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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, March 30, 2022

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

• (1400)

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: It being Wednesday, I will ask the member for Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation to lead us in our national anthem.

[Members sang the national anthem]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we start Statements by Members, I just want to remind everybody to make sure to keep them all to a minute. The last thing I want to do is shut people down on their statements. The last few days they have been a bit long, but they have been great statements nonetheless.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

RAMADAN

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend Muslims in Pickering—Uxbridge, across Canada and around the world will mark the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, a time where Muslims will embark on a month-long journey of fasting and prayer.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to host Iftars and join our Muslim community at the Masjid Usman, where we are reminded that Ramadan also serves as a time to put the needs of others before our own.

As Muslims fast during the day, they reflect on the values at the heart of Islam: service to others, gratitude and compassion. These values continue to resonate now more than ever. Muslim Canadians have made and continue to make invaluable contributions to our country, from serving on the front lines during COVID-19 to supporting numerous community initiatives, including collecting food during Ramadan for families in need.

May this month be a blessed one.

[Member spoke in Arabic]

INFLATION

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the lineups have already started. Canadians will fill up their gas tanks today and tomorrow in advance of the latest price surge, which will take Canadian gas prices to an all-time high. The increase of the federal carbon tax of \$50 per tonne will kick in April 1.

Along with the price of gas, the price of everyday essentials will also be going up. Inflation has already surged to 5.7%, the highest in decades, and it is climbing. The majority of Canadians already say they are struggling just to keep up, and it is no wonder. Let us look at food prices. They are up 5.7%. Meat alone is up 10.1%. Bread is up 7.5%. Fresh fruit is up 8.2%.

After Friday, Canadians will be paying even more. When will the NDP-Liberal government realize it is hurting all Canadians?

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• (1405)

OUR LADY OF LEBANON PARISH

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to rise with overwhelming pride to share news of a significant and historic celebration. The Lebanese Maronite Catholics at Our Lady of Lebanon parish will officially launch the celebrations of the opening of our new church and Cedar Event Centre in Halifax West.

On the last weekend of April, the community will gather for a solemn mass and dinner banquet alongside His Excellency Bishop Paul-Marwan Tabet. I want to acknowledge all those whose donations, generosity, time, effort and vision went into realizing this tremendous accomplishment.

[Translation]

Our church is the heart of our religious, social and cultural life.

I am deeply grateful to everyone who contributed over many years.

[Member spoke in Arabic]

[Translation]

*Statements by Members***MAURICIE UNION OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS**

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize Jean-Marie Giguère's commitment to the Mauricie branch of the Union des producteurs agricoles.

Today we celebrate nearly a quarter-century of devotion to the farm union movement, including nine years as president of UPA Mauricie. Jean-Marie Giguère is passionate about horses and has developed significant expertise in breeding magnificent Percherons. He will now have more time to spend on his passion and his family.

On Sunday, Martin Marcouiller was elected to take his place. Mr. Marcouiller has held various positions with the UPA since 2004 and, having spent time in his kitchen talking about various agricultural ideas, I can guarantee that the future of UPA Mauricie is in good hands. As Mr. Giguère says, "The future of agriculture is up to society as a whole." I agree.

I thank both men for their passion.

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NEW PRESIDENT OF CHILE

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 11, 2022, I had the honour of representing Canada in Santiago during the transfer of power to the new president, Gabriel Boric.

At the age of 34, he became the youngest president of Chile, leading a young government comprised mostly of women. The new president concluded his speech on a balcony in La Moneda with the famous words of Salvador Allende: Here we are again, dear compatriots, opening up great avenues where free men and women will pass to build a better society.

The Boric government represents a wind of change that promises a more progressive, feminist and inclusive future for the Chilean people.

In this symbolic year of 80 years of diplomatic relations between our two countries and of the 25th anniversary of the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement, and as we approach the 50th anniversary of the coup, I wish this new government every success. I look forward to working on our Canada-Chile relations.

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[English]

SASKATCHEWAN VOLUNTEER

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Joyce Willick, who turns 85 years young next month, has been named one of nine recipients of Saskatchewan's volunteer medals. She has driven the Zamboni at the arena for over 30 years and is being recognized for her dedication and commitment to her community of Spiritwood.

In addition to her duties at the arena, Joyce is also an honorary life member of the Spiritwood Skating Club, has been involved in both minor hockey and softball, is very active with the local seniors group, has helped the Spiritwood tourist booth and is an active member of her church.

Feeling overwhelmed by the honour, she said, "It's not something you set out to do and it just blew me away. I thought it was a scam." When congratulated on the recognition recently—at the rink, of course—she replied, "There are so many people more deserving."

A sign of a true volunteer is that they enjoy what they are doing; therefore, it does not feel much like work.

Joyce's energy and enthusiasm are inspiring and make her a perfect role model. I ask all members to join me today in recognizing a very special volunteer, Joyce Willick.

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● (1410)

THE GREAT LAKES

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Great Lakes are binational treasures that drive our economy by creating 238,000 jobs and billions in economic activity. This fiscal support is buoyed by many social and environmental advantages, which jointly create a triple bottom line advantage for millions of residents, businesses and communities within the basin and throughout this great nation.

Despite these advantages, this vital resource is desperate for our attention and investment, and the time for meaningful action is now.

Our government has been clear, both in our platforms and in the throne speech, that the Great Lakes are a national priority. From fully funding our Great Lakes treaty promises to ensuring the establishment of a Canada water agency and a freshwater action plan, the time is now to make sure the Great Lakes are no longer seen as Canada's forgotten coast.

As we prepare for budget 2022, we must seize the opportunity to work together to protect and keep the Great Lakes great, not just for Canadians today but for future generations to enjoy and benefit from.

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ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 302

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just over three years ago, on March 10, 2019, an Ethiopian Airlines plane carrying 157 people, 18 of whom were Canadians, crashed in Ethiopia en route to Nairobi. Some were going home or visiting loved ones, some perhaps starting new adventures, but many were humanitarians headed to the UN environment conference in Nairobi, like a constituent of mine, Stéphanie Lacroix.

When she was not in Ottawa, Stéphanie spent time working for various NGOs in southeast Africa. Stéphanie loved her community unconditionally, and in doing so drew out the best versions of people.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]*

Like Stephanie, all the passengers on Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 had hopes, dreams and plans for a future they will now never have.

[English]

Although it has been three years, we have not and will not forget them. My heart is with the families that continue to mourn the loss of their loved ones.

[Translation]

May they continue to be a source of inspiration for us all, as we continue our efforts to create a better future for all.

[English]

May Stéphanie and all those whose lives were lost rest in peace.

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HOUSING

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unbelievable how tone-deaf and out of touch the Minister of Housing is when it comes to the realities the average Canadian faces. He tries to brag about how well the government's housing plan has been working over the last five years while the average housing price in the country doubled under his watch. Rents are skyrocketing with no end in sight, and a record number of Canadians are giving up on the idea of ever owning their own home. The government's first-time homebuyer shared equity program is a failure and needs to be scrapped in favour of a new approach, but here is the biggest sign of disrespect: It was recently revealed that the minister rewarded staff at the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation with \$40 million in performance bonuses, when literally the single reason they exist is to make housing more affordable for everyone in Canada.

Instead of being petty and trying to suggest that anybody who questions his failed record does not care about homelessness or affordability, he should self-reflect. After all, Canadians have 40 million reasons to question his judgment.

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*[Translation]***RIGHT TO EDUCATION**

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I was eight or nine years old, my father drove me past the University of Montreal and said, "Look, Sophie, that will be your school one day". A world of possibilities was open before me.

Unfortunately, that is not the case for many girls around the world. That is why I would like to emphasize that education is a human right for all women in the world, including Afghan women.

The Taliban's refusal to allow girls and women to receive an education not only violates their rights, but, as Michelle Bachelet said, it leaves them more exposed to violence, poverty and exploitation. We need to put more international pressure on the Taliban.

*[English]***SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE**

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday I had the pleasure of attending a fundraising supper at St. George Ukrainian Catholic Church.

The event, which included a Ukrainian feast, raised \$12,000 for Come Back Alive: a charity supporting members of the Ukrainian forces with protective equipment, medical care and mental health services. The charity began operating seven years ago, when tensions between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed separatists first erupted.

The event also featured a silent auction by the Veselka Ukrainian Cultural and Heritage Club. It raised \$3,500 towards the Canada-Ukraine Foundation, which is involved in several humanitarian projects in Ukraine.

Residents of my constituency stand with Ukraine, with the people of Ukraine and with the over one million Canadians who have ties with Ukraine. They are our neighbours, our friends and our family. They are an integral part of Saskatchewan. Their concerns are our concerns.

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● (1415)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, five weeks ago Putin unleashed a brazen attack on Russia's sovereign, peaceful and democratic neighbour Ukraine. Since then, the world has witnessed murderous Russian attacks on civilians and awe-inspiring acts of dauntless courage and determination by Ukrainians.

Putin's war of conquest threatens the comfortable peace that Canada has taken for granted for decades. We must immediately and significantly increase our capacity to defend ourselves and our allies. The sovereignty of Canada's Arctic land, water and air space is threatened. Democracies from the Baltic to Taiwan fear invasion, while Ukrainians are fighting for their very lives and freedom.

We are witnessing the undoing of 30 years of progress toward peace, prosperity, collective security, law and order and democracy as Putin pummels Ukrainian cities into dust. Canada must do more to help stop Putin now, because the price of stopping a murderous dictator always goes up.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]***HOUSING IN CHÂTEAUGUAY-LACOLLE**

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to share a wonderful story of perseverance and collaboration between the communities of Châteauguay and Kahnawake.

This joint effort, spearheaded by the regional federation of municipal housing offices in Montérégie and the Eastern Townships and by the Kahnawake band council, led to the announcement on Friday of the creation of 31 housing units, in a former motel, for homeless people or people at risk of being homeless in both communities.

This project may see the light of day thanks to our rapid housing initiative. Health partners, our government, and the Government of Quebec have supported this amazing project, which could be used as a model for addressing housing concerns across the country.

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*[English]***INTERNATIONAL TRANSGENDER DAY OF VISIBILITY**

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is the International Transgender Day of Visibility. It is a day to celebrate our transgender neighbours, friends and family members.

Trans individuals overcome formidable challenges. They face pressure to conform or change to please others. They are forced to manoeuvre in our health care system and our government services, which often refuse to see them for who they truly are, and they are too often subjected to hate and violence.

The International Transgender Day of Visibility is not just about seeing transgender people and understanding the sometimes brutal challenges they face. The Transgender Day of Visibility is an opportunity to thank people for leading a human rights revolution. They are heroes. We thank them for not giving up. They are not alone. We thank them for being themselves. They are power.

Let me say it today. Let us repeat it tomorrow. Let us remember it every day. Trans men are men, and trans women are women.

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*[Translation]***KINDNESS CHALLENGE**

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the “Surfe la vague”, or ride the wave, kindness challenge came to an end on March 27. Over the course of 21 days, people were asked to show kindness and empathy by taking care of themselves and others and sending messages of compassion and support to help everyone's mental health.

This initiative was created by the Haute-Yamaska regional county municipality, the City of Granby, the Corporation de d  veloppement communautaire de la Haute-Yamaska, the Centre int  gr   universitaire de sant   et de services sociaux de l'Estrie, the Granby CEGEP, the Centre de services scolaire du Val-des-Cerfs and the Haute-Yamaska users' committee.

In short, many people were involved in creating this project developed by Haute-Yamaska, which brought together over 75 partners from different sectors who wanted to raise awareness about the collateral effects of the pandemic in order to enhance the resilience of communities and individuals facing this new pandemic reality.

I am proud to wear this button in support of creating a huge wave of kindness and positivity in our communities after two years of COVID-19. Let us hope that “Surfe la vague” will spread elsewhere in Quebec. Congratulations to all those who worked on and participated in this challenge.

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● (1420)

*[English]***EMISSIONS REDUCTION PLAN**

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the environment minister released a new greenhouse gas emissions reduction plan, which is being called “insane” by some in Alberta. This new plan is a direct attack on the energy sector, on Alberta and on Canada. Even the far left-leaning opposition party from Alberta has called the Liberal-NDP government's emissions goals a fantasy.

The energy policies introduced by the government are detrimental to our economy, yet on April 1, the government will also be increasing the carbon tax. Canadian families are struggling with the highest levels of inflation in 30 years. They are struggling to pay their bills, buy food and commute. These are essential needs that Liberals, supported by the NDP, are making more and more unaffordable.

The government needs to stop attacking Alberta's energy sector, and it needs to stop making life more unaffordable.

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DAFFODIL MONTH

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I am rising in honour of those affected by cancer, in honour of those who give hope to others battling cancer, and in honour of folks like Jim and Judie Edgar. Their incredible vision to create something meaningful, and hard work to create a special place for others, has led to the beautiful Daffodil Garden for Cancer Survivors in my riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

The daffodil, a resilient little bulb that survives in the frigid ground throughout the harsh winter and emerges in spring with a bright burst of yellow, is a symbol of strength, courage and hope. April is Daffodil Month, and hard-working volunteers such as the Edgars are helping the Canadian Cancer Society with its annual daffodil campaign in support of Canadians living with cancer.

Soon, the Daffodil Garden for Cancer Survivors will turn into a vibrant sea of yellow. It is a beautiful symbol of hope. I am asking all Canadians to join me in supporting Daffodil Month to help raise awareness and to help support Canadians affected by cancer.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance finally announced an important date. On April 7, we will witness the presentation of the first NDP budget in the history of Canada.

We can expect three things, namely more spending, more taxes and a bottomless deficit. It will certainly be a dark day for all the Canadians who did not vote for that and who are struggling to make ends meet.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Were former Liberal prime minister Jean Chrétien and then finance minister Paul Martin consulted about this budget?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to talk down the Canadian economy and spin economic fiction.

I would therefore like to share with the House some very important facts.

First, according to StatsCan, our GDP grew at an annualized rate of 6.7%. Second, we are poised to be the fastest growing economy in the G7 next year. Third, our economy is the second fastest growing in the G7 this year, and fourth, despite the omicron variant, our GDP is back to pre-pandemic levels.

Those are the facts.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Let us talk about that, Mr. Speaker.

The NDP Prime Minister and the leader of his moderate wing signed a secret agreement that seeks to implement the NDP's \$200-billion spending plan, which goes against supposedly Liberal values.

As Jean Chrétien said, "The time to reduce deficits is when the economy is growing." Paul Martin said, "Not to act now to put our fiscal house in order would be to abandon the purposes for which our Party exists and this government stands".

Are there any fiscally responsible Liberals left in this government or did they all join the NDP?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has made historic investments in the lives of Canadians and Quebecers, in all communities and in all provinces, to prevent the worst depression since the 1930s.

The other side of the House can vote for Bill C-8, for \$1.8 billion for rapid COVID-19 tests, for \$100 million to improve ventilation in our schools and to help businesses and teachers.

When will the other side of the House vote in favour of Bill C-8?

• (1425)

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I suspect that many Liberal members were not consulted on this NDP budget.

Oral Questions

Inflation is at record highs. Small businesses are struggling with the price of gas. Families are struggling to pay the grocery bill.

In 1995, finance minister Paul Martin said, "If our purpose is to get the economy right, we need to redesign the role of the government in the economy to fit the size of our pocketbook and the priorities of our people."

Does the Minister of Finance now realize that selling her soul to the NDP in exchange for a majority will hurt the Canadian economy?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is refreshing to hear the other side of the House talk about taxation after their terrible record over their 10 years in government.

On this side of the House, we are focused on supporting Canadians. We are on the verge of voting on Bill C-8 and we have introduced day care benefits to help Canadian families, increased the additional support for seniors and increased the Canada child benefit.

On this side of the House we are focused on affordability. Who knows what is going on across the way.

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[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the spend-DP-Liberal coalition has never seen a rule on tax it did not like, regardless of how inflationary it would be. Take, for example, making an energy rating mandatory when selling a home. The Ontario Real Estate Association calls this a crazy thing to do in the middle of a historic housing affordability crisis, as it would only increase the cost of buying a home.

Why is the spend-DP-Liberal coalition even thinking about doing this crazy thing that would only price out more millennials and first-time homebuyers?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have prioritized giving more Canadians access to their dream of home ownership. We are moving forward with a housing accelerator fund that would increase the housing supply across the spectrum, we are moving forward with a rent-to-own program that would turn more Canadian renters into homeowners, and we are also moving forward with a 1% tax on non-recreational property owned by foreigners. What did the party opposite do with respect to that measure? It voted against it.

