. I have outlined all those measures during my speech, but right now, as it stands, I would urge the government to not abandon the idea of moving forward on visa-free Ukraine travel. It should put that in place, as it would be faster and more efficient than the process that is in place right now.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague.

A few weeks ago, my colleague from York—Simcoe made a trip to bring humanitarian aid to the people of Ukraine, and he found no Liberals there helping out. Now that there is an NDP-Liberal coali-

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tion, how will the member work with her new government to ensure we are more efficient?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, of course, the situation as it stands with the agreement, which is a supply and confidence agreement, does not mean that the NDP is part of the government. The Conservatives should know that, but they want to conflate the issue, confuse the issue and put out misinformation. All the more power to them, I suppose. What we need to do here in this House is to stop the politics and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are out of time.

Resuming debate, we have the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

• (1250)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to speak to the debate on the report from the citizenship and immigration committee.

Essentially, the report does three things. It condemns the unwarranted and unprovoked attack on Ukraine by President Putin and the Russian Federation. It calls on the government to support Ukrainians and people residing in Ukraine who are impacted by this conflict to ensure that there is a process to process immigration applications on an urgent basis without sacrificing the department's ability to process other applications. Finally, it calls on the government to implement visa-free travel from Ukraine to Canada, including the issuance of electronic travel authorizations and increasing staffing resources so there are no additional backlogs in other immigration streams.

I support this report because we, for some time, have been calling on the government to implement visa-free travel from Ukraine to Canada. In fact, we have been making this call for over a year. It is similar to other calls we have made to the government to assist Ukraine and Ukrainians in the last year. We have, for some time now, called on the government to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine, something it resisted up until recently. We made the call for lethal weapons over a year ago, asking the government to come to Ukraine's assistance, as we were anticipating some of the threats we are now seeing unfold from the Russian Federation against Ukraine.

Up until February 14, the very same day that the government invoked the Emergencies Act, the government resisted the call for visa-free travel and the call for providing lethal weapons to Ukraine. In fact, it said that with respect to providing lethal weapons to Ukraine, the solution would be a diplomatic one, not a military one. On February 14, on the very same day it announced the invocation of the Emergencies Act, it did a 180° on the policy of not providing lethal weapons to Ukraine and announced the government would, in fact, be providing some nine million dollars' worth of lethal weapons to Ukraine. However, it did not reverse course on our long-standing call to implement visa-free travel to Ukraine.

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That is why this report has come to the House. It is because the government has still not addressed the problem of the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Ukraine. It has still not done enough to ensure that Canada plays its part in assisting Ukrainians, both in Ukraine and those in the European Union. Ukraine is a country of some 45 million people. About a quarter of the country is now displaced. Over 10 million Ukrainians have been forced out of their homes. Some of them are now internally displaced people. Some seven million of them are now in Ukraine, not at home, fleeing the indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas we are seeing being perpetrated by the Russian Federation. An additional three million Ukrainians have fled Ukraine into the European Union.

It is those Ukrainians who have fled that we feel Canada can do a better job of assisting. Right now, the burden is falling disproportionately on member states in the European Union, particularly member states in the eastern regions of the European Union, places like Poland, Hungary and the Baltic states.

While the Government of Canada has said that it is processing visas for Ukrainians to come to Canada, the problem is that there are the backlogs and long wait times to apply for a visa to come to Canada. In fact, we are getting reports that it is taking up to four months just to book an appointment to get biometric scans done in order to begin the application process for a visa. Ukrainians in eastern Europe who have family members here who could take care of them have been applying for these visas to come to Canada, but the websites are indicating that it would be up to four months from now before they can get the biometric scan that would allow their visa application to be processed. After the biometric scan is completed, who knows how much additional time the department will take to process their visa applications?

• (1255)

These wait times are not acceptable. The government has had some time now to fix this process and ensure that biometric data can be collected more speedily and that processing of the applications can take place more speedily.

That is why we have put this motion in front of the House today: It is to put some pressure on the government to fix this broken process, and this should come as no surprise to the government, because this has been going on for some time. We saw this only last August when we went through a similar problem, to the shame of this country, in Afghanistan.

In the months leading up to the fall of Kabul on Sunday, August 15, of last summer, the opposition had been calling on the government to take expeditious action to bring to Canada Afghans with an enduring tie to Canada in order to protect them from being attacked and killed by the Taliban. We made that call in a statement we issued in early July of last summer, more than a month before Kabul fell. It was reiterated by the then leader of the official opposition, who wrote a publicly released letter to the Prime Minister at the end of July that called on the Prime Minister to take expeditious action to help Afghans who were vulnerable to attacks from the Taliban and Afghans who had an enduring tie to Canada.

These are Afghans who assisted Canadian soldiers in the field during the war in Afghanistan, one of our most significant commitments in the last two decades. These are Afghans who served as

translators, advisers and other local experts on the ground who assisted Canadian soldiers in the field and who no doubt saved countless Canadian lives, and without their expertise Canadian soldiers would have been operating in a much more dangerous and much less information-rich environment.

We made these calls leading into the fall of Kabul on August 15 because it was clear from quotidian reports that were being published almost daily by reporters on the ground from reputable newspapers like The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Guardian that the Taliban were making advances quite rapidly through the first six months of last year. It was clear that the Government of Afghanistan was not able to contain the Taliban advance, and it was clear that Kabul was going to fall a lot earlier than many people had expected when American withdrawal from Afghanistan was confirmed by President Biden earlier last year.

Despite these calls, the government did nothing. It could have easily evacuated some 6,000 or 7,000 Afghans whom we needed to evacuate, those who had these enduring ties to Canada. These 6,000 or 7,000 Afghans were made up of about 1,000 or so Afghans who served as interpreters, advisers and local experts for Canadian troops in the war in Afghanistan, as well as their families. Afghan families can often be quite large, and so there were about 6,000 or 7,000 individuals we needed to evacuate and had a duty to evacuate, because they put their lives on the line to protect Canadian soldiers and assist Canadian soldiers in the field and because they believed in the mission that we had embarked on. This was a mission, I might add, that was commenced by the then Liberal government of Paul Martin in 2005 and was continued by the subsequent Harper government when it came to power in February 2006. However, despite these pleas, the government did nothing.

The government could have easily evacuated these 6,000 to 7,000 individuals on Globemaster flights. These are immense planes that can easily hold 400 to 500 people. In fact, during the chaos of the fall of Afghanistan on August 15 and the days around that fall, there was a report of a Globemaster that took off from Hamid Karzai International Airport with some 850 people on board. We could have evacuated these 6,000 or 7,000 Afghans to whom we owe a debt of gratitude, to whom we owe our honour, on about a dozen Canadian Globemaster flights in an organized manner in the weeks of July and early August before the fall of Kabul. Instead, the government did nothing.

• (1300)

The government then went into a panic about trying to do something at that point in time. I feel that is really where we are at right now on the crisis in Ukraine. The government is now belatedly scrambling to figure out how to address the bureaucratic inertia and the immense backlogs that have sprouted up in the last several weeks when in fact we have known that this was going to take place for some time.

As with the Afghanistan situation, the government seems unable to fix the process that is leading to these delays in biometric scans and visa processing and come up with a much more efficient and much quicker process to process applications for Ukrainians who want to come to Canada. Canada can do better.

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We know we can do better because it was under Clifford Sifton, one of the former Liberal ministers of the Crown under Wilfrid Laurier, that the government opened up western Canada to literally hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians a century ago. The west was settled by these Ukrainians through an ambitious immigration program. It was an open doors program that during the 1920s saw Canada's immigration rise to some of the highest levels in our history. Many of those immigrants came from Ukraine and settled in the western prairies of this country. They broke sod and laid the foundation for modern western Canada. Some 1.3 million Canadians today trace their roots back to those waves of Ukrainian immigration a century ago. We can do better because we have in the past done better.

The motion in front of us today is a call on the government to do better when it comes to addressing what is currently one of the biggest humanitarian crises in the world. Ironically, it ties in to the biggest humanitarian crisis in the world today, which is the crisis unfolding in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is facing the biggest humanitarian crisis. Shortages of food, energy and so many other things are putting millions of Afghans at risk of starvation and severe deprivation in the coming months. There too, as in the present situation in Ukraine, the Canadian government, while it is doing a number of things to address the situation, can do a lot better, especially considering the immense wealth and the fortunate circumstances we have in this country in not being directly affected by war and conflict, as both Afghanistan and Ukraine are. Part of what I hope comes out of this debate today is the government's understanding that parliamentarians are seized with this issue and that we believe that the government should do a better job in helping Ukrainians flee from Ukraine and helping Afghans flee from Afghanistan.

The situation regarding Ukrainians in eastern Europe is arguably much easier for the government to address than the situation in Afghanistan today, for the simple fact that Afghanistan has become a closed-off society with a government that we do not recognize, a government that is listed by the Canadian government and other western allies as a terrorist entity. It is a government with which we should not and cannot be doing any business, whether directly or whether indirectly through humanitarian aid groups on the ground.

However, that is not the situation with Ukrainians in eastern Europe. There are some three million of them that we could be assisting today here in Canada. All it takes is for deputy ministers and central agencies to figure out what the roadblocks are, shorten the wait times for biometric scans from four months down to four days or so, and figure out what we then need to do to shorten processing times for visas down from an uncertain amount of time now to several days or so.

• (1305)

That would ensure that we can start admitting Ukrainians in the numbers needed to relieve pressure on our NATO allies in eastern Europe. We have done these quick things before in our country's history, and the urgency of the situation today requires us to do the same now. It is in our interest to do this. These are things that we have the resources to do and the capabilities of doing. If the issue is a concern about security, as the government has indicated in recent weeks, then surely we can work more quickly with the European governments and the European Commission to exchange the data

necessary to ensure that bad actors do not use the cover of a humanitarian crisis to sneak into Canada and continue their nefarious work.

We live next to one of the largest countries in the world, the United States of America, where some 300 million citizens have the right to visa-free travel into Canada. I can assure colleagues that as is the case in Canada, there are a lot of bad actors south of the border whom we do not want admitted through our Fort Erie-Buffalo border crossing, our Niagara Falls border crossing, our Queenston-Lewiston border crossing or the dozens of other border crossings that dot this great land, so we have put in place information-sharing systems to ensure that CBSA officials at the border can interdict individuals from coming into Canada as soon as their passports are swiped, because we have information from U.S. intelligence and from U.S. law enforcement about which individuals should not be coming into Canada and vice versa. I am sure there are individuals here whom the Americans do not want to see entering the United States, and on a daily basis they deny entry to.

We should be putting in place similar systems expeditiously, right now, between democracies in the European Union and Canada, because the European Union member states have already done exactly that in order to ensure the protection of their own citizens. In fact, the European Union implemented visa-free travel some time ago between Ukraine and the European Union. The three and a half million Ukrainians who have fled from Ukraine to the Schengen zone of the European Union have done so without visas. That process was in place well before the advent of the war. The European Union felt comfortable putting in place that visa-free travel because they had put in place security systems to ensure that bad actors did not take advantage of visa-free travel to enter the European Union zone and do their nefarious work.

We should be able very quickly to get the security data and the other intelligence data to ensure that we do not allow bad actors into Canada. It is the job of political leaders to do that expeditiously. It is the job of the ministers responsible and the Prime Minister's office to direct central agencies, to direct the department, to establish a task force among departments, central agencies and the political leadership to unstuck what is stuck so that we can do our fair share to help Ukrainians to flee Ukraine, help Ukrainians currently in the European Union and help alleviate some of the pressure some of our eastern European NATO allies are feeling as a result of the influx of millions of Ukrainian refugees.

I hope what comes out of this debate today is a real sense of urgency on the part of the Government of Canada to do better when it comes to helping Ukrainians, both in Ukraine and in the European Union.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I often enjoy the remarks from the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills. I do not always agree with him, but I appreciate his perspective.

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What I heard from his remarks moments ago was the notion of not compartmentalizing our compassion, the notion that we have an immigration system that is wholly unprepared for the scale and the scope of the atrocities that are being committed around the world, in particular in Ukraine. He referenced Afghanistan, but of course atrocities are also happening in Syria, Palestine, Yemen and all around the world, not just as wars being fought but also from a climate disaster perspective. I would argue that prior to this war in Ukraine, our immigration system was vastly outdated and completely inadequate to meet global needs.

Through you, Madam Speaker, to the hon. member, given what is before us today, what lessons can we learn and what systems can we improve to ensure that our immigration system is prepared not just for what is happening in Ukraine but for the atrocities that are happening around the world?

• (1310)

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, quite simply, I think we need to get better. The Government of Canada needs to do better when it comes to operational excellence. The Government of Canada has immense policy capability, but my observation over the past several years is that its ability to execute operationally has been lacklustre. When we look at the government's implementation of various policies over the years, it is not a shining record of achievement. We need to do better when it comes to operationalizing policy. That is the best way I can put it.

We can look at things such as the long-gun registry. It was an example of policy implementation that went awry. The implementation of a payroll system is another example of policy implementation gone awry. When we look at processing applications for people from Afghanistan wanting to come here as permanent residents, again it is implementation of a policy gone awry. It is the same thing with eastern Europe, when it comes to processing temporary resident visitor permits for Ukrainians wanting to come to Canada.

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I did not have the opportunity to speak to the member for Wellington—Halton Hills on an opposition motion that he brought forward a couple of weeks ago. I will pose that question today, because I think it is relevant to the remarks that he made today in the House. It is around natural gas.

I know that the member opposite believes that it is an important pathway, and that this government supports energy transition both in the interim and beyond. Would he agree with me that it is not necessarily about pipelines, but about the capacity to take existing liquefied natural gas and get it to Europe?

That is probably going to be at least a two-year or three-year play. Does he think that is something the government should still be pursuing? This is not just a six-month program, but a longer piece. If he has a moment, could he also comment on critical minerals and how important they are to the energy transition beyond fossil fuels?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, there are myriad ways in which we need to assist Ukraine and our European allies. The motion in front of us today is one example of what we are calling on the government to do, and is on visa-free travel. The other issue the hon. member has raised is energy.

We, as a country, need to understand that our natural gas and oil are not simply important to our economy, but are essential to our defence and security. They are also essential to our food security, as about 2% of the world's natural gas supplies are used to create synthetic nitrogen, which some will argue is responsible for half of the world's grain and oilseed production. In other words, without synthetic nitrogen, we could only feed three and a half billion people on the planet instead of seven billion people.

I note that the Minister of Natural Resources, last Thursday in Paris, announced that Canada would pump another 200,000 barrels of oil a day by year-end and another 100,000 barrels of oil equivalent of natural gas by year-end in order to assist our European allies in displacing Russian oil and gas.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague brought up an important point about operational excellence and the ability of the government to deliver on its functions. We see, on the one hand, the government trying to extend the powers of the federal government and get involved in provincial jurisdiction, people's private lives and all kinds of areas that are not its core responsibilities. On the other side, on things such as immigration, which is a core function of the federal government, we see a failure to be able to get critically important things done.

We heard the Minister of Immigration at committee admit that the reason the Liberals do not want to lift the visa-free travel is not about security. It is that it would take too long to lift the requirement. How long should it take to lift an existing requirement? We are not talking about putting in place a new requirement: we are talking about lifting a requirement.

Could the member talk more about how we get the federal government to focus on its core-area functions, and do those things well and efficiently?

• (1315)

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I think the reason the government is hesitant to implement visa-free travel probably has to do with the fact that it does not believe it can expeditiously negotiate bilateral or multilateral information-exchanging agreements and implement those agreements quickly enough to ensure that we can weed out any bad actors who might use the cover of a humanitarian crisis to try to sneak into Canada. I suspect that is really the problem, which relates to the Government of Canada's general lack of ability to execute operationally the policies that it stands for.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I always enjoy listening to my hon. colleague, who is very logical in his approach.

I was not clear on one thing. The motion that the Conservatives have presented is to have visa-free travel to Canada for Ukrainian refugees. He also mentioned that if there was a way we could find to do the visas in a very short time, in days, as well as the biomedical data, that would also seem to be a solution.

I just want the member to clarify this. Which approach is he advocating?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I want to tell my colleague how touched I was by his grandchildren's mural that was put together.

Quite simply, I think we need to do both. We need to shorten the time and increase the availability of biometric scans for Ukrainians wanting to come to Canada. Subsequent to that, we also need to shorten the processing time for applications by IRCC to ensure that people get a yes or no answer very quickly.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forth with the question on the motion now before the House.

[English]

The question is on the motion.

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.

The hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, we would request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 25, 2021, the division stands deferred until later this day at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[Translation]

The House will now resume with the remaining business under Routine Proceedings.

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have been waiting for this moment. I thank you for the opportunity to table a number of petitions today.

The first petition is on the very serious issue of Canadians struggling with mental health challenges. It notes that the Canadian Mental Health Association states that, as a recovery-oriented organization, it does not believe that mental illnesses are irremediable, and the petitioners are concerned about the government's decision to open up facilitated suicide within the medical system for those struggling with mental health challenges. The petitioners call on the government to repeal euthanasia for those for whom mental illness is the sole condition, and to protect Canadians struggling with mental illness by facilitating treatment and recovery; not death.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition highlights concerns about ongoing tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In particular, the petitioners are concerned about the continuing detention of Armenian prisoners of war following the end of the conflict and note

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that this is a violation of international law. They call on the Government of Canada to condemn the continuing detention of Armenian prisoners of war, to use all diplomatic tools available to advocate for their release, to condemn state-sponsored hatred in the context of the conflict, and to denounce aggressive rhetoric. The petitioners are also concerned about ongoing issues with respect to the conflict and the violations of the ceasefire we have seen in recent days.

HAZARAS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I am tabling highlights the very challenging situation facing the Hazara community in Afghanistan. The petitioners note that human rights abuses against the Hazara community predate the Taliban takeover, but have become significantly worse since. There have been various instances of genocide against the Hazara people that go back a very long time. The petitioners want to see the House recognize the genocides the Hazaras have faced and designate September 25 as Hazara genocide memorial day.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition that I am tabling is in support of Bill S-223, which would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad and receive an organ that had been taken without consent. It would also create a mechanism by which the Minister of Immigration could designate people as inadmissible to Canada as a result of their involvement in forced organ harvesting and trafficking. Currently, there is no law against somebody being involved in forced organ harvesting and trafficking abroad. This legislation would remedy that. The petitioners are hoping that this Parliament, after 15 years of efforts to pass legislation on forced organ harvesting and trafficking, is the one that finally gets it done.

ETHIOPIA

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I am tabling highlights the ongoing challenges, conflict and humanitarian crisis in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. The petition dates back to a very acute phase of conflict. There continue to be significant concerns about hunger, limited access to food and challenges regarding access to vital health care and other needs. The petitioners are calling on the government to be actively engaged with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments, to conduct proper investigations into the human rights abuses that have taken place, to defend fundamental human rights in Ethiopia and to address ongoing humanitarian challenges.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition highlights concern about a Liberal Party election platform commitment that would effectively politicize charitable status determinations. Existing charities law already prohibits dishonest conduct, but the Liberals' commitment, highlighted here, is particularly to target the alleged dishonest behaviour of those with political views that differ from theirs.

Routine Proceedings

In particular, it seeks to deny charitable status to organizations that have a pro-life viewpoint and that support women in a crisis pregnancy situation. Their proposal would jeopardize the charitable status of hospitals, houses of worship, schools, homeless shelters and other charitable organizations that do not agree with the Liberal Party on this issue as a matter of conviction. This is very similar to what we saw with respect to the values test that was associated with the Canada summer jobs program the Liberals tried to put in place previously.

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

● (1320)

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the final petition that I am tabling today is also about the human rights situation in Afghanistan. This particular petition highlights the condition of the Sikh and Hindu minority community. Petitioners highlight the persecution that the Sikh and Hindu minority community has faced in Afghanistan. They call on the Minister of Immigration, as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to take action to support this minority community.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions today. The first one is a petition on behalf of Canadians who are concerned that certain charities could be targeted based on their views. The petitioners call on MPs to ensure that charities that hold views that are different from the government's do not lose their charitable status.

● (1325)

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition has to do with conscience rights. Yesterday, my colleague from Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek spoke on her bill, Bill C-230, the protection of freedom of conscience act, and I am presenting a petition today that supports this legislation. The petitioners are concerned about doctors and health professionals who might be coerced into engaging and supporting euthanasia or MAID, and they want conscience rights and second opinions to be protected.

The petitioners ask that protection of conscience rights be enshrined into law, protecting physicians and health care workers from coercion or intimidation regarding providing or referring someone for MAID or euthanasia.

VACCINE MANDATES

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, my petitioners are seeking for the government to cease and desist its ostracism of those who are mandated, through a petition that says that Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada's Bill of Rights, and our history of sacrifice in defence of liberty demand that we respect and uphold the con-

science rights of all Canadians, and that the Prime Minister has encouraged hatred and contempt toward the individuals exercising their constitutionally protected rights. Therefore, they would like the government to cease and desist this dehumanizing behaviour of refusing to let people leave the country by plane if they do not have their shots.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of several Prince Edward Islanders who are concerned about the climate crisis. They are calling on the Prime Minister and the Government of Canada to enact just transition legislation that is wide-ranging and that includes some of the following elements: a reduction of emissions by at least 60% below 2005 levels by 2030; the creation of good, green jobs, ensuring decent low-carbon work for all workers; the protection and strengthening of human rights and workers' rights; the respect of indigenous rights and an emphasis on support for historically marginalized communities; and the expansion of the social safety net.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, this petition is in support of Bill S-223, seeking to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking, making it a criminal offence to go abroad and receive an organ taken without consent. This bill has passed the Senate unanimously three times and passed unanimously in the House of Commons in 2019 in the same form. The petitioners hope that this Parliament will act on this petition.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I too am going to present a petition in support of Bill S-223. This bill seeks to combat forced organ harvesting and trafficking, and would make it a criminal offence for a person to go abroad. This bill has been introduced in some form over the last 13 years, and the petitioners are hoping that the current Parliament is the particular Parliament that gets it passed. Petitioners signed this petition because they want this bill passed and are in full support of it.

● (1330)

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I have to present is from people from across the country who are concerned about the conscience rights of physicians. They are calling on Parliament to pass legislation that would make it a criminal offence to coerce, intimidate or use any form of pressure to force physicians, health care workers or health care institutions to become parties to assisted suicide or euthanasia. As such, they are calling on the government to enact Criminal Code protections for conscience rights.

NORTHERN RESIDENTS TAX DEDUCTION

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I have to present is from folks from Fox Creek and Swan Hills, two towns in northern Alberta. The petitioners say that the rising cost of heating their homes and other expenses, and the vast distances they must travel, are making life more expensive. They are calling on the government to recognize the fact that they live in northern Canada. They are currently 12 kilometres short of the arbitrary line that runs across Alberta, preventing them from claiming the northern living allowance. They are calling on the government to recognize Fox Creek and Swan Hills as being in the intermediate zone, so that they can claim the northern living allowance and deduct that from their income taxes.

AGE VERIFICATION SOFTWARE

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I have to present is from Canadians from across the country. The petitioners are concerned with the accessibility of violent and degrading sexually explicit material and its impacts on public health, especially on the well-being of women and girls. They recognize that we cannot say we believe in preventing sexual violence toward women while allowing pornography companies to freely expose our children and youth to violent explicit sexual imagery day after day. This is a form of child abuse. As such, the petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to require meaningful age verification on all adult websites.

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I have to present, and this will be the last one today, is on behalf of Canadians who are concerned that certain charities could be targeted based on their views. The petitioners call on MPs to ensure that charitable status is not subject to a litmus test or a values test. They are calling on the government to ensure that those who have charitable status maintain their charitable status and that the government not require an ideological lens to enable them to maintain their charitable status.

SENIORS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a petition before me signed by the residents of Winnipeg North. They are asking for the government and all members of Parliament to take a look at the many different seniors programs, whether it is the GIS support programs, OAS, New Horizons or the issues of mental health and long-term care. They are asking for all members of Parliament on all sides of the House to be strong advocates for all of these types of programs to the benefit of seniors in Winnipeg North, but obviously it would apply to all Canadians.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ONLINE STREAMING ACT

The House resumed from February 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, before I begin, I am sharing my time with the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

Today, I used the Internet. This is not an extraordinary statement and it is not shocking to any of my colleagues, so why do I bother saying it at all? It is because we are here today as the government to advance Canadian interests through a forward-thinking digital policy agenda. By taking action and introducing legislation, we will ensure that the Internet remains an engine for innovation but also adapts to Canadian values.

However, when I did not use the Internet daily, it was 1991. Back then I was a little younger, in elementary school still, and there was an upstart comedy on TV called *The Red Green Show* making its debut. Coincidentally in 1991, that was also the time when the Broadcasting Act had its last major update. The time to modernize the act is now and time is of the essence. The online streaming act is part of this work. It would improve fairness in our broadcasting system. It would create sustainable funding for our cultural industries, and it would continue to support the livelihoods of Canadian artists and creators as well as enrich the lives of Canadians who want to see more of themselves on screen and in song.

The bill addresses an important regulatory imbalance by requiring online audio and video broadcasting services to contribute to the achievement of important cultural policy objectives in the same way that traditional broadcasters always have.

As early as the 1990s, concerns were raised about the potential for online streaming to disrupt the broadcasting sector. An early decision was made not to place requirements on online streaming services, then, to avoid stifling innovation, given the relative limited impact of those services at that time. Remember, broadcasting regulation only applies where there is a material impact on the broadcasting sector. Today, the rationale to exempt online players simply no longer stands.

Government Orders

Over the past decade, subscribers to online broadcasters have grown from 6% to 78% of Canadians. In the spring of 2021, surveys indicate that nearly 100% of millennials watched Internet videos. Even if we only focus on the last few years, the revenues of online video services have seen fast and substantial growth, while over the same period of time traditional broadcasters have seen steadily shrinking revenues.

The reason I bring this evidence to members' attention is to make it clear that the world of broadcasting has changed. We all know this. We regularly turn to online streaming services such as Netflix, Spotify, Crave and CBC Gem to access our music and television in addition to more traditional services like radio and cable. Times have changed. It has taken us over 20 years, but online streaming services are now the method through which a growing majority of Canadians access their content.

Some detractors of the bill have said that what we are putting forward will cause foreign players to withdraw from the market. What we have seen is the opposite. These platforms are here to stay and more are coming. Their libraries continue to grow and they are competing directly with regulated broadcasters for programming, audiences and advertising dollars. Let us take a look at a few examples of their impact.

Satellite and cable are losing subscribers to streaming services, while viewers seek out more economical online alternatives. Television stations like Corus, CTV and CBC have shut down transmitters over the last 10 years to cut costs. The broadcasting system is losing advertisers, revenues and audiences to online streaming services. There has been a drastic shift in Canada's broadcasting sector, which has directly impacted the level of support for Canadian programming and talent. Jobs are threatened. Continuing to regulate online and traditional broadcasters differently is not fair and it is not sustainable. It is putting the support system for Canadian stories and music at risk.

To explain how modernizing the act will create sustainable funding for our cultural industries, it is important to look back at the proven track record of innovation in our cultural sector and recall how transformative digital disruption has been for broadcasting in Canada. The support system that I am proud of, which has cultivated Canadian cultural works and supported innovation and talent in our audiovisual, music and sound recording sectors, is one we intentionally developed through policies, programs and legislation.

● (1335)

Let me remind members of the House how things were at the beginning of Canadian broadcasting. Radio and TV channels, as well as cable and satellite distribution companies, had to be Canadian owned and hold licences. They were allowed, and still are of course, to show foreign programs or carry American channels. In return for participating in Canada's broadcasting system and accessing our domestic market, they were required to fund, acquire or broadcast Canadian programs.

They are also required to make programs accessible to Canadians and contribute to the creation of Canadian programming, including in French. Over time, broadcasters' demand for Canadian programs increased. The system was working as intended and domestic creative industries flourished. Thousands of Canadians found careers

in broadcasting as journalists, producers, actors, writers, directors, singers, lighting designers, makeup artists, set designers, showrunners and so much more. There was upskilling in Canada's cultural industries and investment in production clusters. We became known for our creative and technical talent.

