



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

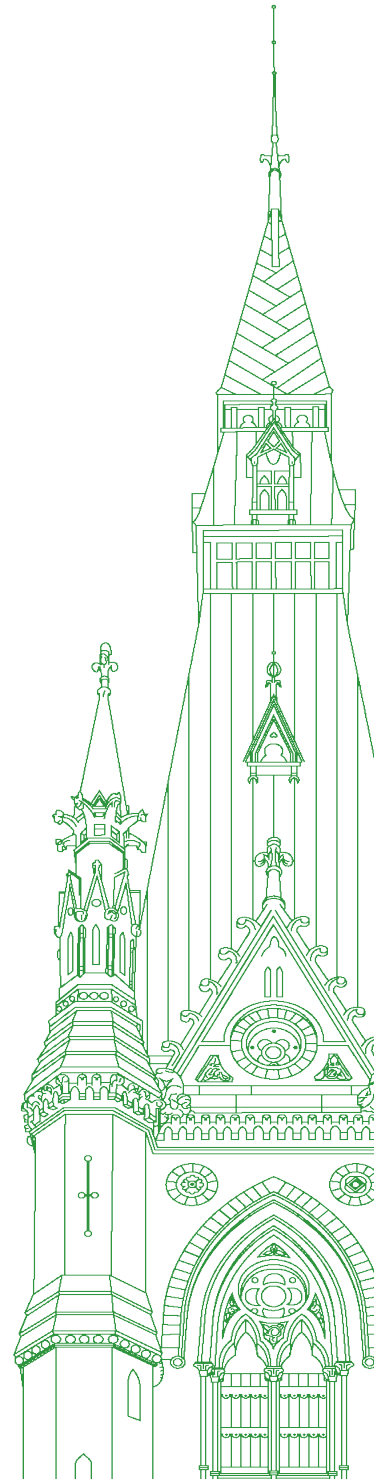
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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 2, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1000)

[Translation]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would like the House to take note of today's use of the wooden mace. It serves as a reminder of the fire that took the lives of seven people and destroyed the original Parliament buildings, except the library, on the night of February 3, 1916.

[English]

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

As the House will not be sitting on Saturday, the anniversary of the fire, the wooden mace is being used today to recall what happened 108 years ago.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA-UKRAINE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2023

The House resumed from December 12, 2023 consideration of the motion that Bill C-57, An Act to implement the 2023 Free Trade Agreement between Canada and Ukraine, be read the third time and passed, and of the amendment.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today in support of this historic legislation to implement the modernization of the Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement.

This is an incredibly important agreement for both Canada and Ukraine, and I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate what this legislation would accomplish.

The Canada-Ukraine bilateral relationship is long-standing, unique and unshakable, and has always been marked by Canada's

steadfast support of Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Recently, in the face of protracted Russian aggression abroad and rising isolationism here in Canada, Canada's assistance has become even more important. Canadian aid for Ukraine in its time of need has included military, diplomatic, economic and humanitarian support. Trade, an important component of Canada's economic support, should not be overlooked.

The modernized Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement is an important element in our support to our Ukrainian allies. Not only would it help strengthen the bilateral economic ties between our two great countries; it would provide to the world yet another sign of Canada's unflappable support for our Ukrainian allies. This agreement constitutes a measure of support that would not only offer benefits in the near term; it would extend well beyond Russia's illegal and unjustified war of aggression by strengthening the foundation on which Canadian and Ukrainian businesses could work together during Ukraine's recovery and economic reconstruction and, indeed, underpin the long-term economic relationship between our two countries.

We know that Ukraine's economy can benefit from Canadian expertise and investment in key sectors such as infrastructure, resources, energy and finance. This agreement would make it easier for Canadian companies to supply goods and services to Ukraine during reconstruction, as well as to invest and operate in the Ukrainian market with greater confidence while also supporting Ukrainian companies and exporting their goods and services to Canada.