*Oral Questions***CARBON PRICING**

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only thing progressive about the spend-DP-Liberal coalition is that people are progressively paying more for everything. Inflation bleeds the purchasing power of every single Canadian.

The Governor of the Bank of Canada has confirmed that the carbon tax is inflationary. Some point to rebates, but the Parliamentary Budget Officer says the government will collect more than it rebates to Canadians.

Will the spend-DP-Liberal coalition finally give millions of Canadians a break from their inflationary policies and cancel the April 1 carbon tax hike?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise to hear this from the Conservatives when their top candidate for leader, the member for Carleton, is campaigning against real action on climate change. The PBO's report confirms that the price of pollution has a progressive impact that gives eight out of 10 Canadians more money through the climate action incentive, which goes back into their pockets. In the last week, we announced climate incentives in Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

While members on that side of the aisle fight each other, we fight for Canadians.

The Deputy Speaker: The first three questions were great. Everybody was listening and it was awesome.

[Translation]

The hon. member for La Prairie.

* * *

SENIORS

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have spent a lot of time talking about what is in the NDP-Liberal agreement, but we should also talk about what was left out, and that is seniors.

This agreement leaves seniors by the wayside. Even though rising grocery prices are hitting them harder than anyone else, nothing will be done to protect their income until 2027. That is especially true for seniors between the ages of 65 and 74, who are also not entitled to an OAS increase. This agreement makes the creation of two classes of seniors a done deal.

I would like to know one thing. Whose decision was it to dump seniors? Was it the Liberals, the NDP or both?

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has delivered on its commitment to increase OAS by 10% for all seniors aged 75 and up. This helps with Canadians' extra needs later in life. Older seniors face increased care expenses and are at greater risk of running out of savings. As seniors age, their health and home care costs rise, all while they are more likely to be unable to work, have disabilities or be widowed. Seniors are living longer today. Life ex-

pectancy for Canadians has increased by seven years, to 82 in 2019 from 75 in 1980. We have the backs of our Canadian seniors.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one need not be good at math to understand that, when the cost of living goes up, the first to suffer are people on fixed incomes, the seniors aged 65 to 74 who have been denied the OAS increase by the NDP and the Liberals.

Food prices have gone up by 7.4%. That is not as bad for seniors aged 75 and over whose OAS has gone up by 10%, but for those 74 and under, there are some groceries they can no longer afford. That is their reality.

Why did the NDP and the Liberals sign a contract that abandons these seniors?

[English]

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government's priority has always been to support seniors, especially the most vulnerable. When it comes to supporting seniors, we are proud of our record. One of the first things we did for seniors was restore the age of eligibility for OAS back to 65 from 67, which was moved forward by the Conservatives. We raised the GIS for single seniors. We introduced a special tax-free payment for those who receive OAS and GIS. We provided a one-time \$500 payment to seniors 75 and over, and this year we are increasing the OAS by 10% for them.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the cost of living goes up it hurts families, but it certainly benefits some corporations like big banks. In the upcoming budget, the Liberal government has a choice. Will it side with families and get them the help they need, or will it side with large corporations and continue to protect their record profits?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, building a fairer, more inclusive economy that works for all Canadians has been a central focus of our government from the beginning, and while we appreciate the intent behind the previous NDP motion and the hon. member's question, let us remember all the things we have done for the middle class. We provided more pandemic supports for Canadians and businesses in Bill C-2, and the NDP voted against it. We raised taxes on the wealthiest 1% and lowered them for the middle class. We stopped the Canada child benefit from going to millionaires and it benefited nine out of 10 Canadians.

There is much that we have done for Canadians on affordability. We will keep doing more.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the cost of living goes up, it hurts families, but it helps big corporations like banks.

In the upcoming budget, the government has a choice. Will it help families and support families in need or will it continue to protect large corporations' profits?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question on the need to build a more just and more inclusive economy for all Canadians. That has been the focus of our work ever since we formed government.

We only have to look at all the measures we have taken to make life more affordable for Canadians: We provided support to Canadians during the pandemic with Bill C-2; we raised taxes on the wealthiest 1% and we cut them for the middle class; we increased the Canada child benefit. That is making life more affordable.

* * *

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while government members drone on about making life more affordable for Canadians, they ignore their self-selective, industry-killing ways of tax and spend. They will claim to offer affordable day care and housing, but a person would have to lose their job and their neighbours to get it. In the meantime, they will buy less at the grocery store and put off the next trip to the gas station.

Could the government show one small act of mercy to its citizens and axe the carbon tax?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to answer my colleague's question because, in fact, we now have national child care across the country. In provinces like Alberta, that means families have already received a 50% reduction in fees. That is a huge help when it comes to paying for gas and when it comes to paying for groceries. It means more money in the pockets of Canadians to do what they need to do to support Canadians. This government will be there for Canadians every single time.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government promises the moon and the stars, but it will take the shirts off the backs of Canadians to pay for it. It tempts Canadians with shiny things in the window, but it cannot cash the cheques it writes. The losers are everyday Canadians. They can drop off their kids at day care, but their tummies will be empty, and they better be in walking distance, because Canadians cannot afford gas.

Will the government find it in its heart to show one small act of compassion and axe the carbon tax?

• (1435)

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have heard from parents in

Oral Questions

Alberta who talk about how important the reduction in fees in child care is, and how it means they are able to look for full-time employment because now they are able to afford it. It means they can now pay for the things they could not for their children.

We know that affordable day care is not only good for children and families, but also good for the economy, and there are 25 years of experience in Quebec to show just that. This is a program that more than pays for itself. It is good for Canadians, it is good for our children and it is good for the economy.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is tax time in Canada and millions of Canadians are filing their tax returns. Last year, many Canadians received their carbon tax rebate in full, but this year they have to wait three more months just to get a quarter of what they received last year.

With inflation at generational highs, the Liberals' move to quarterly payments means less money for Canadian families. Canadians want their money now. Why is the government nickel-and-diming Canadians on their carbon tax rebates?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the members on the other side have been fixated on April 1, I have been fixated on July 15. Of course, that is the date when Canadians will receive the climate action rebate cheques. It will be a double payment, and they will receive these quarterly cheques for months to come. We are fighting climate change and we are promoting affordability.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the PBO has put to rest the NDP-Liberal government's bogus claim that the carbon tax is revenue-neutral. The St. Albert Legion wrote to me and said that the carbon tax will cost it \$6,000 this year. That is \$6,000 that could have been spent to support veterans in my community.

When will the NDP-Liberal government just admit that the carbon tax is not revenue-neutral and axe the tax?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the hon. member is getting his numbers from, but under our plan, the majority of families will continue to receive more money back in a rebate than they pay. Members have heard these numbers before from our associate finance minister. This year it is \$600 in Ontario, \$700 in Manitoba and \$1,100 in Saskatchewan and Alberta. This is more money in the pockets of Canadians.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are two days away from April 1. If the government wants to know what is on Canadians' minds on April 1, the fact of the matter is that in two days, the Liberal carbon tax will go up.

For weeks we have been calling on the government to give Canadians a break, to give them some breathing room and not increase the Liberal carbon tax. There are two days left.

Can the government understand the goodwill behind this and, more importantly, could it give Canadians a break by not increasing the Liberal carbon tax?

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before in the House, pricing pollution is recognized as one of the most efficient ways to fight climate change. It will not only reduce pollution, but drive innovation to help create a clean-growth economy and the jobs of tomorrow.

Once again, as the Parliamentary Budget Officer has said, eight out of 10 families will be better off. Those families will receive the cheques quarterly, starting July 15.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that for months and months inflation has been on the rise in Canada. The fact is that inflation is now at more than 5.7%. The fact is that all Canadian families are paying more today than they were several months ago.

In two days, the Liberals are increasing the Liberal carbon tax. Do they understand common sense? Raising the Liberal carbon tax will increase inflation, and Canadian families will pay even more.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the facts. First, we cut taxes for the middle class twice and increased taxes for the wealthiest 1%. The Conservatives voted against it. Second, we created the Canada child benefit, which is indexed to inflation. The Conservatives voted against it. Third, we gave seniors aged 75 and over a one-time \$500 payment. What did the Conservatives do? They voted against it. We are taking action. We are not sure about the Conservatives.

* * *

● (1440)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the government announced measures to expedite the processing of Ukrainian refugees. That responds in part to the Bloc Québécois's demands, but there is an elephant in the room. The most important element is missing, and that would be the planes.

Even though the announcements addressed the 60,000 applications in one fell swoop, the refugees will be quickly disappointed when they see that they are vying for the same handful of spots on flights from Poland to Canada for a minimum of \$1,000. What fam-

ilies need is not to be approved by Canada but to get to Canada. When will an airlift be put in place?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to again thank my colleague for his question and co-operation since the start of the crisis, this war in Ukraine.

We are working with all our partners, including the airline companies. We recently announced the easing of biometric requirements to allow three cohorts of people to arrive in Canada more quickly. We will be there for Ukrainians, before and after.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is a partial answer to an administrative problem. It is not an answer to the human problem. There are families who need to get out. They have fled the war, but not everyone can afford three or four plane tickets.

Hearing that their file has been processed is not what will soothe mothers who left home a month ago with traumatized children. What will bring relief is the day they can unpack their suitcases in their new homes, knowing that they are safe here. That is the reality. When will the minister charter flights to get them out?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that we have welcomed over 12,000 Ukrainians to Canada so far. We have been there from the beginning.

Let me remind the House of what we have done. We have launched a new program, we have relaxed the biometric requirements and we have brought in more agents to process applications. At the settlement centres, we will continue to be there.

* * *

*[English]***TAXATION**

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians in rural and northern communities are disproportionately disadvantaged by the Prime Minister's carbon tax. New studies by the parliamentary budget office and the Bank of Canada have confirmed that Canadians are paying more in this tax than they receive in rebates and that this tax is contributing to out-of-control inflation.

Knowing that so many rural and northern families and seniors are already struggling to pay for essentials like groceries, home heating and fuel, why would the Prime Minister break his election promise and increase this punitive tax yet again?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate again that pollution pricing works not only to reduce pollution but to drive innovation and help create the clean economy of tomorrow, which is jobs. I know the hon. member wants to create jobs in this country. This means billions in economic development and good jobs today and tomorrow.

We know where the economy of the world is headed. It is to low-carbon energy. The Conservatives are stuck in the past. We are looking toward the future.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cost of everything is rising at historic rates and Canadians are at a breaking point. Seniors in Hastings—Lennox and Addington and across this country do not want a handout. They want the dignity and respect that they have earned. They want to regain pride in being Canadian. They need a government that works with them, not against them.

When will the Prime Minister stop dodging questions in the House and tell working-class Canadians and low-income seniors what he is doing to fix this abysmal economic situation he helped create?

Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, seniors have worked all their lives and they deserve to be safe and financially secure later in life. Our Liberal government is delivering on our promise to increase OAS by 10% for those 75 and older, strengthening support for all Canadians later in life.

Since 2015, our Liberal government has restored the age of eligibility for OAS to 65, increased GIS for single seniors and strengthened CPP for future retirees, which was mirrored by the QPP. During the pandemic, we took action to provide seniors with needed support through special tax repayments and a GST top-up.

* * *

● (1445)

TAXATION

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, constituents in my riding can barely afford to fill up their cars. They have spent more and more of their income on the most basic of necessities. The Liberals say they are working hard to deliver a real change for Canadians. The truth is just the opposite. Canadians are giving all their hard-earned change to the Liberals.

Can the Minister of Finance show just a little compassion, give Canadians a break and promise no new tax increases in the April 7 budget?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while we have to wait just over a week to learn the full contents of the budget, I am very happy to share today some facts that speak directly to affordability. First, a single mom with two kids will receive \$13,600 from the

Oral Questions

Canada child benefit. Second, the average family in Saskatchewan will get almost \$1,000 in a carbon price rebate. Third, seniors received \$500 this summer and we are increasing OAS by 10%. Fourth, a student will save more than \$3,000. Those are the facts.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives have started a housing task force. Does anyone want to know why? It is because the government continues to fail Canadians when it comes to the price of homes. Here is one example. When it comes to the first-time homebuyer program, the Liberals have changed the criteria three times in the last two years. Does anyone want another example? On the shared equity mortgage program, there have only been nine applications in three years of a five-year program. They have doubled the average price of homes in Canada.

How can the minister continue to say his programs work?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will just give the hon. member one example of the large national housing strategy. The Canada—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us quiet down a bit.

The hon. Minister of Housing has the floor.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member asked which programs work. I will just give him one small example that is making a significant impact on the lives of his constituents. The Canada housing benefit is helping 35,000 households with rent in Alberta. That is a program in the national housing strategy.

However, perhaps the hon. member may speak to some of his colleagues. The member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry believes that we should stop investing in affordable housing through the national housing strategy and that we should stop investing in the first-time homebuyer incentive. He should speak to his caucus members who do not believe in federal investments in housing.

*Oral Questions***CLIMATE CHANGE**

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the climate crisis is putting everything we value at risk, yet the Liberals' emissions reduction plan clearly does not meet the urgency of the crisis, with inadequate ambition and massive subsidies to unproven carbon capture technology. The government continues to put the interests of big oil and gas above protecting the workers who are impacted by the climate crisis. Climate delay will not cut it. We must act now.

With the upcoming budget, will the Liberals finally take the climate crisis seriously?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if the hon. member caught the emissions reduction plan announcement yesterday, but it is a practical road map to fight climate change and create good jobs as we build a clean economy. Here are a few of the highlights. We are going to make it easier and more affordable for—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Let us all restart here. The parliamentary secretary can restart his answer.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I am really excited about our emissions reduction plan, as members can see. As a reminder to the hon. member, we are going to be investing in energy retrofit for greener homes and buildings, and establishing a greener electricity grid. We are going to reduce oil and gas emissions, which I know is important to the hon. member. Very, very importantly, we are going to support our farmers in agriculture to be more sustainable and put more money in their pockets. It is a great plan; it is an action plan.

* * *

● (1450)

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, American student loan payments have been frozen since the pandemic started. Meanwhile, in Canada people only received six months of relief from crushing monthly payments. In fact, the federal government collected \$3.2 billion in student loan payments the following year. It is bad enough that young people have had to deal with cuts from Conservative premiers during the pandemic, but it is truly shameful the Liberal government also collected billions from them. Canadians deserve better.

When will the Liberal government start tackling affordability by cancelling student debt?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise the member that until at least next March of 2024 students do not have to pay debt on their student loan payments, and we made a commitment, which we will make good on, to eliminate permanently student debt for students so they can go off into their careers in a position to excel, to flourish and to prosper, like every Canadian has a right to.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, citizens of my community of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek were clear in the last election they wanted a government that would invest in public transit. Once initiated by the province, the completion of projects like the Confederation GO station in Hamilton will spur economic development and reduce highway congestion. Our government knows that safe and affordable transit is the key that unlocks social economic opportunities in our communities.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities provide an update to the House on the critical investments we are making in public transit infrastructure?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has made unprecedented investments in public transit. Last year, our government announced approximately \$12.1 billion in new investments for the GTHA to build new and expand existing transit networks. Thanks to the advocacy of that member and his hard work, important work is currently under way for critical projects such as the GO Transit expansion project, which will provide important service and connections to many communities. We will continue to invest in transit across Canada.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, the Prime Minister promised not to buy F-35s, even though he knew that Canada's defence industry had already invested hundreds of millions of dollars and had to meet its obligations to Lockheed Martin.

Even with this week's announcement, the Prime Minister is still keeping Canada's defence industry in limbo. He did not commit to buy F-35s. He agreed to talk about it.

When will he realize that the aerospace industry has waited long enough and that the time for talk is over?

[English]

Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a highly complex procurement. It represents the most significant investment in the RCAF in over 30 years. We did not go to sole source based on speculation. We entered into a competitive process based on evidence and facts. It is imperative that we get this right, and that is why we took the time we needed to make the best decisions for Canadians and for our air force. We have ensured from the beginning that the process was done in a responsible way.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 file clearly shows that the Prime Minister is not serious about Canada's defence and our commitments abroad.

In 2015, when he promised not to buy F-35s, he was putting his political ambitions and those of the Liberal Party ahead of the aspirations of the Canadian Armed Forces. When he wasted \$360 million on Australia's old, rusted-out F-18s, it was to buy time. Even the experts say that the Liberals act based on ideology when it comes to military procurement.

Can the Prime Minister cut short all the talking and immediately settle the issue of the F-35s?

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the member opposite that we are ensuring that our Canadian Armed Forces has the equipment it needs to protect Canadians.