Broadcasting plays a key role in supporting Canada's creative industry and evolving cultural identity. The Canadian broadcasting, film, video, music and sound recording sectors are also important economic drivers. They contribute about \$14 billion to Canada's GDP and account for approximately 160,000 jobs. These figures point to a sector we can be proud of, not one we can take for granted.

We knew the day would come when the 1991 Broadcasting Act would no longer be sufficient. Unfortunately, that day has come and long passed. Unlike Red Green, we are not approaching this challenge with duct tape. The legislative process works. We have been working tirelessly with stakeholders, parliamentarians and Canadians to make the requested amendments to the previous act to get us to where we are today. We are fighting for the recognition and supports that our creative sectors need not only to survive but to thrive. Time, as I have said, is of the essence.

The online streaming act will build on the economic and social benefits of the Broadcasting Act. It is about ensuring the continued viability of the Canadian broadcasting system. It is also about ensuring our cultural sovereignty. We are home to innovation and emerging talent, and it is imperative that we support our creators and creative industries.

As an artifact of outdated legislation, online broadcasters are not required to support Canadian music and storytelling or any other broadcasting objective. As the revenues of traditional radio and television broadcasters stagnate and decline, so too will the level of support for Canadian music and stories and for the professional creators behind them. This is not right, and I know it is not consistent with a forward-looking digital agenda.

The proposed act would equip our broadcasting system to meet the known and immediate challenges of today and help brace for the challenges of tomorrow. The implications for the broadcasting system, which is the bulwark of Canadian cultural expression, are grave. Canadian broadcasters have responded by cutting costs, and that has a real impact on their services to Canadians, on their contribution to Canadian culture and on good, well-paying middle-class jobs.

As Canadians, we would be poorer for not seeing homegrown talent supported and more diversity on screen and in song. Who knows where Ryan Gosling would be today without Canadian television shows such as *Road to Avonlea* and *Breaker High*. Notable gem *Degrassi High* is on the verge of a third iteration. As a country, we have been intentional about supporting Canadian artists and programs. Without this, The Guess Who or Tegan and Sara could possibly have remained some of Canada's best-kept secrets.

The breadth of voices within our borders is unparalleled. Our indigenous audiovisual storytellers, with the support of campaigns such as APTN's *Speak with Pride*, continue to push boundaries. Previous generations such as mine enjoyed shows like the *Polka Dot Door*.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Polkaroo.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, there is some excitement on the other side.

There was *Mr. Dressup* and, in French, *Passe-Partout*. We were collectively sitting at the edge of our seats watching *Hockey Night in Canada* and others enjoyed, late at night, *The Kids in the Hall*.

We are not alone. Countries around the world have moved to support their own culture, and we need to do the same thing. The online streaming act is not about picking winners over losers. It is about ensuring that our cultural sector will continue to grow. No matter how Canadians access their content, they should be able to see themselves in stories.

The 1991 Broadcasting Act got us here, and now the online streaming act will move us forward. Perhaps I am dating myself, but I will end with the motto of *The Red Green Show*'s lodge: *Quando omni flunkus moritati*. It is mock Latin for "When all else fails, play dead." We will not play dead on this issue. We will take action on it.

• (1340)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member across the way talked about the importance of this piece of legislation and how it is going to expand diversity. He went on to say that Canadians deserve to "see themselves" in the stories that are being shared. What I find interesting is that this bill would allow the CRTC to regulate online creators. Now, the CRTC, the commission or governing body that will be responsible for making sure the bill is followed, is composed, interestingly enough, largely of white middle-aged men. In fact, there is only one woman on the leadership of the CRTC. Sorry, there is more than one woman, but only one non-white individual on the CRTC.

I am just wondering: Is this the type of diversity the member sees as needed in public broadcasting?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her interest in diversity and inclusion. However, with the bill and the changes we are putting forward, it is the platforms that have obligations, not the users. The Conservative Party, last time this bill came around, left our creators and artists behind. We are not going to make that mistake again. Platforms are in; users are out.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Government Orders

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order. The question was asked and an answer was given.

The hon. member for Drummond.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I can see that some of my colleagues on the other side of the House still have some things to say.

I thank and commend my colleague from the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage for his speech.

I completely agree with him. Quebec and Canada have had some massive success stories precisely because our broadcasting system promotes content created by Quebecers and Canadians. Many artists have enjoyed successful careers in Quebec, in Canada and abroad because of the CRTC's broadcasting rules.

There are a lot of benefits, but there are also some pitfalls. One such pitfall that we hear about quite a bit is regulation of social media, and I think this aspect has been adequately addressed in Bill C-11. The Minister of Canadian Heritage clearly stated that he did not want to regulate content generated by users, by the private individuals who use platforms like YouTube, TikTok and so on. These creators have, however, expressed some concerns about the wording of this bill in its current form.

Does my colleague think that we could review the wording of Bill C-11 to satisfy and reassure these creators, who are becoming more and more of a presence in our broadcasting system?

• (1345)

[English]

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his work on the heritage committee.

We are eager to see this bill before committee and to engage in discussion on how to make it better, ensuring its principles and what we and the minister have set out are met. There is room for amendments and room for discussion, and the proper place is in committee. We hope to see this bill quickly brought forward to the heritage committee.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the web giants are using every possible loophole to circumvent our tax rules, the funding of Canadian cultural content and the visibility of the work done by artists and creators. The government has a responsibility to ensure that the bill does not contain such loopholes.

In the interests of transparency, does the government intend to make public the instructions to the CRTC to ensure that the web giants fulfill their obligations in spending, making Canadian content discoverable and disclosing their financial information to contribute to the development of our cultural content? When does it plan to send and disclose these instructions?

Government Orders

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I do not think I have enough time for a response, but the goal is to make sure that broadcasters and online giants are on a level playing field. That is what we put forward, that is the goal of this legislation and that is what we hope to see moving forward.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very proud of the incredible content that I can create and put out on social media. I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary can comment on whether or not the incredible content that I am able to put out on a daily basis will be impacted by this legislation.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Madam Speaker, I think it is members of the Conservative Party who usually provide that content for the hon. member, but I can assure him that if he puts any of his videos online and gets millions of hits, it will not be regulated by the CRTC.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I respectfully acknowledge the Anishinabe people here in the national capital region, located on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin nation.

[Translation]

Our government made a commitment to advance the interests of Canada and Canadians through a digital framework that ensures progress for everyone. This program includes measures that will make the Internet fairer and safer for all Canadians while ensuring that it remains a tool that fosters innovation.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to invite my colleagues to support the online streaming act introduced by the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier and Minister of Canadian Heritage.

[English]

Parliamentarians, stakeholders and industry players have rightly insisted that our Broadcasting Act, last updated in 1991, no longer adequately supports current or future Canadian creators. In that year, the top song in Canada was Bryan Adams's (*Everything I Do I Do It For You*). Since 1991, the broadcasting industry has changed and shifted at an unprecedented pace, partially due to technological developments, but also because of COVID and its impacts on when, where and what content is consumed. In short, the status quo is not a situation that Canadian creators, producers, broadcasters or culture can accept.

[Translation]

For that reason, I would like to take a few minutes to explain why Canadian stories and music should be seen and heard, and why artists such as the Quebec group Bleu Jeans Bleu need a renewed regulatory framework to help them succeed in Canada and abroad.

[English]

The Broadcasting Act is a vital part of promoting Canada's cultural sovereignty. The Government of Canada continues to work to ensure that whatever the medium, Canadians will be able to see and hear their own stories, express their values and share their experiences with each other. The act is about harnessing the creativity of Canadians and leveraging the promise of technology.

• (1350)

[Translation]

Online streaming services now dominate the market around the world, and Canada is no exception. In Canada, these services have grown by leaps and bounds by providing their services across the country.

[English]

Platforms like Netflix, Disney+, Amazon Prime and others provide Canadian talent with a stage before global audiences. There is no doubt these platforms have made meaningful contributions to the support and promotion of Canadian creators, but there is more that could be done.

[Translation]

These platforms do not have the same responsibilities as traditional broadcasters under the law. For example, these services are not required to support Canadian music and storytelling and other essential objectives of broadcasting in Canada. That is a problem.

[English]

Canadian voices and perspectives are unique. Our country's diversity is unparalleled on the world stage, and so are the creative works that emerge from it. The time has come for streaming services to participate in and contribute to the production and exhibition of Canadian stories and music. They are well placed to make a significant and important contribution, while taking into consideration their different and varied business models.

The online streaming act would ensure that financial contributions are made to further Canadian stories and music in a variety of ways, including to support their development, production or promotion, while contributing to the training and development of Canadian creators. In recent years, we have seen one Canadian success story after another, from *Schitt's Creek's* record-breaking season to *Orphan Black's* Tatiana Maslany and *Kim's Convenience's* Simu Liu, who is headlining productions in the Marvel cinematic universe. Large platforms like Disney, Apple and Netflix have taken notice of what Canada has to offer.

[Translation]

Support for the modernization of the Broadcasting Act is not just about guaranteeing access to Canadian creative content. In Canada, we have artists from a variety of cultures, backgrounds and perspectives. This bill is critical to help support our artists and creators, who must be able to realize their full potential.

We have a responsibility to establish a framework and create the necessary space for women and people from francophone, indigenous, racialized, official language minority, LGBTQ2+ and other communities.

The difficulties we have been experiencing over the past two years with the COVID-19 pandemic have shown us that solidarity is essential to support our artists and creators. They support our diverse communities every day. They strengthen the soul of our cultures. They keep our Canadian heritage strong.

The tools proposed in this bill could help us discover the next Denis Villeneuve. We must support our artists, like Canadian drag artist Priyanka, young Mohawk actress Kiawentiio, Manitoban actress and screenwriter Bahia Watson, and Atikamekw artist Laura Niquay from Quebec.

[English]

Of course, this includes Hamilton's favourite modern rockers, the Arkells, and many other creators like them who deserve recognition. This bill would breathe new life into a system that will invest in the production and broadcasting of Canadian series, films and music. It would aid in building the infrastructure to continue to support and expand an industry that already employs about 160,000 Canadians. That is similar to the number of workers in our oil and gas sector. This investment will bring even more jobs and opportunities to our artists, creators and producers.

Canadian music is a particularly important part of the cultural sector. The music production and sound recording industry accounts for over \$625 million worth of Canada's GDP and almost 10,000 jobs. Through their music and lyrics, Canada's musicians help create relationships and memories, initiate important social discussions and forge a collective national identity and collective national values.

Music allows us to share our country, our culture and our ideas throughout the world. Much of the music we listen to today is provided to us through online services like Spotify, Apple Music and YouTube. It is only fair that just as traditional radio does, these services contribute to supporting Canadian music, whether it be through financial contributions to funds intended to support the Canadian music industry or by showcasing Canadian talent.

It should not matter whether one listens to Michael Bublé on Spotify, YouTube or the radio; these platforms must all contribute to achieving Canada's cultural policy objectives. The need for a modern broadcasting system is now. This bill recognizes the importance of investing in Canadian stories and music.

• (1355)

[Translation]

I would ask the hon. members of the House to support this bill, which is fair, equitable and forward-looking. We need to take immediate action to support the next generation of Canadian talent.

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the individual across the way made mention in her speech that through Bill C-11, money will be taken from broadcasters and put into an art fund, and artists will then be able to pull from that art fund in order to generate more "Canadian content".

She said this is an investment in broadcasting of Canadian material. When I look at YouTube, TikTok, Twitch or Snapchat, I see some incredible up-and-coming Canadian artists. We call them dig-

ital-first creators, and they will be captured under this piece of legislation. There is good potential that 30% of their revenue will have to be contributed to this art fund.

Can the hon. member help me and those digital creators understand whether they would have the opportunity to also pull from that fund by applying for grants from it, in the same way that they are paying into it?

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Madam Speaker, the government has been very clear that it is platforms that fall within the mandate of this legislation, and not users themselves. It is the platforms that we are asking to contribute. Right now, we have a system that is two-tiered, and traditional broadcasters have to follow a number of rules that new streaming services do not have to follow. We want to make an even playing field for broadcasters in this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I appreciated the speech from my colleague, with whom I serve on the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Bill C-11 corrects a concern that was raised during the study of Bill C-10, the predecessor of Bill C-11, which was dropped in the previous Parliament.

Bill C-11 clearly states that the CRTC will not be able to use algorithms to verify whether digital platforms are meeting the objectives set out in the Broadcasting Act.

I have a question for my colleague. If it turns out that algorithms are the only way to verify whether the objectives are being met, what might the solution be? How will we ensure that the platforms are meeting discoverability and other objectives?

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with my colleague to improve Bill C-11 in any way that we can.

[English]

With respect to algorithms, I want to point out that YouTube's own algorithm actively recommends video containing misinformation or hate speech, and those videos tend to perform well on the platform. When it comes to the algorithms about discoverability, we know that in 2020 Spotify found that its own algorithms were leading users to less diverse content.

Under the current system, the share of royalties that Canadian songwriters receive from traditional media outlets versus digital platforms is almost 70% less.

Statements by Members

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my question for the member relates to her background as a journalist. I wonder if that background informs her assessment of the bill. If it does, what parts of the bill really stand out as improving upon the status quo?

• (1400)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Madam Speaker, as a broadcaster for 20 years, I very much look forward to working on this bill. I am very proud and happy to be part of the heritage committee working on this legislation. The world of broadcasting would not have long to live if it were not for this legislation and the actions of this government to support our Canadian heritage.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my riding of Oakville North—Burlington is home to some of Canada's most innovative global leaders in technology and clean energy. I recently joined the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry to announce an investment of \$27.2 million from our strategic innovation fund in Burlington's Westinghouse Electric Canada to ensure its next-generation small nuclear reactor will be successfully licensed in Canada. This technology will result in a transportable source of clean energy to serve rural and remote communities reliant on diesel.

Canada is a global leader in nuclear safety and energy, a zero-emission clean energy source. Our government is committed to supporting innovators like Westinghouse in developing and delivering solutions to global challenges like climate change to ensure that Canada achieves its target of net-zero emissions by 2050.

ONOFRIO CURATOLO

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, Kelowna—Lake Country lost a wonderful spirit, Onofrio Curatolo, or, as most called him, Ono.

Ono studied in the seminary for 11 years until his family received their visas to start a new life in Canada. In May 1960, they embarked on a voyage from Italy and settled in Winnipeg. Soon after completing English lessons, he founded Universal Travel Agency, which he owned until 1979, later relocating his family and parents to Kelowna. Ono was an entrepreneur at heart, owning numerous stores and businesses and, most recently, Ace Screens & Tint. Having a strong work ethic and wanting to stay involved, Ono, at 83, never fully retired, as he loved meeting new people.

Ono was proud to be Canadian, yet preserved his Italian heritage. He was an active member of the Kelowna Canadian Italian Club and the Galileo Lodge of the Sons and Daughters of Italy. Ono was always generous and volunteered throughout the community. People would always see his warm smile and hear his big personality. He always greeted my family and me with open arms and was gra-

cious in teaching me a few sentences in Italian that I could use at community events.

My heart goes out to his entire family. May he rest in peace.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, yesterday we reached an agreement to bring Ontario in line, finally, with every other province and territory to make affordable child care a reality for all Canadian families. The price of child care will be cut in half by December and reach an average of \$10 a day in the next five years. There will be 86,000 new child care spots created in my province alone.

This agreement matters. It matters for families in Parkdale—High Park, who face skyrocketing child care costs and are making tough decisions about how many children to raise. It matters for women across Toronto who, given the financial constraints, were more often than men the ones who chose to stay home with their kids. These women now have the option to stay in the workforce. It matters for children around the country, who will benefit from greater access to early learning, which will help their development. Finally, it matters for elected representatives. I heard my constituents' repeated calls to address this inequity and I and our government got to work.

Yesterday's agreement demonstrates that with determined advocacy, we can rise above voter cynicism and deliver for Canadians.

[Translation]

MÉLANIE RAYMOND

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I have a few words for Mélanie Raymond, who has served as the director general for Carnaval de Québec since 2016.

Mélanie has overcome incredible challenges since taking the helm at Carnaval de Québec, the biggest and best carnival in the world. In addition to boosting Carnaval's cultural and tourism potential and rejuvenating the event's programming, she had to deal with the pandemic without ever losing sight of the fact that our city and our nation take pride in Carnaval, a tradition that is dear to our hearts.

Mélanie will be focusing on other projects, and I am sure she will make them just as great as she did the Carnaval de Québec. She is strong, creative and empathetic, a real treasure. Her presence showed the entire Carnaval team, along with the people of Quebec City and Quebec as a whole, that anything is possible. She can be proud of the work she has done.

I am honoured to have crossed paths with her, and I hope to do so again. I am grateful to Mélanie.

• (1405)

[English]

ANTI-SEMITISM

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have recently seen an increasing number anti-Semitic incidents across Toronto and in my riding of York Centre. Public schools have been vandalized, teachers harassed and faculty and students at the University of Toronto made to feel unsafe and “less than”.

“I am safer on campus if I do not identify as Jewish” is something that I have heard time and again from university students in the schools of social work, medicine and education. The safety of Jewish Canadians in public spaces is not conditional. Jewish Canadians cannot face marginalization or denigration by virtue of their faith or connection to their community.

When I first took my seat in this House, I shared that day with the announcement of Irwin Cotler’s appointment as Canada’s Special Envoy on Preserving Holocaust Remembrance and Combatting Antisemitism. His work is essential. The events of the past few weeks and generations of anti-Semitism demand that we clearly define and address it, as we have done through the IHRA definition.

These are difficult conversations. We know that diversity is a fact but inclusivity is a choice, and it is one that requires the respectful inclusion of Jewish voices in our community spaces.

SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Russia invaded Ukraine, Chilliwack-based Hungry For Life International sprang into action, using their local knowledge, network and team in Ukraine to provide humanitarian aid to those directly impacted by the war. The Hungry For Life team, led by Chilliwack’s own Chad Martz and his wife Mary, a Ukrainian national, has already provided food and shelter to thousands of people there.

Since the invasion, they have purchased and distributed over 400 tonnes of food to those in need. Their team has made hundreds of trips into conflict zones to deliver critical aid to those who cannot escape. They partnered with local churches to provide shelter to thousands of refugees fleeing the violence. To date, Hungry For Life has raised over \$1.5 million for their Ukrainian relief efforts and the need continues to grow.

On behalf of the people of Chilliwack—Hope and the entire House, to Chad and Mary and everyone at Hungry For Life, we thank them for the incredible life-saving work they are doing for the people in Ukraine.

FIFA WORLD CUP

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in 36 years, Canada’s national soccer team qualified for the FIFA World Cup. Team Canada will be travelling to Qatar from November 21 to December 18, led by a new generation, a golden generation, of players and a world-class coach supported by an entire country. Our national men’s team earned a

Statements by Members

ticket to the world’s biggest sporting event with a historic 4:0 victory over Jamaica. The entire country is proud of these determined players, who stand out in the biggest leagues in Europe and who are the heroes of many young Canadian soccer players.

Today, we want to thank all of Team Canada for this magical moment as the team moves to the next round on the world stage. They should know they have our full support and that we are cheering them on.

Go, Canada, go.

CAREY ASHTON

Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to bring to the attention of the House the passing of Carey Ashton, a dear member of our community of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and a beloved member of the NDG minor league baseball community. Serving as the head coach of the NDG Junior Lynx team from 2001 to 2011, he led the team to six consecutive provincial championship titles, but more importantly, Mr. Ashton became an inspiration to people around him by demonstrating courage in the face of his health condition through his dedication to his players and to the baseball field.

[Translation]

As a result of these impressive accomplishments, Mr. Ashton was awarded a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal and named coach of the year five times.

[English]

I would like to extend my deepest sympathies to his wife Sharon, to his children Wayne, Rebecca and Taylor, and to the members of the community who had the chance to know this inspiring human being.

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE SICKNESS BENEFITS

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again this year, more than 151,000 Canadians will need more than 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits to recover from a serious illness such as cancer. We can do more to help them.

Statements by Members

Bill C-215 would increase the maximum number of weeks of EI sickness benefits from 15 to 52 weeks for Canadians going through a difficult period in their lives.

I want to point out the courage, determination and resilience of those suffering from a serious illness. By passing Bill C-215, members of the House will be showing their support for these individuals and demonstrating that they have the wisdom to set aside partisanship and provide all Canadians with additional financial security.

I invite Canadians to follow the debate, which will start tomorrow, March 30.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

CAMBRIDGE BUTTERFLY CONSERVATORY

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize a small business that is unlike any other in my riding of Kitchener South—Hespeler. The Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory is a privately held attraction in Cambridge, Ontario, that is recognized as one of Ontario's iconic attractions, drawing many tens of thousands of visitors every year to the Waterloo region. The 10,000 square foot indoor tropical conservatory houses thousands of free-flying butterflies and actively funds and implements butterfly conservation research.

In addition, it is important to the health and mental well-being of those who visit, importantly providing guests with a respite from the harsh realities of the past two years of COVID.

Since opening in 2001, over 300,000 schoolchildren have participated in the conservatory's educational programs. The conservatory also manages a robust outreach program, visiting libraries, schools, seniors' homes and community centres.

Please join me in congratulating the Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory as it celebrates 21 years of serving the community.

* * *

[Translation]

THE SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, founded in 1892 by Father Joseph-Onésime Brousseau and Virginie Fournier, who became Mother Saint-Bernard.

This community settled in Saint-Damien-de-Buckland. These women performed many tasks and devoted their talents to the service of the most vulnerable and to teaching the residents of rural parishes. It is thanks to them that we have heritage buildings, a history centre, publications and countless archives.

In 1894, the community began to spread its roots in Quebec. Then in 1948, the order of nuns would expand to Latin America and Africa, offering their services to those populations with the same devotion.

As these nuns leave Saint-Damien-de-Buckland, I thank them kindly for their undeniable contribution to the well-being of the society and legacy they have left us.

* * *

[English]

CARBON TAX

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Friday, April 1, the NDP-Liberal coalition government will make life less affordable for Canadians by breaking their promise and increasing the carbon tax again. Canadians cannot afford this April Fool's punishment, especially those living in rural and northern communities like mine. They are already paying the price for the Prime Minister's incompetence with the highest inflation rate in a generation.

These skyrocketing prices for life's essentials are unaffordable for most Canadians and many families and seniors in the Peace Country are already at the breaking point. This tax increase will be devastating. This crisis, created by the Liberals and supported by the NDP, will lead to higher prices, higher taxes, more debt and less accountability. The carbon tax is an absolute failure and it should be scrapped, not hiked.

Canadians are no fools and on April 1, they will know that this tax increase is no joke.

* * *

[Translation]

CLAUDETTE BRADSHAW

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Claudette Bradshaw, former Liberal minister and member of Parliament for the riding of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, died earlier this week.

Ms. Bradshaw loved to say that she was just an ordinary woman, but the truth is quite the opposite. She was an extraordinary woman with a big heart and a great Acadian.

Everywhere she went she exuded unparalleled warmth and compassion, and those on the receiving end of her many hugs can attest to that.

[English]

Her life's work in community advocacy and politics was all about giving back to those in need and helping people who simply needed a little head start in life.

[Translation]

She simply could not abide the idea of people living in poverty and so she did everything in her power to help them. We owe her an immense debt of gratitude for her service to the community.

On behalf of the federal Liberal MPs from New Brunswick, I offer my deepest condolences to her family and friends.

Thank you for everything, Ms. Bradshaw. Rest in peace.

[English]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the climate emergency is real. We all have to redouble our efforts to achieve net-zero emissions.

Today, I rise to highlight two forward-thinking innovative individuals on Manitoulin Island. Craig and Kelly Timmermans know that being part of the solution to climate change and reducing or eliminating electricity costs means changing the way we think about energy. In 2020, Craig and KT built their new radio station for Great Lakes Country 103 FM and Hits 100.7 FM powered by solar energy, which created Canada's only off-grid radio station. With excess energy to spare, Craig will be installing a single class 2 green energy EV charging station, offering competitive rates with a view to expand.

It is vital that we acknowledge the work of those leading the way in mitigating climate change, so today I say cheers to Craig and KT. Their entrepreneurial spirits show that we can embrace the shift to green technology and reinforce the fact that transitioning off our dependence on fossil fuels is truly doable.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

DENIS VILLENEUVE

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday evening, Quebec once again celebrated the success of one of its distinguished ambassadors at the biggest event in Hollywood. *Dune*, from filmmaker Denis Villeneuve, a native of Gentilly in Bécancour, took home no fewer than six Oscars.

Experts all agreed that *Dune* was the kind of film that even the most seasoned director could have bungled.

This was not Denis Villeneuve's first time at the prestigious awards ceremony. In 2017, his film *Arrival* was nominated eight times. In 2018, *Incendies* was nominated for best foreign language film. This year, *Dune* was nominated 10 times.

Denis Villeneuve's greatest accomplishment, however, is having clinched his spot in the exclusive club of the greatest directors of our time. His collaborators lauded him, praised his great talent and, most importantly, spoke to his human qualities, talking about how open he is and what a joy he is to work with.

Denis Villeneuve will undoubtedly be dazzling us with his beautiful films for years to come, and Quebec will never stop being proud.

* * *

[English]

CARBON TAX

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Friday is April Fool's Day, but Canadians across the country are not laughing because the NDP-Liberal carbon tax is going up. That means home-heating bills, electricity bills and already sky-high gas prices are all increasing. Inflation continues to rage out of

Statements by Members

control. The carbon tax coalition now has an agreement that will continue to trash our world-class energy industry.

While the new NDP Prime Minister ignores the pain of everyday Canadians, other countries and jurisdictions around the world, including 11 U.S. states, are cutting gas taxes, carbon pricing and even income and business taxes, all in an effort to reduce the cost of living. The Alberta government is also doing its part to help hard-working Albertans lower the price of fuel by eliminating the provincial gas tax while prices remain high.

The people in my riding are now looking to Ottawa to do the same, but the government wants to punish them for driving to work. Canadians need relief. The NDP-Liberal government must stop making Canadians' lives miserable and scrap this horrible April Fool's Day carbon tax hike.

* * *

GEORGE MEJURY

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sorrow that I inform the House of the passing of my good friend and constituent, George Mejury. The funny thing is that we did not start off as friends. George, otherwise known by his Twitter handle of @TOareaFan, and I first met when he tweeted at me shortly after the 2015 election. George wanted me to know that he did not vote for me and that he was going to hold my feet to the fire to make sure I honoured my position and worked hard to deliver for our riding of Brampton North.

George loved Brampton. We may not have always seen eye to eye, but we both loved our city. George taught me the value of political discourse and that sometimes the voices that challenge us the most become the ones that lift us up, support us and eventually vote for us too, not because we always agree but because we take the time to hear each other out.

George was a proud Canadian who gave back to his community and was one of the biggest TFC fans I knew. He would have been so proud to see Canada's men's team qualify for the FIFA World Cup, especially because seven of the team's players are from the one and only Brampton.

We will miss George.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***CLIMATE CHANGE**

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all eyes are on Canada for its ethical, essential energy, but today the NDP-Liberal government announced that it is turning its back on its allies in its plan.

Over the past six years, the Liberals have been unable to meet their greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. Worse still, emissions have actually increased. What are the Liberals proposing now? They are proposing even higher targets at the expense of Canada's economy and jobs.

Yesterday, I met with the EU ambassador, and she made it very clear that Canada must play a greater role in making its natural resources available, especially given the war in Ukraine.

How many billions of dollars will this plan cost Canadians, who are already grappling with historic rates of inflation?

• (1420)

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the emissions reduction plan announced today is an ambitious achievable sector-by-sector road map for Canada to achieve its climate targets. Canadians have been clear. They want to see clean air, good jobs, a healthy environment and a strong economy. The emissions reduction plan outlines the practical next steps to continue delivering on these priorities from coast to coast to coast.

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*[Translation]***THE ECONOMY**

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been in this seat for quite a few weeks, and there is one thing people talk to me about a lot: the NDP-Liberal government's inability to answer any opposition questions whatsoever.