As members are aware, the Prime Minister and Ukrainian President Zelenskyy announced their intention to modernize the trade agreement between Canada and Ukraine in 2019. This was in response to a clause contained in the original 2017 agreement committing Canada and Ukraine to review the agreement within two years of its entry into force with a view to expanding it. While comprehensive from a trade and goods perspective, the 2017 agreement did not include chapters on trade in services or investment. These areas were specifically identified by the review clause as potential additions, without restricting the parties from exploring other areas. As such, this was an opportunity to make this agreement a fully comprehensive one on par with Canada's most comprehensive free trade agreements.

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It is toward that goal that our government announced the launch of the agreement modernization negotiations in January 2022. Unfortunately, only weeks after, Russia began its full-scale illegal invasion of Ukraine. As part of our support to Ukraine, Canadian trade officials relayed to their Ukrainian counterparts that they stood ready to proceed with the agreement modernization discussions in accordance with Ukraine's capacity and willingness to do so.

In May 2022, Ukrainian officials conveyed in no uncertain terms that they were ready to initiate and indeed expedite the trade agreement modernization negotiations and that they were eager and determined to move forward to conclude as quickly as possible. Thus, our trade officials got to work immediately with the goal of reaching an ambitious and high standard agreement on a rapid time frame.

Throughout the process, and despite difficult circumstances, Ukrainian officials demonstrated eagerness to reach an ambitious outcome within very short timelines with the aim of facilitating increased trade between our two countries, not just to meet the immediate needs of reconstruction but long into the future. This eagerness is reflective of how comprehensive the modernized agreement is with respect to not only trade in goods but also to the new chapters and provisions for investments, services, labour, environment, inclusive trade and others. In this current context, the new areas covered in the modernized agreement would make it much more than just a trade agreement.

• (1005)

As Ukraine's First Deputy Prime Minister Svrydenko has explained, this agreement is a way to demonstrate that Ukraine's economy is:

...built on the same principles of respect for workers and the environment as in Canada. This is the first agreement that confirms that Ukraine shares the trade agenda of Canada, the US, the EU, Japan and our other partners. Its text is based on the standards of the Canada-US-Mexico Free Trade Agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement... In this way, Ukraine is joining... countries that share the [same] principles of economic policy. In fact, this is a modern trade and legally binding economic pact with partners who support our security.

This is why this modernized agreement is so important for Ukraine and why, despite truly incredible and daunting circumstances, Ukraine dedicated scarce resources toward that goal and pushed forward this modernization with Canada. Beyond the short-term benefits related to the reconstruction efforts that will be needed, it did so because it recognizes and acknowledges the long-term importance of building and safeguarding an open and inclusive rules-based global trading system, a system that contributes to creating strong and resilient economies and enables long-term growth.

Increasing Canada's trade and attracting investment is a priority for this government as is Canada's continued support for Ukraine, both during and long after the war. For this reason, I urge all members to support Bill C-57 and allow this government to move ahead to implement the modernized Canada-Ukraine free trade agreement on a timely basis.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am wondering if my colleague opposite, in the context of this agreement, will commit right now to talking to the Prime Minister and to his caucus to strongly commit Canada to re-

purposing seized Russian assets back to Ukraine. Will he commit to ensuring that Canada leads a G7 effort to send back seized assets to Ukraine?

• (1010)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Madam Speaker, I will entertain a conversation with the Prime Minister if she entertains a conversation with the leader of the official opposition to ensure its support of Bill C-57 and its support for Ukraine.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, this is a very important bill.

The 2017 agreement, which was essentially negotiated by Stephen Harper's Conservative government, was mostly about extending a hand of friendship to Ukraine in the wake of the 2014 Russian invasion. As members know, the negotiations ended in the summer of 2015, just before the election, but the agreement was signed by the current government during the Ukrainian Prime Minister's visit to Ottawa in 2016, and it took effect in 2017. It was negotiated by Stephen Harper's Conservatives, but now it seems as though the Conservatives are no longer on board.

Why is that and what impact will that have?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. He raises a good point. I do not know what happened to Brian Mulroney's party, which believed in free trade agreements. For some reason, the leader of the official opposition decided to no longer support an agenda that promotes free trade, even though the President of Ukraine clearly indicated that he wants Canada to support this free trade agreement. I do not understand what is happening to the Conservative Party in 2024.