On Monday, when we announced the procurement of the 88 fighter jets and the top-ranked bidder, this brought us one step closer to a new fleet of state-of-the-art fighter jets for our Royal Canadian Air Force. This is going to ensure that our pilots have the most effective tools they need to do their jobs, to defend our country, to defend our Arctic and to participate in NORAD and NATO.

• (1455)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday the minister stated that costing is being further refined on the F-35 purchase.

After seven years and \$2 billion spent on upgrades of old and used fighter jets, the minister knows that there is nothing to refine in terms of price. As a consortium member, the government has the right to buy the F-35 for the same price as the U.S. government during whatever fiscal year it opts into. The government waited another four months when it knew who won.

Now it is playing for time, saying the price must be refined. Why?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the member opposite again that we have ensured and we will continue to ensure that we are taking the steps needed to select the right fighter at the right price with the right benefits for the Canadian Armed Forces.

Oral Questions

This is the most significant investment in the RCAF in 30 years. As we continue to move through this process, the details on costing will be further refined. As I have said, we will select the right aircraft at the right price for the RCAF.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, replacement fighter jets are delayed. Replacement pistols for the army are delayed. Polar icebreakers are delayed. Fixed-wing search and rescue are delayed. Arctic offshore patrol ships are delayed. Surface combatants are delayed. Joint supply ships are delayed. Rusted out, second-hand jets from Australia are on time.

When did the Liberals decide to go from strong, secure and engaged to delayed, weak and second-hand?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is somewhat humorous. Unlike the Conservatives who cut billions from defence, we are providing our CAF members with the equipment they need to keep Canadians safe. We are moving to finalize the 88 new fighter jets. We are delivering the first Canadian-built ship in 20 years. We are acquiring six Arctic offshore patrol vessels, two of which are in the water and one of which has circumnavigated the North American continent. We are delivering rifles for our rangers. When it comes to procurement, I would take our record over theirs any day.

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[Translation]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the greenhouse gas reduction plan presented yesterday is nothing but a half-measure, some wishful thinking.

The government is still talking about potential reductions instead of real objectives and it is characterizing its commitment to “exploring measures that help guarantee the price of pollution” as progress. Come on. That reeks of promoting oil over addressing the climate emergency.

Why is the government working so hard to hide Canada's oil problem instead of fixing it?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing to see the Bloc Québécois playing political games. The Bloc should understand the importance of working with Quebecers to create new economic opportunities and sustainable jobs.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his greenhouse gas reduction plan, the minister talks about reducing carbon intensity, which refers to the number of tonnes of greenhouse gases emitted in relation to the GDP. This is another attempt to avoid dealing with the climate emergency. We need to reduce actual emissions, and it is not fair for the government to be talking to us about green oil.

Oral Questions

Will the government finally acknowledge that green oil is like a square circle, a philosopher's stone or a vegetarian vampire, in that it does not exist?

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to relay to the hon. member that our government is working on many fronts to address oil and gas emissions. On top of the cap to reduce oil and gas sector emissions, we are implementing the clean fuel standard to accelerate the adoption of cleaner fuel. We are putting a price on carbon pollution, as I have mentioned many times in this House. Importantly, we are phasing out fossil fuel subsidies two years ahead of schedule.

• (1500)

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has only been one week since the NDP-Liberal marriage and already there is trouble in paradise. The Minister of Natural Resources wants to produce more oil and gas. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change wants less. Meanwhile, the NDP deputy prime minister is silent on the matter. Look folks, we cannot sit and stand at the same time.

On behalf of Canadians, who in this place is telling the truth?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the hon. member caught the emissions reduction plan we announced yesterday, but it is a road map for Canada to reach our ambitious climate targets. It is getting great reviews. I will just cite a couple of them.

The Cement Association of Canada said the emission reduction plan “provides the cement industry with predictability”. Oil Sands Pathways said, “With positive industry and government collaboration, Canada has an incredible opportunity to help provide for global energy security while being a leader in producing clean energy.”

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has the most environmentally and socially responsible oil and gas in the world. After almost seven years of the NDP-Liberals stopping pipelines and blocking exports, the natural resources minister now says Canada can boost production by 300,000 barrels per day to offset dictator oil. However, the environment minister's new plan risks 13,000 Alberta jobs and will cut production by 235,000 barrels per day.

The NDP-Liberal anti-energy agenda has already killed hundreds of thousands of jobs and cost Canada billions. Which one of these ministers should Canadians believe?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the emissions reduction plan is ambitious, and it is achievable. It is a clear and robust plan that will get us to net zero by 2050. When we talk about oil imports, our oil imports have actually reduced. In fact, if the member is interested, the Canada Energy Regulator has said that we have imported

the lowest amount of crude oil since 1988 and the majority of it comes from the United States.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was talking about exports, but the reality is that Canadian energy producers have reduced emissions and increased production over the last 20 years, but the NDP-Liberals have done everything they can to shut them down. The Liberals now claim to support hiking production, but they also plan to cut it. The NDP deputy prime minister does not want any future oil and gas at all.

Uncertainty crushes jobs and investment. The only thing that is clear is that the left hand does not know what the other left hand is actually doing. I will try again. Who is actually in charge of killing Canadian jobs?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we have is, in fact, one of the most robust and detailed climate reduction plans in the world. It provides certainty to all Canadians and industry when we talk about the exports to support our European allies in this time of trouble.

They asked for short-term assistance, but they have also clearly said that in the mid-term and the long-term, they are working toward renewables. It is in the 10-point plan from the International Energy Agency. We are working with them to support them into the future and right now in their time of need.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like many Canadians, I am proud of our Canadian Armed Forces, and I want them to have the equipment they need to do the tough jobs we ask them to do. That is why I was pleased that our government announced its intention to begin the final negotiations for the purchase of 88 F-35 fighter jets.

Would the Minister of National Defence please tell the House what this investment means for Canadians?

• (1505)

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Saint-Laurent for her question.

Canada is getting closer to the delivery of a new fleet of fighter jets that will help our Royal Canadian Air Force defend Canada and our allies. This will also create economic opportunities for Canadians, especially in Bagotville, where we are investing in modernizing infrastructure to house the new fleet.

This is good news for Canadians.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, inflation is roaring out of control. Families do not know how they are going to pay for groceries or tank up their cars to get their kids to school. The dream of home ownership is now over for millions of Canadians. Ever since the finance minister took charge, the cost of living in Canada has skyrocketed. Things are not getting better. They are actually getting worse.

When will the minister tell Canadians how she plans to fight inflation? Will her next NDP-Liberal budget include such a plan?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to talk down the Canadian economy and spin economic fiction. Let us deal in facts. StatsCan showed that our GDP grew by 6.7% in Q4. Our economy is the second fastest growing in the G7 this year. We are poised to be the fastest growing economy in the G7 next year, and despite the challenges of omicron, our economy's GDP is back to prepandemic levels.

The other side can spin economic fiction. Those are the facts.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, inflation is raging across our country. That is a fact, and Canadians are being left behind. They cannot get groceries. They cannot afford gas to take their kids to hockey or music lessons. The cost of everything is through the roof. We know paycheques do not go as far as they used to. We know Canadians are struggling to make ends meet, yet the minister refuses to act.

This is her mess. She is Canada's finance minister. Will her budget include a plan to fight Canada's affordability crisis?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will find out in due course what is in the budget. This last weekend, I was at the doors in my riding of Edmonton Centre. Moms and dads were thanking me and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development for passing the child care agreement with Alberta, and just this week we have a deal in Ontario.

Every province and every territory is now covered, with thousands of dollars back in the pockets of everyday Canadians. That is leadership. That is affordability.

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, do members know who benefits from inflation? It is the government. Next week the federal government is going to announce record revenues from higher taxes, higher oil prices and inflation.

Canadians want to know how the Liberal-NDP government is going to use this windfall. Will it provide relief to Canadians through tax holidays? Will it reduce the size of the deficit, or will it just spend more money, which everyone agrees is going to create more inflation?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our record is clear when

Oral Questions

it comes to supporting the most vulnerable Canadians with the cost of living. We introduced the Canada child benefit, which is indexed to inflation, and lifted 300,000 children out of poverty. Our government increased the guaranteed income supplement, which is also indexed to inflation and has helped over 900,000 seniors. From 2015, when we formed government, to 2019, we raised 1.38 million Canadians out of poverty. That is leadership. That is focus on affordability.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Richmond Hill we have numerous organizations that work tirelessly to provide housing for vulnerable populations. The staff at Blue Door, an emergency housing provider in York Region, have played an instrumental role in supporting individuals experiencing homelessness in our community.

Can the minister provide an update to the House on how our government is supporting organizations such as Blue Door in their work to end pandemic homelessness?

● (1510)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Richmond Hill for his important question and his advocacy with respect to chronic homelessness.

We understand as a government that the pandemic has made worse existing housing challenges for Canada's most vulnerable people. That is why we introduced an investment of \$2.5 billion through the rapid housing initiative to create over 10,000 new permanent affordable homes and provided \$567 million to Reaching Home: so that frontline organizations like the member mentioned can fight homelessness and end chronic homelessness on the ground. On this side of the House, we are committed to ending chronic homelessness once and for all.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

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

The extent of indigenous language loss is evidence of the deep impacts of colonialism. It is an essential and basic part of reconciliation to preserve first nations, Inuit and Métis languages. The Indigenous Languages Act was passed three years ago by the Liberal government, yet little to no action has been taken.

Routine Proceedings

Words mean nothing without action. What will the minister do to ensure that indigenous languages are supported and protected for now and for future generations?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to advancing reconciliation for the protection and promotion of indigenous languages. I personally really appreciated the member opposite's testimony and involvement at committee this past week.

We are currently studying with Elections Canada how to move forward on ensuring that indigenous languages are available, and that people who speak indigenous languages have access to that, when they go to vote at election time. I look forward to the conclusion of this study and its recommendations, and I very much appreciate the work that the member is doing in this regard.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's so-called emissions reduction plan sold Canadians a fairy tale. If only we give the oil and gas industry tens of billions more in subsidies for an unproven technology, the carbon intensity of their oil will magically disappear.

We need a climate plan that lines up with what climate scientists tell us is required to hold on to the possibility of a maximum 1.5°C rise in global temperatures. Why is the Prime Minister gambling with big oil on a safe climate future for our kids, instead of making transformational investments in proven solutions?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the emissions reduction plan announced yesterday is an achievable road map for Canada to reach our ambitious climate targets. That is 40% to 45% below 2015 levels. It is getting great reviews from environmental groups to banks, to those in the resource sector.

Let me read a couple for the hon. member. The Pembina Institute says, "The Government of Canada's 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan...is a significant step forward in meeting the climate moment that Canada and the world face today." Environmental Defence says that "the Government of Canada's emissions reduction plan provides the most comprehensive national climate action—

The Deputy Speaker: That is all the time we have for question period today. Thank you so much for your interest.

We have a point of order from the hon. Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

CORRECTION TO OFFICIAL REPORT

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to correct the record on an answer I gave earlier when I said we would eliminate student debt. I would like to correct the record to say that we will eliminate interest on student debt.

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We had many discussions in QP today, particularly around the Bank of Canada confirming that the carbon tax is inflationary. I have the letter from the Governor of the Bank of Canada, Tiff Macklem, and would like to table it with unanimous consent. I have it in both official languages, so I think if you seek it, you shall find unanimous consent to hear about the inflationary nature of the tax. I thank the member of Parliament for Northumberland—Peterborough South for asking the question and getting the response.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion to table the document will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1515)

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to eight petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

While I am on my feet, I move:

That the House do now proceed to the orders of the day.

The Deputy Speaker: 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 please rise and indicate it to the Chair.

The hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, I request a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1600)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 51)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Ali	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arseneault	Arya
Ashton	Atwin

Routine Proceedings

Bachrach
Bains
Barron
Beech
Bennett
Bittle
Blair
Blois
Boulerice
Brière
Carr
Chagger
Champagne
Chen
Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)
Cormier
Dabrusin
Davies
Dhaliwal
Diab
Drouin
Duclos
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Ehsassi
Erskine-Smith
Fillmore
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Freeland
Gaheer
Garrison
Gerretsen
Green
Hajdu
Hardie
Holland
Hughes
Hutchings
Idlout
Jaczek
Joly
Jowhari
Kayabaga
Khalid
Koutrakis
Kwan
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lattanzio
LeBlanc
Lightbound
Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor
Maloney
Masse
May (Cambridge)
McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McPherson
Mendicino
Morrice
Murray
Ng
O'Connell
O'Regan
Powlowski
Robillard
Rogers
Sahota
Saks
Sarai
Schieffe

Badawey
Baker
Battiste
Bendayan
Bibeau
Blaikie
Blaney
Boissonnault
Bradford
Cannings
Casey
Chahal
Chatel
Chiang
Collins (Victoria)
Coteau
Damoff
Desjarlais
Dhillon
Dong
Dubourg
Duguid
Dzerowicz
El-Khoury
Fergus
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser
Fry
Garneau
Gazan
Gould
Guilbeault
Hanley
Hepfner
Housefather
Hussen
Iacono
Ien
Johns
Jones
Julian
Kelloway
Khera
Kusmierczyk
Lalonde
Lametti
Lapointe
Lauzon
Lebouthillier
Long
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Martinez Ferrada
Mathysen
McDonald (Avalon)
McKay
McLeod
Mendès
Miao
Morrissey
Naqvi
Noormohamed
Oliphant
Petitpas Taylor
Qualtrough
Rodriguez
Romanado
Sajjan
Samson
Scarpaleggia
Serré

Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
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Shanahan
Sidhu (Brampton East)
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Thompson
Turnbull
Van Bynen
Vandal
Virani
Weiler
Yip
Zarrillo

NAYS*Members*

Aboultaif
Albas
Arnold
Barlow
Barsalou-Duval
Bergen
Berthold
Bezan
Blanchette-Joncas
Brassard
Brunelle-Duceppe
Caputo
Chabot
Champoux
Cooper
Dancho
DeBellefeuille
Desbiens
Doherty
Dreesen
Ellis
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast
Findlay
Gallant
Gaudreau
Genuis
Gladu
Goodridge
Gray
Hoback
Kelly
Kniec
Kramp-Neuman
Kusie
Lantsman
Lawrence
Lemire
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Lloyd
MacKenzie
Martel
Mazier
McLean
Michaud
Morrison
Muys
Normandin
Patzner
Pauzé
Perron
Poilievre
Redekopp
Rempel Garner
Roberts

Aitchison
Allison
Baldinelli
Barrett
Beaulieu
Bergeron
Bérubé
Blanchet
Bragdon
Brock
Calkins
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Chong
Dalton
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Deltell
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Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Epp
Falk (Provencher)
Ferrerri
Fortin
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Godin
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Lake
Larouche
Lehoux
Lewis (Essex)
Liepert
Lobb
Maguire
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
Melillo
Morantz
Motz
Nater
O'Toole
Paul-Hus
Perkins
Plamondon
Rayes
Reid
Richards
Rood

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Ruff	Savard-Tremblay
Scheer	Schmale
Seebach	Shields
Shipley	Simard
Sinclair-Desgagné	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	Zimmer— 148

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[Translation]***CRIMINAL CODE**

BILL C-5—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved:

That, in relation to Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the bill; and

That, 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders on the day allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this order, and, in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67(1), there will now be a 30-minute question period. I invite hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their places so that the Chair has some idea of the number of members who wish to participate in this question period.

Questions and comments, the hon. House leader for the official opposition.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, it is a profound disappointment that the government is now moving time allocation on what is effectively a very substantive justice bill repealing, for example, mandatory minimums. Effectively, what it is doing is giving criminals a get-out-of-jail-free card at a cost to victims.

I want to point out, too, that we have dealt with this issue since December of 2021 with only four days of debate on this substantive bill. I also want to point out that I am sure the left hand will be holding the left hand on this one. In the agreement between the NDP and the Liberals, it says that both parties agree that parliamentary debate is essential and they will identify the priority of bills to

expedite them through the House of Commons, including expediting sitting hours to allow for additional speakers, so I do not quite understand why they are not allowing for additional speakers on this bill, especially as it is something so substantive.

My question to the Minister of Justice is this. There has been an increase in gun crimes and domestic violence in this country since this bill was introduced. Why is the NDP-Liberal government proposing time allocation? Why is it putting the rights of criminals ahead of the rights of victims?

● (1605)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, this is an important bill. I agree with the hon. member that this is a substantive criminal justice reform bill that would effectively reverse a series of policies that frankly did not work, and that are being abandoned everywhere around the world, particularly in the United States, which served as an inspiration for the previous Conservative government to bring in these kinds of minimum mandatory penalties.