Yesterday, I asked for measures to help mitigate the disastrous impact of inflation on grocery bills. Their answer was about the GDP. I also asked for scientific evidence pertaining to the vaccine mandate. I was offered all kinds of figures that had nothing to do with it. There are many examples of such responses to our questions.

Today I would like to try asking a very simple question. Is inflation costing Canadians more, yes or no?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government understands that the cost of living is a major concern for Canadian families.

That is why we reduced income taxes for the middle class and raised them for the wealthiest 1%. That is why we created and indexed the Canada child benefit. A single mother of two can collect up to \$13,666. Furthermore, all Canadians will have access to \$10-a-day child care.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is another one. In three days, this NDP-Liberal government is going to raise taxes on Canadians. In three days, it will help to further increase inflation and the price of absolutely everything.

This new democrat government loves three things: big spending, more taxes and endless deficits. The Conservatives are clear. We are against any form of tax increase that will hurt families.

I am offering the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister another chance. Will he suspend the carbon tax to give Canadian families a bit of breathing room?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives keep pushing a false economic narrative.

The reality is that Canada is resilient and our economy is recovering well from the COVID-19 recession. Our GDP grew 6.5% in the fourth quarter, making us the second strongest economy in the G7. We have recovered 112% of the jobs lost because of the pandemic, compared to only 90% in the United States.

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*[English]***CLIMATE CHANGE**

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today the Liberals released their 2030 emissions reduction plan, which is their attempt to reduce emissions across the Canadian economy, but last week the PBO showed that the Liberals did not actually account for the cost of something simple, such as the carbon tax, across the Canadian economy.

If they were that lazy and sloppy in their examination of the carbon tax, how can Canadians have any faith that a multi-sector approach will not be a disaster for Canadian jobs and pocketbooks?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed that the majority of households will receive more in climate action rebates than they pay. That is eight out of 10 families. Like the Minister of Health—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, order.

I will ask the parliamentary secretary to start again to answer the question.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Mr. Speaker, as I was going to say, our friendly Minister of Health loves numbers and so do I, so let me quote a few for the hon. member.

A family of four will receive up to \$745 in Ontario in rebate. In my home province of Manitoba, that will be \$830. In Saskatchewan and Alberta, it will be \$1,100. We are fighting climate change and we are supporting affordability.

• (1425)

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not when the cost to the Canadian economy is factored in though, right? They cannot even do that simple math. Eight minus four is all they can do.

Let us talk about some other Liberal math. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change said at committee that they have spent \$60 billion to reduce greenhouse gas emissions since 2016. Guess what. Emissions have gone up. If the Liberals are going to spend \$60 billion to increase carbon emissions, how many trillions are they going to spend to ruin the financial security of Canadians with this plan?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that, if the Conservatives were in power, our emissions would be up 12%. We have flattened the curve. We know that pollution pricing works not only to reduce pollution but also to drive innovation and help the clean growth economy, which is exploding around the world. We know the world is headed to lower carbon energy. While the Conservatives are stuck in the past, we are looking to the future.

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[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 5,000 Ukrainian refugees are applying to come here every day.

La Presse asked the minister about this, and his office replied that an upward trend has been noticed in recent days, without offering an explanation. Seriously? Ukraine has been at war for 34 days, and 5,000 people are asking for help every day. Where do we stand now? Canada has welcomed only 6,000 people, including its permanent residents, since the war began. This is a failure.

When will the government charter flights to help these people?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect, the work that we have done over the last number of weeks has been extraordinary. We have now seen, since the beginning of the year, more than 12,000 Ukrainians arrive in Canada. They are here now.

We have also introduced new programs just in the last couple of weeks that have seen tens of thousands of applications come into the system. We have seen people arrive as recently as yesterday in the province of Alberta. We are going to continue to work, not just to get people here, but also to make sure they are supported when they arrive. I look forward to continuing the spirit of collaboration I have enjoyed with the Bloc Québécois over the past number of weeks to welcome as many people as possible here as quickly as possible.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the number of refugees that have come to Canada since the war began is not 12,000; it is 6,000. The minister is wrong.

Once again, Air Transat has stepped up, saying it was just waiting for a request from the government to help, as it did in Syria in 2015. Air Canada is also in discussions with the government. We do not understand why, on day 34, Canada is still not there for the women, children and seniors who are asking for help. Even the airlines want to contribute, and they are quicker to respond than the government.

What is the government waiting for to take action?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to a certain degree, the hon. member's argument is self-defeating. On the one hand, he says we are not working with the airlines, but he acknowledged in his question that we are having discussions with the airlines.

We continue to work not just with the airlines but with members in Canada who want to make generous donations. There was a flight that arrived literally last night in Edmonton, Alberta, carrying Ukrainians who have fled to Canada. We are going to continue to do what we can, not just to get them here, but to also work with generous private donations such as this. We will also work on behalf of the federal government to facilitate the entry of as many people as possible to Canada as quickly as possible. A crisis like this demands we take action, and I am proud of what our government has done today.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the plan to reduce emissions proposed by the Liberal government today is quite disappointing. It does not include fossil fuel subsidy elimination. It does not include a clear plan for workers to know that they will have a good job today and for the future.

It is a plan that continues to do the same thing, which is providing more money for fossil fuel sectors and a free pass. When will the Liberal government respond to the crisis of the climate crisis with the urgency that it deserves?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize that our government is advancing on many fronts to address oil and gas emissions. On top of the cap to reduce oil and gas emissions, we are implementing the clean fuel standard to accelerate the adoption of cleaner fuel. We are putting a price on carbon pollution through to 2030, and we are phasing out fossil fuel subsidies two years in advance. We are seized on the just transition.

Oral Questions

● (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's proposed emissions reduction plan is disappointing.

This plan includes the same things we have seen in the past: more money for oil companies and a free pass. We are not seeing the elimination of the oil subsidies.

When will the government understand that listening to oil companies is not going to solve the climate crisis?

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, our emissions reduction plan is our practical road map to fight climate change, create jobs and ensure that Canadians are global leaders in the transition to a clean economy.

Let me cite some of the measures we are introducing. We are going to make it more affordable for Canadians to switch to electric vehicles, improve building codes, invest in greener buildings, build a greener electricity grid, and reduce oil and gas emissions. We are also going to support our farmers.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, I was in Washington meeting with U.S. lawmakers, business leaders and other stakeholders, and I heard a blunt message from our U.S. friends. Canada has a reliability problem. I have been told that Canada cannot be counted on as a major supply chain partner.

The government's public policy failure to combat supply chain shortages and other trade disruptions has inflation at a 30-year high. Canadians are hurting. What is the plan to improve the trading relationship with our number one trading partner? What is the plan?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite and the plan is as follows: We will have continuous engagement with the U.S. administration at the highest levels. That means the Prime Minister and the Minister of International Trade.

Second, we will have a team Canada approach, which involves the member opposite who just asked the question. He was included in a recent trade mission with the Minister of International Trade. We are taking a full and comprehensive non-partisan approach.

Third, we will emphasize to all actors on both sides of the border that the economic interests at stake are both on this side of the 49th parallel and in the United States itself. Trade irritants hurt constituents of both of our countries, and we are determined to address this issue.

*[Translation]***THE ECONOMY**

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, young people cannot afford to buy a house and are being forced to camp out in their parents' basement. Seniors are having a hard time buying food and paying for their medications. Gas is now \$1.85 a litre in my riding.

Meanwhile, the Liberal government is signing agreements with the NDP, which also wants to spend recklessly.

The government has done nothing for the past few months. Now it is drafting its budget. How much breathing room will it give Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is what we have done since coming into office. We have invested over \$30 billion and re-established a federal leadership through the national housing strategy. We have proposed bringing forward a housing accelerator fund to turn more Canadian renters into homeowners. That is what we are doing.

The party opposite has voted against every single measure I have mentioned. They have no plan and no credibility on the issue of affordable housing.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the United Kingdom implemented a properly structured grocery code of conduct after trying the Australian model and failing. U.K. consumers are now experiencing lower food costs at the grocery shelf because their supply chains operate more efficiently. Here the potential CP Rail strike triggered threats of fines from our retailers to our national food suppliers three weeks prior to even the strike having a deadline.

The cost of living is skyrocketing here. Canadian families cannot afford to put food on their tables. When will the NDP-Liberal government implement a properly structured grocery code of conduct?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure my colleagues that this is a very important element for us. We made it a priority at my last meeting with the provincial and territorial agriculture ministers.

Minister Lamontagne in Quebec and I are co-chairing a committee and are expecting a report in the next few days.

HOUSING

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, moving season is coming soon. My constituents are very worried and even discouraged because there is no housing available and housing is unaffordable. What is more, the cost of two-by-fours is skyrocketing, which contributes to the housing crisis.

Prices are soaring everywhere, and I am not talking about groceries or gas. The government, however, claims that everything is fine.

Let us ask Canadians whether everything is fine. They have lost confidence in their economy. When will the government make Canadians the top priority?

• (1435)

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has invested over \$30 billion in affordable housing since coming into office. We re-established federal government leadership through the national housing strategy, but unfortunately the Conservatives have opposed virtually every affordable housing initiative that we have introduced, and it is getting worse.

Maybe the hon. member needs to speak to the Conservative member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, who stood in the House and said that we should pull back from the national housing strategy. That is what the Conservatives believe, and Canadians can see that.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Peterborough—Kawartha, 26-year-old Jonathan and his partner will soon be the proud first-time homeowners of an 1,100-square-foot, two-bedroom bungalow with no garage for a screaming deal of \$729,000, but wait: There is more. CMHC will take another \$20,000, and they get to pay another \$1,600 in taxes to CMHC.

We have a housing crisis. People need homes they can afford. Why are we punishing first-time homebuyers and rewarding CMHC?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we agree on the importance of enabling more Canadians than ever before to access the dream of home ownership. That is why we introduced the first-time homebuyer incentive, but the Conservatives voted against it. As recently as last week, the Conservative member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry said that we should stop helping first-time homebuyers. Maybe she needs to talk the member.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a February 2022 report by the Barrie and District Association of Realtors indicated that the average selling price of a home in Barrie was over \$950,000. This is a 36% increase compared with the same time just one year ago. The report also stated that prices have risen 86% over the past two years in Barrie

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and the surrounding area. This astronomical increase in home prices has now made home ownership only a dream for most.

Would the Prime Minister please tell Canadians what his government is planning to do to stop this rampant price increase in the housing market and make home ownership a reality again?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only will I tell the hon. member what we have done, but I will also tell him what the Conservatives have done constantly to oppose measures to help Canadians, whether it is the first-time homebuyer incentive or the Canada housing benefit. We heard another member talk about rental supports.

The Conservatives voted against the Canada housing benefit and, as recently as last week, a number of members on that side of the House called for us to pull back from the national housing strategy. They have called for no more help for first-time homebuyers. They have absolutely no credibility on this issue.

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[Translation]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel is a failure that is slowing the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Quebec and Canada. The government needs to arrange to airlift them out and deal with the paperwork once they are safely here. The government can enlist border services officers to help with that. They are trained in immigration and can help collect the biometric data, and I think they would be very proud to contribute to this effort.

Will the government airlift people out and ask border services officers to help families with the administrative details?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the concern that he has demonstrated in recent months for the people of Ukraine and for his willingness to help the government design measures that are actually going to advance the arrival of Ukrainians.

I would point out, with respect to the situation involving biometrics on the ground, that we actually are opening a second visa application centre in Warsaw. We have sent more teams, who arrived yesterday, and we are going to continue to boost that capacity. I should also point out that for certain low-risk cohorts, certain individuals will no longer be required to have biometrics so that we can facilitate the entry of more people into Canada as quickly as possible.

Regarding the airlift, we continue to have conversations with airlines to arrange to get as many people here as quickly as possible. I look forward to continuing to co-operate with the member in this pursuit.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is not good enough for us, and it is not good enough for Ukrainians. This is day 34 of the war, and we cannot spend any more time getting bogged down in the paperwork. Border services officers can deal with that once Ukrainian families are here. They are already trained, they are in place, and they are already working in airports. They even have prior experience because they handled all the Syrian refugees' biometric data in 2015.

Now that we are at day 34, will the minister acknowledge the urgency and ask border services officers for help now?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect, the member drew an analogy to the situation in Syria where we intervened, after the 2015 election, three years into a conflict.

The member mentioned it is day 34 of the conflict in Ukraine. Let me tell him some of the things we have done. We have extended the ability of people who are already in Canada to stay. We have waived fees for applications through IRCC. We have expedited applications in the system of almost 12,000 people who have arrived since the beginning of the year. We sent teams and equipment into the region before the conflict, and more arrived yesterday. We created a new, expedited pathway and attached an open work permit so people could support themselves.

Yesterday, we advanced settlement supports. We removed the biometrics for certain individuals in low-risk cohorts. We are going to continue to do more, as much as we can, as quickly as we can.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are the only ones saying that this is going well. At some point, a reality check is needed.

The government is failing. It does not currently have the resources in eastern Europe to look after refugees from Ukraine. However, it does have the resources here, with border services officers supporting the immigration department. There are probably even some employees working from home who would be honoured to get back out there and help.

The government has a duty to turn its failure into success. First, will it charter flights to go and pick up families? Second, will it mobilize border services officers to look after these families once they get here?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect, the member suggested the only people who were saying it was going well are Liberals. I would invite him to speak to one of the 12,000 people from Ukraine who have arrived in Canada since the beginning of this year.

We have been leveraging resources not only internal to our department, but from other departments since the very beginning of

this effort. I would point out to the member that, if he thinks there is not capacity on the ground, just yesterday more staff arrived in Warsaw, Vienna, Bucharest, Budapest, Prague and Bratislava.

We are going to continue to send resources where we see the people moving. That is the best and most responsible way to act. We are going to do everything we can to help as many vulnerable people as possible who are fleeing these circumstances today.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP-Liberal government's planned carbon tax increases on Friday will have a dramatic impact across the country. We know the carbon tax has significant and disproportional negative impacts on prices for the poor, and everything continues to rise. Businesses in my riding have indicated that increased carbon taxes will lower their profits, undermine competitiveness and limit investment.

When will the coalition government give Canadians a break and cancel its planned carbon tax increase?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I want to thank the Parliamentary Budget Officer for his work in pointing out that the price on pollution is progressive and gives eight out of 10 families more in climate action rebates than they pay in.

Putting a price on carbon pollution is recognized as one of the most efficient ways to drive down pollution. Again, let me point out that the Conservative member for New Brunswick Southwest is on the record as saying that his province should go back to using the federal carbon price. I agree with that member.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my Conservative colleague for Huron-Bruce introduced a bill that would remove the Liberal carbon tax from grain drying and heating.

At a time when global food security is so important, the government continues to restrict our agriculture industry. This bill would have passed in the last Parliament if the Liberals had not called an unnecessary election.

Will the government help to support Canadian farm families by supporting Bill C-234?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no later than this morning, the Minister of Environment announced a significant increase to our program to support agricultural clean technology. We have tripled the budget as promised. This would support our farmers very significantly in affording energy-efficient technologies, including grain dryers.

Oral Questions

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently at committee, the Commissioner of the Environment revealed that there is no metric in place to measure how much Canada's carbon footprint has been reduced as a result of the carbon tax.

This is the core policy of the NDP–Liberal government's environmental plan. We have no way to know if it is even working after over a decade of it being in use in some parts of our country. What we do know is that this tax is ineffective and punitive, and that it disproportionately affects seniors, farmers, producers and those living in rural communities and small towns.

When will the Prime Minister abandon this failed policy and get off the backs of hard-working Canadians?

• (1445)

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that pollution pricing works not only to reduce pollution, but also to drive innovation and to help create the clean growth economy that is exploding around the world. This means billions of dollars in economic development, and the good jobs of today and tomorrow. We know where the world is headed, which is to a low-carbon economy. I would say, once again, that Conservatives are stuck in the past and we are looking to the future.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last thing Canadians can afford right now is anything that will make life less affordable, yet the Liberal government wants to raise the carbon tax by \$10 a tonne on April 1. Not only will this cost Canadians an extra 11¢ a litre at the pumps, but it will also have an inflationary impact on the cost of living by raising the prices of groceries, energy bills and everything else.

How can the government justify its high-tax, high-deficit agenda when Canadians across the country are already struggling to make ends meet?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member did not hear me when I cited some numbers from the various provinces a little earlier. This year, a family of four in Ontario will receive up to \$745 in rebates. It will be \$830 in my home province of Manitoba, and \$1,100 in Saskatchewan and Alberta. We are fighting climate change and we are promoting affordability.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, millions of Ukrainians continue to flee violence in their country. The majority are women, children and seniors. The Ukrainian Canadian Congress says, "There are virtually no federal supports for Ukrainians". The government must do everything it can to get Ukrainians and other displaced people to safety and help them settle in Canada by ensuring access to supports such as language training, employment assistance, child care, health care, housing and more.

Will the minister guarantee that these vulnerable people get resettlement supports, no matter where they are in Canada?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question, but more importantly, for her sincere concern for the well-being of those who fled Ukraine to come to Canada.

I am very pleased to share with her that yesterday we announced that we would be extending settlement supports to Ukrainians who have landed in Canada, including employment assistance, language training and other measures that we make available directly to refugees who come to Canada. We continue to work with provinces and territories to see what more we can do to support people when they get here. It is not enough that they arrive. They have to be set up for success once they get to Canada.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, I asked the minister when he would provide timelines, targets and funding to respond to the calls for justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The response was "reconciliation is a journey, not a destination". What a gross, callous and cold response to this ongoing genocide. Families and survivors of violence are suffering. This is not a journey. This requires urgency.

When will the government put in place timelines and the resources needed to save lives?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a society, none of us should pretend there is any form of success until every woman, child and LGBTQ person in this country is safe, and if that is a measure of success, we are failing.

The reality is that in this year, the ministry of Crown-Indigenous Relations announced the federal pathway. That was only the beginning, and it was coupled with \$2.2 billion of investments. We are coming up on the first anniversary, and we will be looking to measure those, as opposed to the outcomes for the survivors and those who continue to face unacceptable levels of violence. As a society, we have to keep fighting against that and keep fighting for those people who are still vulnerable today.

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THE ECONOMY

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the challenges Canada has faced over these past years have been numerous, and we have seen that Canadians and Canadian businesses have met them head-on and succeeded. The upcoming federal budget will showcase our government's plan to support Canadians and to grow our economy.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Finance inform Canadians and the House when they can expect federal budget 2022 to be presented?

• (1450)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government was re-elected on a commitment to grow our economy, to make life more affordable and to continue building a Canada where nobody gets left behind. That is exactly what we are doing, and that is what we are going to continue to do in the budget that I will present to the House on April 7, 2022, at 4 p.m.

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THE BUDGET

DESIGNATION OF ORDER OF THE DAY

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I ask that an order of the day be designated for that purpose.

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HEALTH

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have asked the NDP-Liberal coalition government to give Canadians hope by outlining the benchmarks used to end federal mandates. Some Canadians, such as Carolyn, are being treated as second-class citizens, unable to work or travel domestically. This issue has failed to receive an answer, both at the committee level and here in the House of Commons.

When is the NDP-Liberal government going to stop disrespecting the institution of Parliament and give Canadians the plan they so rightly deserve?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for giving me one more opportunity to speak about the importance of vaccination. Just this morning, we were informed of a recent U.S. study that showed that, between June and November 2021, had there been more vaccinated Americans, they would have saved about \$14 billion in the cost of hospitalization and 700,000 would not have ended up in the hospital. This would mean many lives saved and cared for.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when lifting COVID mandates in my home province of Saskatchewan, Premier Moe said the following: “It’s time to heal the divisions.” Premier Moe recognizes something the Prime Minister simply cannot, that a leader must unite Canadians. Instead the Prime Minister is using every opportunity to divide Canadians based on vaccination status. Dr. Tam has stated that the science supports a review of federal COVID mandates and restrictions.

Since the government claims to listen to science, why is it not immediately announcing a plan to lift all federal COVID mandates and restrictions?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reason we are able to lift restrictions is that we have a large number of people here in Canada who have been vaccinated. I just spoke a moment ago about the recent U.S. study. What I did not mention is that in that study 163,000 deaths would have been averted

ed between June and November last year in the United States, had there been more vaccinated Americans during that period.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “Every citizen of Canada has the right to enter, remain in and leave Canada.” Those are not my words; that is the charter. Vaccine mandates have prevented Canadians from travelling within Canada and outside of Canada. We are also experiencing closures at the borders in my riding that are obstructing essential businesses from operating. A return to regular hours is not asking for too much. Nobody is winning with this current set-up.

When will the government end the mandates and fix the mess at the border?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, we are very grateful to the almost 30 million Canadians who got vaccinated. That is the reason we were able to avoid the closing of schools and the shutting down of businesses, restaurants, theatres and cinemas. That is the reason we will be able, on April 1, to make it easier for people to travel into Canada by changing the prearrival testing rules. This is all very good news, and it is due to the benefits we have from vaccinations.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the provinces have all signalled an end to their vaccine mandates, the Liberals are continuing to punish Canadians who are not vaccinated. Unvaccinated Canadian citizens cannot get on an airplane to fly inside of their own country to attend weddings and funerals or visit ailing relatives. They are unable to travel for work, which impacts their ability to provide for their families. The science does not support this continued discrimination.

When will the Prime Minister finally follow the science and end his cruel and vindictive vaccine mandates once and for all?

• (1455)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, “cruel” is indeed the right word when we speak about the impacts of COVID-19 on our families, our children, our seniors, our economy, our workers and our businesses over the last two years. It has been extremely harsh and cruel. The reason we are able to make life more normal now is that we are continuing the fight against COVID. Living with COVID means continuing the fight against COVID. We cannot live without COVID. We have to live with it and continue the fight against it.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***CANADA REVENUE AGENCY**

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are learning a lot today from the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report on the Canada Revenue Agency's performance.

One of the things we have learned is that, in a comparison of more than 150 tax administrations around the world, the Canada Revenue Agency ranks second to last in terms of its collection ratio. This means that the CRA, whose job it is to go after the money that is owed in taxes to fund services to citizens, is missing out on or walking away from more money than just about any other jurisdiction on the planet.

Does the Minister of National Revenue have a plan to lift the CRA from the bottom of the world rankings, or is she going to wait around and hope that things magically get better?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Parliamentary Budget Officer for his important work.

Our government has invested heavily in the CRA's ability to ensure international and large businesses compliance. As noted in the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, the CRA has improved its large business tax compliance performance since 2018. This is good news. Our investments in the CRA will continue to pay off for years to come.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister is pleased to come second-last. This is a real fiasco, just like Phoenix, welcoming Ukrainian refugees, border management during the pandemic, and the indigenous communities waiting for clean drinking water. Same government, same fiasco.

We often talk about areas of responsibility, but when it comes to the federal government and Revenue Canada, would "irresponsibility" not be more apt?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what my colleague across the way said, I can tell the House that for the past two years, the Canada Revenue Agency has been there to support Canadians, businesses, families and seniors. Unlike the members across the way, we are doers, not complainers.

* * *

*[English]***IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP**

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Tetiana is a Ukrainian who worked with the Canadian Forces as an interpreter before the Russian invasion. After she left Ukraine for Poland, she applied for the emergency travel. She tried to get an appointment for biometrics on March 21, but all the spots were full in many neighbouring countries until July 2022. That would be over four months since she applied, and Tetiana is not alone.

When will the government finally honour our adopted motion, get Ukrainians out of this never-ending Liberal-made backlog and implement visa-free travel?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raised two issues in his question, one on the requirement to complete biometrics to get here and the other on the execution on the ground.

I would like all members of the House to know that, as of yesterday, certain individuals in low-risk cohorts will no longer be required to have biometrics before they are permitted to enter into Canada. In addition, we are putting more resources on the ground, including opening a second visa application office in Warsaw. Another team of people arrived yesterday in Warsaw.

We are moving the resources, as we have since the beginning of this effort, to where people are moving to so that we are in a position to respond as quickly and as nimbly as possible. We will continue to do that until we get as many people here as we possibly can.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House will vote today on a Conservative motion to allow visa-free travel for Ukrainians who are fleeing Putin's war crimes. Visa-free travel is the compassionate thing and the right thing to do. Opening the door to visa-free travel should be simple and efficient, yet the government keeps making different excuses.

If this motion passes, will the government respect the will of Parliament?

● (1500)

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my view, it is essential, when we move forward with a plan to literally process an unlimited number of applications from a war zone, that we have to have some semblance of security screening, particularly when we know there are high-risk travellers who could potentially be eligible.

As I shared just a moment ago, certain individuals in the low-risk cohorts, as of yesterday, are no longer required to complete the biometric process. We are using a database and evidence-based approach to ensure that we can get people here as quickly as possible with as few barriers as possible. We will continue to do the right thing and to do the compassionate thing and bring Canadians along with us the whole way.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Olena, a constituent in my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country, is trying to help her sister in Krakow, Poland, who is a refugee from Ukraine. Her sister received a visa requirement biometric instruction letter to go to Warsaw for biometrics. This is a 600-kilometre return trip. Her sister has no way to get there and back, and she was told if she leaves the hotel in Krakow, she cannot return to it. What is she supposed to do?

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister have compassion and remove the Ukrainian refugee visa requirements so that Olena and many others can help their family members in Ukraine and bring them to safety in Canada?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind members of the House that, when we made the decision to create an authorization for emergency travel, the primary motivation at the time was that it allowed us to set up a system in a matter of just two weeks. We have done that. We have now seen tens of thousands of people apply. Had we gone with the creation of a new system through an electronic travel authorization, which is what we do when we have visa-free travel, it would have taken 12 to 14 weeks, and we would not be taking applications yet today.

I shared earlier during question period that certain individuals from low-risk cohorts will no longer be required to comply with a biometrics requirement. We are using an evidence-based approach to make sure we remove as many barriers as possible to get people to Canada quickly.

* * *

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have faced many complex challenges in recent years, and Canadians and Canadian businesses have overcome these challenges with perseverance and tenacity.

The upcoming federal budget will present our government's plan to support Canadians and stimulate our economy. Could the Minister of Finance tell Canadians and the House when budget 2022 will be presented?

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

Our government was re-elected on a promise to grow our economy, make life more affordable and continue to build a Canada for everyone. That is exactly what we are doing and what we will continue to do in the budget that I will present in the House on April 7, 2022, at 4 p.m.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last summer, I met with the Popal family, who own the Shawarma House and Pizza in Cobourg. The Popals have family members from Afghanistan who are in fear for their lives. Before the Taliban took over, they were women's rights defenders, they were activists for democracy, and they were fighting the Taliban in the Afghan army. However, at every twist and every turn, my team has been met with roadblocks and rejection.

When will the minister finally show some compassion, some heart, and allow our friends from Afghanistan, our allies who have done so much for us, to have safe harbour here in Canada?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his advocacy for the well-being of Afghans who are fleeing horrifying circumstances on the ground and who seek refuge here in Canada.

I am pleased to share with the House that we now have more than 9,500 Afghan refugees who are already in Canada pursuing a second lease on life. When I was in western Canada just last week, I had the opportunity to sit down across the table from some of our new arrivals, and they are grateful for the generosity of Canada.

I will continue to work every single day to make sure we remove as many barriers as possible so we can get more Afghan refugees here. We made one of the most substantial commitments in the world to have 40,000 Afghan refugees, and we will not rest until we make good on that promise.

* * *

[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago I asked the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry and the Minister of Rural Economic Development a question about the lack of cell coverage in my riding and in other rural parts of Canada.

In her answer, the Minister of Rural Economic Development talked about high-speed Internet, which is not what my question was about. I would like to give the minister another opportunity to respond. It is 2022. What is the government doing to improve cell coverage in rural Canada?

● (1505)

[English]

Hon. Gudie Hutchings (Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague knows, the universal broadband fund is just that: connecting Canadians with high-speed Internet. I can advise the hon. member that we are well under way to meeting our targets of connecting 98% of Canada by 2026.

There are funds available under the CRTC and other programs for cell coverage, but right now we are focused on connecting Canada. We have a plan to connect all of Canada by 2030, and that plan is working. We have agreements in place with Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta and British Columbia. We are well under way.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Hanson Lake road in northeastern Saskatchewan is a 324-kilometre stretch of highway connecting Creighton, Denare Beach, Flin Flon and many first nations to the rest of the province. Unfortunately, there is no cell or broadband service. Not only is this extremely dangerous, but it restricts the much-needed economic growth opportunities in the region. I have written and talked to the minister on several occasions with no response.