I was in Washington last week and met with a number of bipartisan groups and think tanks working on criminal law reform. The basic message from all of them was that incarceration does not work. We need to shorten incarceration periods and minimum mandatory penalties, and the kind of flexibility that conditional sentence orders offer is precisely the kind of reform that they are suggesting, and that we are suggesting. Even states such as Louisiana have abandoned minimum mandatory penalties, because they simply do not work.

The idea that this is in some way soft on crime or does not protect victims is completely false, for a number of reasons that I would be able to elaborate upon.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is rather odd to hear the minister say that this is an important bill and that he is imposing closure. If it is an important bill, we must discuss it and express our opinions.

Five Bloc members have spoken about this bill. This is happening against a backdrop of increasing incidents involving firearms in Quebec. The minister knows this. He is from Verdun. He should know that this is a serious problem in Quebec, that we must come up with some useful and intelligent solutions, and that we must have some room for debate.

The Bloc Québécois proposed splitting the bill because it dealt with diversion measures as well as minimum sentences. These are two different matters. We would have liked to have had more debate, because we must have an intelligent discussion. We need a bill that will fix the problems we have on the ground once and for all. The minister is well aware of this.

My question is simple. Why have they decided to move closure when people, especially in Quebec, expect us to do our due diligence?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. colleague for the question. I am pleased to admit that I, too, have a hard time with the French term for “diversion measures”. We can stumble over it together.

Fighting gangs and gun trafficking is not the objective of this bill. We will be introducing another bill, as we did in the previous Parliament, to tackle the problem raised by my hon. colleague.

In this case, we are talking about minimum sentences for offences that do not pose a threat to public safety and should be considered differently to ensure they are more effective for communities, making them safer, and for the justice system.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the hallmarks of a successful opposition party is that it does not just oppose all the time but comes to the table to propose.

I have heard the same tired arguments from the Conservatives about mandatory minimums, but they have yet to show the House evidence to back up their point, and they completely ignore sections in the Criminal Code that allow judges to increase or decrease a sentence based on the severity of the crime. Let us face it: Conservatives do not trust our judges.

My question to the minister is this. If Conservatives are so concerned about the content of the bill, would it not be a good idea for them to bring their arguments and their witnesses before the justice committee, propose amendments and demonstrate to Canadians that they are actually serious and know what they are talking about?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, indeed, in the previous Parliament with this bill's predecessor, Bill C-22, and now in this Parliament, we have had ample opportunities to discuss this bill. We are still waiting for the opposition to show the evidence.

Today, the Parliamentary Budget Officer came out with a report looking at one of the minimum mandatory penalties that was thrown out by the Supreme Court of Canada. The clear conclusion of the Parliamentary Budget Officer was that not only did it contribute to the overrepresentation of Black and indigenous peoples in the criminal justice system, and not only did it cost more money, but it was completely ineffective at reducing the overall sentencing rates.

• (1610)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take the Minister of Justice back to 2019 when we had a round table in Scarborough with a number of different stakeholders who were directly impacted by mandatory minimum sentences, particularly members of the Black community. We know that the statistics are quite relevant here because MMPs have disproportionately impacted members of the Black community, as well as indigenous communities.

Can the minister give us a sense of how the changes to MMPs in Bill C-5 would ensure that fair justice is administered when it comes to racialized and indigenous people, as well as talk about

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conditional sentencing orders and what kind of impact those would have on sentencing?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, indeed, I remember that round table very well.

This is precisely the reason why we brought forward this bill: to combat overrepresentation of Black and indigenous peoples in the criminal justice system. What MMPs do on crimes that do not threaten the safety and security of our society, but on fairly minor crimes or mistakes, is tie the hands of judges and restrict them from fashioning appropriate orders. The possibility now of having a conditional sentence order, which the previous Harper government rejected, would allow judges to fashion a sentence, often in the community. The community can help to rehabilitate people. If it is an indigenous community, they can use restorative justice. It allows them to fashion a sentence that actually works, that serves victims and that serves the community, instead of what we have now.

A study from Professor Kaiser-Derrick, published by the University of Manitoba Press, highlighted the vastly disproportionate and negative impact that minimum mandatory sentences and a lack of conditional sentence orders had on indigenous women. It is an endemic problem and it is a shame in this country, and we are attacking it.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Through translation, I heard the minister say, if I got it right, that this was tackling issues and offences that were not a threat to public safety. We have reckless discharge of a firearm: that means a drive-by shooting, potentially, of an occupied residence.

First, how is that not a threat to public safety? Second, the Liberal government could make this constitutional by adding a safety valve; that is, by having a mandatory minimum with an exception to address the very issues that the Minister of Justice has addressed. This is a perfect middle ground. Why will the minister not accept it?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, the fallacy and the argument that is being brought forth by the hon. member is quite clear. We are eliminating minimum mandatory penalties. There is still a maximum sentencing range that exists for all crimes. In the crime that he described, and in the circumstances that he described, a judge would have the flexibility and the opportunity to give a serious sentence. That is precisely what happens.

What we are doing is taking away the lower end, where a person perhaps has a few too many on a Saturday night and puts a couple of bullets into the side of an empty barn. There are differences in the way these sentences ought to happen. What we are doing is giving power back to the judges.

Judges are the hallmark of our common-law system. I do not know why the other side does not trust them.

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Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just heard the response from the minister and I have full confidence in the independence of our judicial system. It was actually quite refreshing to hear about giving that power back to judges.

I would appreciate it if the minister could expand on what is being proposed and how the independent judicial system can ensure that justice is being served, rather than perhaps advancing more of the systemic issues that we know are far too common within our prison system.

• (1615)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I worked a great deal together, and continue to work a great deal together, on these kinds of issues.

What the bill would do is allow for context to be taken into account. I will give an example. In a ruling, the Supreme Court of Canada has allowed a sentencing judge to take into account factors, for an indigenous person, of how that person's life might have helped to account for the crime and what ought to be taken into account for the sentence. This was the so-called Gladue report.

A minimum mandatory penalty means the judge's hands are tied, with respect to it. With this bill, the judge would be able to look at, first of all, not having a minimum mandatory penalty, but also being able to fashion, using a conditional sentence order, the kind of appropriate treatment that a person might need. Whether it is a health issue or a social welfare issue, people could get the support they need. That better serves the community, it better serves the victim and it certainly costs us less money in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the minister support and agree that it is important for us to get this bill to committee so we can have a conversation there on how we can improve this piece of legislation and offer the suggestions that have been brought to our attention?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I think members on all sides of the House know, including many members of the official opposition, that with respect to the parliamentary process and committees, I work in good faith with all sides of the House on amendments. I am always open to the bill being improved. Any amendments brought in good faith are things I will study with my team and with other members of the House with due diligence. If we can make it a better bill, we will make it a better bill.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, house arrest for human trafficking is what the minister is proposing with this particular bill. In what world does he think that house arrest is appropriate for human trafficking? Human traffickers often operate from their house. This would do nothing to intimidate them or remove the issue from our streets here in Canada. The other question I have is, how in the world did he get the NDP to sign on to this?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of the question of the hon. member. Human trafficking is not one of the minimum mandates. There are a number of different gun offences, a number of different tobacco offences and a number of different drug offences.

Any party that looks at the evidence, the statistics and the reforms that are happening around the world, including in the United States, realizes that minimum mandatory penalties simply do not work. They clog up the criminal justice system.

An hon. member: They keep people safe.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, they do not keep people safe.

The majority of constitutional challenges to pieces of the Criminal Code are about minimum mandatory penalties, and over half of them succeed. They clog up the system and cause delays. Perhaps hon. members of the opposition will take responsibility if and when Jordan rulings come out as a result of the system being clogged up by minimum mandatory penalties.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I come from a riding where Donald Marshall Jr. once lived. Donald Marshall Jr. is famous for showing that there is systemic racism within the justice system. Far too often we see indigenous people overrepresented in jails.

I am wondering if the Minister of Justice could speak a bit about his efforts to ensure that we are taking the steps and measures needed to ensure that systemic discrimination within the justice system is removed and that indigenous people get a fair chance at justice within Canada. I am wondering if the Minister of Justice could comment on that.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. member's concern for making the criminal justice system better and for decreasing the systemic overrepresentation and, quite frankly, the systemic racism against Black and indigenous people in the criminal justice system.

This bill is a first step, allowing more flexibility for sentencing judges through conditional sentence orders, removing minimum mandatory penalties and creating a bias toward diverting people from the criminal justice system for simple possession offences. However, it is only a first step. We have invested, as a government, in better Gladue reports and better coverage for Gladue reports. We have begun a pilot project in Nova Scotia, Toronto and British Columbia on impact of race and culture assessments for Black offenders. We are working on funding community justice centres and indigenous community justice centres so we can provide wraparound support, better serving victims and offenders so that we reduce recidivism and provide a more holistic response to criminal justice.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-5, on which the government is moving closure, is an important bill that should be studied in depth.

The government seems to have a growing appetite for closure motions all of a sudden. This worries me. In the past, the Liberals decried the Conservative majority governments' abuse of closure. However, once they came to power in 2015, the Liberals moved one closure motion after another, although they have not done it as often in the past few years.

I have to wonder whether they will start using their manufactured pseudo-majority to abuse closure as others have done in the past.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

I also thank his colleague from Rivière-du-Nord, who supported Bill C-22, which was introduced in the House during the previous Parliament. The bill we are debating today is identical, and since the hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord fully supported it last time, I hope he will support it this time for the same reasons.

I think it is very important to work with my colleagues, and I am prepared to work with them on this bill, which has already been thoroughly debated, studied and discussed. We can now move on to the next stage.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister mentioned simple possession and that one of the goals of Bill C-5 is to reduce that issue. My colleague, the member for Courtenay—Alberni, has tabled a private member's bill, Bill C-216, to address exactly that issue and, in the process, address the overdose crisis that is happening right now all across the country. This will save lives, if we pass Bill C-216, and will reduce simple possession by decriminalizing it.

Will the minister support my colleague's bill?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, we are still studying that bill. Certainly the sentiment behind it is one that speaks well of the hon. member and of all people who would like to attack the opioid crisis and other problematic drug abuse situations in our country.

This current bill is not meant to do that. It is meant to address flexibility in sentencing to reduce the overrepresentation of Black and indigenous people in the criminal justice system. The fundamental challenges that are being attacked by the private member's bill on the other side are wider than that, and I will look at the bill, as will all of my colleagues, with due diligence.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every single day 20 Canadians lose their life to an opioid overdose. That is 7,000 Canadians a year, yet in the face of an opioid crisis, Bill C-5, shockingly, eliminates mandatory jail time for producers and manufacturers of schedule 1 drugs like fentanyl and crystal meth.

Why in the world is the government making life easier for the very producers and pushers of this poison that is killing Canadians every single day?

• (1625)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I have had lovely and intellectual exchanges with the hon. member over the course of our time here since 2015, but I reject the premise of his question.

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Today, the error is in presuming that a judge would always give the minimum sentence. In the serious set of facts that he is describing or alluding to, a judge would have the power to go to the maximum sentence, according to the circumstances involved. What we are doing with this bill is not what he is referring to. Rather, we are referring to people who are innocently or naively caught up in something and not necessarily the major perpetrator, or who perhaps have a problematic addiction that needs to be dealt with. The bill allows a sentencing judge to take those circumstances into account and fashion a sentence that fits the crime.

Serious crime, I will assure the hon. member, will always be punished seriously in this country.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I found it very interesting that when the minister was giving the last answer and he said that judges would have the opportunity to go to the maximum, a heckle came from across the way from the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, who said that they will never do it. Nothing underscores more their distrust in the justice system than what the member heckled during the answer. That is the truth. That is what this comes down to.

My question for the minister is more simple than that. Nothing could divide the Conservatives and the Liberals more than when it comes to issues like this. The Liberals believe in using the correctional system to rehabilitate and reintegrate people into society—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. There is a lot of heckling going on here.

I will let the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands finish his question.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, nothing shows a more clear difference between the Liberals and the Conservative than an issue like this. The Liberals believe that a correctional institution is there to rehabilitate and reintegrate people into society when possible, whereas the Conservative approach is much different. It is to lock them up and throw away the key.

Can the minister talk about how important it is for this government to make sure that we give people who have a chance at being rehabilitated and reintegrated into society the opportunity to do that?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I will also refer to the heckle by the hon. member from the other side. With respect to MMP subsection 95(2) of the Criminal Code that was struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has said that taking out the minimum mandatory penalty has had no impact on the overall total amount of sentencing that has been handed out by judges. It is false to say that judges always go to the minimum.

What we are doing is what the hon. member wants us to do, which is help give judges the ability to give appropriate sentences so that we can rehabilitate. This is the point the hon. member is trying to make. We need to look at alternatives to incarceration.

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I mentioned I was in Washington. The growing consensus is that we need to massively reduce incarceration rates to get better outcomes for communities, increase public security and rehabilitate victims. That is the belief we have in the criminal justice system. It is the animating belief behind this bill, and it is something that I hope hon. members will share. It is certainly shared across the United States and in many other jurisdictions, like the United Kingdom.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the people of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

I will first address the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands. I challenge him to find one case where the maximum was imposed, if that was the case.

If we are going to discuss mandatory minimum sentences, I note there are a lot of mandatory minimum sentences in the Criminal Code. There are mandatory minimum sentences for sexual offences and mandatory minimum sentences for murder. Is that where we are going next with the logic that is being espoused by the minister today?

• (1630)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I obviously do not share the member's skepticism in the criminal justice system and I do not share his skepticism over improving the criminal justice system based on evidence. What we have done in this bill is selected roughly 20 minimum mandatory penalties that have a demonstrated impact on the overrepresentation of Black and indigenous people and other racialized Canadians in the criminal justice system. That is the goal here.

It is a goal that is necessary. It helps us identify systemic racism within the system. It helps us achieve better outcomes for communities and victims, but also for offenders in terms of their rehabilitation. It also helps bring the justice back to the justice system. That is what we are doing here. I hope we succeed. I hope we get the support of all members of the House.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Mr. Speaker, I would like a chance to ask the minister the same question I asked him earlier because the Bloc Québécois has a constructive approach.

I think we have always had a constructive approach with respect to the bill on the table right now. We have looked at its merits and its flaws, and we have tried to find ways to improve it.

The problem we have now is that the government is invoking closure. Closure here is problematic because it prevents us from really digging into things. We are wondering if closure is going to be the government's new modus operandi and if it finds this to be a constructive approach.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. He will have a chance to work with us and propose amendments during the committee's study.

This is not a new bill. We introduced it in the previous Parliament, and it was discussed here and in public many times.

I noted that the hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord participated in those discussions. We did have time to study this bill, and we will have time to study it in committee. We will respect the parliamentary process.

[English]

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, MMPs are a part of the destructive Harper-era policies that have not deterred crime, have not kept us safer and have clogged up our courts. This party is the reason we are in this position. They were more concerned with locking up low-risk first-time offenders and targeting people of colour than truly keeping our communities safe.

Could the hon. minister please expand on CSOs and how they will help communities of colour?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I personally feel that the conditional sentence order part of the bill is the most important part of the bill, in the sense that this is what brings back the flexibility in sentencing that allows for a judge to attack a problem or rectify a problem in the sentence that ought to be attacked. For example, a conditional sentence order will allow a judge to say a person needs to serve home arrest and get the appropriate mental health supports or the appropriate rehabilitation supports if there is a problematic addiction.

It allows for communities to take on the responsibility for the rehabilitation of people through a community justice sentence, which we are funding. This is one of the major ideas that has come from the communities themselves, whether they be racialized, indigenous or Black. They want to help rehabilitate people. Experts in the field tell us that this is the best way to move a community forward, to move society forward and to help everybody heal while protecting public safety. That is what conditional sentence orders do.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very concerning to hear the minister and the NDP-Liberals misrepresent what this bill would do. To be clear, what this bill would really do is reduce mandatory minimums for all kinds of existing gun crimes and also allow for house arrest for the kinds of crimes that leave people traumatized and harmed forever, like human trafficking, like sexual assault, like kidnapping, like abduction of kids under 14, like causing bodily harm by criminal negligence and causing bodily harm through assault or with a weapon, or like assaulting a peace officer causing bodily harm or with a weapon.

That is what this bill would actually do, so how on earth can the NDP-Liberals pretend that this protects public safety and has anything to do with justice?

• (1635)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I would ask people to pay attention to what is being done in the bill and what is not. This is not the minimum mandatory penalties part of the bill, as a previous speaker from the other side seemed to intimate. This is the conditional sentence orders part of the bill and here we are allowing a judge to give a serious sentence where there is a serious crime. A conditional sentence order, and I tell the hon. member this, can only be done for a crime in which the sentence would be under two years and would not endanger public safety. They do not involve the kinds of acts, in any way, that were raised by the hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Dufferin—Caledon, Taxation; the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni, Health; the hon. member for Kenora, Health.

It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the house.

The question is on the motion. Shall I dispense?

Some hon. members: No.

[Chair read text of motion to House]

The Deputy Speaker: 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 invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, we request a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1720)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 52)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Ali	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arseneault	Arya
Ashton	Atwin
Bachrach	Badawey
Bains	Baker
Barron	Battiste
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Bibeau
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blaney
Blois	Boissonnault
Boulerice	Bradford
Brière	Cannings
Casey	Chagger
Chahal	Champagne
Chatel	Chen
Chiang	Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)
Collins (Victoria)	Cormier
Coteau	Dabrusin
Damoff	Davies

Desjarlais	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
Garneau	Garrison
Gazan	Gerretsen
Gould	Green
Guilbeault	Hajdu
Hanley	Hardie
Hepfner	Holland
Housefather	Hughes
Hussen	Hutchings
Iacono	Idlout
Ien	Jaczek
Johns	Joly
Jones	Jowhari
Julian	Kayabaga
Kelloway	Khalid
Khera	Koutrakis
Kusmierczyk	Kwan
Lalonde	Lambropoulos
Lametti	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Lattanzio
Lauson	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lightbound
Long	Longfield
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacDonald (Malpeque)	MacGregor
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney
Martinez Ferrada	Masse
Mathyssen	May (Cambridge)
McDonald (Avalon)	McGuinty
McKay	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod	McPherson
Mendès	Mendicino
Miao	Morrice
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)
Singh	Sorbara
Spengemann	St-Onge
Sudds	Tassi
Taylor Roy	Thompson
Trudeau	Turnbull
Valdez	Van Bynen
van Koeverden	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Virani
Vuong	Weiler
Wilkinson	Yip
Zahid	Zarrillo
Zuberi — 183	

*Government Orders***NAYS****Members**

Aboultiaf	Aitchison
Albas	Allison
Arnold	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Benzen	Bergen
Bergeron	Berthold
Bérubé	Bezan
Blanchet	Blanchette-Joncas
Block	Bragdon
Brassard	Brock
Brunelle-Duceppe	Calkins
Caputo	Carrie
Chabot	Chambers
Champoux	Chong
Cooper	Dalton
Dancho	Davidson
DeBellefeuille	Deltell
Desbiens	Desilets
Dowdall	Dreeshen
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Ellis
Epp	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Ferri	Findlay
Fortin	Gallant
Garon	Gaudreau
Généreux	Genuis
Gill	Gladu
Godin	Goodridge
Gourde	Gray
Hallan	Hoback
Jeneroux	Kelly
Kitchen	Kmiec
Kram	Kramp-Neuman
Kurek	Kusie
Lake	Lantsman
Larouche	Lawrence
Lehoux	Lemire
Lewis (Essex)	Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Liepert	Lloyd
Lobb	MacKenzie
Maguire	Martel
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	Mazier
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McLean
Melillo	Michaud
Moore	Morantz
Morrison	Motz
Muys	Nater
Normandin	O'Toole
Patzer	Paul-Hus
Pauzé	Perkins
Perron	Plamondon
Poilievre	Rayes
Redekopp	Reid
Rempel Garner	Richards
Roberts	Rood
Ruff	Savard-Tremblay
Scheer	Schmale
Seebach	Shields
Shipley	Simard
Sinclair-Desgagné	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	Zimmer— 150

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The hon. Minister of Justice is rising on a point of order.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, I am tabling the government's responses to Order Paper Questions Nos. 323 to 332.

* * *

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from December 15, 2021, consideration of the motion that Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, inscribed at the top of one of the great law schools of this continent is the motto “Not under man, but under God and law”. I would read these words and feel a sense of pride that ours was a nation of laws, not men; a nation of citizens, not parties; of Canadians, not Liberals or Conservatives. For a nation as big and diverse as ours, our institutions, our norms and our rules bind us together, give shape and order to our common lives even when we disagree, and especially when we disagree.

However, every so often comes a time to make a change, a step in a better direction, a turn of the page, because in our very creed as Canadians, we are always striving to do better. The time has come to turn the page—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I must interrupt the hon. member very briefly.

I wish to inform the House that, because of the proceedings on the time allocation motion, Government Orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

The hon. member for Mississauga—Malton.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Madam Speaker, the time has come to turn the page on many mandatory minimum penalties. This was a policy that in the end did not discourage crime. It certainly did not make our justice system any more fair. All it did was imprison far too many indigenous, Black and marginalized Canadians. The evidence is in the numbers of the prison population, and the numbers are stark. Indigenous individuals represent 5% of the general population but account for 30% of federally incarcerated inmates. This is double what it was 20 years ago. The number is profoundly higher for indigenous women, who represent 42% of those who are incarcerated, and these numbers are even more exaggerated in some provinces. Black inmates represent 7.2% of the federal offender population but only 3% of the general population. This is shameful.

The numbers are so high because of sentencing laws that focus on punishment through imprisonment. The centre of this is the mandatory minimum regime. The broad and indiscriminate use of MMPs, or mandatory minimum penalties, and restrictions on the use of conditional sentences have made our criminal justice system less fair and have disproportionately hurt certain communities. This rigid one-size-fits-all approach takes power away from judges to look at mitigating factors.

I want to be very clear: This is not a soft-on-crime approach and these are not hardened criminals we are speaking of. We are speaking of low-risk, first-time or non-violent offenders.

We are introducing legislation to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Bill C-5 is an important step in the right direction, as the legislation would make reforms to sentencing. We are proposing to repeal MMPs of imprisonment for all drug offences and certain firearm offences. These MMPs in particular have been shown to have had a disparate effect on Black, indigenous, and marginalized communities.

This bill would increase the availability of conditional sentencing orders in cases where offenders do not pose a risk to public safety. CSOs allow offenders to serve sentences of less than two years in the community under strict conditions, such as house arrest and curfew, while still being able to benefit from employment, educational opportunities, family ties, community and health-related support systems. By repealing these MMPs, we will restore the judge's ability to impose an appropriate sentence, moving away from the one-size-fits-all approach.

Again, this is not a soft-on-crime approach. To be clear, we are keeping some mandatory minimum policies in place for murder, sexual offences, impaired driving offences and serious firearm offences, including those that involve organized crime. The powers of judges will not be limited. In fact, we will allow them to do the job they have been trained to do.

I was in law school, and that is where I was introduced to certain ideals or principles within a justice system, one being that the aim of justice is not just retribution. Mandatory minimums are just that—retribution. There are more useful aims, such as rehabilitation. We can make ourselves into better people even after we have wronged and especially after we have wronged. The justice system should be a part of that rehabilitation. Mandatory minimum penalties do not work in criminal law terms. They do not have a positive effect on recidivism. They tend to overpunish people who should be helped through other channels.

When it comes to deterrence, MMPs do not do any better. In sentencing for less serious crimes, imprisonment is often ineffective and unduly punitive. A longer sentence is not going to do anything more than a shorter sentence will, except destroy entire lives. In America, for example, the notion that harsh minimums could seriously dampen the drug trade has collapsed in the face of the manifest failure of the drug war.

With the way our current justice system is set up, we have criminalized poverty, mental illness and problematic addiction. It is so much harder to get that second chance with MMPs in place. Once a person is out of prison, their opportunities are limited and their cir-

cle oftentimes becomes the people that they met in prison. This has to stop.

• (1725)

Canada is not alone in recognizing that the increase in the indiscriminate use of MMPs is problematic. They have proven to be costly and ineffective in reducing crime. Indeed, other nations have moved away from this regime because it encourages cycles of crime.

MMPs are a failed policy, and we are turning the ship around. What we propose is a necessary reset for our criminal law, which is necessary to address systemic racism in the criminal justice system. This policy change is necessary, but further work must also be done.

We are also developing an indigenous justice strategy in collaboration with indigenous peoples, and we are developing a Black Canadian justice strategy. We will continue to address the social determinants of crime. Every action that we take to improve access to housing, mental health care, addiction treatment and youth employment helps build a safer country. Criminal justice policy is not developed in a vacuum, and we must do more so that we are better informed.

In my life, I have come to understand certain principles and rules, and that we are not just our mistakes. We are not just the worst thing that we have ever done. I believe we are more than that. As a society, we should make no mistake that we will not be judged for our reason and our intelligence and for our technology and tools. We will not be judged by the towers we build. Ultimately, our society will be judged not for how we treat the powerful, the rich and the privileged, but for how we treat the poor and condemned.

• (1730)

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the citizens of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

My hon. colleague and I do agree on a number of points, one of which is that there is a necessity to keep and to lower incarceration rates for marginalized people. Now, where he and I part company is when he frames the discussion as one around retribution. The courts in this country have consistently highlighted the need for denunciation and deterrence, and part of denunciation and deterrence comes by way of sentencing.

When we are talking about shooting at people, these are not the low-risk, first-time offenders, necessarily, that the hon. member highlighted. How does he reconcile those concepts?

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Madam Speaker, I disagree with the premise of my hon. colleague's question.

Government Orders

These policies have been shown through data to affect marginalized communities, and by repealing them, we are helping those communities and those individuals who were targeted to rejoin society. The way the policies are currently set up, they are focused on retribution, and we are trying to change that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, in his comments, the member talked about ending the war on drugs, and he talked about addressing the overdose crisis. From that perspective, I would ask him whether or not he supports the private member's bill, Bill C-216, of my colleague, the member for Courtenay—Alberni, which calls for the decriminalization of a small amount for personal use. It is one way to ensure that people are not criminalized. It is one way to ensure that we end the war on drugs, and it is one way to ensure that we actually help save lives.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Madam Speaker, I agree with the sentiment behind my colleague's question, but my speech was on mandatory minimum penalties, which is what we are here to talk about.

This is an important step in the right direction. I would like to see the data surrounding other MMPs to see if they are also having a desperate effect on communities to see if we could further repeal those.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my colleague across the aisle.

Earlier I asked the Minister of Justice about the relevance of imposing a gag order. If he ever gets a chance to speak with me about it, I would be pleased to do so, but I would like to come back to the issue that has also been raised by some of my Bloc colleagues. The bill currently before the House deals with mandatory minimum sentences for gun possession, but it also deals with everything related to the decriminalization of drugs. We are dealing with two very different subjects. Why did the government reject our proposal to split the bill in two?

By splitting the bill, we would have had the opportunity to study each of its two aspects in greater depth, so that they could be dealt with in an intelligent manner, and this would mean that members would not have to vote for or against the bill in its entirety. I think the government is mixing things up. This is creating confusion both in the debate and in the study of the bill.

[English]

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Madam Speaker, I humbly reject the premise of my hon. colleague's question. We would not be decriminalizing drugs with this bill. We are looking at mandatory minimum penalties.

I want to be clear that this is not a soft-on-crime approach. Those who commit serious offences would continue to receive serious sentences. Our bill is about getting rid of the failed policies that filled our prisons with low-risk, first-time offenders, who just needed help.

• (1735)

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Mississauga—Malton for his focus on this

being about trust in the judiciary, first and foremost. My question for him builds on a comment he made earlier on wanting to go further.

Recognizing this legislation only targets one of five of the existing mandatory minimum penalties in the Criminal Code, and that, for example, Truth and Reconciliation Commission call to action 32 calls for departing from this, could he share more about his interest in going further in removing mandatory minimum penalties?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Mississauga—Malton has time for a very brief answer.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Madam Speaker, again, these proposed measures represent an important step in further addressing systemic issues related to existing sentencing policies. We know rooting out systemic racism and discrimination cannot be accomplished with just one measure—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Unfortunately, we need to move on to the next speaker.

The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, when I spoke to the first iteration of this bill back in April 2021, I remarked at the time on how out of touch the Liberal government had become. If anyone from the new NDP-Liberal coalition actually took time to come and speak to mayors, chiefs and councillors, or the RCMP members in northern Saskatchewan, they would know that bills like this do far more to hurt communities than to help them.

When I speak to elected leaders, I constantly hear that there are violent offenders they do not want in their communities. In fact, they are searching for ways to keep them out. They wonder why these repeat offenders cannot remain in custody and why they are allowed to keep returning to victimize their communities. They are frustrated. They realize that when certain people are removed, they seem to have a time of peace and quiet. This bill would add to the frustration.

Bill C-5 would eliminate mandatory minimums for offences such as robbery with a firearm, extortion with a firearm, weapons trafficking, importing or exporting knowing a firearm is unauthorized, and discharging a firearm with intent. The list goes on. The Minister of Justice, just this afternoon, told us that he believes these are just minor offences. I do not believe these are minor offences.

Police officers, judges, prosecutors and many others in the communities already do everything they can for non-violent offenders to ensure they have every opportunity to stay out of prison. Sometimes the peace of mind that comes with mandatory minimums is essential to ensure our communities feel safe and are safe.

In northern Saskatchewan, there is a concerning trend of witness intimidation, as well as increasing recruitment of young people into gangs and the drug trade. Mandatory minimums assist the police and prosecutors to ensure the safety of witnesses. By keeping violent offenders off the street, greater opportunity is provided to engage in early intervention and prevent criminal gang recruitment.

March 17, just last week, Meadow Lake's RCMP Staff Sergeant Ryan How wrote an article in Saskatchewan Today. It reads:

From October 1, 2020, to March 15, 2021, Meadow Lake RCMP responded to 66 firearms complaints. In the same time frame in 2021 to 2022 RCMP have received 30 firearms complaints. Any level of gun violence is unacceptable and the Meadow Lake RCMP Detachment is unfortunately still busy dealing with violent occurrences, while at the same time noting that this reduction in gun calls is well-progress.

A focused formal enforcement project led by North Battleford Provincial GIS was put in place in early 2021 to dismantle one of the gangs involved in the violence and has resulted in the following convictions....

He goes on to list the names, the offences they are charged with and the sentences of several violent gang members. It is shocking that the charges include one that is being proposed to no longer have minimum sentences under this bill. The Government of Canada ought to be supporting more initiatives like the one Staff Sergeant How talks about and supporting enforcement officers like him who are investing time and energy in building relationships in the communities they serve, rather than basing Criminal Code policy on political ideology.

I am neither an RCMP officer nor a crown prosecutor, like some of my colleagues, but when I hear from experts on the ground that getting rid of mandatory minimums like those proposed in Bill C-5 would put our communities in greater danger, I tend to believe them. We need to be equipping law enforcement to carry out their duties and keep our communities safe, not neutering their abilities to keep violent offenders off the streets.

One of the questions that keeps coming up around this bill is regarding judicial discretion. While I agree that judges should have some discretion when it comes to sentencing, this is also the role of Parliament. Parliament, in the past, has assigned not only maximum sentences, which impact judges' discretion, but also minimum sentences. This has been done with Parliament's wisdom. It is up to us and within our power to change that, but it has always been the case that Parliament sets out the parameters whereby judges sentence people.

We are the ones who decide, through the Criminal Code, what is a criminal act, and we set out the parameters for sentencing. That is part of our job, and it is not partisan.

• (1740)

Many of the minimums being eliminated by this Liberal government were in fact introduced by previous Liberal governments. This is about ensuring there is an appropriate sentence for someone who commits a very serious crime. Again, as I said previously, Bill C-5 is not about minor and insignificant offences. It deals with what I would conclude are very serious offences, such as robbery with a firearm and extortion with a firearm. I have not even begun to discuss the sections in the bill dedicated to drug-related offences.

Government Orders

Bill C-5 would also eliminate mandatory prison time for trafficking or possession for the purposes of trafficking, importing and exporting or possession for the purpose of exporting and production of a substance under schedule I or II. Examples of those are heroin, cocaine, fentanyl and crystal meth. When I read the legislation, it seems clear to me that no one from the Liberal-NDP coalition has ever sat across the table from a chief and elders pleading to get and keep these drug dealers out of their communities.

When I first spoke to Bill C-22 in the last Parliament, I shared a story from a local paper. The story was about a judge's decision, arguments by the Crown prosecutor and the victim impact statements of some RCMP officers. Today I am going to take a few minutes of my time to share that story again, one of the victim impact statements of one of the officers. I truly hope today that all members in this House, even if they ignore everything else I say today, will listen to this story.

The statement said:

When I encountered the gold truck you were in north of Loon Lake the only emotion I felt was sadness.

I knew right away how this was going to end. It's always the same, just a varying degree of tragedy. When I saw your co-accused run from the Equinox and point what may have been a gun at me, I just felt tired and defeated....