When will the government approve Saskatchewan's application to the CRTC and give these communities what they need for both safety and success?

Hon. Gudie Hutchings (Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago I was in British Columbia and was humbled by the presentation and overview I had on the Highway of Tears, where the federal government, the provincial government and the Internet service provider have connected that terrible section of the highway in British Columbia. That is what happens when partnerships happen. That is the result when people work together, when communities, provinces, territories, indigenous groups and municipalities work together.

I encourage my hon. colleague to get his province to come to the table with us. As I said earlier, we have commitments now, memorandums of understanding with Ontario, B.C.—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for months Ontarians have been eagerly awaiting an update on the status of negotiations between provincial and federal governments on a child care agreement. This has been a significant issue for people in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt because we know Ontario families have been paying some of the highest fees in the country.

Could the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development please update the House on yesterday's announcement and what it will mean for families in Scarborough and across Ontario?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to announce in the House that today in Canada families from coast to coast will have access to affordable, quality child care. Although we have been negotiating with Ontario for months, it finally joined the Canada-wide early learning and child care agreement. This means that families in Ontario will have access to reduced fees, with a 25% reduction as of April 1. This is great news for families in Ontario.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Federal Court of Appeal handed down a ruling. The government cannot just abandon its responsibilities by offloading the provision of services in French onto the provinces.

While francophones in British Columbia and across Canada were rejoicing, the federal government was preparing a nasty surprise for them: The case will be appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada. That is unacceptable.

When will the government acknowledge its mistakes and restore services in French for British Columbia's francophones?

Oral Questions

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to protecting and promoting the rights of francophone and anglophone minority communities in Canada.

In this case, we asked for a stay of the Federal Court of Appeal's decision because we are concerned about the serious consequences that terminating agreements could have in British Columbia and across Canada.

The stay was not granted. The deadline for giving notice of termination is today. Under the circumstances, we will not be applying for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada.

* * *

● (1510)

[English]

COVID-19 PROTESTS

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when Ottawa was shut down and Windsor suffered an illegal blockade, Windsor's response became a model on how to deal with the crisis, despite the economic damages reaching into the billions.

For months I have joined residents, doctors, retailers, manufacturers, first responders and the city in asking for fair compensation for doing the right thing. COVID has burdened border communities, and the current government's lack of border policies created confusion and disruption. Ottawa and its businesses are being compensated. Will the government treat Windsor equally by covering the costs we incurred doing our part during this convoy crisis for our country?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I begin by thanking my hon. colleague for his advocacy. Throughout the blockades we remained in close contact, along with my colleague, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

I also want to take a moment to thank law enforcement for doing an exceptional job in bringing a peaceful resolution to the blockades on the Ambassador Bridge. I and other colleagues within the government will remain in touch with my colleague to ensure that Windsor recovers fully from any impacts, and I know this is work that will continue going forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Today, during oral question period, the Minister of Health, probably unintentionally, forgot to provide the House with the information about vaccine mandates that he had promised me.

If you seek it, I am certain you would find unanimous consent of the House to have him table these documents.

Routine Proceedings

The Deputy Speaker: A minister does not require the approval of the House to table documents. It is up to him to do so.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

The Deputy Speaker: It being 3:12, pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 25, 2021, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Call in the members.

• (1525)

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

(Division No. 50)

YEAS

Members

Aboultiaf	Aitchison
Albas	Allison
Angus	Arnold
Ashton	Bachrach
Baldinelli	Barlow
Barrett	Barron
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Benzen	Bergen
Bergeron	Berthold
Bérubé	Bezan
Blaikie	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney
Block	Boulerice
Bragdon	Brassard
Brock	Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins	Cannings
Caputo	Carrie
Chabot	Chambers
Champoux	Chong
Collins (Victoria)	Cooper
Dalton	Dancho
Davidson	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Deltell
Desilets	Desjarlais
Doherty	Dowdall
Dreeshen	Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Ellis	Epp
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Ferreri
Findlay	Fortin
Gallant	Garon
Garrison	Gaudreau
Gazan	Généreux
Genuis	Gill
Gladu	Godin
Goodridge	Gourde
Gray	Green
Hallan	Hoback
Hughes	Idlout
Jeneroux	Johns
Julian	Kelly
Kitchen	Kmieć

Kram	Kramp-Neuman
Kurek	Kusie
Kwan	Lake
Lantsman	Larouche
Lawrence	Lehoux
Lemire	Lewis (Essex)
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Liepert
Lloyd	Lobb
MacGregor	MacKenzie
Maguire	Martel
Masse	Mathysen
May (Saamich—Gulf Islands)	Mazier
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McPherson
Melillo	Michaud
Moore	Morantz
Morrice	Morrison
Motz	Muys
Nater	Normandin
O'Toole	Patzer
Paul-Hus	Paupé
Perkins	Perron
Plamondon	Poillievre
Rayes	Redekopp
Reid	Rempel Garner
Richards	Roberts
Rood	Ruff
Savard-Tremblay	Scheer
Schmale	Seeback
Shields	Shipley
Simard	Sinclair-Desgagné
Singh	Small
Soroka	Steinley
Ste-Marie	Stewart
Strahl	Stubbs
Thériault	Therrien
Thomas	Tochor
Tolmie	Trudel
Uppal	Van Popta
Vecchio	Vidal
Vien	Viersen
Vignola	Villemure
Vis	Wagantall
Warkentin	Waugh
Webber	Williams
Williamson	Zarrillo
Zimmer — 175	

NAYS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Ali	Anand
Anandasangaree	Arseneault
Arya	Atwin
Badawey	Bains
Battiste	Beech
Bendayan	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Blois
Boissonnault	Bradford
Brière	Carr
Casey	Chagger
Chahal	Champagne
Chatel	Chen
Chiang	Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)
Cormier	Coteau
Dabrusin	Damoff
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diab	Dong
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Ehsassi	El-Khoury

Erskine-Smith	Fergus
Fillmore	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fragiskatos	Fraser
Freeland	Fry
Gaheer	Gerretsen
Gould	Guilbeault
Hajdu	Hanley
Hardie	Hepfner
Holland	Housefather
Hussen	Hutchings
Iacono	Ien
Jaczek	Joly
Jones	Jowhari
Kayabaga	Kelloway
Khalid	Khera
Koutrakis	Kusmierczyk
Lalonde	Lambropoulos
Lametti	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Lattanzio
Lauzon	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lightbound
Long	Longfield
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacDonald (Malpeque)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Martinez Ferrada	May (Cambridge)
McDonald (Avalon)	McGuinty
McKay	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod	Mendès
Mendicino	Miao
Miller	Morrissey
Murray	Naqvi
Ng	Noormohamed
O'Connell	Oliphant
O'Regan	Petitpas Taylor
Powlowski	Qualtrough
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rogers	Romanado
Sahota	Sajjan
Saks	Samson
Sarai	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Serré
Sgro	Shanahan
Sheehan	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Sorbara
Spengemann	St-Onge
Sudds	Tassi
Taylor Roy	Thompson
Trudeau	Turnbull
Valdez	Van Bynen
van Koeverden	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Weiler
Wilkinson	Yip
Zahid	Zuberi — 154

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair would like to make a statement regarding the recent use of certain language that may be deemed inflammatory.

[*Translation*]

Members are regularly reminded of the importance of conducting themselves in a civil manner. While views can be expressed forcefully and even passionately, they must remain focused on the sub-

Government Orders

ject matter at hand. Members must always be mindful of avoiding statements that attack or demean the character of other members.

We are all here as elected representatives and each of us is entitled to respect. Personal inflammatory language has no place in our debates.

[*English*]

It is also true that, as parliamentarians, we possess an exceptional degree of freedom of speech. As Speaker Milliken observed in a ruling of April 17, 2007, members must “use their freedom of speech in a responsible fashion and...exercise moderation in their choice of language.”

The use of inflammatory and provocative statements is contrary to the respect owed to all members. Accordingly, the Chair reminds members to be mindful of the language they use in debate, with respect to their colleagues, in order to maintain proper civility and respect in our proceedings.

I thank the members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded division, Government Orders will be extended by 12 minutes.

* * *

ONLINE STREAMING ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

History seems to be repeating itself. Canadians will recall, but here we are again. Having debated Bill C-10 last spring, we are now debating its replacement, Bill C-11. The new heritage minister will try to tell Canadians that he has fixed the problems that existed in the former legislation. However, this is an extremely misleading statement.

My time is short, so I am going to cut to the chase. The government claims that the bill is about support for Canadian culture and levelling the playing field. I would like to see Canadian culture promoted and celebrated, so let us explore that for a moment.

Government Orders

I have two questions. First, is the bill about meeting Canadians where they are at in the 21st century and celebrating the amazing work being done by digital first creators to produce Canadian content and enhance culture in their very own unique way, or is the bill about the government imposing its definition of Canadian content in order to fulfill a government-driven agenda? Second, will the bill truly level the playing field, or will it be used as a cash grab in which those who have worked hard to expand their viewership and generate revenue are forced to subsidize the traditional media industry, which is producing content for which there is little to no demand? I realize that these questions make the government uncomfortable, but they must be asked in order to understand this legislation.

My grandparents were not required to subsidize horse and buggies when cars became an alternative. Society moved forward in an innovative way, because it just made sense.

In effect, Bill C-11 would put in place an Internet czar, the CRTC, which will govern how easily creators, those who post, are able to make their content accessible online to those of us who view it. In other words, it would impact what Canadians can and cannot access. It would be an act of censorship.

The Internet is a vast, infinite and magical space where all Canadians, no matter their background, are able to post and engage. In the new public square where we engage with one another, we do it through writing, audio and visual arts. For many Canadians, socializing online is the new norm. If passed, Bill C-11 will thwart our freedom in this new space.

Again, the minister will try to tell us that all the problems have been fixed. He will point to convoluted parts of the bill in order to try to prove his point, but here is the thing: If the minister is telling the truth and has nothing to hide, why is the bill not crystal clear? Why is the Liberal government choosing to use muddled language by placing exceptions within exceptions in order to confuse people?

There are many flaws in Bill C-11, but I will focus on three of them today: the first is the overabundance of power that it would place in the hands of the CRTC, otherwise known as the "Internet czar"; the second is its negative impact on creators; and the third is how it negatively impacts viewers.

If passed, the bill will give the Internet czar, the CRTC, almost unlimited power in order to regulate the Internet. Talk about an attack on freedom. The CRTC could have been given very specific, very narrow guidelines, but the government chose to give it free rein to amend, to exempt, to include. The Liberals claim that bringing more government intervention, and this is an interesting one, will boost Canadian culture, but that is not true. I mean, tell me a time in history where more red tape and regulation has increased innovation, incentivized artistic creation and brought about prosperity? Members cannot, because it does not, ever.

Let us talk about creators. One of the biggest complaints that we heard from digital first creators last time was that the bill would regulate their content online. Members can think of TikTok, Snapchat, Twitch, podcasts, YouTube and, yes, even cat videos. Now, the minister will claim once again that he fixed it by adding section 4.1(1) back into the bill, but the problem is that section

4.1(1) is immediately followed by subsection 4.1(2), which creates exceptions that nullify 4.1(1). It is pretzel logic. It is confusing and purposefully muddled.

Michael Geist is a law professor at the University of Ottawa where he holds the Canada research chair in Internet and e-commerce law. He seems qualified. He has pointed out that, under the act, digital first creators can be described as broadcasters and therefore forced to comply with the CRTC regulations.

● (1530)

In other words, essentially any audiovisual material could be brought under the scope of this bill, not just large streaming platforms, but even individuals who use music. The member opposite actually even clarified this earlier in her own speech.

This means that TikTok videos, which essentially always use music, and YouTube videos, which mostly use music, will in fact be captured under this legislation. This means creators, right off the top of their revenue, will have to pay 30% into an art fund. They have to pay in, but they do not get to pull out.

It also means that the content of digital first creators will be assessed based on how Canadian it is. The CRTC, the Internet czar, will of course make the conclusion. That material will then be promoted or demoted accordingly. The minister will try to tell Canadians that what I am saying is not true, that only big companies, such as Netflix and Disney, will be caught by this legislation, but if that is the case, I would again ask the government to clarify that and to say it outright. It does not. The bill does not. It is purposefully muddled.

Let me talk about the negative impact that the bill will have on viewers, members, me and Canadians. Imagine going on YouTube to look for videos on Black voices but being shown instead a bunch of videos on hockey in Canada, having never searched for hockey before, and all of a sudden those are the videos that are being fed to you. That would be extremely frustrating.

What we are talking about here is discoverability. It is the use of algorithms to make some content accessible and other content not. It bumps it up or down. Sometimes it can be found on page 1. Sometimes it is found on page 53. Currently YouTube carries material based on a person's individual preference. It bumps it to the top of the page if a person likes it, if maybe they have watched similar videos in the past.

This legislation would force content, so-called Canadian content, in front of the eyeballs of Canadians at the expense of showing them the content they actually really want. It totally disrespects and disregards Canadians' freedom, choice and desire to watch certain things over others, all because the government has an agenda.

Canadians know what they like. They know what they want to watch. That desire, that free will, should be respected. I have not even addressed the problem with the definition of CanCon, which is absolutely ludicrous. Let us talk about that for a moment. CanCon, or Canadian content, is that content that the government would actually be putting at the top of the page.

A bilingual Canadian sitting in his Montreal condo producing YouTube videos about maple syrup and hockey, all while using the Canadian national anthem in the background of his video, would still not get counted as Canadian content. Can members imagine that? In fact, based on the definition of CanCon, the only ones who will receive the government's stamp of approval are members of the traditional media.

The CRTC will define who is in and who is out, who gets noticed and who does not, who gets to be on page one and who has to get bumped to page 53. An individual's preferences are inconsequential, and the government would now decide.

In Canada, we are punching above our weight in what creators are able to produce. It is absolutely jaw-dropping. They literally share their talent with the world. It is incredible. Lilly Singh, a famous YouTuber, has pointed out, "creators who have built their careers on the Internet need to be consulted on these decisions." She went on to say, "In trying to do what seems like a good thing - highlighting great Canadian-made content - you can unintentionally destroy a thriving creative ecosystem."

Morghan Fortier of Skyship Entertainment is so eloquent when he put it this way, "In Canada, digital content creators have built a successful thriving industry on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok and others that export a huge amount of Canadian content to the rest of the world.... They've done this through their entrepreneurial spirit, their hard work and largely without government interference or assistance.

"This achievement should be supported, celebrated and encouraged."

Bill C-11 is presented as a means to support the future of the broadcast industry, but it completely ignores the global reach of Canada's digital success stories in favour of an antiquated regionalized broadcast model.

Bill C-11 is a direct attack on digital first creators. It is a direct attack on our choice as viewers. It is actually a direct attack on the advancement of arts and culture in Canada in the 21st century. The bill needs to die 1,000 deaths.

• (1535)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have an example in which this precise measure made a huge difference. These were the Canadian content regulations that applied to radio, starting in the early seventies. The Canadian music industry was nowhere back then, but as a broadcaster I was required to play 30% Canadian content. In the beginning, it was horrible, but in no time we had an amazing amount of great Canadian content. I do not think we need those measures anymore because the content is there. It is good.

Government Orders

Would she not agree that this is a perfect example of a measure that actually led to a very strong, well-respected worldwide industry?

• (1540)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Speaker, I love the question. It is such a good question, and Canadians are really going to appreciate it as well. The Broadcasting Act in the 1970s was created in order to regulate television and radio because there was a limited sphere available. In other words, there were only a certain number of radio channels. Rather than give them all to Canadian English media, they also wanted to make sure that some were given to French media. That seems appropriate, because we are a bilingual country. When we are dealing with a finite resource in order to spread it around, absolutely that is appropriate.

However, we are now talking about the Internet: this vast, magical, infinite space where any Canadian from any background with any language, any religion and any ethnicity can create a site, post on YouTube and have a TikTok account. Why is the government regulating them?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to know whether my colleague feels the same way she did when we were studying the previous version of this bill, which she said was designed to help artists that are stuck in the early 1990s because they have not managed to be competitive on new platforms.

I have already mentioned this here, but two days ago, Patrice Vermette, a Quebecker from my riding, won an Oscar for production design for his work on *Dune*. Denis Villeneuve directed the film, which won six Oscars. There is also Xavier Dolan, a Quebecker who is at Cannes almost every year. The Cirque du Soleil is from Quebec.

There are thousands of artists who represent Canada and Quebec and captivate audiences all over the world. These are the people that Bill C-11 is designed to protect.

[*English*]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that there are amazing artists in this country. Of course there are. We are Canadian. We have 37 million incredible people who call this place home. Of course there is extraordinary talent.

Of course there are artists across this country who deserve to be celebrated and deserve to be promoted, but that does not mean that the government intervenes. It does not mean that the government gets to pick winners and losers. It does not mean that the government gets to go after those individuals who are using non-traditional platforms in order to achieve great success and take money from them and demote their content in order to give that money to traditional broadcasters and traditional artists and promote those artists at the expense of the digital-first creators.

Government Orders

This is nonsense. Instead, yes: We should be celebrating the amazing artists that are coming out of this country in every facet, whether it is through traditional broadcasting systems or through digital-first creation. Yes, let us celebrate them, but what I am saying today is that the government does not need to get its sticky, grimy hands on this.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would ask my colleague about the web giants that have been using every possible loophole to circumvent our tax rules. They have tried to escape the funding for Canadian cultural content and discoverability.

Would she not agree that it is time for the institution of Parliament, representing the Canadian people, to try to close those loopholes and ensure that there is a level playing field for the hard-working men and women who work in our cultural industries in this country?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Speaker, when the hon. member brings up web giants and the need to make sure they pay their fair share, that is incredibly misleading. That was actually already addressed last summer. They now have to pay GST. Make no mistake: that is not a part of this legislation. What is a part of this legislation is actually going after those digital-first creators, those new innovative artists, and asking to take 30% of their revenue to give to traditional, antiquated, outdated artists who cannot make a go of it otherwise.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise on behalf of the constituents of the beautiful riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke who value freedom and diversity of thought.

Recently, there has been an outbreak of diversity of thought among my Liberal colleagues. I know that can be scary for some of them. To reassure them, I will heed the call to unity and try to lower the temperature on this very important debate about Bill C-11, which is the online streaming act.

This may disappoint my biggest fan, the member for Winnipeg North, but he will be delighted to learn that I have saved a special section just for him. When a similar bill was first introduced last Parliament, I went on my Facebook Live show, The GNN, and described it as a serious threat to freedom of expression. I stood in the House and described it as a serious threat to freedom of expression.

The media, to be fair, and much of the public shrugged off these concerns. As outlined in my first speech, this bill would have little effect on popular mainstream expression, other than to make it more expensive. The threat to freedom of expression with this bill comes from the impact it would have on smaller, less popular minority expressions. It was only when the government members of the committee, in a coalition with the NDP and the Bloc, removed the legislated safeguards on user-generated content that everyone online became aware of the threat this legislation posed.

Fundamentally, Canadians understand that if the government has the power to regulate, promote or demote their online expression, then that expression is no longer free.

My Liberal colleagues will raise a hue and cry, and claim the Prime Minister does not want to censor Canadians' cat videos. That

is true. The Prime Minister does not want to censor cat videos; he wants to tax them. The Prime Minister wants to tax Canadian and foreign artists not covered by the current Broadcasting Act. He wants to tax them and give that money to the powerful media and cultural lobbies. Of course, arts groups that profit off this bill support it. It is the artists who do not have a powerful lobby organization who pay this new CanCon levy.

This legislation proposes to take money from digital artists and redistribute it to the government's preferred analog artists. This is just as the government takes income tax dollars from new media journalists and gives them back to the horse-and-buggy media.

The government really wants to tax Netflix, but does not say it wants to tax Netflix. In order to pull off this tax without saying "tax policy", the government is changing the very meaning of broadcasting. This takes us to the heart of the problem. The Broadcasting Act, by its very nature, places restrictions on Canadians' right to freedom of expression.

I want to repeat this in order to be absolutely clear. The Broadcasting Act is designed to limit and regulate freedom of expression. The reason it has not been struck down for violating the charter is because those limits are reasonable.

My constituents know I will defend their freedom no matter what, but they understand there can be reasonable limits. The Broadcasting Act is an example of this. It places limits on Canadians' freedom to broadcast their expression. The reason for this is the technology. If all Canadians with electricity and an antenna were able to broadcast their individual expression on whichever electromagnetic frequency they chose, everyone would cancel one another out and no one would be heard.

By the nature of the technology, the freedom of one person to use a particular frequency impacts the freedom of everybody else to use that frequency. Broadcasting technology, by its nature, requires broadcasting regulation. Without broadcasting technology using limited public airwaves, the federal government has no legal right to regulate the content that carries expression from Canadians or to Canadians.

Our predecessors knew that having control of Canadians' expression over public airwaves was something best kept at arm's length from cabinet, so they set up the CRTC. The Broadcasting Act regulates expression. It is baked into the legislation. It is what the CRTC does. Streaming is not broadcasting. The freedom of one Canadian to stream content does not limit the freedom of any other Canadian to stream other content.

As we much appreciate Canadian authors and Canadian painters, we do not legislate the content of book stores or art galleries to promote their expression over foreign expression. It is not because a foreign author or painter has freedom of expression, but it is because Canadians do.

• (1545)

We cannot pass legislation that limits or restricts Canadians' access to artistic expression. We cannot pass legislation to regulate any expression that does not infringe on the rights of other Canadians' expression. If the House proceeds with this fundamentally flawed legislation, it will be infringing on the rights of Canadians. Most Canadians will not notice the infringement beyond paying higher streaming bills. Netflix and Disney can afford to hire Canadian lawyers and lobbyists and have lunch with the chair of the CRTC. They will be fine.

Majority expression in a democracy is rarely threatened. It is the minority expression that suffers. For example, what about the foreign-language streaming services? Take the streaming service TFC, which is based in the Philippines. It streams thousands of movies and televisions show in Tagalog, and TFC accepts Canadian credit cards. The riding of Winnipeg North has 20,000 people who speak Tagalog at home. The member for Winnipeg North may want to be absolutely certain this legislation will not cause the TFC to block the Canadian Internet from accessing its service. TFC may have no choice.

Under this legislation, TFC would need to either produce Tagalog-language movies and shows in Canada or pay into a fund to support English, French or indigenous movies and shows. Netflix is already producing movies and shows here. Netflix can afford to spread its CanCon levy across five million subscribers. Can TFC afford to spread its CanCon levy across 20,000 constituents in Winnipeg North or, more importantly, can the Tagalog community in Winnipeg North afford the CanCon levy?

That CanCon levy has to come from somewhere. It can come out of the pockets of hard-working immigrants in Liberal ridings, or it can come at the expense of writers, actors, musicians, costumers and set designers in the Philippines. How does this possibly sit well with my colleagues across the aisle? It just cannot be the cultural special interest groups, who do a lot more than just sip champagne at galas in order to keep the Liberals in power at election time, so it must be about the money. It always is.

The fact is that the bill would exempt user-generated content unless it makes money. It strongly suggests that it is just a tax grab, with a side order of censorship, but in the interest of promoting listening among parties, I want to acknowledge that for some of my colleagues, in particular those from Quebec, this bill is about protecting Canadian and Québécois culture. Quebec is an island of French in a sea of North American English. In the age of broadcasting, Canadians mostly tolerated CanCon rules as the bargain for protecting Canadian culture. In the age of the Internet, we do not live next door to the United States. We live next door to everyone online. We have to turn our cultural policy inside out. We have to stop protecting our culture from the world and start promoting it to the world.

Government Orders

My colleagues have not noticed that the world wants more Canada, and I am not just talking about the maple leaf flying in the streets of capitals across the world as a symbol of freedom. While Canadians have been binge-watching *Lupin* and *Squid Game*, people from Albania to Zimbabwe have been streaming *Kim's Convenience* and *Schitt's Creek*. Canadians are expressing themselves. This legislation threatens that expression. That threat falls primarily on minority expression, and it is what the Broadcasting Act does.

This legislation is regressive protectionism. It looks backward and inward. The members opposite still cannot see the risk this bill poses to their constituents before they vote, so they should go out and speak to them; not to the lobbyists or the special interest groups. They should ask their constituents how much they spend each month and what they would be forced to give up if the price went up by 10% or 20%.

I plan to vote against Bill C-11, because I have listened to what my constituents are saying. I hope my Liberal colleagues will listen to the minority-language voices in their ridings, because they have just as much right to expression in their language as they do.

• (1550)

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise with interest on the member's new-found interest in diversity and inclusion. Her colleague for Lethbridge talked about an overabundance of power, but the status quo deals with some of the largest companies in the world that often do not pay the creators who are posting videos and content, unlike broadcasters in traditional forms of media.

Why is the opposition so intent on supporting companies such as Chinese giant TikTok and Google over Canadian content creators who are not earning anything?

• (1555)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that the question was posed to a specific member and I know the member does not need any additional assistance in addressing it.

The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, I found it interesting that the member opposite had to go to my colleague's speech to generate a question. Maybe the member was not listening carefully. I said that the point of this bill is to raise revenue for Liberal special interests. It is not the government's intent to have censorship with this bill. The censorship is just a by-product of using the Broadcasting Act.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for her speech, although I had a hard time following it because it had so many elements.

I have a question for my colleague.

Government Orders

We all know that we are governed by the legislative, executive and judiciary powers. We all know that the power of the media and companies like GAFA cannot be ignored, since in some ways, it is greater than the government.

How could the CRTC, which has merely surveyed the damage so far, possibly require the web giants to follow its guidelines, given that it is an institution from the last century?

[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, I did not quite get the question, but the member was talking about the Broadcasting Act and protecting language and culture, which the Broadcasting Act does because there are limited channels in broadcasting. If it were a free-for-all and any Canadian could get on a broadcast channel and start broadcasting, we might have a problem. However, this is about online streaming, and when we stream online, we are not preventing anyone else from viewing what they are watching on TV. In fact, more people have the opportunity to see different shows that may not make the cut on regular network channels.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, in 2020, one in four people working in the cultural sector lost their jobs. However, Netflix revenues increased by 22% in that same year. Unsurprisingly, the Conservatives have always promoted tax and regulatory breaks for the benefit of the web giants and at the expense of our broadcasters and workers, who are struggling to make ends meet because of this unfair competition.

Can the member clarify why the Conservatives are planning to sacrifice the Canadian cultural sector to the American web giants?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, the focus of the censorship is to reduce the ability of minority cultural groups to speak on the Internet. Netflix can afford to pay extra fees, and I am sure in return it gives generous money to certain Liberal parties. We are concerned about people such as those who live in the riding of the member for Winnipeg North. The Tagalog from the Philippines will not be able to afford what maybe Netflix can.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, before I begin talking about Bill C-11, I note that it is a great day today because we learned the date the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance will be delivering the budget to the House, which is April 7. I look forward to the next steps in moving our country forward. Not only have we recovered all the jobs we lost and created more than we had prepandemic, but our economy is actually larger than it was prepandemic. We will continue doing what is right for Canadians, not only those lovely Canadians who live in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge, but Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

It is always great to rise in the House, and it is a privilege and honour to serve the residents of Vaughan—Woodbridge. It is also great to see a government that is delivering for Canadians, not only here in Bill C-11, the online streaming act, but also with the environment minister, jointly with the Prime Minister, unveiling the emissions reductions plan, in beautiful Vancouver on the west coast, for how we will meet our targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and how we will get to net zero by 2050. I encourage all parties to look at that because it has something to do with the agen-

da, much like Bill C-11, the online streaming act, is a part of that agenda.

It is also much like yesterday when, joined by the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, our government brought forward a national day care and early learning child care plan. I think that is something to be celebrated. I know that when we enrol my youngest daughter, Leia, in day care in October, we will benefit from it personally. That is real change. That is what we call a promise made, a promise kept.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, if the hon. members wish to do a point of order on relevance, I would encourage them to do so. I will always speak to our government's record and how it is benefiting Canadians.