I knew what you would do when you came up to the road block. And you did the same thing every other desperate criminal does—you accelerated and swerved towards the police.

As you did that, I took off my seatbelt and accelerated my truck directly at you. I wanted to be able to at least have the chance to manoeuvre in the cab if you and your fellow gang members started shooting at me. As I lined up my truck to yours head-on I fully expected to be shot but I tried to make sure my truck would stay on a straight path and hit you even if I couldn't steer because you needed to be stopped.... Even after all of this, after hours of chasing after you, hours of being frustrated, angry, and tired, [I] was required to be of calm mind and use sound tactics as I drew my gun on you and the people with you.... At that moment I was furious that it had come to this. I was furious that your stupidity was causing me to miss an important family event going on right at that moment I had you in my gun sights. I was furious that I might have to shoot and kill you.... I didn't shoot you...My coworkers didn't shoot you, even though we were taunted and dared to do it by the people in the truck with you. Even though your actions caused one of my coworkers to almost be run over and killed. We made sure you were safe. It was a joke and a game to you. It was life and death for me, for my partners, and the public. I'm telling you that on January 17, 2019, you were lucky to be arrested by some of the most capable and experienced police officers in the country. They showed incredible restraint and professionalism to make sure you lived to be here today.

I had the opportunity to speak to Sergeant How after this and he shared with me how these events had become almost routine in his world. I am asking members to imagine this becoming part of the daily routine. I remember having to fight back the emotion.

Government Orders

Finally, this bill would allow for greater use of conditional sentence orders for a number of offences. Allowing criminals who commit violent acts to serve their sentences on house arrest puts communities in my riding at risk.

In closing—

● (1745)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is 5:45 p.m., and I have to stop the debate.

[*Translation*]

It being 5:45 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

The question is on the motion.

[*English*]

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

The hon. House leader of the official opposition.

Mr. John Brassard: I request a recorded division, Madam Speaker.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Accordingly, pursuant to an order made on Thursday, November 25, 2021, the division stands deferred until Thursday, March 31, 2022, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

* * *

SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE ON MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions amongst the parties, and if you seek it, I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That,

(a) pursuant to subsection 5(1) of An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying), a special joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons be appointed to review the provisions of the Criminal Code relating to medical assistance in dying and their application, including but not limited to issues relating to mature minors, advance requests, mental illness, the state of palliative care in Canada and the protection of Canadians with disabilities;

(b) pursuant to subsection 5(2) of the act, five members of the Senate and 10 members of the House of Commons be members of the committee, including five members of the House of Commons from the governing party, three members of the House of Commons from the official opposition, and two members of the House of Commons from the opposition who are not members of the official opposition, with two chairs of which the House co-chair shall be from the governing party and the Senate co-chair shall be determined by the Senate;

(c) in addition to the co-chairs, the committee shall elect three vice-chairs from the House, of whom the first vice-chair shall be from the Conservative Party of Canada, the second vice-chair shall be from the Bloc Québécois and the third vice-chair shall be from the New Democratic Party;

(d) pursuant to subsection 5(3) of the act, the quorum of the committee be eight members whenever a vote, resolution or other decision is taken, so long as both Houses and one member of the governing party in the House, one from the opposition in the House and one member of the Senate are represented, and that the joint chairs be authorized to hold meetings, to receive evidence and authorize the printing thereof, whenever six members are present, so long as both Houses and one member of the governing party in the House, one member from the opposition in the House and one member of the Senate are represented;

(e) the House of Commons members be named by their respective whip by depositing with the Clerk of the House the list of their members to serve on the committee no later than five sitting days after the adoption of this motion;

(f) changes to the membership of the committee, on the part of the House of Commons, be effective immediately after notification by the relevant whip has been filed with the Clerk of the House;

(g) membership substitutions, on the part of the House of Commons, be permitted, if required, in the manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2) and that they may be filed with the clerk of the committee by email;

(h) until Thursday, June 23, 2022, where applicable to a special joint committee, the provisions contained in paragraph (r) of the order adopted by the House on Thursday, November 25, 2021, shall also apply to the committee;

(i) the committee have the power to:

i. sit during sittings and adjournments of the House,

ii. report from time to time, to send for persons, papers and records, and to print such papers and evidence as may be ordered by the committee,

iii. retain the services of expert, professional, technical and clerical staff, including legal counsel,

iv. appoint, from among its members such subcommittees as may be deemed appropriate and to delegate to such subcommittees, all or any of its powers, except the power to report to the Senate and House of Commons,

v. authorize video and audio broadcasting of any or all of its proceedings and that public proceedings be made available to the public via the Parliament of Canada's websites;

(j) pursuant to subsection 5(5) of the act, the committee submit a final report of its review, including a statement of any recommended changes, to Parliament no later than Thursday, June 23, 2022; and

(k) pursuant to subsection 5(6) of the act, following the tabling of the final report in both Houses, the committee shall then expire; and

that a message be sent to the Senate requesting that House to unite with this House for the above purpose and to select, if the Senate deems advisable, members to act on the proposed special joint committee.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay.

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

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

The hon. member for Peterborough—Kawartha is rising on a point of order.

OFFICIAL REPORT

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to clarify something. Last week in the House, I referred to myself as a single mother of six children. I would like to clarify that statement. What I should have said is that I have been a single mother and I now care for up to six children at a time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): That is noted.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you might find unanimous consent to call it six o'clock at this time so that we can begin private members' hour.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC) moved that Bill C-215, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (illness, injury or quarantine), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, it is an honour for me to debate my private member's bill, namely Bill C-215, which seeks to amend the number of weeks for employment insurance sickness benefits.

The bill proposes to increase from 15 to 52 weeks the period for which Canadians eligible for employment insurance sickness benefits are able to use extra weeks for their recovery or their convalescence with a minimum amount of financial security in case of serious illness, such as cancer and other illnesses that require long recovery periods.

This is not a new debate in the House. Every party has introduced similar bills over the past few Parliaments, which implies a certain unanimity among members. Since the devil is in the details, even with positive support in the House, we absolutely need the support of the Liberal government to obtain royal recommendation, since there is a financial implication to Bill C-215.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer did a study in 2019 and March 2022 proving that this bill is affordable and the cost shared by Canadians and Canadian employers is reasonable. The study indicates that 151,000 Canadians a year need more than 15 weeks of sickness benefits for their convalescence. Should those 151,000 Canadians use all of their weeks, which would obviously not be the case, the cost would amount to \$1.6 billion a year on average for the next five years. This cost could be lower than forecast because the average number of weeks required is approximately 38, according to the PBO costing note updated on March 29, 2022.

This debate is truly important for Canadians. Families in my riding have been calling on me for a long time to improve this situa-

Private Members' Business

tion. The lived experiences of Canadians across the country and what I have personally gone through with people very close and dear to me remind me of the harsh reality of the hard times and difficult challenges we have faced with sick family members, who were unable to take care of themselves or even work to pay their bills.

All too often, Canadians with long-term health issues find it very hard to make ends meet and to cover the additional costs resulting from their prolonged illness. These people enjoy an active social life and do not deserve to be left on their own or to lose their dignity.

All of us in the House have a duty to support those who are not covered by income protection insurance, a type of private insurance that is too costly for low-income earners. That is why Bill C-215 is so important for Canadians. Its low cost affords some basic financial security in the event of a prolonged illness. We are talking about less than the cost of one coffee a month.

Solidarity and compassion are important to me, and I am hoping I can rally the support of all my colleagues here in the House because solidarity and compassion are important to them too. I have faith that, together, we can support the individuals and families who are affected every year when a loved one is diagnosed with a serious or even life-threatening illness. Once again, we have a collective responsibility to do something.

We cannot let life partners, parents, children and grandchildren think that, in Canada, we do not take care of each other and we do not support those who are suffering. Some stories are easier than others, but if we pass Bill C-215, we can give Canadians some mental and financial peace of mind.

As members know, everyone here who is in good health is unbelievably lucky, and this good health is too often taken for granted. For many, cancer is life experience, but others are not lucky enough to recover quickly, especially if they have many other concerns on their plate. The medical aspect is just one part of living with cancer. Then there is life after treatment, which is a period of transition and adjustment that often brings much bigger challenges than the patient was originally expecting.

Given the scope of the challenge facing Canadians and the tremendous resilience they will show, we must absolutely support them through this experience, which involves precarious periods of great uncertainty.

• (1755)

Many people have to rethink every aspect of their lives, and that takes a lot of courage. Unless I am mistaken, Canadians can count on the opposition parties' firm commitment to supporting them now and on today's debate persuading the Liberal government to give them what they deserve, which is the right conditions for recovery while they await better financial support.

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Here in Canada, we are lucky to have a health care system that delivers hospital care to sick people for free. However, there can be many out-of-pocket and unforeseen expenses. Travel to the treatment site is one example, along with parking, child care, nutritional supplements, vitamins and prescription drugs, as well as any equipment needed for recovery.

Employment insurance sickness benefits provide up to 15 weeks of financial support to individuals who cannot work for medical reasons. That means 55% of a person's pay up to \$595 per week. To be eligible, individuals must obtain a medical certificate indicating that they cannot work for medical reasons. Medical reasons may include sickness, injury, quarantine or any other condition preventing them from working.

Insurable earnings include most types of employment income, such as wages, tips, bonuses and commissions. The Canada Revenue Agency determines what constitutes insurable earnings.

Some employers provide their own paid sick leave or short-term disability insurance plans. Before applying for employment insurance sickness benefits, individuals must check to see if their employer has a plan. If a medical condition is likely to be long-term or permanent, individuals may be eligible for other benefits, such as the Canada pension plan disability benefit or the Quebec pension plan disability benefit.

I would like to draw my colleagues' attention to a very important report on EI sickness benefit policies that was produced following a multi-stakeholder policy round table held on September 4, 2019. This 2019 round table brought together seven different stakeholders interested in Canada's sickness and disability benefit policies.

This initiative was organized by the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Labour Congress, Cystic Fibrosis Canada, Diabetes Canada, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada and Neurological Health Charities Canada.

The discussions followed an initial conversation at a similar forum in 2015, which provided an update on the state of health benefits in Canada. One notable difference between the 2019 round table and the 2015 forum is that the 2015 discussion took a more holistic view of the supports offered, whereas the 2019 session focused primarily on recommendations for health insurance benefits.

The report found that in any given year, six per cent of Canadian workers will suffer a personal health issue that will require them to adjust their work status, including being away from work for an extended period of time, changing from full-time to part-time work, and leaving the labour market entirely; and pointed to the need for a comprehensive re-examination of the needs of working Canadians who are living with an illness or a disability. In particular, two conclusions were focused upon:

1. The call for improved coordination within government and between levels of government, including greater coordination of research;
2. The call to increase basic access to support coverage.

I would also like to draw my colleagues' attention to a very important point that was raised during the debate on former Bill C-265. During that debate, a member said that there were many inconsistencies in program administration, the most obvious being that a caregiver is entitled to 26 weeks of benefits while a sick person is entitled to only 15 weeks.

• (1800)

Some might balk at the idea of providing 52 weeks, that it may be too much. I would just point out that no one has ever gotten rich from being sick, and especially not with 55% of their salary in the short and medium terms. When you battle cancer with a loved one, as I have, 15 or 26 weeks are not nearly enough. I do not need an expert to confirm that.

Some people have expressed concern over potential abuse or fraud by program recipients. As hon. members know, anything is possible. Still, to be eligible for employment insurance sickness benefits Canadians must fill out an application and provide a medical certificate from their doctor or health specialist.

I would therefore like to reassure these people by proposing certain initiatives. After second reading, during study of the bill in committee, we could rely on experts and health specialists to identify all the serious illnesses that are eligible for this extension of benefits to 52 weeks.

We could bring in employment insurance officials to explain the audits that are carefully done every year for the EI monitoring and assessment report.

To conclude, I will reiterate all the positive points of my Bill C-215. All parties and experts in the field agree that we must increase the number of weeks of EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50. This bill proposes to extend benefits to 52 weeks.

It is our duty as legislators to ensure that we have an adequate safety net for the most vulnerable. This measure affects 55% of the population, namely those who do not have group insurance and work primarily in the goods and services sector.

The EI program has rigorous monitoring and annual audit mechanisms to prevent mistakes, fraud and abuse. The medical certificate attests to the number of weeks required for the recovery of an applicant through the healing process.

This is a promise that was made by the Conservative Party of Canada during the 2021 election campaign. It is a measure that was voted on by members of our party and presented in the Conservative Party of Canada platform.

Employees who have a private health plan must use up their weeks of sick leave before applying for EI sickness benefits.

This measure is affordable and reasonable when we consider the cost to small and medium-sized businesses of private insurance plans offering the same benefits.

In July 2022, the Liberal government will extend the number of weeks of EI sickness benefits to 26, which means that the PBO's cost estimate will decrease considerably.

I hope to get the support of all my colleagues in the House for this noble cause, which will make it possible for those we love to take care of themselves and have the time they need to fully recover.

• (1805)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would note that this particular bill that has come forward is almost identical in form to Bill C-265, from the 43rd Parliament. The reason why I bring this up is because, after Bill C-265 went through all the stages of the House and returned back here, the Speaker ruled on the third reading of the vote that it could not proceed because the bill did not have the required royal recommendation.

I am wondering this. Can the member provide some input as to whether the discrepancies or the challenges within the bill, which require that royal recommendation, have been properly dealt with? At my first glance, it does not appear as though that is the case. Unfortunately, it appears that the bill will, in all likelihood, end up with the same fate as that previous bill.

Can the member let us know?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right.

To obtain royal recommendation, I need the support of the Liberal government or two ministers in the House. It is true that other opposition parties have previously introduced similar bills. This bill is very good for Canadians.

You have the pressure of deciding whether to support this bill or not. It is up to the Liberal government to say yes or no, and you will live with the consequences of your decision.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): Order. I remind the hon. member that he must address his comments through the Chair.

The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my Conservative colleague for introducing this bill. The bill comes after we have been fighting for 10 years to increase EI sickness benefits to 50 weeks from the 15 weeks that have been provided for the past 50 years.

My colleague was asked by the party opposite whether this bill required a royal recommendation.

Does he think that what is really required here is for the government to show some political will in moving this forward?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. She is absolutely right.

I think every member of Parliament is in favour of this bill. All the parties have previously introduced similar bills, including the

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Liberal Party. The current Prime Minister voted in favour of such a bill during a previous Parliament. I think that all members in the House can do some soul-searching and move forward.

It is up to the Liberal government to allow the House to move forward with Bill C-215. I would go so far as to say it is the wish of the entire House, because this bill will no doubt be supported by the majority.

• (1810)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my Conservative colleague and congratulate him on his private member's bill. This is a very good idea, one that the NDP and other parties have already had. It would really help people.

I always like it when the Conservatives, while in opposition, do things that are good for workers.

However, it did take them some time to get to this point. Why did my colleague not introduce a bill like this one when his party was in government?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The whole process was 100% democratic. This measure, which we managed to put in the Conservative Party of Canada's platform, came from an association in Quebec. Moving forward with this is now one of our party's national objectives.

I would like to thank the Bloc Québécois and the NDP for supporting my bill because they had similar bills themselves.

I think this is very much the right time to go ahead with this.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what really motivated my colleague to introduce this bill.

In my riding, I have seen so many people end up with absolutely nothing. Even as they were fighting for their lives, they could not cover their basic expenses.

Is that the kind of situation that motivated my colleague?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, that was actually my personal experience for a year.

My wife had cancer, and I had to support her. Without the help of my whole family and our friends, we would have had a very hard time getting through a very hard year.

[*English*]

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. colleague for his story and for his words. I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to this proposed amendment.

Private Members' Business

Our employment insurance program is there to support Canadians when they are unable to work or unable to find work. Over the past several decades, governments have amended the EI Act to adapt to Canada's changing employment environment. In that same tradition, the bill we are debating today seeks to change an existing program to address evolving circumstances. However, we need to ensure that any amendments to the EI Act are considered in the full context of the new reality. Please allow me to outline some of the reasons that the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion opposes Bill C-215.

Parliament has already approved an extension of EI sickness benefits from 15 to 26 weeks. We are working hard to implement the extension this summer to better support Canadian workers. In contrast, an extension of EI sickness benefits from 15 to 52 weeks, as proposed in this bill, would incur an estimated incremental cost of over \$2 billion per year, which is \$1 billion more per year than the extension to 26 weeks. It could impact labour-market attachment and participation by providing additional income support to many workers who are not expected to return to work, and could result in a drop in employer-provided sickness benefit coverage, leading to more claims against the EI program.

Sickness benefits within the EI program are a short-term income replacement for temporary work absences due to illness, injury or a quarantine. When Canadians are facing illness or injury, they deserve to feel confident that the EI program is financially supporting them and protecting their jobs as they recover. Unfortunately, we recognize that some workers use the maximum number of weeks of EI sickness benefits available to them before they are healthy enough to return to work.

A worker who needs more time to recover from an illness should not have the added burden of coping with financial stress, which is why in budget 2021 our government pledged to extend EI sickness benefits from 15 to 26 weeks. The permanent extension of the EI sickness benefits, expected to be in effect by the end of this summer, will provide Canadians with additional time and flexibility to recover and return to work. Other supports are available to workers who may be eligible for longer-term illness and disability, including the Canada pension plan disability benefit, benefits offered through private and employer insurance, and financial supports provided by the provinces and territories.

The current 15 weeks of temporary income support available under EI sickness benefits provide an amount equal to 55% of the worker's average weekly insurable earnings. In 2022, this maximum weekly amount is \$638. In 2019-20, on average, workers used approximately 10 weeks of EI sickness benefits. However, just over one-third of workers used the full 15 weeks of sickness benefits available. That told us there was a need to extend the number of weeks available to provide more time to recover for those suffering from longer-term illness. That is why we have committed to increasing the maximum number of weeks from 15 to 26 weeks. We think this strikes a good balance.

The increased number of benefit weeks is a positive change to the EI program, but the government has a much bigger picture developing that must also be addressed. When the COVID pandemic struck, it quickly exposed inadequacies in the EI program. It taught us that EI has not kept up with the way Canadians work, nor has it

kept up with emerging trends in labour markets. The gradual and continued emergence of gig workers and self-employed Canadians in recent years is perhaps the best example. The CERB and the Canada recovery benefit helped many of those 2.9 million people keep food on the table and a roof over their heads. It is clear that the EI program was unable to adequately respond to a major crisis like the COVID pandemic, hence the necessity for the government to introduce a series of emergency benefits.

● (1815)

On the positive side, the government is grasping the unique opportunity to bring the employment insurance program into the modern era and to make it more inclusive. Indeed, it is a major component of the mandate letter for the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion.

Last summer, the minister joined the Canada Employment Insurance Commission to launch the first phase of a two-year consultation on the future of the EI program. To reach as many Canadians as possible, the minister asked her department to launch a consultations portal, which included an online survey, where all interested Canadians could share their views. The survey was open from August 6 to November 19 last year and drew more than 1,900 responses. Approximately 60 written submissions came from a cross-section of labour, employer and other groups.

The minister personally attended many of the 10 national and 11 regional round tables to hear feedback on how the EI program could better serve Canadians. Input was received from more than 200 stakeholders across the country, including employer and employee organizations, unions, academics, self-employed and gig worker associations, parent and family associations, and health associations, just to name a few. The overarching goal is to bring forward a vision for a new and modern EI system that is simpler and more responsive to the needs of workers and employers.

The first round of the consultations focused on key priorities relating to improving access to EI, including how to address the temporary emergency measures that will expire this fall. We are also examining whether the EI system meets the evolving and diverse needs of Canadian families, like, for example, how to make maternity and parental benefits more flexible and inclusive for adoptive parents. There are differing views, obviously, but I know the minister has found a unanimous commitment on the part of both employer and employee representatives to develop a modern EI program that is resilient, accessible, adequate and financially sustainable. The government is planning a second phase of round-table consultations by the summer.

Aside from the information, advice and recommendations from the round tables and online consultations, there are several other reviews, evaluations and reports already available. In particular, there was some excellent work in 2021 by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, which included 20 recommendations on modernizing the EI program.

In conclusion, the EI program has been a crucial part of Canada's social safety net since 1940. As I mentioned earlier, EI has become the most complex system within the Government of Canada. Reforming EI for the 21st century is essential, and the government is moving with pace to get it done and, more importantly, get it done well.

• (1820)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today in support of the bill introduced by the member for Lévis—Lotbinière, which seeks to increase the number of weeks of EI sickness benefits to 52 weeks.

I welcome the bill, but I am sorry to see that we are still at this point. We nearly made it to the finish line in the last session. Bill C-265, the Émilie Sansfaçon act, introduced by my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît to increase the number of weeks of sickness benefit from 15 to 50, made it through the committee stage. Sick workers were finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel.

Unfortunately, as we know, the bill required a royal recommendation, which was never given. Then we were left with nothing, because an election was called. Only the government knows why it was called. It is a total mystery, like the Caramilk secret.

I would never put it the same as the member for Lévis—Lotbinière did, and I am surprised he did not say it, but after 10 years of struggle and multiple bills, it is a disgrace that we are still at this point.

Nevertheless, I will try to avoid giving a history lesson and instead look to the future, because this bill is fundamentally about hope. It represents the possibility for sick workers to look forward to the future with optimism and with the tools they need to recover in dignity.

Supporting this bill is a matter of consistency and willingness to listen. The weeks of sickness benefits have one purpose: to give in-

sured workers the time to heal while maintaining their employment relationship and to offer them income to support their needs.

To be consistent, these benefits need to be tailored to every type of illness. Some call for more time than others.

During the implementation of the original program of 15 weeks of sickness benefits 50 years ago, 82% of workers had to take more than 16 weeks to recover before returning to work. The program was already flawed because it was demonstrated that recovery took longer than 15 weeks. It seems to me that it would be logical to adjust this measure to make it meet its primary mission, namely to provide the necessary number of weeks of benefits for people to recover from any type of illness.

The government has been talking a lot about science. Science obviously needs to have a role, but what do science and research currently tell us? They tell us that on average, in cases of serious illness, a person needs at least 40 weeks to recover. The current program offers 15 weeks, but this inconsistency is not new. We have to rectify this.

A number of people spoke out against the situation and called for change. People have been saying for years that 15 weeks is not enough. The government needs to listen.

It needs to listen to Émilie Sansfaçon, who dedicated her final years to this cause and who was calling for 50 weeks. The government must listen and it must acknowledge the hard work done by Marie-Hélène Dubé and the 619,000 signatures she collected in support of increasing the number of weeks of sickness benefits. Ms. Dubé has been advocating for this for 10 years.

Seven bills have already been introduced in the House on the same issue. One such bill was introduced by Denis Coderre and received the support of the current Liberal Prime Minister, who was an opposition member at the time.

Listening also involves being logical. We must acknowledge the many bills that have already been introduced in the House and address this issue.

• (1825)

We have had debates about this, we have had studies, recommendations and committee reports. It is time to stop dithering and get this done. At this point, all we need is the political will.

In its most recent budget, the government decided to increase the number of benefit weeks to 26. That will not happen until July. Recently, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion said that it might even take another three months because the computer systems are not ready. Apparently they are too old to handle these changes.

My question is, why stop at 26 weeks? Why stop halfway when we know that it takes people at least 40 weeks to get better?

The government was supposed to fix things once and for all for workers who contribute to EI, get sick and need protection.

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There is private insurance and there is public insurance. These are not the workers we are talking about, because 60% of workers do not have private insurance. They cannot afford private insurance.

I would remind members that a majority of the House of Commons voted in favour of a Bloc Québécois motion to that effect. At least 50 weeks are needed. On June 17, 2021, when the Émilie Sansfaçon bill was being studied in committee, it passed unanimously, without amendment. It was just a matter of will.

The bill also raises a fundamental question. As we figure out how to live in harmony with one another, what values should we base that on? For me, it is fairly obvious. It is about compassion. Workers need to be able to recover from an illness without falling into poverty.

We hear some real horror stories. Some people are forced to use up all of their savings, while others have to remortgage their homes to survive financially. Some manage to get by, because they have enough savings and a good family and support network. Others are forced to fend for themselves. It makes no sense to leave people in such poverty.

From the beginning of this parliamentary session, the government has been trying to convince us that it must intervene in health, trampling on provincial jurisdictions in the process. It now has an opportunity to take meaningful action that will have a real impact on people's health, while remaining within its own areas of jurisdiction. Will the government seize this golden opportunity?

I am appealing to our compassion. We have to allow workers to recover with dignity. It is a matter of justice. Need I remind members that this money belongs to workers and employers? That is how the employment insurance system works. A worker who contributed to the system their entire life and gets sick should be entitled to enough weeks of benefits to recover. It is as simple as that. It is their money after all. It is only fair that they have access to it.

The government justifies its half-measure by invoking the argument of cost. It says that it is too costly. It would not cost \$2 billion, but \$1 billion. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that this would cost roughly \$1.1 billion more a year.

The government's upcoming budget presents an opportunity. Given that the government is going to spend billions of dollars on issues that are not its own priorities, it must be able to invest \$1 billion to correct such a serious injustice toward sick workers.

The member who spoke before me talked about employment insurance reform. There have been calls for such reform for years. The Liberal government promised to reform the system in 2015. It needs to happen now.

There are two opportunities to take action: the budget and employment insurance reform. This needs to happen today, not tomorrow.

• (1830)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not every day that I rise in the House to say that I agree with the member for Lévis—Lotbinière, but it does happen. I will warn you, however, that I may not make it a habit.

I thank my Bloc Québécois colleague for her earlier comments.

I believe that we can perhaps arrive at a consensus, even though it may not be unanimous, on the need to move forward with this bill. Many, if not all, political parties in the House have introduced a similar bill at some point in time. I believe that getting this consensus is the right thing to do to support those who are sick and need help and to ensure that the social safety net is effective and useful.

Many people have been calling for improved special sickness benefits for years. I would obviously be remiss if I failed to mention the labour movement, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, the Centrale des syndicats du Québec, and community groups such as Mouvement Action-Chômage, Mouvement autonome et solidaire des sans-emploi and the Conseil national des chômeurs et chômeuses du Québec, which are all calling for these improvements to be made.

Like some of the other members who spoke, I, too, want to highlight the efforts of two exceptional women who have fought hard to ensure that these improvements are made to the EI system. One of them continues to carry on the fight. The first of these women is the late Émilie Sansfaçon, who unfortunately did not live to see these changes made to EI sickness benefits, but who worked hard to achieve them. The second is Marie-Hélène Dubé, who has survived cancer three times and has worked very hard for 10 years with all parliamentarians and political parties to advance this cause. She managed to do something remarkable when she got nearly 620,000 signatures on a petition calling for these improvements to the EI system. That is an amazing feat.

This shows that people are aware of these issues and that they are concerned about them. They recognize that the current system is inadequate and needs to be improved. The Liberals say that they want to listen to the science, but let us listen to what doctors are telling us here. Let us listen to what studies are telling us and look at what people with serious illnesses have to deal with.

Bill C-215 is very similar to NDP Bill C-212, which my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona introduced in the previous Parliament. This bill was very much along the same lines as the one before us today.

Fifteen weeks of benefits is completely ridiculous. At one point, caregivers were entitled to more weeks of EI benefits than the person with the illness. The Liberals have taken action, but once again they have not done enough. Rather than increasing sickness benefits to 50 or 52 weeks, they increased them to just 26 weeks.

Why do things halfway, when we are being told that someone with cancer, for example, needs 50 or 52 weeks?

Recovery can take 35 to 40 weeks. The average is 41 weeks. Why not go ahead and make 50 or 52 weeks available? By what logic is the Liberal government telling sick people that they cannot collect benefits while they are sick or that they cannot keep collecting them until they make a full recovery? That is not very humane, it does not meet people's needs, and there is no reason for it at all.

We all agree that 26 weeks is better than 15, but why not go all the way?

I want this to be clear. I am sure we can all agree that sick people themselves do not decide that they need 50 weeks of sickness benefits. That is for doctors to decide. People need a doctor's note to claim special sickness benefits. That strict medical framework is already in place, and it is not up to individuals to choose to take an extra four weeks. That is up to the doctor.

● (1835)

I really encourage the Liberals to do the right thing and support Bill C-215 so we can finally resolve this issue once and for all. This has been dragging on for far too long.

If a royal recommendation or the support of two government ministers is required to move this forward, let us do it. I hope those on the Liberal benches will find enough political courage and common sense to do the right thing. It would be historic, and everyone would be delighted. I think everyone could then say that we worked together to get something done that will really help people who are suffering and who need this help.

As someone mentioned earlier, this is also the workers' own money. This is not public money that falls from the sky, but rather premiums paid by workers and employers to create this fund, which must serve the people.

Unemployment is already not a choice anyone makes. It is something that can happen to anyone. People are victims of it. Illness is also never an individual choice; people are victims of it. Individuals who find themselves in this extremely distressing double situation must have all the necessary supports.

As parliamentarians, as elected members and representatives of the people, the least we can do is adapt our programs to meet the needs of the people, especially those in need.

We have to take it further than that. The 26 weeks that will be granted are not enough and will not meet the needs of 75% of the people who are sick. I do not understand why the Liberals are stopping halfway like that.

I want to talk about the employment insurance system in general. We are almost desperate for major EI reform. It makes no sense that for years, the majority of workers who contribute have not been eligible for benefits because they did not have enough hours to qualify. The system is completely broken. It went off the rails over the years and urgently needs to be modernized.

The Liberals said change was coming, but they have been saying that for a long time about certain issues. Fortunately, sometimes the NDP pushes them to reach an agreement in order to speed things up so the work can actually get done.

Private Members' Business

EI for seasonal workers, the five-week pilot project for seasonal gappers or for self-employed workers, is a disaster. There is nothing in that program that meets people's needs.

There are more and more freelancers, self-employed workers and contract workers in the new economy and in our society. Not only are they not eligible for benefits, but they also cannot even contribute because they are both an employer and an employee. They are not covered by the system. Gig workers, self-employed workers and freelancers are left out.

I was going to talk about the COVID-19 pandemic using the past tense, but we just learned that Quebec is officially in the sixth wave of the pandemic. Unfortunately, this means that we may still be in it for a little longer. This pandemic has shown that our social safety net is flawed, gutted and in shambles, and it is clear that it needs to be rebuilt.

At the federal level, EI is a very important tool to help individuals get back on their feet. Our health care system needs assistance as well. It needs better protection and more funding. It needs guarantees and standards to ensure that people are getting good care from the public sector. We must not allow privatization and money to dictate whether someone can access care.

If not for the much-talked-about CERB and its successor, the CRB, a whole bunch of self-employed workers, freelancers and contract workers would have been forced to declare bankruptcy. We succeeded with the CRB. We negotiated with the minority Liberal government to increase the benefit to \$2,000 and to extend the program when people needed it. However, that was a temporary measure, much like putting a bandage on a broken leg.

It is now time to not only increase the duration of sickness benefits to 52 weeks for those who need it, but also overhaul the EI regime. It must be done.

● (1840)

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the name Marie-Hélène Dubé mean anything to you?

For 10 years, she has been the voice of thousands of people, especially women, who are fighting serious illnesses like cancer under difficult conditions. They have had to deal not only with the illness, but also with the financial problems it causes because of the current limitations of Canada's Employment Insurance Act.

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Marie-Hélène submitted the largest-ever petition to the House, a petition signed by 600,000 people. Originally from Rivière-du-Loup, in my riding, Marie-Hélène now lives in Montreal and has had cancer three times. Not one, not two, but three. She went through all her bouts with cancer in very precarious financial circumstances because the EI system only provides 15 weeks of benefits. Those with family members or friends battling this horrible illness of cancer know that it is not possible to recover in 15 weeks.

Statistics show that, in many cases, a minimum of 52 weeks of treatment is needed to beat the illness. Let us be clear, people affected by an illness certainly do not need financial stress on top of that. In an advanced country like Canada, where so-called progressive parties such as the Liberal Party and the NDP have united in the hope of providing free dental care and universal care for all, I find it inconceivable that the Liberals are proposing to increase benefits to only 26 weeks, or half the time required for a full and potentially complete recovery from the illness.

The vast majority of people affected by different types of cancer are women, and most of the time they are vulnerable. In this context, should a so-called feminist government led by a Prime Minister who calls himself a feminist not revisit its position on a bill such as this one?

Of course, Marie-Hélène Dubé is not the only one who spent more than 10 years fighting for this cause and for people with serious illness, but we all know it is pretty rare to see someone so determined to further a cause. I am deeply grateful to her for all her hard work, which I hope will come to fruition this time. Over the past 10 years, several bills have been introduced to fix this injustice, including by the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. They got through several stages, but unfortunately went nowhere.

The Conservative association for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup instigated a proposal to make this issue one of our party's policies at the request of several people in my riding who received only 15 weeks of EI benefits to recover from diseases that often require more than a year of treatment. We cannot ignore that fact. That is why our party adopted this measure. Today I am proud to support the private member's bill introduced by my colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière.