When I look at Bill C-11, I see the last time changes were made to the Broadcasting Act was in 1991, and I think about where I was as an individual in 1991 and what environment we operated in. I was beginning my first year of undergrad in university at Simon Fraser University. At that time, we did not even have email accounts. We were just given email accounts of some sort and were figuring out what was going on with this new technology. I think print was still pretty big as well. Fast-forward from then, and obviously we see there have been a number of changes in media and in what the Internet has created and we see the obvious metamorphosis that has happened in society. It is great to have been a witness to that and a participant in it.

I see today how that is impacting the lives of Canadian families, including my two older daughters, who are nine and almost 11. They receive their content and watch TV through Disney+, Prime, Netflix and YouTube, and all of their friends and cohorts receive and watch their content through online streaming. If I asked them if they knew the traditional media channels of ABC, CBS or NBC on the U.S. side, or CTV, Global and CBC on the Canadian side, I think my daughters would know the channels of Disney+, Crave and so forth much better because they receive so much content on them.

That is why it is so important that we as a government not only focus on Bill C-11, but, again, focus on achievements like a national early learning and day care plan and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and focus on what I would say is a Broadcasting Act that brings us into the modern age. We know that legislation is always a work in progress and it has to be adaptable, but we also know that in the world we live in, the government tends to be sort of reactive in the sense that technology and changes in the world will move in a much faster fashion than sometimes government can respond to. That is a natural thing. It is a natural thing that we need to now respond to what is happening online.

I want to read one quote about the support this bill has received, because I think it is exciting, it is relevant and it does bring certain aspects of the Broadcasting Act into modernity. It is from eOne Canada:

● (1600)

“We're excited about the Online Streaming Act, which we see as an opportunity to increase investment in Canadian content and in turn help grow Canada's creative sector and domestic talent pool even further. The strength of Canada's film and TV sector today is a direct result of both public supports and private-public partnerships formalized over many decades, and a modernized act is the logical next step. We encourage all parties to collaborate to pass Bill C-11 as soon as possible.”

When we talk about Bill C-11, we are talking about modernization. I have always been a proponent of modernizing, whether it is in our tax structure or our regulatory burdens. I actually called for that in an op-ed a few weeks ago, and this is part of that mantra. This is part of that tangent where we look at whether the acts we utilize are impacting various industries, and the Broadcasting Act is one of them.

I want to take this time to recognize the powerful impact that Canadian cultural policies have had and continue to have on creative content production in Canada and what I would call our cultural sovereignty. We know that Europeans, if I can use them as an example, protect their cultural content. We know how much they revere their cultural content and how proud they are. Bill C-11, which would amend the Broadcasting Act, takes us down that path. It ensures that we put in value, that we march with our heads up and are very proud of what our Canadian creators from coast to coast do and that they receive the support they need.

The digital age has continued to transform Canada and how Canadians share their stories and consume content in an open and dynamic global marketplace, in addition to traditional television and radio. Most Canadians access their favourite songs, films and television shows through online streaming services like Netflix, Spotify, Crave, Disney+ and many others. It is time that these services are required to contribute to Canadian stories in the same way that Canadian broadcasters always have.

Our government is advancing an important digital policy agenda aiming to help create a fairer, safer and more competitive Internet for all Canadians. The online streaming act builds upon the economic and social benefits of the Broadcasting Act. It ensures the sustainability of the Canadian broadcasting system. It continues to support an ecosystem where public, private and community elements work together to contribute to the creation and exhibition of Canadian programming, and it ushers in a new era of broadcasting.

The online streaming act follows on our promise to safeguard our cultural sovereignty and support our creators and creative industries. We want to continue supporting Canadian creators and showcasing their stories on screen and in song. We want to continue supporting their livelihoods and inspiring future Canadians of all backgrounds in this beautiful, diverse and inclusive country we get to call home by allowing them to see themselves reflected on all platforms, including online. Those are some of our objectives with the online streaming act.

Government Orders

We have listened to stakeholders, experts, professionals, parliamentarians and many Canadians and taken note of their needs, interests and preoccupations. Following royal assent of the online streaming act, our government will issue a policy direction to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, to indicate our priorities when it comes to putting in place the new regulatory regime. The policy direction has two primary goals. First, it will focus on the importance of consultation and special consideration of the needs of equity-seeking groups. Second, the direction will make clear areas where regulation is needed, as well as areas where flexibility should be exercised. That is very important, as we move forward with Bill C-11, for the primary goals and the focus areas.

We will continue to consult, as the government has done since day one in 2015 when we formed a majority government, and work with all Canadians and all stakeholders. We will also, of course, ensure the regulation is flexible, while meeting the goals of the amendments to the Broadcasting Act that are brought through Bill C-11.

It is my pleasure to speak in more detail about our government's plan for a policy direction and the steps after the royal assent of the online streaming act.

● (1605)

If Bill C-11 is adopted, the Minister of Canadian Heritage intends to ask the Governor in Council to issue a policy direction to the CRTC to guide its implementation of the online streaming act. A policy direction is an opportunity to clarify the government's policy intent on certain issues regarding social media platforms and digital first creators. It will also provide a level of flexibility that ensures any necessary changes can be made quickly in the future when needed.

It is so important to have legislation and acts in place that react to the changes of the day so that we can look at and make the changes we need to understand the technology and how it is changing, not only in the workplace but in this situation with online media platforms and how they are changing a sector. We can point to how changes have come forth to many industries we operate in. I remember that when I first started working on Wall Street in New York city, we had a thing called a PalmPilot. We had it by our desk and we used to tap it for our schedule. Within a year or so, that became totally irrelevant. Then we would be contacted using a thing called a BlackBerry pager. Again, the technology changed so quickly. Therefore, we, as a government in this realm, are amending this section of the Broadcasting Act of 1991 to bring it up to speed.

Government Orders

It will also provide a level of flexibility that ensures any necessary changes can be made quickly in the future when needed. For instance, a policy direction to the CRTC will make it clear that the content of digital first creators who create content only for social media platforms should be excluded. Of course, individual users of social media will never be treated as broadcasters under the online streaming act, and only some commercial content carried on social media platforms could trigger obligations on that platform. A policy direction will clarify that the content of digital first creators will not be part of the commercial content that can trigger obligations for platforms.

This means that the content of digital first creators will not be included in the calculation of the social media platform's revenues for the purposes of financial contributions. Content from digital first creators will not face any obligations related to showcasing and discoverability. Canada's digital first creators have told us that they do not want to be part of this new regime, and we have listened.

The policy direction will also specify the government's intent when it comes to video games, and gaming is a very big industry in Canada, whether it is in Vancouver, Montreal or here in Ontario. I will repeat again that video games are not to be regulated.

The policy direction will also allow our government to signal important priorities to the CRTC, including with respect to such topics as advancing reconciliation with first nations, Inuit and Métis people; combatting racism; fostering diversity and inclusion; accessibility; official languages; adaptation to our new digital realities; and more.

When I think about diversity and inclusion in my area of York Region, I think about how we have Telelatino, which has been a long-time ethnic broadcaster in Ontario and throughout the country. When I talk to the principals at that entity, which is a mix of Spanish and Italian broadcasting, they are obviously here and doing things in Canada and participating with the government and agencies. I want to give a shout-out to Aldo and the entire team at Telelatino, TLN, for the great work they do in promoting not only Canadian content but content from various parts of the world and bringing it to our homes on a daily basis.

The draft policy direction will be prepared in the months to come and published upon royal assent of the online streaming act. It will reflect relevant legislative amendments adopted during the parliamentary review of Bill C-11 and the important feedback the government continues to receive. In the last session of Parliament, I sat on three committees and I know how important the role of committees is in allowing members the opportunity to provide feedback to strengthen legislation from the government of the day to make it better, more flexible, more efficient and more reflective of industry and stakeholders. "Better is always possible" is what we say at committee. I know all my hon. colleagues do a wonderful job in providing feedback and bringing their views to the legislation that is brought forth, and that will include Bill C-11.

Once the direction is published, all stakeholders, including members of the public, will have an opportunity to provide additional feedback. A summary of their feedback will be published prior to the issuance of the final direction.

• (1610)

I listened intently to some of my hon. colleagues from the official opposition prior to my opportunity to rise and speak. I listened intently to some conspiracy theories, if I can use that term, being bandied about by some of the official opposition members, and I encourage them to submit this feedback into this feedback loop. A summary of their feedback could be taken in and published. If they would like to say that, it would be great, because I am still scratching my head about where with some of the stuff that is spouted forth comes from. I will try to understand it even better, but I am just not sure if I can.

The policy direction will provide the CRTC with the guidance to move forward quickly on the implementation of the new legislation and may even provide direction on the timelines for implementation of key elements of the regime.

I really need to speak to this point, because inherent in this act is obviously a policy direction or directive that would guide the CRTC in moving forward. The feedback mechanism would be in place to ensure that the online streaming act and the amendments to the Broadcasting Act really hit the nail perfectly and get that right. We are getting this right. We are moving in the right way.

We have listened to concerns of Canadians, we have listened to concerns of stakeholders, and we have listened to the feedback from stakeholders. That is what the right thing to do is as a government. It is to listen, to sit down and to talk to all viewpoints within industry, whether it is directed by ourselves or by the consumers, and we know that changes have to be made. I go back to 1991, the last time changes were brought forward, and I think of how the world has changed since 1991 for all of us, and hopefully in a positive manner.

In my humble conclusion, I want to repeat that the online streaming act would work to ensure that no matter how Canadians access their content, they should be able to see themselves in stories and songs that reflect their experience and their communities. When I think about that, I ask what it is to be Canadian today, as we all come from various backgrounds and various parts of this country. With the cultural content we consume, we need to obviously take a step back and always think about what Canadian content is and how we provide for it and finance it and assist it. We know other countries around the world assist their cultural industries, and the tourism side as well, to a great degree.

Whether it is Spotify, Crave, Disney+, Amazon Prime or Netflix, I think we pay for all of them in my household. We know there has to be a contribution here for the benefit of Canadian content. We know how valuable Canadian content is and we need Canadian content creators to have the opportunity to make sure the stories and histories that everyday Canadians see and hear are told. That is so important.

Before I finish up, I will say that members can rest assured of our commitment to carry out consistent and thorough consultations with everyone who has a stake in the implementation of this bill, including members of the official opposition, whom I have been reading some very interesting things about these days. This commitment will extend to the implementation and the subsequent policy direction to the CRTC.

I wish to thank members for their ears today and for hearing my thoughts on Bill C-11. I would like to say that this is part of our government's record of moving forward on a number of initiatives. That is what governments are elected to do, and it was great to see the national early learning and day care plan come to fruition yesterday. Today it is the emissions reductions plan, which is substantive, and today we are also debating Bill C-11, the modernization of our Broadcasting Act, and bringing over-the-top or online platforms into the modern age here in Canada.

* * *

• (1615)

[Translation]

CRIMINAL CODE

BILL C-5—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs, Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada and Minister responsible for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, Lib.): Madam Speaker, an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-5, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

• (1620)

[English]

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

* * *

ONLINE STREAMING ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member, during his speech, made a comment about digital-first creators. He said that they will not be captured by this legislation. This is a talking point that is used over and over by the government.

It is very clear in the legislation that anything that uses music will be captured, and therefore the CRTC regulations will be applied to those things. TikTok videos, by their very nature, use music. That is how they are created and that is how they are structured. If a TikTok video posted by a digital-first creator has music, then the regulations of the CRTC would be applied to it.

Government Orders

I would like the hon. member to help me understand his pretzel logic as it relates to how these TikTok videos might possibly be exempt from the regulatory arm of the CRTC.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I know this hon. member has been quite passionate and quite involved in commenting on Bill C-11 from the onset and even in the prior session of Parliament before the last election. I applaud the hon. member for Lethbridge for their due diligence and work on this issue, because they have been there commenting from the beginning and asking tough questions to our government.

From looking at the research I have done on the bill and from the work that I have done, I know the bill explicitly excludes all user-created content on social media platforms and streaming services, and—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order.

The hon. member had an opportunity to ask a question, and neither she nor anybody else on that side of the House should be raising any more questions or comments while the hon. member is answering.

The hon. member has about eight seconds to respond before I ask for another question and comment.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I just want to thank you for restoring decorum in the House while I finish answering my question. I will go to the next question now.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order.

[English]

Sometimes that is what happens when individuals are continually being interrupted. I want to remind members that if they want to ask questions, they must wait until it is their time to do that.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I sincerely hope that Bill C-11 will be passed as soon as possible.

I applaud the work that our colleague from Drummond did in committee. I am very happy that Bill C-10, now Bill C-11, is before the House today.

I do not understand why anyone would oppose this bill. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act is archaic and toothless.

Francophone cultural content is in decline, and all our broadcasters are losing momentum. I believe we must act to resist the web giants of the world. Personally, I find this very important.

Government Orders

My question for the member who spoke is this: If this bill passes, it will go to committee. How much time will it take for the CRTC to implement the changes?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

[*English*]

I would like to say I completely agree with the hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville on the requirement and the real need for the modernization of the Broadcasting Act with the amendments we are bringing forward.

In terms of the length of time the CRTC would need, at this juncture I cannot answer that question. I would have to get back to the hon. member on that question.

I completely agree that Canadian content is unique. I was reminded of that when I spent a few days in Quebec City over March break with my family. We are unique here in Canada, and it is important that Canadian stories be told from coast to coast to coast and that we ensure that online providers deliver and provide funds when Canadian providers of content already do so.

• (1625)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know that my friend from Vaughan—Woodbridge spent a good deal of his life in the beautiful city of Prince Rupert, which is in northwest B.C. I was just reading online that there is a feature film being shot in that beautiful city right now, creating a lot of excitement and activity.

When I think about Canadian content creators, I think about film and television productions like that and the many that have been shot in the Bulkley Valley where I live. I think about content creators like the great Alex Cuba, nominated for multiple Grammy Awards and having won many other awards over the years.

The idea of capturing revenue and reinvesting it in the creation of Canadian content, to me, has a lot of merit. My question is why it has taken the government so long to level the playing field and insist that the big streaming platforms pay into those funds so that they too are reinvesting in content creators like the ones I have listed. Could the member comment on that matter?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is correct. That is where I was born and raised until I went off to university like many young Canadians do.

As a person who spent the first 20 years of his career in the private sector, I will say that I tend to be sort of impatient because I expect things to be done yesterday not today. That is just the way I operate, but obviously there is a process involved in government in laying out legislation and a time frame and a timetable to do so. I am very happy and glad to see the modernization of the Broadcasting Act and the amendments therein to bring in online streaming services that have become such a big part not only of our culture but of the economy globally. I look forward to that.

I also look forward to again visiting my hometown of Prince Rupert. Hopefully it is in the not-too-distance future because I do have many relatives and friends there still.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting that the Conservatives seem to want to deny the reality that times have changed. It is about the modernization of a very important piece of legislation. It is legislation that is going to enable a higher sense of fairness.

I can say for my Conservative friends who wear the tinfoil hats and so forth that they do not have to fear. It is not an attack on freedoms. It is all about updating the Broadcasting Act. I wonder if my friend could provide his thoughts as to why it is so important to recognize that, through the development of the Internet, there is no level playing field. By passing this legislation we are going to enable more Canadian content and level the playing field among different outlets.

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Winnipeg North for his great work and hard work in the House in pushing legislation forward.

At this moment in time, these online content creators have no responsibility. They have complete access to the Canadian market but they have no responsibility to Canadian arts, culture and content creation. That has to change. That is what we are doing with the modernization of this act. We as a government are acting and moving forward. We all know that industries change and sectors change with technological development. We as a government must react. All governments react.

I encourage the official opposition, where there are legitimate concerns, to please raise them and ask those tough questions. The folks who sent them here to the House to represent them expect that. We expect that. A healthy democracy expects that.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member opposite talked a lot about the foreign streamers and the web giants. I am just curious to know how he feels about the fact that he has spent \$19,000-plus on Facebook advertising, rather than focusing on the important local broadcasting or local newspapers in his own riding. Why does he feel the need to spend his money on the foreign web giants rather than investing in Canadian broadcasting and print journalism?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Madam Speaker, I just want to make sure that people all understand that the obligations will fall only on to the platforms. That is the first thing I want to make sure is clear in my remarks today.

For the hon. member, I am sure that if we look at all parliamentarians and the advertising they do, because many of our residents are on Facebook and other platforms, I am sure that we would see that all parliamentarians advertise to reach their residents through the platforms they are using to receive their information as well.

• (1630)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, Royal Canadian Mounted Police; the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, Health.

[English]

Before I go to resuming debate, I just want to advise the members that the time allotted for 20-minute speeches has now reached an end. Therefore, members will now have 10 minutes for speeches with five minutes for questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very proud, as always, to rise in the House to speak for the incredible people of Timmins—James Bay.

We are here to talk about Bill C-11. We have to step back into the last Parliament where we had Bill C-10, which this is the update of, and what was then Bill C-11, which was supposed to be about addressing the long outstanding need to bring Canada's laws up to standard in dealing with the tech giants.

This Bill C-11 was the old Bill C-10, which should have been pretty straightforward. Who does not want Facebook to finally start paying tax? This is a company that made \$117 billion in profit last year, up \$31 billion in a single year, and it is not paying tax. That is what Bill C-10 was supposed to do, but then it was our modern Minister of Environment who was then the minister of heritage who turned it into a total political dumpster fire. It was so bad the Liberals had to call an election, just to get that thing off the table.

Now the Liberals have brought it back. At the time, then Bill C-11 was supposed to be the privacy bill, a pretty straightforward thing. However, that was another dumpster fire, because the Privacy Commissioner had to come out and say that the Liberal plan to update privacy rights would actually undermine basic Canadian privacy in the realm of digital technology. Particularly, the Privacy Commissioner found this American company, Clearview AI, broke Canadian law for their illegal use of images in facial recognition technology. In response, the Liberals were going to rewrite the rules so it would be easier for Clearview AI to break the law, rather than for the Privacy Commissioner to protect Canadians.

The Liberals had to call an election to erase all of that. Now the Liberals have been given, as they have so many times in the past, one more chance. The *deus ex machina* comes down and gives them a chance to do things all over again.

Now we are looking at this Bill C-11. I can say one thing about this Bill C-11 is that it fixed a lot of the problems with the previous dumpster fire, maybe by moving the minister, although God help the planet now that he is looking after the environment. That is just my own personal thoughts from having read his ridiculous environment plan today. What he was going to do for culture, he is now doing to our environment.

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Having said that, I would say that there is a couple of key issues we need to be looking at. We need to be looking at the need for Canada's legislation to actually address the right of artists to get paid in the digital realm. For too long in Canada we sort of pat our artists on the head. We all talked about the favourite TV shows we had growing up. One of the Liberals was talking about the Polka-roo.

Arts policy should not be that we just pat our artists on the head. This is an industry. It is one of our greatest exports. We are not promoting arts as an export or promoting our artists to do the work they need to do. We saw from COVID the devastating impacts on Canada's arts industry, on theatre, on musicians and on the tech people, the highly skilled tech people who went over two years without working. We really need to address this. One of the areas where they have been so undermined is online.

Let us talk about Spotify. It is basically a criminal network in terms of robbing artists blind. The number of sales one needs to have on Spotify to pay a single bill is so ridiculous that no Canadian artist could meet it.

We have streaming services that are making record fortunes. Therefore, it is a reasonable proposition to say that they are making an enormous amount of profit and they have a market where they do not have any real competition, so some of that money, and this was always the Canadian compromise, needs to go back into the development of the arts so that we can continue to build the industry.

The one thing I have also come to realize is that what the digital realm gives us and what streaming services give us is the ability to compete with our arts internationally on a scale that we never had before, if we are actually investing. Let us not look at it in a parochial manner, like what was done with the old broadcasters, where it was one hour on prime time a week they had to have a Canadian show on. Let us actually invest so that we can do the foreign deals. Why is it I can watch an incredible detective show from Iceland on Netflix, yet people in Iceland are not seeing an incredible detective show from Canada?

• (1635)

This is what we need to be doing. This is a reasonable position to take. With the profits that Facebook and Google are making, they can pay into the system. That is simple. They have unprecedented market share.

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I will go to the second point, which is dealing with the tech giants. It is something I worked on in 2018. Our all-party parliamentary committee came up with numerous recommendations. I have to speak as a recovering digital utopian because there was a time when I believed that when we let all these platforms come, if we stood back and did not put any regulations on them, they would create some kind of new market promised land, but what we saw was that those dudes from Silicon Valley who were making YouTube in their parents' garage morphed into an industrial power that is bigger than anything we have ever seen.

There is a term, “kill zone of innovation”, where these companies have become so rich, so powerful and have such unprecedented corporate strength that it dwarfs anything we have ever seen in the history of capitalism, companies like Facebook. When Facebook gets a \$5-billion fine, it does not even blink. It does not bother it. When the Rohingya are launching 150-billion U.K. pound lawsuit for the mass murder caused because of the exploitation of Facebook's platform, we realize we are dealing with companies that are so much beyond that they do not believe that domestic law applies to them. There has to be some level of obligation. I have worked with international parliamentarians in London, and there were meetings in Washington, trying to see how we can address the unprecedented power.

There is one thing that changed fundamentally when we saw the growth of this power. There used to be a principle that the telecoms would always tell parliamentarians, which was that we should not be blamed for what is in the content because, as they say, the pipes are dumb. We just send out the content and people choose, but people do not choose the content on Facebook and YouTube because of the algorithms. It is the algorithms that make them culpable and responsible.

I refer everyone to Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, who demanded Facebook explain how many of these stolen bot pages were driving misinformation during the convoy crisis here in Ottawa. Congresswoman Maloney wrote, “Facebook's history of amplifying toxic content, extremism, and disinformation, including from Russia and other foreign actors” is well known. It is no wonder that some members on the Conservative backbench are so defensive about this bill. My God, this is their main source of news. What are they going to do if we start dealing with bot pages that they think is something that came down from the promised land?

As parliamentarians, we have an obligation to address bot accounts. We have an obligation to hold these companies to account. What does that mean? Number one, it is about algorithm accountability. I do not care what someone watches on Facebook or YouTube, that is their business, but if the algorithm is tweaked to show people what they would not otherwise see, Facebook is making decisions for them.

I would refer my colleagues to Tristan Harris, the great thinker on digital technology. He spoke to the committee in 2018 and said, “Technology is overwriting the limits of the human animal. We have a limited ability to hold a certain amount of information in our head at the same time. We have a limited ability to discern the truth. We rely on shortcuts” like thinking what that person says is true and what that person says is false. However, what he says about the algorithm is that the algorithm has seen two billion other people do

the same thing, and it anticipates what they are going to do so it starts to show people content. What they have learned from the business model of Facebook and YouTube is that extremist content causes people to spend more time online. They are not watching cat videos. They are watching more and more extremist content. There is actually an effect on social interaction and on democracy. That is not part of this bill.

What the all-party committee recommended was that we needed to address the issue of algorithmic accountability and we needed to address the issue of the privacy rights of citizens to use online networks without being tracked by surveillance capitalism. With this bill, we need to ensure that these tech giants, which are making unprecedented amounts of money, actually put some money back into the system so that we can create an arts sector that can compete worldwide.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this bill will ensure that broadcasters and streaming platforms contribute to the direct support of creators from francophone, racialized, indigenous, LGBTQ2 and disability communities. Could my colleague elaborate a bit more on this aspect?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for this important question.

The role that the francophone community plays in the arts is essential for Canada, for Quebec and for my region of northern Ontario, where many proud Franco-Ontarians live.

It is essential for the francophone community to have access to the digital environment. It is also essential that Facebook, Netflix and YouTube support the development of Canada's francophone community to ensure that the whole world has access to Canadian content.

[English]

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Timmins—James Bay for his speech. We have a lot of friends and family from Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame actually living in the Timmins area and working hard in the resource industry, bringing new dollars into the economy, but I was a bit sad that he had to insult Conservatives after the Deputy Speaker chastised us about insulting each other. I guess that respect is not really there.

He made reference to tin hats and things like that. I was feeling really bad. He talked a lot about marmalade, but he could not spell jam, so after all this I do not know which way my colleague across the way is going to vote. Is he going to stay in line with the marriage, or is he going to cheat like he did earlier today in our vote?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague. At least his relatives work hard for a living, and I am glad they are working in the mines and the forestry industry in Timmins.

One of the great concerns that we have in the digital realm is the dumbing down of conversations to a level that they would fit on a Facebook meme. The fact that my hon. colleague thinks we are talking about marmalade and jam while we are actually talking about the digital marketplace is really concerning to me. Maybe he should spend a little less time online and come up to Timmins—James Bay. We could show him what real working people do.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I believe we feel the same way about this bill, which is very important for the discoverability of French-language content and is essential for Quebec artists. Members may not know this, but I used to be an actor. I have friends who really struggled during the pandemic, and this is a fundamental bill.

I would like to address something else with my colleague. He stated that platforms such as Facebook and Google are siphoning off advertising revenues. A recent UNESCO report found that Google and Facebook now soak up no less than half of all global digital advertising spending.

This bill does not address that threat. The fact that these major global platforms account for half of all advertising spending is a threat to democracy and independent media. Does my colleague believe that it is time to pass legislation to address this issue as quickly as possible?

• (1645)

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, this is really important. The size of these companies are without parallel, and the fact is that they make the choices of what we see. They make the choices through the algorithm, which has a huge impact. For example, when I saw I could find my good friend Richard Desjardins' film *Trou Story* on Netflix, I was telling all my friends they had to see this film. I am in it by the way, but that is a side issue, it is still a great film.

People should be able to see great Canadian films on Netflix and not have the company decide what we watch or do not watch. That is why the accountability of algorithms is there, and they should pay into the system so we can make better films.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before resuming debate, I want to remind members who are having side conversations that it is not really respectful when someone has the floor and is trying to answer questions or do their speech if other members are having side conversations. There is a lot of echo in

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here. I would ask those members to bring their side conversations outside in the lobby. That would be a lot more appropriate.

Resuming debate, we have the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The one thing that really upset me was being accused of talking about jam and marmalade. I am afraid, if the Conservatives keep talking among themselves, they are probably not actually hearing what the conversation is, so perhaps—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That is not a point of order.

It does take time away from other speakers being able to have their debates, so if someone is going to rise on a point of order, please make sure it is a point of order.

The hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon has the floor.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am just going to fix my tie because a constituent said that the last time I spoke I did not fix my tie. It was the first thing I heard at Tim Hortons when I returned home—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: You should wear a red tie.

Mr. Brad Vis: You know what? I love this blue tie. Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Again, there should not be side conversations going on. As well, the hon. member knows full well that, in the House, we are not to use the name of somebody who sits in the House.

We will get back to the debate because the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon's time is running.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, today I am so pleased to speak to Bill C-11, an act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other acts.

This bill is big, and this bill is really big news. When a lot of Canadians where I come from think of what the government does well and does not do well, it often relates to what we might watch on TV or what we might stream on the Internet, so in terms of consequences in our day-to-day lives, what we are talking about today really does matter.

It was in 1932 that the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Act was passed, which recognized the importance of radio broadcasting concerning educational, social and cultural development on a national level. Throughout the years, this act was revised and modernized, with the last update occurring in 1991. The world has changed over the last 30 years, especially with the rise of social media and the Internet.

Today, our current government says it is updating the act for today's digital world to ensure that Canadian content is reflected in online programming. While there is a need to promote Canadian content and support Canadian creators, is the government truly respecting user choice, or is it trying to control what we see and hear online?

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The heavy tone of all the regulations in this bill, in my opinion, is more of government oversight rather than cultural and language promotion. Why is the government telling the subject matter experts how to use their language and what stories they should be telling?

For example, under section 9.1, subsection (1)(d), the CRTC regulates:

the proportion of programs to be broadcast that shall be devoted to specific genres, in order to ensure the diversity of programming;

Is the government trying to tell us how many comedy, drama or horror programs that broadcasters under this act, in the age of social media and the Internet, would have to offer?

Last year, I did a survey on the previous iteration of this bill, Bill C-10. I heard from one elderly gentleman in my riding who was angry because he did not have any say over which channels he could get in a basic TV package. These are covered by the current Broadcasting Act and CRTC regulations, which would be amended by the legislation we are debating today.

In the modern era of broadcasting in Canada, more government oversight has meant fewer options for viewers. People do not want to be told what programs they have to include and pay for in their cable packages. This has led to a domination of traditional media by a few legacy giants, whose viewership continues to decline year over year as many are choosing the Internet and its vastly more diverse range of content and options.

This legislation risks causing the same reality we witnessed with cable TV, but applied to the Internet, including fewer choices, and fewer independent actors and creators. At the end of the day, is this just another attempt by the government to prop up failing legacy media?

Bill C-11 was the government's opportunity to move into modern day concepts of broadcasting programs. The government claims it wants to modernize the Broadcasting Act of 1991, yet Bill C-11 is basically using the exact same definition of broadcasting, meaning the starting point for regulation in Canada is that all audiovisual content would be cast as programs. Had the government perhaps distinguished between conventional and on-demand broadcasters versus video sharing platforms, like was done in the European Union, there would be no need for exceptions, exemptions and exclusions, which are riddled throughout this legislation.

It is not me saying that. It is Michael Geist, the Canada research chair in Internet and e-commerce law. He explained that, when we start with legislation that includes everything and we try to narrow it down, we simply cannot. We end up with loopholes, undefined services, and plain and simple confusion.

Rather than clearly define what needs to be regulated as broadcasting, this bill would leave much of those decision-making powers up to the CRTC. This limitless reach of the CRTC was even identified in an internal government memo during the committee process of Bill C-10, the last iteration of this legislation. The memo stated that social media services such as YouTube and Facebook greatly expand the number of individuals and other entities than can be said to be transmitting programs over the Internet. It also high-

lighted the importance of limiting the power of the CRTC to regulate user-generated content.

● (1650)

Despite this, the government removed the exemption for user-generated content in Bill C-10. Now in Bill C-11, the government claims the exemption is back with proposed section 4.1. The government now says it listened and fixed the concerns around social media. However, when we look at proposed subsection 4.1(2), we see there is an exception to the exception, and indeed the government does allow for regulation of content uploaded to social media. How are users and content creators to know if they are the exception or the exception to the exception?

Proposed subsection 4.1(2) states:

(2) Despite subsection (1), this Act applies in respect of a program that is uploaded as described in that subsection if the program

(a) is uploaded to the social media service by the provider of the service or the provider's affiliate, or by the agent or mandatary of either of them

Subsection 2(1) would define "affiliate" as follows:

in relation to any person, means any other person who controls that first person, or who is controlled by that first person or by a third person who also controls the first person

My tongue is already twisted; this is really complicated stuff. It seems to apply to YouTube creators and other creators, but with the vague definition and really challenging legislation to read and understand, we do not know. It is almost like the government tried to make it as complicated as possible so people would not understand the complexity of what it is trying to achieve, which we still do not know either.

Podcasts, one of the richest spaces for user online expression, would fall within CRTC power to regulate content as a program. This bill is trying to categorize, in very convoluted language, any and all Canadian content on the Internet as broadcasting. It simply is not. Foreign services that carry modest Canadian presence or services might not take so kindly to CRTC oversight. Their first response may very well be to block the Canadian market entirely, leaving many Canadians with less program choice, more expensive services, particularly with respect to access to multicultural programming, and algorithms that do not meet their needs online or respect their choices.

One of the key questions I get from constituents regarding this legislation is “Will I now be subject to CRTC regulations for what I watch and do on the Internet?” Recently, Darcy Michael, a comedian from B.C. with a large following on TikTok, expressed his concern with how the bill will affect artists in the digital space and those consuming culture online. Mr. Michael cautioned that CRTC oversight would limit creativity of independent artists and that the current system of “user-generated content exists because it works”. Algorithms right now, as I understand, reward content that is popular and it is shown to people who are likely to be interested. That is how Mr. Michael has made a lot of money and has done it as an artist. By showing Canadian content to viewers who are less likely to interact with it, we hurt its ability to reach foreign viewers and the creator's ability to make a living in the digital marketplace beyond the limited Canadian media landscape. Therefore, one of the most disconcerting issues is the financial impact this bill will have on Canadian creators, many of whom have large foreign audiences and are the real reason people know about Canadian culture in the first place.

In conclusion, there is so much to cover, but this is not the 1930s, the 1950s or the 1990s, when we would turn to the radio or television to hear the news or watch a local hockey game. This is 2022, and we are constantly facing new media platforms. We need to eliminate the uncertainty this bill creates. We need to avoid the problems this bill will create. We need to define key provisions, decide on what actually constitutes a Canadian creator, fully exclude user-generated content and limit the scope of the bill to a manageable size. It is unrealistic in the 21st century to think the government can regulate the Internet, and the consequences of doing what we are doing here today will be felt for a long time in ways that we do not understand.

• (1655)

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to quote Ian Scott, chair of the CRTC. He said, “We will never regulate user generated content. We are not interested in that.” The Minister of Canadian Heritage, Pablo Rodriguez, said, “once this bill has gone through the parliamentary process—”

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I remind the member that she is not to use a minister's name. She can mention his department, but not his name.

The hon. member.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Madam Speaker, thank you for that reminder.

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage said, “once this bill has gone through the parliamentary process and received royal assent, we will make it even more clear to the regulator, through a policy directive, that this legislation does not touch users, only online streaming platforms. Platforms are in; users are out.”

I am a member of the heritage committee, so I have the privilege of speaking one on one to a lot of the stakeholders for Bill C-11. What I am hearing from members opposite is a lot of the YouTube talking points, so I am wondering why the Conservatives are so intent on supporting the web giants and not Canadian arts and culture.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, what I am supporting is the right of Canadians to decide what they want to do on the Internet with

their own free time. Frankly, when a Liberal member tells me that the Liberal Minister of Canadian Heritage has given us a guarantee, all we have to point to is Bill C-10. The former minister of the environment frankly lied to Canadians over and over again about the impact the bill would have on Canadians and social media. I find it disingenuous that the minister would even quote—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I have a point of order.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sure I know what the point of order is, but let us hear the point of order and then I will rule on it.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I do not think it is a surprise to any member who heard the member that I will ask him to retract his comment with the reference to a lie.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I was going to get up on that as well.

I remind the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon that he cannot say that someone has lied in the House and he also cannot use the word “disingenuous” because that is saying indirectly what he was trying to say directly. I ask him to retract his words.

• (1700)

Mr. Brad Vis: I retract the words, Madam Speaker, and that is a fair point. My apologies. In the debate, I should not have said that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member has 26 seconds if he wants to finish his response before I go to the next question.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I would encourage the member opposite to take a look at Canada research chair Michael Geist, who commented extensively on the exception to the exception and the parts from proposed section 4.1 that I quoted in my speech. I think that says enough about what the bill would do.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon for his very lengthy speech.

I would like my colleague to address one very simple question. How would he define freedom of expression?

[English]

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, how do I define freedom of expression? Well, there are a lot of definitions of freedom of expression, but of course it is always going to be subject to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know my colleague from Mission—Mat-squi—Fraser Canyon has a very large riding that is home to many first nations with a very rich history and culture. My own riding is home to the Coast Salish people, who speak Halkomelem.

I would like to ask the member about the provisions in Bill C-11 that are going to allow first nations and indigenous people across Canada to have the ability to access broadcasting services, and probably do so in their own language, and what that is going to really mean to those individual communities. Would he not agree with me, considering the deep, rich, cultural history of his riding, that this is a very positive aspect to Bill C-11?

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague from Vancouver Island raises a valid point, and I do believe that provisions related to promoting indigenous culture and language are in fact good. I am always reticent to give power to regulators to determine winners and losers, but I do support, in general, more supports for some of the rural indigenous communities that I represent to get their fair share of funding, which does not generally go to places where I live.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the time to ask a very important question of my friend, but I will add this before I get to my question. If the Liberal government would actually fulfill its promises, we would quit pointing out that it keeps breaking its promises, to use parliamentary language.

Does my friend think that this is such a convoluted bill because the Liberals are trying to sneak things past and regulate some things that they would not want the public to know they are going to do?

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, my biggest concern with this legislation is that it is lazy. I do not think the government even tried to adapt to the 21st century with this bill. It took outdated and anachronistic terms and definitions that have been in place since 1991 and is trying to apply an outdated and unworkable formula for the reality we live in in the 21st century. As I mentioned in my speech, the consequences of this bill are not just going to be felt tomorrow. They will impact the next generation in 20 years, and we do not know what we are doing fully with the content of this legislation.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I remind the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan that once the Speaker has ruled and has accepted an apology, it is not really wise to try to stoke the fire again.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Yellowhead.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak on Bill C-11, an act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other acts.

I have received many concerns about this bill from many of my constituents. They are worried this bill is against the freedoms their ancestors fought and died for. In their view, Bill C-11, which is also known as the online streaming act, is an overreach that would slowly erode their freedoms and eliminate their free speech.

This bill would give the CRTC enormous powers by putting the commission in charge of regulating streaming services and video sharing sites as well as traditional broadcasters. Will the regulator be prepared to handle sweeping jurisdiction over audiovisual services around the world? Where is the evidence the CRTC has the expertise to address these issues?

Matt Hatfield, campaign director of Open Media, stated, “The online streaming act continues to give the CRTC the power to use sorely outdated 1980s ideas about what ‘Canadian’ content is, to control what shows up on our online feeds and what doesn’t.” By making the CRTC the de facto regulator of the Internet, the Liberal government’s strategy poses a serious threat to innovation, competition and freedom of expression.

There are still concerns the law could apply to people using and posting content on social media. It is simply a “just trust us” approach. It is all there in the text of the new legislation, which looks remarkably like the old legislation known as Bill C-10.

While the bill numbers have changed, the purpose of Bill C-11 has not. The bill states its purpose is to add online undertakings for the transmission or retransmission of programs over the Internet as a distinct class of broadcasting undertakings. The reason for that is so the CRTC can determine the proportion of programs to be broadcast that shall be Canadian programs.

Canada is home to many world-class writers, actors, composers, musicians, artists and creators who need rules that do not hold back their ability to be a Canadian and a global success. The Liberals claim there is now an exemption for user-generated content, but this legislation would allow the CRTC to regulate any content that generates revenue directly or indirectly. That means virtually all content would still be regulated, including independent content creators earning a living on social media platforms like YouTube or Spotify.

The term “web giants” is frequently used by the Liberal government when talking about Bill C-11 and broadcast reform. According to Facebook’s Ad Library, at the time Bill C-11 was tabled, the Liberal Party of Canada’s Facebook page spent \$4,233,000 on paid ads since June 25, 2019, and the Prime Minister’s Facebook page spent \$2.8 million on paid ads. How does the Liberal government justify its attack on so-called web giants in speeches while it keeps putting money into Facebook to promote itself?

If this bill passes, Netflix, Prime, Apple Music or Stitcher accounts would be required to ensure the discoverability of Canadian content. What exactly are the details? Public Works and Government Services Canada's own annual report on Government of Canada advertising activities from 2020 to 2021 shows that the Liberal government spent \$11.6 million on advertising on Facebook and Instagram, \$3.2 million on Twitter, \$2.8 million on Snapchat, \$1.5 million on LinkedIn, \$377,000 on TikTok and \$265,000 on Pinterest. Why does the Liberal government say one thing and spend taxpayers' money in another way?

Dr. Michael Geist, Canada research chair in Internet and e-commerce law at the University of Ottawa said, "for all the talk that user generated content is out, the truth is that everything from podcasts to TikTok videos fit neatly into the new exception that gives the CRTC the power to regulate such content as a 'program'."

• (1705)

There are many issues with Bill C-11 for digital-first creators that are said to be given to the CRTC. It is too broad and could include every piece of content online. Most alarming is that there is still room in the bill for the government to force platforms to put approved Canadian content ahead of independent Canadian content and artificially manipulate the algorithms. This bill only has downsides for digital-first creators. While the traditional media industry gets their funding doubled, the requirement for streamers to pay in to the creation of Canadian content could see some services leave Canada.

Digital content creators in Canada have been successful in building platforms such as YouTube, TikTok and others that export Canadian content to the rest of the world, not only bringing revenue from other countries back home to Canada but also hiring local tax-paying Canadian workers. These achievements should be supported, celebrated and encouraged.

Bill C-11 is presented to support the future of the broadcast industry but ignores all the global reach of Canadian digital success stories in favour of an outdated delegated broadcast model. The only thing that Bill C-11 will succeed at is falsely swaying the procedures of social platforms. This could eventually have a negative effect on Canadian content. What it will do is marginalize the people who, through their hard work and dedication, are making an impact by sharing Canadian content worldwide. YouTube's algorithm, which applies across borders, detects whether a video has been watched, ignored or turned off partway through, as well as whether it gets a thumbs-up or it is disliked. This influences how the content is promoted, not just in Canada but beyond its borders.

Bill C-11 subjects streaming companies, such as Netflix, to the same rules as traditional Canadian broadcasters. It would force web firms to offer a set amount of Canadian content and invest heavily in Canada's cultural industries, including film, television and music. Because of our relatively small population, will they make these financial investments to create Canadian content?

The bill will also update the 1991 Broadcasting Act, which predates the Internet revolution that changed the way people watch film and video content and listen to music. The government says the bill would not regulate user-generated material and would give platforms room to decide how they promote Canadian content, yet

Government Orders

critics warn this could lead to the regulation of people posting videos on YouTube. In 2020, Oxford Economics calculated that YouTube contributed \$923 million to Canada's gross domestic product, including payments from ads alongside YouTube videos and royalty payments to music labels.

I question whether the government should even get involved in determining what constitutes Canadian content. With Bill C-11, it would seem the Liberals don't want to hear from digital-first creators and their thoughts on the destructive impact Bill C-11 will have on them if passed. If passed, Canadians could see fewer services offered, more government regulation of what we can watch or listen to online and a loss of jobs.

Bill C-10 was problematic. Its replacement, Bill C-11, is no better and should be scrapped. We Conservatives support creating a level playing field between large foreign streaming services and Canadian broadcasters, while protecting the individual rights and freedoms of Canadians.

In closing, we Conservatives will continue to bring forward amendments to protect Canadians' free speech and the livelihoods of independent content creators by carefully reviewing every aspect of Bill C-11, and we expect the Liberal government to allow the full study and review it requires.

• (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague on the importance of protecting Canadians' free speech. However, I would like to know whether he understands that the bill does not affect the content that social media users create. The bill targets the platforms and the web giants.

Does my colleague not think it is good for these major companies to promote Canadian content, as the bill would require?

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[English]

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, we absolutely need to have some kind of rules and regulations against the web giants because the member is right. They are not doing good Canadian content. Indirectly though, they are basically using algorithms that the CRTC is going to have the power and control over. In other countries it has already been promoted or talked about how anywhere from 80% to 85% of content that was censored or banned actually should never have been. There is where the question lies. It is on the regulations. Are we actually going to be banning Canadian-approved content that should never have been banned by the bill? That is the biggest question that we cannot answer right now.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, Quebec's cultural sector suffered greatly under the Harper Conservatives, who made massive cuts to cultural spending. At the same time, they inexcusably neglected to regulate the web giants, which took in all of the advertising dollars.

This bill is designed to ensure the discoverability of Quebec- and Canadian-produced content. If my colleague is against that, I would like to know how he would help our cultural and media sectors, because it seems to me that, in the past, the Conservatives did absolutely nothing in this regard.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, that is quite interesting. I agree that we need to regulate the web giants in order to make sure that they are paying their fair share when it comes to any kind of Canadian content, whether it is news or even people who are promoting their own artistic ways.

One of the problems though is that it is a false sense of security knowing that, if it is Canadian-produced content, automatically it is going to be promoted by the web giants. That is not necessarily the case. Are they going to promote it or are they just going to leave the country? We only have a population of 38 million. There is more population in the state of California than in all of Canada. We have to understand that a lot of these web giants do not have to cater to Canadian content.

The other side that we need to look at is whether it is going to be censored on Canadian content. Because of the CRTC, there is potential that, regardless if it is made in Quebec or not, the CRTC could end up censoring Canadian content simply because it does not agree with whatever type of media form or whatever the message was in that video that was posted.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, since the beginning of the pandemic, our cultural workers have been losing jobs and income. In fact, in 2020, one in four people working in the cultural sector lost their job, but Netflix revenues increased by over 22% in the same year.

The Conservatives seem to think it is okay for Netflix not to have to pay its fair share. Why?

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Madam Speaker, I think the member misunderstood what I was saying. I have said all along that the web gi-

ants need to pay their fair share. They need to make sure that they are paying for what kind of Canadian content they have, whether it is news, types of videos or types of music, even pictures of artists they have promoted. Everyone needs to pay their fair share to make sure, so I think you were misled a little there because I have never said they should not pay.

My concern is about the big corporations. Are they actually going to promote or enhance Canadian content simply because they are told to, or are they just going to ignore Canada and go on to other countries around the world where there are fewer rules and regulations? That is my concern with that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member was not saying that I had been misled, so I just want to remind him that he should address questions and comments to the Chair and to be mindful of the words that are being used as well.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Thornhill.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to rise in this place on behalf of the good people of Thornhill to speak to issues within Bill C-11, the online streaming act. It is a new name. As many will remember, in the previous Parliament my colleagues in this place spoke to the issues in a different bill: That was Bill C-10, an act to amend the Broadcasting Act.

While this new bill has a new title, the very same issues exist in this bill as did in the last. It is almost the same bill, with a different name and the same problems. Those problems were an admission of the former heritage minister: He said it was flawed. It was a flawed bill that nevertheless passed the House only for Canadians to be spared its overreach by an election the Liberals deemed the most important in history. That, of course, brought us to almost the same result, with the same bill by a different name. This bill is a near copy of the government's deeply flawed Bill C-10. It fails to address the serious concerns raised by experts and Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

While we will hear members opposite claim that there is now an exemption for user-generated content, which is one of the major concerns the minister admitted was deeply flawed, the new bill would do the same thing as the old bill and would allow the CRTC to regulate any content that generates revenue, directly or indirectly. That means virtually all content would still be regulated, including independent content creators earning a living from platforms such as YouTube, Spotify or even TikTok, which is a favourite of some members in the new government arrangement.

Let me be absolutely clear. Conservatives support creating a level playing field between large, foreign streaming services and Canadian broadcasters while protecting the individual rights and freedoms of all Canadians. That is fundamental. We also know that Canada is home to many world-class writers, actors, composers, musicians, artists and creators. Creators need rules that do not hold back their ability to be Canadian and global successes. With this all being true, there are those who are rightfully warning that digital creators, those we celebrate as Canadian stars, could lose foreign revenue if the government forces digital platforms to promote Canadian content. That means cutting into revenue that Canadian content creators earn, which is the exact opposite of what we should be doing.

The online streaming act would skew the algorithm our online platforms use to match them with viewers' personal preferences. That force-feeding of Canadian content that the government chooses, rather than what might match the viewers' preferences, is no doubt a problem: When they force people to watch something that they may not want to watch, in an effort to promote it, they might be doing the exact opposite. It would suggest that if they force content on viewers, a conclusion could very well be that the forced content is not actually popular, leading of course to potentially less promotion abroad of what was irreparably deemed unpopular by the government or the CRTC.

This is actually disadvantaging our talent, which is arguably one of our greatest exports. Yes, as many in the House know, videos that few people watch are actually harder to find. They do not pop up. They are not promoted. If people do not select the Canadian content the government decides it wants them to watch or that it has offered them, people click on something else, leading to perhaps the dreaded thumbs-down rating. This, of course, knows no boundaries, and it would be deemed less popular here and abroad. Again, the government will say it is not doing that and that it will not regulate YouTube users and TikTok users who post their content, but that is not what the bill says.

The bill would give the authority to the CRTC to regulate any content. Even if people were to take this at face value and believe it, why would the government not make that scope in the bill more clear? Why would it not make it more prescriptive? If it walks like a duck and it talks like a duck, it is probably a duck. Hiding behind the complexity of legislation, as the minister has, should be a concern to every single Canadian who generates content that this bill would regulate and every single Canadian who watches it.

It should be of great concern that the CRTC is being tasked with administering the act. It is a body already stretched to its limits in this country. A fair question to anyone supporting this bill would simply be that if the CRTC lacks the capacity to carry out its current mandate effectively, how can it be expected to take on the entire, infinite Internet? Knowing all that, the CRTC would be handed the power to develop the rules and regulations. It could make those up as it goes along, because guess what? The bill does not stipulate it.

Government Orders

• (1720)

This act would bestow on the CRTC the ability to determine its own jurisdiction without constraints, again despite it having no capacity to even do it.

Let us put that very serious issue aside for a moment and pretend the government bill does not do what it says it is going to do.

[*Translation*]

When the government sticks its nose in where it does not belong, we find ourselves up against a difficult reality that has become a recurring theme for the opposition.

If this bill is passed, Canada will become the first democratic country to enforce its Internet regulation law. Canada will also become the first country to regulate online content created by people living in Canada.

We will be in good company with dictators from countries like Iran, Turkey and North Korea when it comes to protecting personal freedoms, because the government is not comfortable with a vast, open communication space that exists outside its control.

• (1725)

[*English*]

That is control the government could potentially exert over the tens of thousands of digital first creators who have found a way to earn a living and export their talent globally. We should be celebrating these accomplishments. We should be encouraging their spirit of entrepreneurship. We absolutely should not be punishing them with the demands of this legislation under the guise of creating a “level playing field”, as the government says, “where web giants will pay their fair share”. What we would actually get is like the disappointment we get in a cereal box: We would get an Internet czar, which sounds alarming because it is alarming.

It is important to remind members of the House that the Broadcasting Act was not meant to regulate the Internet. Many will say that this modernization of an act that was put in place for radio and TV will somehow boost the Canadian arts and culture sector. To that, I say I have a bridge to sell them. It is not going to happen. That is not how it works. More regulation has never, and will never, incentivize more artistic creation, let alone more wealth and success for creators, because one thing is for certain. When the government-instructed bureaucrats pick winners and losers, there are no winners in this realm or in any other in the history of government. Having the government pick winners, based on how Canadian content is viewed or how it decides what we will watch, is an imposition on our freedom to choose what we actually want to watch. It also does not lead to more Canadian content.

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Bill C-11 is a solution looking for a problem that does not exist. I hope members of the House will carefully review every aspect of this bill because, as a member before me said, it is going to have grave consequences for generations to come. There is a lack of clarity in this bill on what it is going to do. Instead of promoting our Canadian creators, it actually punishes them.

I hope that members of the House will think of their rights and freedoms on the Internet before they agree with the current government's illogical pursuit to control what we see online.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listen to the debate today as somebody who went through the first Canadian content regulations. I was on the air, and if I play Anne Murray's *Snowbird* one more time I think my head will explode. That was the point. What we did on the radio or on standard television was present a very linear stream of programming, so we would get this one and then this one, and the only choice people had was to watch or turn to another channel.

This is where I want the member to kind of reflect. If I go on to Netflix, there is an endless number of titles that I can select from. Some of them should be Canadian, because I am a Canadian and I deserve to at least have the opportunity to know that my stories are being told. To create content and not let people know it is there is like winking at somebody in the dark. I would ask my hon. colleague this. Can we not just say that there is a real benefit to at least letting people know this material exists while they have an infinite—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I do have to allow for other questions. The hon. member for Thornhill.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Madam Speaker, the member opposite would know that, if he looked at all of the titles on Netflix, he would see Canadian content.

Canadian content is important. The problem is that the bill does not even stipulate what Canadian content is. How does the member opposite regulate something if he cannot define it?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, for me, this debate is about equity. Right now, traditional broadcasters are regulated. They have to contribute to Quebec and Canadian culture. All this bill does is extend regulatory enforcement to foreign and online platforms.

I do not understand what my colleague wants. Is she saying we should deregulate traditional broadcasters? What does she see as the solution?

• (1730)

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Madam Speaker, what I am saying is that the government should never regulate what we see online. It should never pick winners and losers, and it certainly should not have the CRTC deciding the ad hoc rules of what Canadians can see online and when. That should be one's choice.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for Thornhill. I have enjoyed our time

together on the transport committee, and I listened carefully to her speech.

Near the beginning, she indicated that she supports the premise that we should be requiring these platforms and these broadcasters to reinvest in Canadian content creation, that we should level the playing field and that this is a worthy goal.

Later, she said she does not believe that regulation can actually result in better or more Canadian content creation, yet we have had regulations in the country that for decades have required organizations and companies to pay into a fund that reinvests in Canadian content creation.

Does she feel that those decades of regulatory policy have been all for naught and that we should have avoided that path altogether as a country?

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Madam Speaker, we have heard a lot from the NDP talking about making web giants pay their fair share. This is, again, a party that has spent almost \$2.5 million on platforms such as Facebook. To the hon. member's question, I do not see how he can stand in the House and ask that question. I would say to the hon. member that we cannot regulate ourselves to success. That is not going to create more, or better or successful, Canadian content. We have never done that. We could never do that.

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to take part in this important debate.

Thinking back in history about failed regimes, what did they do? In the dying days of these governments, they censor the public. They take over broadcasters. They print money. They put down protesters and stifle free speech. How that relates to this government, to this failed regime, is that I believe Bill C-11 follows in those dangerous footsteps that we have seen around the world in different parts of history when failed regimes overreach.

We even heard this after the preceding speech by the member for Thornhill. The question was about going onto Netflix and not finding Canadian content. The problem is that with VPN and different technologies, we can pretend that we are anywhere in the world, so we are trying to regulate something that cannot be regulated. Unfortunately, that is going to make an uneven playing field for some.

We all want Canadian content. We all want Canadian content to be produced to tell our stories. It has been pointed out that it is not the creators but the portal or the streaming services, but the bill unfortunately is an analogy with different parts in history when governments burned books or banned books to be sold. Authors could write all the books they wanted, but only government-approved books were sold, and in government-run stores.

This is the problem we have with the government. It is over-reach. The Liberals think they can regulate everything in our lives. Many Canadians have reached out to me to say that they disagree with this approach. They disagree that we need the censorship that comes with Bill C-11. They disagree with the CRTC not reporting to Parliament, to all of us, but to the Prime Minister.

It is troubling that an order in council will clarify the instructions on the bill. That is quite frightening. Also, on the backdrop of what the last week and a bit have been, we have had the NDP prop up the government and then literally almost cross the floor to support the Liberals in their endeavours. With the floor-crossing NDP supporting the Liberals, the bill will pass.

• (1735)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): On a point of order, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, that is a personal attack. I did not cross the floor. I was sitting here all along. They put me—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is not a point of order but a point of debate, and the hon. member has seven minutes and 20 seconds left.

The hon. member for Saskatoon—University.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Madam Speaker, it is good to hear the NDP members defending themselves on crossing the floor. I think they are going to have to defend themselves a lot, because I believe history will show the follies in the move they have made to prop up the government.

There were also problems with the last time this bill was before the House as Bill C-10. Now it is Bill C-11, but Bill C-10 was at committee. At that time, the NDP did not cross the floor, but the bill never became law, thankfully.

The Deputy Speaker: There is another point of order from the hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, the member claims that I have crossed the floor to join the Liberals. That is an entire misrepresentation of reality and it is a violation of my privilege.

The Deputy Speaker: That is really not a point of order. We are getting into debate.

I will recognize the hon. member for Saskatoon—University.

Mr. Corey Tochor: Mr. Speaker, be it across the floor or at committee, when Bill C-11 gets there, I wonder what the coalition partners are going to ask. How are they actually going to scrutinize the bill when their partner, the Liberal government, is proposing it? In the case of Bill C-10, we did see some questioning from the NDP on that government bill, and ultimately, thankfully, Bill C-10 was defeated. I have less hope for this bill.

I have less hope for the freedoms that Canadians have relied on and expect to have in their country. After the bill passes, we will have an Internet czar that will tell us what we can and cannot post and what content we can watch. Meanwhile, I have highlighted how problematic it is that through technology we are going to be able to do an end run around that.