Life is short, and we must do everything we can to improve the lives of sick and vulnerable people, especially women. Less than a month ago, Stéphanie Bourgoin, a 35-year-old mother of three in my riding, found out she had breast cancer.

Are we even capable of imagining the impact of such news on the psyche of a dynamic, loving young mother of three or what she will have to go through? Does anyone think we should add insult to injury by telling her she can have a mere 15 weeks of EI benefits to get through this difficult time?

Another survivor in my riding, Nancy Dumont, had this to say about the issue we are attempting to address with Bill C-215.

In an era of full employment, it is time to make major changes to the EI program. Needs have changed since the 1970s. Cancer is a scourge, and its impacts have tentacles that reach into all areas of our lives. I can assure you that all of my energy and all of my thoughts during these four long years centred on one thing:

healing and living. It is inconceivable that people do not have access to a minimum of 52 weeks of sickness benefits.

When illness leads to bankruptcy or debt, we need to ask ourselves some questions as a society, as Canadians. As Terry Fox put it so well, not all marathons are won at the finish line. Elected officials, you have a chance to make a real difference for the 229,200 Canadians who will receive a cancer diagnosis this year.

● (1845)

Canada must do better.

Please allow me to digress for a moment. Nancy Dumont started work again yesterday, after four years of fighting cancer. That is why my colleague from Lévis—Lotbinière introduced Bill C-215 and why I am so pleased to support it. I hope this bill passes quickly, because we have done our homework on this issue.

I would remind members that the Parliamentary Budget Officer already analyzed the costs associated with this measure to extend EI benefits in the event of serious illness in 2019. According to his findings at the time, extending benefits from 15 to 50 weeks would have a financial impact of \$1.1 billion in 2020, rising to \$1.3 billion by 2025. This might seem like a huge number, but the government has a budget of \$400 billion. In any case, that money would not come from the government, but from the pockets of workers and employers.

As Conservatives, we are always concerned about public spending, and we do not wish to increase the tax burden on Canadians to the point where our competitiveness would be jeopardized. I would therefore remind the House that EI premiums do not come from tax revenues, but rather from the direct contributions of employers and workers.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer calculated that this billion dollars, distributed among all workers, would mean employees would have to contribute 6¢ more, which, in 2019, was \$1.62 for every \$100 in insurable earnings, up to the maximum insurable earnings of \$53,000 per year.

I want to point out that the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a study yesterday with an update on those figures. Because the labour shortage has brought down the unemployment rate, the employee contribution has dropped to just \$1.58 for every \$100 in earnings. Even if we were to add the aforementioned 6¢ to ensure that all Canadians are covered for up to 52 weeks in the event of a serious illness, that contribution amount would be \$1.64, which is less than the 2018 premium rate of \$1.66.

This increase would put the maximum additional contribution per year at \$31.86 for the employee and \$44.60 for the employer. I am an employer, and \$45 a year per employee would not change much for my business. Governments have implemented other measures in recent years that have had more of an impact on my business.

I also want to note that this amount of 6¢ per \$100 falls well short of the regulatory requirements in connection with the disability insurance or balance protection products offered by the mortgage, vehicle financing or consumer credit sectors. With this measure, the vast majority of the public will save money.

This measure to extend EI benefits in the event of serious illness from 15 weeks to 52 was part of our election platform in 2021. I talked about this issue on the campaign trail for 30 days. I met many people who had gone through such tragedies.

All my colleagues in the Conservative Party want this measure to be brought in because it is compassionate and family focused, which lines up perfectly with our values. I invite all my colleagues to rally behind Bill C-215 and ensure it is passed quickly, because sick people do not choose when they will get sick.

Stéphanie Bourgoin, a young 35-year-old mother in my riding, cannot wait until this summer or next year. She has cancer now, so she needs benefits now.

In closing, I heard what my Liberal colleague said earlier, that people would abuse the program in some cases. I honestly do not think that we are in any position to talk about women and accuse them of stealing. As my colleagues have pointed out, it is the doctors who issue certificates of serious illness, and they are the ones who determine how long the individual will be entitled to the program.

By the way, I congratulate my colleague and all of my colleagues. However, I will not congratulate the Liberals if they do not support this measure. It is a compassionate measure and one that is important for all those who are sick in Canada. As a society, we cannot afford not to pass such a bill.

• (1850)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): Resuming debate.

Before I recognize the hon. parliamentary secretary, I must inform him that he has three minutes today and that he may finish his speech the next time this matter is debated.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons (Senate), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this private member's bill.

In the very short time that I have, I would like to address my concern that I raised to the sponsor of the bill when he introduced it earlier this evening; specifically, that this bill inevitably is going to require royal recommendation. We know this, because a bill in almost the exact same form, Bill C-265, came through the House in the 43rd Parliament. It went through this deliberative process in the

House. It was voted on after second reading. It went to committee. The Speaker entertained suggestions as to the need for royal recommendation, as he flagged it to be problematic in his view. After it came back from committee, the Speaker ruled that it would require royal recommendation before it could move to the final vote.

It is problematic, because we know it is very rare that a government would provide royal recommendation to a private member's bill. The vast majority of private members' bills that come through the House do not have monetary impacts on them exactly because of that. This is not something that is unique to this particular Liberal government: This is something that is a followed course with all governments throughout the last number of years, decades and perhaps even beyond that.

Although I admire the initiative that is being brought forward by the member, I think it is very clear to him that this will be the inevitable fate of the bill. It leads me to conclude that perhaps the only reason to introduce this bill was to somehow try to shame the government or make it look bad because it would not attach royal recommendation to it. I do not see the benefit of this, or how that would actually advance this particular issue.

To that point, I am thrilled to say that a number of the initiatives that this bill seeks to entertain are actually covered in the budget of 2021, so although this member might be seeking slightly more, a lot of the measures were actually covered in that.

Although I am concerned about the royal recommendation aspect of it, I am certainly interested in hearing more of the debate, and I know that you will give me my remaining seven minutes when we resume it.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired. 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]

HEALTH

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to again highlight the government's failure to address the poisoned drug supply in this country, which has cost 27,000 lives, and the government's inaction.

The Minister of Mental Health and Addictions was at the Standing Committee on Health and said that decriminalizing heroin and other street drugs was no answer to preventing deaths. She also said that the legalization of marijuana did not stop users from buying on the black market and that decriminalization still meant people went to the street to get their drugs.

Adjournment Proceedings

I am going to speak a bit about how there is no silver bullet to tackling this crisis. It is going to take a multi-faceted approach, and decriminalization is a critical step. Saving lives, like I said, is going to take multiple actions. I agree that decriminalization alone will not be enough, but saving lives will require relieving drug users of the fear and shame of criminal behaviour.

For many drug users, this is a necessary prerequisite to accessing a regulated safer supply or stepping forward for trauma-based treatment or help from health care providers. As long as users are living in the shadows of criminal behaviour and are afraid of losing their supply, their employment, their income, their freedom or their social relationships, the likelihood of them trusting essential harm reduction services is very low. That is a fact.

We all need to understand that cherry-picking one or another public policy reform will simply not be enough. Responding to overdose deaths, which are epidemic in our country, requires a multi-faceted response with interlinked and complementary measures that will provide a safe, social environment for users. It cannot be either-or. We cannot say yes to safer supply and no to criminalization. It cannot be one or the other. It cannot be yes to treatment but no to a safer supply, or no to expungement of criminal convictions for simple possession. It cannot be that.

The measures recommended by the government's expert task force on substance use are intended to work in concert. We can walk and chew gum here in this country.

Accessing safe substances will save lives, but walking through the door of a government-sponsored safe injection site takes courage when the very act of using drugs is a criminal offence. Decriminalization will reduce barriers to accessing a regulated safer supply. Expungement of criminal records will help Canadians overcome the barriers to employment, housing and child custody created by criminalization. Universal access to trauma-based treatment will help many recover from the consequences of substance use and allow them to live lives free of the consequences of substance use.

Decriminalization, providing a low-barrier regulated safer supply for users, expunging records of criminal conviction and providing universal access to treatment are all policies that must go hand in hand. A multi-faceted response is needed to a multi-faceted crisis in our society that is taking lives.

I want to thank The Globe and Mail's editorial board, which outlined the failed policies of the government and the lack of priority in taking action to tackle this endemic, which is taking the lives of our daughters, sons, mothers, fathers and community members in this country. It says:

...in the House of Commons there is an NDP private member's bill, C-216, that proposes decriminalization, as well as a national strategy on substance use that includes "low-barrier access to a safe supply of medically regulated substances" and "universal access to recovery, treatment and harm reduction services for problematic substance use."

C-216 sits in the purgatory of second reading. How to change the course of a ruthless epidemic of overdose deaths is right there in front of all MPs.

The pile of evidence, from too many deaths to the policies to save lives, is sitting right there.

I hope the government will listen to that.

• (1855)

[Translation]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the member for Courtenay—Alberni for his efforts, his commitment and his determination to end the opioid overdose and toxic drug supply crisis in Canada, and for raising this important issue in the House this evening.

[English]

I would like to reiterate that our hearts go out to all the families and communities of those we have lost to opioid overdoses.

[Translation]

Our government recognizes that problematic substance use is first and foremost a public health issue.

[English]

We will continue to work with partners to look at ways to support programs and services that divert people who use drugs away from the criminal justice system and toward supportive and trusted relationships in health and social services, such as supervised consumption sites and drug treatment services for those who are ready. Since January 2016, the number of supervised consumption sites operating in Canada has increased from one to 38.

[Translation]

This month, our government announced that \$3.5 million from the substance use and addictions program will be used to fund four safer supply pilot projects in Toronto, Vancouver and Victoria.

In total, our government has invested more than \$63 million in safer supply projects across the country, and they have saved thousands of lives.

[English]

We will ensure that these funds get to where they are needed most for people who use drugs so they have opportunities to access treatment and recovery options at their own pace.

● (1900)

[Translation]

Our diversified approach is built on our previous actions, which included over \$700 million invested in community projects aimed at reducing risk, preventing harm and providing treatment.

[English]

Our government believes that the provision of a safer supply of drugs, through pharmaceutical-grade drugs, is one of the essential tools to help prevent overdoses. It is one part of our comprehensive approach to the opioid overdose crisis.

[Translation]

We enabled pharmacists and doctors to extend, refill and transfer prescriptions to make it easier for people who use drugs to access the medication they needed during the pandemic.

On December 7, my colleague, the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, introduced a bill that, among other things, would require police officers and prosecutors to consider non-criminal responses to drug offences, such as diversion to treatment programs.

[English]

However, even with these government actions, we must continue to expand public understanding that substance use disorder is not a choice but a treatable medical condition that requires a broad range of care and treatment options. Decriminalization, while an important part, is only one facet of this issue. We also have to ensure that the toxic drug supply is eliminated, that a safer supply is provided and that we do everything we can, with a whole-of-system approach, to ultimately save lives.

[Translation]

That is why we are working closely with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners, and with other key stakeholders, to reduce the risks, save lives and give people the support they need. Canadians can rest assured that fighting the opioid crisis remains a top priority for this government.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, pilot projects alone are not going to solve this crisis. Twenty-seven thousand Canadians have lost their lives from a poisoned drug supply since the government came to power. It has an application from British Columbia that is asking for decriminalization, as well as one from the City of Vancouver and now the City of Toronto. This is supported by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, medical health professionals and the government's own expert task force.

I guess my question for the parliamentary secretary is this: How many people have to die before the government listens to its own expert task force? Is it 30,000, 35,000, 40,000, 50,000, 60,000 or 100,000? When are the Liberals going to start to listen to their own experts? Are they just going to let people continue to die from a preventable poisoned drug supply? We know the answer. When will they act? I ask because 75% of people who have died from a poisoned drug supply died at home instead of getting help.

Adjournment Proceedings

Decriminalization is part of the solution. They need to answer to the families of the people who have lost loved ones and they need to act.

[Translation]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: Mr. Speaker, our government obviously understands the urgency of the situation and is moving forward with an evidence-based approach to ending this crisis.

[English]

Overcoming the stigma associated with substance use is also essential in addressing this whole-of-society problem and turning the tide on this crisis.

[Translation]

That includes the investment of more than \$13 million to help change attitudes towards and perceptions of drug users, and a commitment of an additional \$25 million in our platform to reduce stigma.

[English]

Our government is working with provinces, territories and communities to develop a comprehensive, health-based strategy to address the ongoing tragedy, including \$500 million that we committed in our platform to support partners in providing access to a full range of evidence-based treatments. We will continue doing everything we possibly can to save lives and to end this national public health crisis.

HEALTH

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this month, I had the opportunity to ask the health minister a very simple question. I asked when the government would put an end to the arbitrary and unscientific PCR testing requirements at our land border. In response, the minister said:

Mr. Speaker, I am obviously very pleased to hear one more colleague who cares about the industry of tourism. I do as well, as I just said. That is why we are working to protect both the health and safety of workers and travellers, but also to make sure that our tourism industry can thrive. We know how hard it has been for workers and small businesses over the last 23 months, and that is why we look forward to further investing and...supporting our tourism industry.

That was all very nice and lovely to hear; however, I think it is quite obvious that it did not answer my direct question. We also know that, two weeks later, the health minister announced that the government would be putting an end to that PCR testing requirement.

I am certainly pleased to see that the government has taken the action that I called for, but it is too little, too late for many tourism operators. Frankly, the lack of transparency and lack of ability of this government to provide clear information to Canadians, at this point in the pandemic, is especially frustrating for me and for many across my riding and across northwestern Ontario.

Adjournment Proceedings

My question for the government side today is this. I am curious to know what changed in order for this policy announcement to change. What happened in those two weeks? What new evidence came forward that the government did not know before? If there was no new evidence brought forward, I would like an explanation from the government about why it was not able to be transparent with Canadians and provide an answer to my question two weeks before the minister made his announcement.

• (1905)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for the opportunity to provide an update on the measures our government is taking at our borders to protect Canadians from COVID-19.

Throughout the pandemic, the government has used available data and scientific evidence to inform its decisions regarding border measures. The health and safety of Canadians will continue to be our top priority, and our actions at the border reflect that. The evolution of data and the epidemiological situation, both in Canada and internationally, are what dictate our actions.

In addition, thanks to the many Canadians who rolled up their sleeves and got vaccinated, we have a highly vaccinated population. We also have continued access to vaccines, access to therapeutics both in and outside of our hospital system, and increasing access to rapid tests.

For all of these reasons, we continue to move towards a more sustainable approach to the long-term management of COVID-19 at our borders. This approach includes removing the requirement for fully vaccinated travellers to provide a pre-entry COVID-19 test result to enter Canada by air, land or water. This change will come into effect on April 1, 2022. Fully vaccinated travellers who arrive in Canada before April 1 still have the option of providing a valid, professionally observed, negative COVID-19 antigen test or a valid negative molecular test, or proof of a previous positive molecular test result taken between 10 and 180 days before arrival to meet pre-entry requirements.

Fully vaccinated travellers arriving in Canada from any country may need to take a COVID-19 molecular test on arrival if they are selected for mandatory random testing. Travellers who are selected for mandatory random testing are not required to quarantine while awaiting their test results. There are no changes to requirements for unvaccinated travellers.

Given the current international context, I would like to mention that Ukrainian nationals continue to be allowed entry to Canada even if they do not meet Canada's definition of being fully vacci-

nated. The Public Health Agency of Canada is working closely with its partners across government, including Global Affairs Canada, Transport Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

The changes we announced on March 17 are encouraging, but they are also subject to re-evaluation as data and scientific evidence are updated.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Mr. Speaker, with respect, the parliamentary secretary unfortunately again was not able to answer my question. She did mention that the government is looking at the evidence and basing its decisions on science, but what we see across the country is that provinces are moving forward from their COVID-19 restrictions. The federal government, although it has lifted one restriction, is keeping many in place. It is our federal government here that is the outlier.

I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary can explain what scientific evidence they have specifically to justify continuing with the other COVID-19 restrictions at the federal level. Simply, does the government believe that it is right and that every other health official at the provincial level in this country is wrong?

• (1910)

[Translation]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière: Mr. Speaker, border measures continue to be an important part of Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 numbers continue to rise here in Canada and around the world.

We will therefore continue to use the latest scientific data and evidence to guide us as we adjust our border measures. We will continue to work with our provincial and territorial colleagues, our indigenous partners and our international counterparts.

Although the latest changes are encouraging, Canadians must continue to be cautious when they travel abroad. They still run the risk of becoming ill while they are out of the country. Canadians must be aware that they may have to extend their trip if they test positive for COVID-19 while they are abroad.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): The hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon not being present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:12 p.m.)

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