Government Orders

What would this bill actually accomplish? I believe that in the end it is going to limit people's choices, not expand them. It will not expand a creator's ability to tell Canadian stories, and that is what needs to happen first. We will see when this bill gets to committee.

I know some members have questions for me and I am going to cede my time and allow them to ask those questions and have a proper debate. I do hope that we have a proper debate at committee, because we have heard from too many Canadians that the bill is wrong.

To the Canadians who are watching, please consider contacting your Liberal or NDP-Liberal government MP at their office and explain why this censorship bill is not right for Canada.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, does the hon. member think that CanCon regulations in radio in the early 1970s took away Canadians' freedom? He should remember that this was a time when we did not have the alternative of listening to music on the Internet through YouTube and such. Basically, all we had was mainstream radio.

Does he think those regulations were bad for the Canadian music industry? Does he think those regulations were bad for freedom in Canada?

Mr. Corey Tochor: Mr. Speaker, in the context of what we are debating and what we should do based on radio, such as AM radio, I do not think even the member would listen to radio anymore. I would say it is in my car. How it relates to this bill is that it limits the ability for consumers to post their content on social media. That is what I am against, and it is what this bill unfortunately would accomplish for our landscape.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to my Conservative friends and it seems that there is something they do not understand. The way things currently work is that everything goes to the people at the top. Everything goes to the biggest stars on the web, whether they are video or music stars.

I will give an example. Pierre Lapointe, who is hugely popular, has said that for one million streams of his song *Je déteste ma vie* on Spotify, he only received \$500. At this time, artists on Spotify are paid on a pro rata basis. The company tallies up all the streams in a given month, and the artist receives a payment based on their average. In addition, 80% of the streams on digital platforms involve 20% of the titles on offer.

Unless we pass legislation, even Quebec's biggest stars will not be paid much for major hits that are listened to by a lot of people. We must pass legislation. We cannot rely on market forces because that just does not work.

Private Members' Business

● (1740)

[English]

Mr. Corey Tochor: Mr. Speaker, the question is about whether it is a free market. I would say we need to encourage more competition, be it from Spotify or even from a specific one for Quebec. Let the market decide if there is a need for those players. I do not think regulation is going to accomplish what the member wishes it would do. I would say to our creators that we have to compensate the creators for the content they make, but we need to do it in a way that we are not regulating all aspects of their lives. When a country starts regulating Spotify and all other potential streaming services, I believe that is a country I would not want to live in. I would rather open the doors and encourage more platforms to come forward and share Canadian stories than tell a private company what it can and cannot play.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the course of the pandemic, the independent music sector has seen its revenues decline by \$233 million and musicians' revenues have fallen by 79%. At the same time, we are seeing web giants paying almost no taxes in Canada and not contributing their fair share of profits to support the funding of Canadian cultural content.

Will my colleague please clarify whether he will continue to protect web giants at the expense of Canada's independent music sector?

Mr. Corey Tochor: Mr. Speaker, we need to provide an environment that other platforms are attracted to so that our artists can get their product to market. I think that is a better approach than regulating the Internet.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to get my colleague's thoughts on the concerns being raised by YouTube and Michael Geist, foremost expert in Canada on the Internet and e-commerce, concerning the threat that Bill C-11 would be forcing streaming platforms to push Canadian content. It sounds great, but as a consequence it may actually downgrade that content abroad, which I think would be very concerning to our on-line content creators.

Can I get the member's thoughts on that?

Mr. Corey Tochor: Mr. Speaker, we need to help artists get their products to the international markets. This bill would hurt their chances, because other countries might decide to bring in their own censorship bills that would hurt our artists' attempts to enter their markets.

I believe it is better to let it flow freely, to let artists perform and make offerings to the people and let the market decide.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

As we know, it is not permitted under our rules for members to take photographs in the House of Commons. I have here a photograph taken about an hour ago by the member for Saint John—Rothesay and posted on his Instagram account. I wonder if perhaps the member and all members can be reminded not to take photographs in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: As we know, those in the press gallery are the only ones who can take photos in the chamber. I may have an

opportunity to talk to the member for Saint John—Rothesay in due course, but no photographs are allowed to be taken on the floor when the mace is in the blocks.

It being 5:43 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

RETIREMENT INCOME

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Deputy House Leader of the Government, Lib.) moved:

That:

(a) the House recognize that (i) seniors deserve a dignified retirement free from financial worry, (ii) many seniors are worried about their retirement savings running out, (iii) many seniors are concerned about being able to live independently in their own homes; and

(b) in the opinion of the House, the government should undertake a study examining population aging, longevity, interest rates, and registered retirement income funds, and report its findings and recommendations to the House within 12 months of the adoption of this motion.

● (1745)

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about seniors, who have contributed throughout their lives to our country, society and the economy. Seniors have worked tirelessly, served Canada and communities with dedication, raised families and paid taxes. They deserve a dignified retirement free from financial worry.

However, far too many seniors remain concerned about their retirement savings running out. They are worried about not being able to live independently in their own homes. None of us can be okay with this. I am always grateful for the opportunity to listen to seniors' groups in Etobicoke North, the Asian Humberwood Seniors, Caribbean Seniors' Social Club of Toronto, Democratic South Asian Seniors Association, Humberwood Seniors, South Asian Seniors, St. Andrew's Senior Club and Sri Lankan Tamil Seniors Group of Etobicoke.

I love to listen to their stories, benefit from their wisdom, and hear what they need. During the last election in Etobicoke North, I spoke to senior after senior over the telephone. One of the highlights of the election was when a woman who used to sing in Welsh choirs and teach singing sang *Pure Heart* in Welsh to me over the telephone.

With such joy came real heartache. The overwhelming issue I heard during the last election was that seniors need help to ensure a dignified retirement. This was vastly different from my previous four elections, when the overriding issues were jobs and the economy. Some seniors I spoke to were in their 90s and even their early 100s, and had served during the Second World War. One was a 48th Highlander who said that eight decades ago, they had stepped up for their generation and for future generations, and that their motto is *Dileas Gu Brath*, which means “faithful forever”.

I spoke to women who had worked in the war effort. I spoke to teachers who had taught generations of young Canadians for over three decades. I also spoke to many women who had not only worked and cared for their families but also cared for numerous extended family members as they aged, some for over decades, and with no remuneration. I spoke with some who had recently lost their partners and were worried if their savings would be enough to carry them through.

Some seniors stress that, in their words, they had done everything right and had saved for their retirement because they had the means. Not everyone does. However, they were forced to take out money from their registered retirement income funds, or RRIFs, when they did not need the money, when they were not sick, when they had not lost a partner, or when they did not need care.

However, when they really needed the money, it had been depleted through mandatory withdrawals or, in some cases, was gone altogether. They said that while their costs were always increasing, their RRIFs were forever decreasing.

Their challenges did not end there. Sometimes RRIF withdrawals pushed seniors into a higher tax bracket and could even result in clawed back old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits. For seniors in non-profit housing, withdrawals could mean increased rent because rent is tied to income.

Today, when Canadians turn 71, they must convert their registered retirement savings plans, or RRSPs, to RRIFs and begin making mandatory withdrawals at a set rate. Seniors are concerned that the current rates do not reflect that people are working longer than ever before, the length of retirement is generally longer and life expectancy is increasing. When they are forced to draw down on their savings, they risk outliving their funds, and that problem is compounded by lower rates of returns.

I hope that colleagues in the House can come together to start a national conversation around registered retirement income funds, or RRIFs. Specifically, Motion No. 45 asks the government to undertake a study examining population aging, longevity, interest rates and registered retirement income funds, and record its findings and recommendations to the House within 12 months.

All Canadians matter, and they matter throughout their lives. The job of governments is to provide the support Canadians need across their lifespan. We are either seniors today or, hopefully, seniors-in-waiting. We are all in this together. The well-being of older members of our society must be a concern to all of us.

● (1750)

There will be those who ask why we need another study. In this case, requesting a comprehensive study is a good first step to starting a national conversation; focusing attention on RRIFs; collecting evidence; hearing about the realities Canadians are living today, more than two years into a pandemic; and, most importantly, having the government come back to the House within 12 months with real recommendations and options to help Canadians.

There is also a long-standing debate regarding mandatory RRIF minimum withdrawals and the scheduling of withdrawals, whether to increase the mandatory withdrawal age, reduce the rate of with-

drawal set for each age, do a combination of these or eliminate mandatory withdrawals. These are just a few options, and the study could identify more. There are also unknowns regarding the full financial market implications of COVID-19, and how they will vary from person to person.

Private member's motions cannot commit the government to invest public resources. This would require subsequent decisions. Having said this, the motion does focus attention on an issue Canadians very much care about and are anxious about. It encourages the government to do real work and to come back to this House with recommendations on a way forward.

Let me address why this motion focuses on RRIFs. There are over seven million Canadians who are 65 years and older today, and 60% have RRIF savings. That is over four million people, and an opportunity for the government to make recommendations that potentially could help millions of Canadians. While RRIFs cannot be the whole answer to ensuring a dignified retirement, free from financial worry, they are an important part of the solution.

Moreover, Canadians and organizations, such as CanAge, CARP, the C. D. Howe Institute, the Investment Industry Association of Canada and the National Association of Federal Retirees, have been asking for changes to RRIFs.

Today, seniors are forced to make more and more difficult choices as they face the rising cost of living for everything from electricity to food to gas. This compounds the cost of aging and the difficulties brought about by two years of life during the pandemic. In short, this is the time to look at RRIFs, to study how to better support seniors today, how to better protect the middle class and how to better support seniors of tomorrow.

Seniors know that the rules around RRIFs have not kept pace with the times. Canadians are living longer, and that is a good thing. However, with increasing age, seniors may also have increased care needs. Canadian life expectancy is now 82 years of age, and the age cohort of those who are at least 85 years old is growing four times faster than the rest of the population, according to Statistics Canada data.

While almost eight million Canadians provide care to a family member or friend, almost half of these provide care for a parent or parent-in-law, yet seniors are still struggling. I have spoken to people in their late 90s who have increasing care needs, who have lost their partner, their children and their friends, and their RRIFs are gone. As one woman said to me, "I see no option but to sell my home, the place where I raised my children. I can't afford the care I need because everything I saved for is gone."

Private Members' Business

This is a reality for far too many women, who often live longer than men and are disproportionately and negatively impacted. Moreover, the baby boomers, the large generation born between 1946 and 1965, are aging. The oldest of the baby boomer generation are just 76 years old today. Between 2017 and 2037, Canada's population of seniors, those age 65 and older, is expected to grow by a staggering 68%. The Canadian Institute for Health Information predicts that, over this period, the number of seniors in Canada will reach almost 10.5 million.

• (1755)

Importantly, care for aging parents may shift as baby boomers have had fewer children. Adult children have been and continue to be the backbone of long-term care in Canada. In fact, research by the National Institute on Ageing at Ryerson University found that 75% of all care is being provided informally by close family members. The same institute also shows that the cost of publicly funded, long-term care for seniors, including long-term care and home care, is expected to more than triple in 30 years, rising from \$22 billion to \$71 billion in today's dollars.

Canadians are also working longer than ever before, many because they lack private retirement income and they have to work. The percentage of seniors working past age 71 has increased from 15% in 1995 to 24% in 2015, and salary was the main source of income for almost 44% of seniors in 2015, up from 39% in 1995.

Increased longevity and longer retirements mean that mandated RRIF withdrawals put people in a position to outlive their savings as they age, which threatens retirement security. Seniors' savings are further impacted by lower investment returns. When outdated withdrawal rules combine with increased longevity and reduced investment returns, it causes exponentially greater problems for seniors.

In short, Canadians are facing a perfect storm when it comes to long-term financial retirement security. Workplace pensions are becoming less common and interest rates are at historic lows, meaning income is going down while retirement costs are going up. At the same time, Canadians are living longer than ever before, while family size has decreased to historic lows. This matters as adult children have typically provided most of the caregiving so that seniors can stay in their homes.

However, solutions do exist. Rules concerning RRIFs have changed before and they can change again. After RRIFs were first introduced, amendments were made in 1986, 1992, 2015 and most recently in 2020.

Canada's seniors contribute to our communities, country and society in countless ways. They have helped shape our country, and they have raised, mentored and invested in generations of Canadians. They are our parents, grandparents, friends, neighbours, workers, volunteers, and they matter. We must do more than just thank them for everything they have done for us and our country. After all, they laid the foundation for a better future for all of us.

One of the best measures of a country is how it treats its older citizens and the most vulnerable. Seniors worked hard, played by the rules and deserve a dignified and secure retirement free from financial worry. I know that every member in the House cares about

seniors and ensuring they have a dignified retirement. My colleague has done decades of work on this specific issue. Our colleague for Edmonton West has previously brought forward a bill concerning RRIFs.

Friends, with this motion, we have an opportunity to do something really important and impactful. We can come together to start a long overdue conversation, encourage the government to gather evidence and come forward with recommendations to improve RRIFs for Canadian seniors. Most importantly, we have an opportunity to do something for those who have given us so very much.

• (1800)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for speaking out for seniors with this motion.

I have received countless messages from constituent seniors who are really struggling. I have a note from Donna, who is saying that she has to keep her heat at 64°F because she cannot afford heat.

I guess my question is this: How will this motion help seniors right now? They need help today.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I welcome my hon. colleague to the House. I look forward to meeting.

Our government has undertaken many things for seniors. One of the first things we did was to restore the age of eligibility for OAS back to 65 from 67. I do not want to talk about accomplishments. What I want to say is that the RRIF minimum withdrawal rules were established in 1992 and retirement financial circumstances have changed. The RRIF policy should adapt to the current environment. Canadians are living longer. They are facing longer retirement. Workplace pensions are becoming less common. Interest rates are at a historic low.

The reality is that income is going down while retirement costs are going up and fewer adult children are available to provide care to aging parents. We really are facing a perfect storm. The solutions exist. That is why this motion encourages the government to come back to the House within 12 months and give real recommendations and options to help Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my comments are in line with those of my colleague. We cannot be against virtue and against a motion to study seniors' standard of living at this time.

However, why should we undertake a study? Why should we care about a study? The seniors who call my office do not want a study, they want a cheque.

As we know, the pandemic was very hard on seniors. Furthermore, the government created two classes of seniors by sending cheques to those aged 75 and over. The cost of housing, groceries and medications is increasing.

The last thing in the world that seniors need is a study. They need a cheque.

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

[*English*]

My thanks for the support. This study does matter. We have to start a conversation. It has not happened in this country.

We have enhanced the CPP, and Quebec followed with the QPP. We have raised the GIS for single seniors. We have introduced a special tax-free payment for those who received OAS and GIS. We have invested half a billion dollars for seniors' essential services and supplies. We have provided a one-time payment, and we are increasing the OAS by 10%. Let us start a conversation on RRIFs.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was a thoughtful speech. I have worked with the hon. member previously and really enjoyed the work that I have been able to do with her.

However, I have to follow along with my colleagues on this side of the House. The reality is that this is a non-binding motion that may or may not provide some sort of report. We have a lot of reports. I can think of several years ago when I was first elected. We did a great study on a national seniors strategy, where we had a lot of clear recommendations about what we needed to do next to see seniors prosper.

I am just wondering why another study instead of something that is actually going to get us into the implementation. Why should seniors continue to wait?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I have always enjoyed working with my hon. colleague as well.

I think if all of us can come together to put this to the government, we can have real movement. We have not had movement on RRIFs. We have a real change coming. We have seniors increasing in population by 68%, and all of us have heard the challenges seniors are facing. This is an opportunity for the House to come together and for the government to provide real recommendations, recommendations for action.

• (1805)

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to speak to Motion No. 45, brought forward by my colleague from Etobicoke North.

While I am certainly happy to support this motion, I just cannot help but feel it will result in nothing more than another study collecting dust on a shelf in a minister's office.

Private Members' Business

We have been down this road far too often with the government. Unfortunately, it has the habit of proposing framework after framework, study after study, and road map after road map, and then fails to actually implement any changes.

Seniors need action now and not in 12 months. We have a number of studies that are either done or in the process of being done and recommendations that need to be followed up on. For example, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities is currently looking at two studies that are quite relevant. While I am not privy to the internal mechanics of that committee, I do know the committee is undertaking a study of labour shortages that includes but is not limited to the care economy, which is a sector that encompasses health care workers and personal support workers. I imagine the study would be relevant to the areas of aging and longevity.

HUMA also has a study on the docket to study the effects of COVID-19 on seniors. I assume this is to finish up the fantastic work it did in the last Parliament. Going through the hours of testimony and the many briefs submitted to the committee, it is very clear there will be a large overlap between the information the committee has already gathered and what my hon. colleague's motion hopes to achieve.

I cannot fault the hon. member for presenting her motion on something she is clearly so passionate about instead of waiting for the studies of committees, which are out of her control, to be drafted and returned to this place. That being said, I want to highlight a previous study the same committee did when the Liberal government held the majority of seats in this place.

Back in 2016, a motion moved by the member for Nickel Belt, Motion No. 106, which was seconded by a litany of his caucus colleagues, among other things asked the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to study and report back to the House on important issues such as increasing income security for vulnerable seniors and ensuring quality of life and equality for all seniors and the development of a national seniors strategy.

The result of the committee's work was a 142-page report titled "Advancing Inclusion and Quality of Life for Seniors", which made 29 recommendations. Many of these recommendations speak directly to the motion presented by the colleague across the aisle, and many the government has unsurprisingly failed to act on.

I could go through each one of these, but I only have 10 minutes so I will touch on the first section of the first recommendation. One of the areas my hon. colleague mentions is interest rates and registered retirement income funds, or RRIFs. We, on this side of the House, agree affordability for seniors was an issue before COVID and before the recent record increase in inflation and cost of living under the government's watch. Further, we need to keep in mind that exhausted and starving seniors do not even have RRIFs.

Private Members' Business

The very first recommendation of the 2018 report reads, in part:

That Employment and Social Development Canada work with Finance Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency to review and strengthen existing federal income support programs for vulnerable seniors to ensure they provide adequate income.

If the seniors who have flooded the phone lines of my office in my short six months here are any indication, this criteria has not been met. I might have some sympathy for the government if this report came out four months ago. It came out four years ago. Instead of providing an adequate income for Canadian seniors by any identifiable metric, it has gone backward.

The government promised to help seniors and Canadians suffering during the deadliest pandemic the globe has seen in a century. In order to facilitate this, it implemented COVID-related financial relief. Despite warnings from its own ministerial officials, the government sat on its laurels and allowed this benefit, which was taxable, to decimate tens of thousands of vulnerable, low-income seniors this past year by clawing back their GIS.

● (1810)

I am happy to say that after months of advocacy by my Conservative colleagues as well as my hon. friends from Shefford and North Island—Powell River, the now Minister of Seniors took action to finally fix her government's glaring oversight by introducing Bill C-12 and issuing a one-time payment to affected seniors. While we all would have preferred it to come earlier, I understand that the payments will start to be issued next month. I want to thank the minister and her team for their hard work and I trust they will continue to work with the opposition parties, including those not part of their double entity.

That was only the first government benefit that ended up causing more harm than good to seniors. In July of last year, the then minister of seniors announced a one-time payment of \$500 to seniors aged 75 and older, stating, "Canadian seniors can always count on us to listen, understand their needs and work hard to deliver for them." Apparently the government is unaware that one particularly important need for seniors, especially those on benefits, is to receive timely and accurate tax information. Once again, the government's incompetence resulted in over 90,000 Canadian seniors receiving wrong tax information, jeopardizing their ability to file on time and running the risk of once again having their benefits cut off through no fault of their own. This is why I, along with my colleague from southwest Miramichi, have called on the government to extend the deadline for seniors to file their taxes so that there remains zero risk of vulnerable seniors having their benefits taken from them by the government once again.

When it comes to seniors, this government has an unfortunate habit of taking one step forward but then two steps back. The point I am trying to make here is not to be too harsh on the government but rather to highlight that it needs to take meaningful and effective action now to help our seniors. Seniors cannot afford to be an afterthought when implementing policies and programs that are designed to help them.

We must work together as a House to deliver results. This is why I will be voting in favour of my hon. colleague's motion. I look forward to seeing the findings implemented efficiently, effectively and speedily because that is what seniors deserve.

The Deputy Speaker: Just before we move on to the next speaker, the reason I really enjoy PMB is that there is really no heckling that goes on between members. That is not bad.

Continuing debate, the hon. member for Shefford.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Motion No. 45 regarding the financial security of seniors. When this was first proposed to me, my initial reaction was to think that this has already been done, and we already have solutions that could be put in place now. However, as the Bloc Québécois critic for seniors, I will give this matter all the attention it deserves. Members will understand that I have studied the content of this motion with great interest. Let me assure the House that the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of the motion.

The motion asks that:

(a) the House recognize that (i) seniors deserve a dignified retirement free from financial worry, (ii) many seniors are worried about their retirement savings running out, (iii) many seniors are concerned about being able to live independently in their own homes; and

(b) in the opinion of the House, the government should undertake a study examining population aging, longevity, interest rates, and registered retirement income funds, and report its findings and recommendations to the House within 12 months of the adoption of this motion.

For some seniors, however, this means another year of making tough choices.

My speech will focus on three things. First, I will talk about how the Bloc Québécois has fought hard for an increase in the old age security pension. Then I will talk about pension indexing and the protection of retirement funds.

We are not opposed to the federal government conducting studies on the financial situation of seniors, as Motion No. 45 proposes, because it is important to seek out new tools that would enable seniors to better take advantage of their financial wealth and enjoy the best standard of living possible. No one can be against apple pie.

On one hand, we have seniors who have accumulated a fair amount of assets during their life, it is true, but who nonetheless face financial challenges once they retire. On the other hand, we have more vulnerable seniors who absolutely need the support that the social safety net provides. Let us not forget that one in 10 seniors live close to the poverty line. These two groups of seniors do not have the same concerns, do not think the same way and do not turn to the same solutions.

This evening's motion has more to do with the first group of seniors, but that does not mean that we should not also talk about the second group, the so-called most vulnerable seniors who need our help.

Although many seniors have a decent amount of savings when they retire, they are often left to their own devices when it comes to withdrawing that money, even though they are in a situation in which the risk of longevity could negatively impact their savings, in other words, they could outlive their savings.

Another poll by RBC had similar findings. When respondents from Quebec were asked about their main concerns regarding their retirement finances, 52% of them were worried about not having enough savings. That number was higher than anywhere else in Canada. Some 42% of Quebecers also expressed concerns about being able to maintain their standard of living. In addition, 31% of Quebecers expressed concerns about the cost of health care, and again that number was the highest in Canada.

After Japan and South Korea, Quebec has one of the fastest-aging populations, a demographic challenge that is expected to peak in 2030.

The aging population presents many challenges, but there are a number of things we can do to improve living conditions for seniors, and in particular their financial situation, without conducting a new study.

First, the government needs to substantially increase old age security for all seniors 65 and over, on an ongoing basis.

Obviously, we are also not opposed to a motion calling on the House to recognize that all seniors deserve “a dignified retirement free from financial worry”. In fact, seniors’ quality of life and their financial security are among the Bloc Québécois’s top priorities, and we act accordingly.

Members will recall that, last year, the Bloc Québécois got a motion passed calling on the House of Commons to increase old age security. Everyone but the Liberals supported the motion.

There is currently a petition to increase OAS by \$110 a month for people 65 and up. I am sponsoring it, but it was submitted by Samuel Lévesque of Saint-Eustache on behalf of his grandparents with the goal of achieving intergenerational equity.

Still, it is surprising that the Liberals would put this kind of wording in their motion when they voted against our motion and chose to increase OAS by 10%, but only for people 75 and up, thereby creating two classes of seniors.

That is a funny way of recognizing that seniors have a right to a retirement “free from financial worry”. By making this choice, the Liberals are abandoning seniors aged 65 to 74, who account for about half of those collecting OAS, 57% to be precise. In other words, the government is abandoning 3.7 million beneficiaries.

Regardless of what the Liberals think, financial insecurity does not hold off until people turn 75. The FADOQ agrees. We can share numerous examples of people experiencing financial insecurity before the age of 75. Any of my colleagues here can attest to that.

Given Canada’s less-than-stellar record on income replacement in retirement, we might at the very least have expected the Liberals to implement the 10% increase more quickly and to extend it to those 65 and up.

Private Members’ Business

It is also hard to understand how the Liberals can propose the notion of a “dignified retirement free from financial worry” considering how they handled the CERB and GIS file. Despite knowing about the problem since the spring of 2021, the government took too long to correct an inequity in the interaction between CERB and GIS.

● (1815)

Many seniors have had their GIS cut since last July because they legitimately received CERB payments in the previous year.

The member for Joliette and I sent letters to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Seniors on two separate occasions to demand that the situation be fixed as quickly as possible. It was not until 2022, following significant pressure from the Bloc Québécois, that the government finally decided to take action and reimburse the affected seniors for their losses.

Second, let us talk about the indexing of pensions. It is especially important to talk about it now, considering how high inflation is and how the people most affected are those on fixed incomes, such as seniors.

For a dignified retirement free from financial worry, benefits need to be increased. The transition to retirement usually means a major drop in the average standard of living. According to OECD estimates, the net pension replacement rate was 50.7% of pre-retirement income in Canada in 2018, while the average for member countries was 57.6%. The EU average was 63%.

The runaway inflation we have been seeing for some time now is driving up the cost of groceries and rent. This is having an impact on seniors’ finances. Those who are in a tough financial situation have been hit hard, as evidenced by the increased use of food banks everywhere. Organizations that help homeless women have noticed an increase in the number of elderly women among their clients.

The Association québécoise de défense des droits des personnes retraitées et préretraitées, an organization that advocates for the rights of retired and pre-retired people, has noted an increase in incoming messages over the past year, including dozens of emails from seniors who have ended up in disastrous situations. A person’s ability to react to the rising cost of living is obviously limited when that person no longer has paid employment.

When it comes to indexing, we know that OAS and the GIS are indexed to the consumer price index. The indexing rate for 2022 is 2.7%, based on the previous year. However, according to Statistics Canada, the rate of inflation reached 5.1% in January 2022, or nearly double the indexing rate. Even setting aside this one-time discrepancy between the indexing rate and the actual inflation rate, what about the performance of the calculation method in the long term?

Private Members' Business

Indexation is a key determinant of the quality of benefit coverage. As the average life expectancy has increased in recent years, indexation of pensions has become more important, because the payments are made over a longer period of time. The standard of living and purchasing power of seniors are therefore directly affected. Purchasing power is affected when a person's pension increases at a slower pace than the cost of goods and services. It is a question of math.

For example, if the projected level of inflation for the next few decades is 2%, this means an approximately 50% decline in purchasing power over 30 years if a pension is not indexed.

Many pension advocacy groups are suggesting that pensions be calculated based on trends in wages rather than trends in the consumer price index. Many have decried the current situation, including the FADOQ, which spoke out against the sluggish indexation in July 2021, pointing out that the increase is not even enough to buy a coffee at Tim Hortons.

Third, concerning pension funds, my colleague, the member for Manicouagan, worked very hard to protect Bill C-253, which was introduced by that member in 2020 and then died on the Order Paper when an election was called. All four parties had been in agreement, but that bill died anyway. Another bill had met the same fate when the 2019 election was called. We have not made progress.

It is up to the Government of Canada to pass legislation to prevent these mishaps. The public understands very well that we must do everything we can to enhance and protect seniors' buying power. We all know that the population is aging. The number of people over the age of 75 in Quebec is increasing and will double by 2040. The number of people aged 85 and over is actually expected to triple during that time.

We must also help more seniors remain in the labour force. The Bloc Québécois made various proposals during the election campaign. We suggested that a tax credit for experienced workers be created. We also proposed that seniors who want to work longer be allowed to earn a higher income for the purposes of calculating the GIS.

I would like to make one last remark. Having worked in the community setting, at an organization that sought to raise awareness about elder abuse, I am very aware that it is not cool to talk about old people. They are seen as a drain on our society. In other words, we do not care about old people. Let us stop being ageist and recognize them for who they really are: a grey-haired source of strength. They deserve recognition for everything they have done for our society over the years. Truly, let us work together for seniors in our society.

• (1820)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank you, as always, for acknowledging me here so that I can do my work in the House.

We are here today to talk about a motion that commits to another study. When we look at the reality of seniors across this country, what we know is that the bar of dignity for so many seniors has

been lowered yet again. I always use the bar of dignity as my reference point, because I fundamentally believe that all Canadians should be treated with dignity. They should be able to feel that they can take care of themselves, and that when they go out and need essential things, they can get those things.

I agree with the motion before us. I think it is important that seniors be treated with dignity, that they not be overwhelmed with financial worry, and that they not be worried about their retirement savings running out. I think it is important that seniors should be able to live independently in their homes. Those are all important things. However, I also believe that there are a lot of shelves in this place filled with reports about how that is true and what next steps we need to take to make that happen. Here we are: We have a non-binding motion that is going to maybe result in a study so that there is yet another report on a shelf somewhere talking about what seniors fundamentally need in our country. I just do not know how long seniors want to wait to have these things addressed.

Earlier today, I met with representatives from Single Seniors for Tax Fairness. I really appreciated my time spent with them, talking about how the realities of our system benefit seniors who are married or in relationships, and that there is this huge, growing gap for our single seniors who have to look after themselves on their own. These are largely women who maybe worked at great jobs where they had a great income or had worked jobs that were low-income. To me, both of those are incredibly valuable and should be honoured and respected, but at the end of the day, they are the exact stakeholder group that is worried about whether they are going to be able to live with dignity for the last years of their lives and whether they are going to be able to pay for the essential things that they need.

I remember, several years ago, that we did a pretty substantive study on a national seniors strategy. I still think it is unbelievable that we do not have a framework in this country that says, "Hey, we have a large population of people who are aging, and because of that we should probably have a plan federally about how we are going to work with that and how we are going to work with provinces and territories in a meaningful way to make sure that none of the seniors across this country gets left behind."

Unfortunately, COVID showed us that seniors are being left behind. We saw it again and again in horrific ways. This was not something that should have surprised Canadians. We have been hearing from these folks, and from groups that advocate for them, that we do not have the proper infrastructure in this country. When it comes to care facilities, we do not have the systems in place that really focus on making sure that people are cared for in a respectful way. We got to see it in the most horrific ways, and I do not think that this study or this report on a shelf would make a difference.

I am really torn. Do I think it would be good to have more information about what we need to do better? Maybe, but what I am really interested in is something that is actually going to make the action happen: something that is going to look at the reality that people are living longer and that their retirement savings have to last substantively longer, and something that is going to look at how money can be moved around and at what age one has to move over to a RIF. Those are important things to talk about. However, I also know that a lot of that work has been done.

We need solutions and not studies. I really mean that, because I have talked to so many seniors across this country and in my own riding. Seniors have talked to me about the fact that they have to cut their medication in half, especially in the early months of the year when they have not paid the amount that means they get free medication. Seniors are putting their health at risk for the first few months, because they cannot afford to pay what they need to pay to get the medication they need.

When we look at housing, the reality is that affordable housing that is safe for seniors is getting harder and harder to find. We just saw, with the GIS clawback, a lot of seniors lose up to 100% of their GIS.

● (1825)

How many of those seniors actually lost their affordable housing? They are going to get that extra money, which is okay, but they are living in a place that is far more expensive than they were before and they simply do not have the money to make ends meet.

When we look at these solutions, they have to make sense for seniors. Doing another study is making a promise that we will do a study and maybe the government will do something about it this time. I am not persuaded that I will support this. I hear that everybody else looks at this and thinks this is a nice study, let us do that and no harm done, but is there harm done? How long do seniors have to wait? I am really torn on this.

I think that we need better plans. We need actions that are going to be taken. We need to make sure that there is support in place for people as they age so that they can have dignity. I think of my own mother, who is in a long-term care facility. She was a young senior and had a massive stroke. Her whole life changed in a day and our whole family had to change to accommodate that. I see her all the time. She has a decent pension. She was a nurse most of her life and has provided services to the communities that she served. She struggles to make ends meet.

This is assisted living. If she has a bad month, which means she cannot go downstairs and eat the food they provide for her, she has to pay a lot of extra money to have it come up to her. She does not have that money. It gets harder and harder.

I also think about the fact that seniors are starting to lose their well-being because they cannot afford to make ends meet. It impacts one's health, if one cannot afford to make ends meet. We look at the spectrum of seniors as they age. We know that some are doing very well. We know that some are really struggling. We know there are a lot in the middle who sometimes have a good year and sometimes have a very bad year.

Private Members' Business

There are a lot of solutions that could be provided that would really make some meaningful changes. I think of a bill that I brought to the House that talked about seniors who receive the guaranteed income supplement every year. We know that between 20,000 to 30,000 seniors every year lose their GIS for up to three or four months. Why do they lose it? They lose it because they do not get their taxes in on time. Do they get their taxes on time? Absolutely, they do, every year. However, for many reasons, such as their health, that they are caring for a loved one and they are elderly or the onset of dementia, they do not get their taxes in on time and that means on July 1, they lose their GIS for up to four months.

It was a simple bill that said let us just make sure that every senior across the country who receives the guaranteed income supplement gets a year of grace to get their taxes in so that no senior has to go through months without that extra bit.

I will never forget, my first summer as a member of Parliament, getting that call from a lovely woman who was 84 years old who had lost her GIS. The government said, yes, it was going to get that in place as soon as possible, but her landlord said that, since she could not pay the rent, she had to get out. She was 84 years old. Where was she going to go? We worked really hard to make sure that did not happen, but it does not seem right.

I want to see a bill that is actually going to take action, that is going to make sure that seniors are at the very core of it and that we do not just have another report on a shelf somewhere telling us what we should do while seniors suffer across the country.

I regret to say that I am not sure I will be supporting this, and that the NDP is not sure it will be supporting this. How many reports do we need on a shelf, when we urgently need substantive action for seniors across the country now?

● (1830)

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to stand and speak to the motion put forward by the hon. member for Etobicoke North.

Private Members' Business

I listened to the previous speaker's comments about her mom being in a retirement home and the added expenses and so on. The whole core of the motion my colleague put forward is to talk about RRIFs and the fact that when someone is 71 years of age, they have to start taking out the money that they put away for years. That takes a lot of the money. People are living longer, and they are being forced to start taking money out at 71 years old, which often puts them in a higher tax bracket. By the time they are in their mid-80s, they often do not have any funds left. They were forced to take all of their savings when they did not even need it, and then they were taxed on it.

As we promote RRIFs and RSPs and all these programs that we bring in, we have to pay attention to what happens when people get to be 71 and are forced to start taking money out of their RRSPs at a much higher tax rate. If a senior ends up in a retirement home or another centre when they are in their mid-80s, they have limited funds. How long is their money meant to last?

The whole intent of the motion that my colleague has put forward is to focus on the issue of RRIFs and to get the government of the day to change the current system and allow people to hold on to their RRSPs until 75 or 80 or whatever the magic number is. People are living much longer, so they need to hold on to their money and not end up having to give it back to the taxman.

Back in the days of the Harper government in 2010, I was the critic for seniors. We did a study and a white paper on the whole issue of what we needed to be doing for seniors. It was a variety of things. One of them was of course to change the RRIFs. That was in 2010. We were talking about the very issue that my colleague has on the table now, to change the RRIFs so we would not have to start pulling out all of our savings at 71 years of age.

I would fully expect that everybody in the House would support something that makes sense and would end up helping seniors, because I know we all have the same feelings for seniors and we want to make sure we are helping them as much as we can. After this motion is passed, I would hope that within the 12-month period of time, the government would come back with a recommendation specifically saying that it is going to change the 71 years of age requirement to a minimum of 75 years of age to help the very seniors we are talking about.

In this motion from my colleague, we are not talking about the OAS and the GIS and the seniors at that level. This is specific to the RRIF program. The withdrawal rules are outdated and antiquated, and as much as we have made a lot of changes and helped seniors a lot throughout the pandemic and so on, ultimately we have to change some parts of the tax system that penalize people.

We do have a Minister of Seniors in the government now. We had a minister of seniors previously. Ms. Schulte was the first minister of seniors, and she spent an enormous amount of time and effort on behalf of all of seniors in Canada to bring forth a variety of changes. Whether we are talking about the OAS or the GIS, there were changes and constant discussions on how we could make the lives of our seniors that much better.

Loud voices need to be happening. This motion gives us a chance to continue that discussion, but it has to be focused on the

RRIFs. We need the tax changes to happen. The majority of Canadians are going to live long past the retirement age of 65. We know that. I believe the median age is already 84 or 85.

● (1835)

I go to a lot of birthdays now for people who are 102 and 103. By the time they get there, they do not have anything left because they have taken the money out of their home and used it all. Retirement homes and nursing homes are quite expensive. The seniors who are calling us and talking to us want us to make sure that, if they are prepared to save their money and they have it, we should let them keep it and not force them into withdrawals so they end up not having the money to pay the bill at the retirement home. Then their children end up having to contribute more than what is necessarily the purpose for them to do.

If we can stay focused on what the motion is about, we can have a discussion at committee so that we start talking about what tax changes can be made to help the very people that each and every one of us cares about in the House. The criticism is that it will be another study. However, it will be a study focused specifically on RRIFs, and it will give us a chance to have a bigger conversation about what happens when people are 65, 70 and 75. If they have savings, are they forced to take it out? Yes, currently they are forced to take it out and they end up having to give probably a good third of that back to the tax man.

I am proud to be part of the government, but I am not proud to be under a government that is taking seniors' money and making them have to pay taxes on it. They worked all their lives to save that money. They should be allowed to take it out as they need it, not be forced to do so at any particular age. I want a complete abolition of having an age when we have to start withdrawing our RRSPs and the rest of it. The goal for me in supporting the motion is to see that it gets eliminated completely. If seniors have \$100,000 in the bank, let them draw it out as they need it as they get older, especially given the fact that people are living to 101 and 102 years old.

That is the focus that I see in this motion. It is to keep these kinds of discussions going so that we all work together to get this change to happen. It will take all of us working together and pushing the government of the day to make this happen. In 12 months, there will be a report, whether we agree with it or not. If we do not agree with it, then it is up to us to change it.

This is an opportunity for us all to make a difference here in the House on this motion, and I hope that everybody will support it. I know my colleague puts it forward with the utmost sincerity because she has seen it herself and wants to make sure that we make the changes that are going to help. Many of those changes could end up helping many of us in the House today.

• (1840)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for an opportunity to speak to the seniors in my riding of Peterborough—Kawartha. Every member of the House knows how important our seniors are. Every member of the House hears from seniors regularly. As we have heard from many members this evening, this motion is important but there is a lot of concern on action. Conversation is really important and bringing awareness is important. One of my favourite sayings is “education equals awareness equals change”. However, as my colleague from Hastings—Lennox and Addington has said, we do need action.

I want to take this opportunity to read a message from one of my constituents, as it is my job as an MP to advocate on their behalf.

“Michelle, I hope that’s okay. I’m not politically in the wave.” He was not sure if he was allowed to call me Michelle. “Is there any way that our existing governments can help seniors with their expenses? I moved here to Millbrook, Ontario”, which is in the riding of my colleague from Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, “from Toronto many years ago just to get away from the city. After 15-plus years, my company pension is running out. Now with an annual income ready to drop well below \$16,000, I am in a bind to say the least, [with] rent, hydro, gas, Nexicom”, which is Internet and very expensive for basic cable Internet and land line. “I don’t have a cellphone and could not afford one to begin with.

“I have to give up my Legion membership and their lottery pool.” That one makes me very sad. “Being handicapped, my personal care worker costs are over \$1,000 a year. Foodland prices are through the roof: two dollars for one potato, three dollars for one tomato, etc. I’m not asking for any handouts in any way, but turning 75 next month, I am in trouble to say the least. I love the village, but [it has] multiple housing developments. We only have one bank machine. I’m not complaining to you. I just have to vent. Thank you very much for reading my concerns.” This is from Bob, a constituent.

I wanted to take this opportunity to read one of my constituents’ letters. There are many hundreds more like him. They truly are struggling and truly cannot afford to make ends meet, and it is our job, every single member of the House, to stand up for seniors.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of Private Members’ Business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the RCMP provides essential services in communities, especially in the communities that I represent. My

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constituents know how important their work is and appreciate the RCMP members who serve our community. RCMP members deserve appropriate pay for the work that they do and we do not believe that is debatable. To be clear, the issue at hand is not about the pay rate for RCMP members, but rather the financial burden that has been placed on local municipalities and the Liberal government’s failure to engage appropriately with other levels of government.

The collective agreement negotiated last summer by the Liberal government resulted in not only increased policing costs going forward but significant one-time retroactive wage payments. Despite their exclusion from the process, the financial burden of this collective agreement largely falls on the shoulders of other levels of government. These costs have placed a tremendous constraint on municipalities in my riding of Battlefords—Lloydminster and no doubt on rural municipalities across this country.

Municipalities certainly anticipated increased policing costs following these negotiations, but the negotiated agreement far exceeded what was anticipated. We know that municipal governments cannot run a deficit budget by law to cover these costs, so without assistance from other levels of government, municipal governments are faced with cutting services in communities or significant tax hikes. Neither is a suitable option for my constituents.

We cannot forget that these bills are coming due as an affordability crisis continues and is continuing to balloon in this country. The City of North Battleford in my riding has calculated an annual policing cost increase in the range of \$800,000 to just over \$1 million annually. That is in addition to the one-time retroactive wage payment of over \$1.6 million this year. For the City of Lloydminster in my riding, the retroactive payment costs are estimated to be up to over \$1.8 million.

Other municipalities in my riding, like Cut Knife, Wilkie and Paradise Hill, have all expressed similar concerns with their budgetary constraints. These municipalities have asked the Liberal government to provide them some relief by absorbing the one-time retroactive wage costs. I do not think that ask is unreasonable, even more so because the Liberal government chose to exclude municipalities, provinces and stakeholders from the process.

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When I asked the Minister of Public Safety to agree to this reasonable solution, his response was disappointing. The minister not only disregarded the fiscal position many municipalities find themselves in by asserting the current divisions of cost, but he also led the House to believe that there was an established level of communication between his government and local governments in my riding. Sending municipalities a bill and a payment schedule does not by any means equate to meaningful engagement.

Will the Liberal government admit today that it has placed rural municipalities, like the ones I represent, in a difficult position, and will it finally step up now and throw them a lifeline by absorbing the one-time back-pay costs?

• (1845)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is a cornerstone of policing across much of rural Canada, in the Canadian north and in many towns and large urban areas. Its members keep our communities safe. The RCMP is the frontline police service of jurisdiction in the territories, in all provinces except Quebec and Ontario, and in more than 150 municipalities.

The Government of Canada shares the cost of these policing services. In large municipalities, the federal government pays 10% of salary, equipment and other costs. For municipalities with a population of fewer than 15,000 people, the federal government pays 30% of these costs.

I fully agree with the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster that RCMP members deserve fair compensation for their work in keeping our streets safe. That is why, in 2017, our government passed Bill C-7. This historic, first-ever collective agreement between the Government of Canada and the bargaining agent for RCMP members, the National Police Federation, came into effect on August 6 of last year. The agreement provided a reasonable economic increase and market adjustments to address wage differences that existed between RCMP members and reservists and other police services across Canada. It marked the first time RCMP members had received a pay increase since 2017. It also brought their salaries in line with other police services across Canada. The agreement was fair both for our hard-working RCMP members and for Canadian taxpayers.

Our government is mindful that policing represents a significant cost for all communities and local governments. Officials are working hard to engage directly with every contract policing jurisdiction on the costs to implement the new collective agreement. They have written to all partners to provide information, and meetings with individual jurisdictions to discuss their specific situations have started and will continue in the coming weeks.

In closing, let me assure members that our government will continue to work with contract jurisdictions on the financial impacts of the collective agreement, and we will continue to support the RCMP and all jurisdictions to ensure the safety and security of our communities.

• (1850)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, that response disappoints every municipality that finds itself in this position of fiscal precari-

ty because of the agreement that the Liberal government negotiated. There is no meaningful engagement with the government. It does not operate in partnership or collaboration with other levels of government.

I just want to bring to the parliamentary secretary's attention a letter that was addressed and sent to the Minister of Public Safety on November 30, 2021, from the Minister of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety from Saskatchewan. It says that the province was excluded in these negotiations, as were the municipalities, and that the Government of Saskatchewan is requesting that the Government of Canada absorb the entire fiscal impact of unilateral decisions regarding retroactive wage compensation for the prior periods of 2017 to 2021.

Is it normal for the government not to respond to letters from provincial ministers?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, our government appreciates the financial planning challenges and complexities in the implementation of the collective agreement. We know that the retroactive salary increase puts financial pressure on municipalities and contract policing jurisdictions. We collaborated with our partners throughout the collective bargaining process at all levels.

Our government remains steadfast in our commitment to continue our strong partnerships with the jurisdictions. Bilateral meetings have started in order to answer partners' questions and better understand their needs. Our objective is clear: We are engaging all partners in a meaningful way to enable open dialogue and with a view to supporting them in meeting their financial obligations.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been hearing from some Canadians who are considering or have made the decision to join Ukraine's foreign legion. That is obviously a very difficult decision. What those Canadians are not looking for from government is a repeat of travel advice. Those who are choosing to go and fight in defence of Ukraine are already aware there are significant risks associated with doing so and they do so in full knowledge of those risks.

What those Canadians are looking for is legal clarity from the government. My question, in the first instance, was never about if the government can give those people life advice. It was about whether the government could help those people have the clarity of knowing how the law applies to them, specifically with respect to the Foreign Enlistment Act that was passed in 1937, which I think has an important area of ambiguity that the government would do well to clarify. The Foreign Enlistment Act makes it an offence for a Canadian to join or engage in the armed forces of a foreign state at war with a "friendly foreign state". That is the operative phrase. If someone is going abroad to fight against a friendly foreign state, then that person is committing an offence in Canada.

The act does not contain a definition of what constitutes a friendly foreign state. In fact, in the entire history of this act, from what I was able to discern, there have not been any prosecutions under it, which might suggest that the risk of prosecution for a Canadian who is going to fight abroad is low. However, people are still looking for that legal clarity and they do not have the benefit of legal precedent to look at. A friendly foreign state could mean a state that Canada is not at war with. A friendly foreign state could mean an ally or partner of Canada or a like-minded state in some ways, but the problem is that we just do not know.

My original question to the government was if it could clarify whether, for the purposes of the act, not in colloquial usage of the term but for the purposes of the act, is the Russian Federation considered a friendly foreign state.

However, I think more broadly it is important for the government to consider the need for clarity around this legislation, because there are many other cases where Canadians choose to participate in conflicts, feel very deeply on behalf of one side or the other, and there may be national interests that are impacted in Canada by those actions. We do not have clarity in the law with respect to when that would or would not be allowed at all.

I asked the government then, and I am asking the government now, to provide Canadians with legal clarity with respect to the application of the Foreign Enlistment Act, and in particular, the provisions around what constitutes a friendly foreign state. Could the government clearly state that, for the purposes of this act, the Russian Federation is not considered a friendly foreign state?

Could the government also consider regulations or modifications that would provide greater meaning to that section, so that Canadians who are taking this risk to fight in the defence of Ukraine do not have to worry about the possible, what I would argue, misapplication of this statute?

The law also gives the government an opportunity, through Governor in Council regulations, to, “by order or regulation,” provide for “the application of this Act, with necessary modifications, to any case in which there is a state of armed conflict”. Therefore, the government does have the ability, under this act, to put forward regulations that would provide that clarity.

I have an Order Paper question as well that asks the government specifically to respond, to provide a list and to provide information on what it considers a friendly foreign state, because Canadians should know whether or not this law applies to them.

• (1855)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the Foreign Enlistment Act, I can confirm that it does prohibit Canadians from enlisting in the armed forces of any foreign state at war with a friendly foreign state. It also prohibits anyone in Canada from recruiting or inducing another person to enlist with any foreign armed forces. The act defines “armed forces” as including army, navy and air forces or services, but excludes medical and other services engaged in humanitarian work for or under the Canadian Red Cross or other similar Canadian organizations. To my knowledge, no court has considered the act, nor

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am I aware of any prosecutions under the act. It is important to note that decisions about specific criminal investigations are made by relevant police jurisdictions. Decisions on whether to prosecute are made by independent prosecutors.

I want to be clear that the Government of Canada is concerned for the safety of anyone travelling into Ukraine at this time for any purpose, including to take part in the conflict. Global Affairs Canada has advised against all travel to Ukraine since February 1, 2022, and has recently stated in a new travel advisory that the safety of Canadians is at high risk if they engage in active combat. The Government of Canada may not be able to provide any assistance to Canadians who join militias or armies and are injured or captured. The decision to travel is the sole responsibility of the traveller, and we cannot guarantee the safety and security of Canadians abroad.

That said, Canada is committed to contributing to the enormous international effort that is under way to collect and preserve evidence in pursuit of accountability for the serious allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. To that end, we are working on multiple fronts and joined the group of 41 states that ultimately referred the case to the International Criminal Court. I would also highlight that Canada is presently supporting the International Criminal Court through expert deployments and is exploring other possible areas for support. We will continue to co-operate with the court and respond to its calls for assistance in this matter. There is no doubt that this is an international effort, including in the courtroom.

Canada has been and will continue to be there for the people of Ukraine. Together, we strive for peace, security and justice. Having said that, over the years we have seen literally hundreds, if not thousands, of private members' bills and initiatives that have been brought to the chamber. Just prior to going into this discussion, we had a private members' hour, and I would highly suggest and recommend that this might be one of the considerations my friend from across the way might want to put forward, if he feels so empowered, to better address the issue.

• (1900)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I have been working on a private member's bill initiative for the past six years. People were working on the same initiative for 10 years before that, and it has not passed yet. It is something everyone agrees on. That just shows that, when the government has the regulatory power to solve a problem, saying one should wait 15 years for a private member's bill is not very helpful.

I think members could reasonably draw the conclusion, from the statement of the parliamentary secretary and from the statements of ministers, that the Russian Federation is not considered a friendly foreign state, and I think some Canadians will take some comfort in that. However, it is a little frustrating that the parliamentary secretary could not provide a clear response to a clear question, and it is not a partisan question at all. It is simply saying that it is up to the government, in a sense, to define in the context of its foreign policy what states it considers friendly and not friendly, for the purposes of the act. Presumably, courts would refer to statements and opinions of the government, when considering what is a friendly foreign state.

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Why will the parliamentary secretary not simply and clearly state that, for the purposes of the act, the Russian Federation is not considered a friendly foreign state?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we have different departments within the government that are taking a look at the situation that is at play in Europe, and specifically Ukraine. I would suggest to members that these departments have very capable and ably-minded individuals who are very aware of the situation, and we continue to move forward. The issue of humanitarian aid is something that the Government of Canada has taken very seriously, as Canadians have taken it seriously. We have seen that in terms of monetary contributions, and we see that every day, whether it is with prayers or other forms of support that go to Ukraine from Canada. I am sure the specific issue the member has raised will work its way through in a very natural way.

HEALTH

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise this evening to let all members, and all Canadians, know that it is time to end the mandates. This issue is so much bigger than any one individual piece of the pandemic restrictions we have seen over the course of the last two years. It is bigger than any one hardship, but the collective hardships that Canadians have faced amount to so much.

The decisions that the government has made over this time, as we have heard time and time again, have been grounded in science. Hon. members in this place are expected to be honourable at all times, to be honest, to not mislead the House and to be forthright, so this evening I am going to give the parliamentary secretary the opportunity to tell Canadians what the government's plan is. On which date is the government going to end federal mandates?

We know that every single one of the provinces have either ended their vaccine and mask mandates, or they have announced the date they are going to do that. Every single one of them has done that. Those decisions were made by the chief medical officer of health of each of those provinces, guided by the science. We have 10 of the provinces, with 10 chief medical officers of health, all agreeing that it is safe to lift those restrictions based on the science.

The same should be true for the federal chief medical officer of health and for the federal government. Instead, the hardships Canadians have faced over the last two years persist, with those such as the federal public servants who have been put out of work because of those restrictions or a medical choice. Some even received their first dose in a two-dose series and had a reaction, or they were not able to proceed with their second shot. Some were not prepared to disclose their vaccination status to their employer. That is true for federal public servants, RCMP and members of the Canadian forces.

We know that Canadians have the strictest domestic travel regulations in the world. Canadians cannot take a plane to fly to visit an ailing loved one, see the birth of a child, mourn the passing of a family member or a close friend if they do not check the boxes that the government has set out. This is the federal government, when the provinces have said that it is safe to waive those restrictions. Our tourism sector businesses have been incredibly hard hit.

Speaking with members of the Frontier Duty Free Association, members in my riding and their representatives from across Canada, I have been hearing about how they are at risk of losing their businesses and their homes because of these continued regulations, but the science says that it is safe to lift the restrictions. I look forward to the parliamentary secretary telling me all the good things and about the lives that have been saved. We all celebrate saved lives, but now we are at a point two years in where the science tells us it is safe. It is safe to lift those restrictions.

We need to shift to a model of personal responsibility, like so many Canadians have done over the last two years, by following the rules, staying home, masking up and, for many, getting vaccinated. Now that personal responsibility is theirs to bear, and we as a society are prepared to follow the science, to end the mask mandate and end the vaccine mandates because that is what the science says.

● (1905)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes for his question about how we are handling our international borders.

I would like to remind the hon. member that the Government of Canada announced new border measures that will take effect this Friday, April 1. It is a step that so many Canadians have been waiting for and it is great news for snowbirds who are keen to come home after spending the winter abroad.

These new measures are a result of the tenacity of citizens. Canadians, residents, foreign workers, truckers, health care workers and many others have steadfastly worn masks, kept their distance, sanitized and followed public health guidelines. They have postponed, as he mentioned, vacations, weddings, birthdays and so much more.

They have lined up to take not just one or two but three vaccinations. They understand the value of coming together to protect our most vulnerable. I wish I could thank everyone who has committed to these measures over the last two years. It is those sacrifices and that sense of community that allows us to transition this week to a new phase at the border.

I know my hon. colleague will join me in offering our thanks here in the House of Commons. Starting April 1, fully vaccinated travellers will no longer need to provide recent COVID-19 test results in order to enter Canada by air, land or water. Although boosters have shown to help Canadians avoid COVID, they are not necessary to qualify as fully vaccinated.

Public safety remains at the forefront of all of our decision-making, so while we no longer need all fully vaccinated travellers to be tested, some of them will be selected randomly for mandatory testing. Those who are selected will be glad to know they are not required to quarantine while waiting for their test results.

To further safeguard Canadians, we will continue to require valid accepted proof of pre-entry testing for travellers aged five and up who are not vaccinated or are only partially vaccinated.

I would like to remind our returning snowbirds and other travellers that regardless of how long they were away from Canada, we still need them to submit their information in ArriveCAN before arriving in Canada, either by using the free mobile app or by printing their receipt from a computer.

If I may, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Canada Border Services Agency employees for their tireless work over the last two years. We will continue to move toward a more sustainable approach to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I echo the parliamentary secretary's praise of our dedicated CBSA officers, including at the two ports of entry in my riding, but PSAC, which represents federal workers, is calling for an end to the unscientific mandate that is keeping their members and employees off the job.

The businesses along the border, like the duty-free shops I mentioned before, are suffering. They are unable to do business. Those ones in particular were disproportionately hit hard by border restrictions and are just asking the government to follow the science

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and lift the federal mandates, just as has been done in all the provinces where each one of those ports of entry operates.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, over the last few months the Government of Canada has had to make adjustments to public health measures already in place at our borders in an effort to tackle the omicron variant of COVID-19. Based on a number of factors, including Canada's high vaccination rates, the increasing availability and use of rapid tests to detect infection, hospitalization rates and growing domestic availability of therapeutics and treatments, the Government of Canada is adjusting and will continue to adjust its border and travel measures.

Canadians continue to be asked to please exercise caution while travelling abroad, understand the risks that are still associated with international travel and take the necessary precautions.

Rules and public health measures can change quickly. The Government of Canada will continue to enforce public health measures at the border in response to the evolving threat of COVID-19, and we will always protect Canadians.

● (1910)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:10 p.m.)

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