[English]

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, let me ask my colleague a question on words versus actions on this. I see a lot of paper and a lot of words, but as far as the actions and supporting Ukraine go, the government has been a day late and a dollar short almost every time.

Will the member commit to actually supporting Ukraine, as he, his party and his government have not done in the past, including returning the turbine when President Zelenskyy said not to return the turbine and cutting off the oil trade that Russia was importing into Canada far later than this party recommended they should, because that is funding the war for Russia on Ukraine?

Will the member commit to actually performing better as far as the real metrics go, as opposed to the paper metrics?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Madam Speaker, we can all strive to do better, and I would encourage that member to do better as well and to support Bill C-57.

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am finding it odd that we have Conservative members who are actually standing up asking about the government's position with regard to Ukraine when, in fact, what we have witnessed is that the Conservative Party has completely abandoned Ukraine on this very important issue of Canada-Ukraine trade. For the first time ever, Conservatives are going to be voting against a trade agreement.

I am wondering if my colleague would not agree with me that there is a possibility of an oozing of hypocrisy and disappointment all in one in regard to the way the Conservative Party today is treating a very important trade agreement.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Madam Speaker, I have to agree with the hon. member. We know that the leader of the official opposition is getting advice on high grocery prices from a lobbyist called Jenni Byrne, but I am wondering if they are now getting advice on foreign policy from Tucker Carlson, who has been a strong advocate in support of Russia.

I just do not understand where the Conservative Party of Canada is going with the lack of support for Ukraine. It is about high time they stand up and support Ukraine and pass this bill as soon as possible.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak on Bill C-57, the Canada-Ukraine free trade deal.

I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

First of all, I want to start by saying unequivocally that the Conservatives support Ukraine. I want to say it again, because there has been a lot of misinformation from the other side. Conservatives stand with and unequivocally support Ukraine as we always have.

In 1991, it was a Conservative government that was the first western country to recognize Ukraine's independence, and it was under the Stephen Harper government that the initial Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement was negotiated. Therefore, we already have a free trade agreement. I think the discussion today needs to be about what should be in the agreement and what should not be in the agreement.

I also want to share with the House my personal support for Ukraine. When the war first happened and people had to flee, the Liberal government failed to send planes to rescue them. It created a bureaucratic, two-month process to obtain papers to get here. I hired extra staff in my office and worked with local organizations and with people on the ground in Ukraine to bring 200 families to Sarnia—Lambton, to find sponsor homes for them, to get jobs and English training services for them, so, unequivocally, I support Ukraine.

However, let us look at the Liberal record. Initially, when President Zelenskyy asked to please not provide a turbine to Russia so that it could fuel and fund its war machine, the Liberal government sent the turbine. It allowed Canada to supply detonators for mines that are being used to blow up Ukrainians. How in any way is that support? Ukrainians have asked Canada for our LNG to replace the

Russian fuel they were using, and Canada refused. That is something that ought to be in this agreement, but it is not. Also, although the Liberal government promised the surface-to-air missiles over a year ago, they still have not been delivered. Clearly, there is a problem in terms of the Liberals listening to what Ukraine is asking for because none of that is in here. Instead, the Liberals decided to put carbon tax language into this agreement.

The Conservatives have negotiated over 50 trade deals, and all the trade deals that have ever been negotiated with Canada have never contained any of that language. Why was it necessary, since Ukraine already has a carbon pricing mechanism on industrial emissions? It is minor, but certainly for Ukrainians who are trying to recover and to win a war, the last thing they are going to need is to be put under the same regime that Canadians are suffering under, which has driven up the cost of food, home heating and all of those things. Ukrainians definitely do not need that.

I want to highlight a couple of other things that are ongoing. Of course, we have always supported Operation UNIFIER to provide aid, but there is more that Canada can do. Ukraine is asking for munitions from Canada, but the Liberals voted against the Conservative motion to send them. They are still delaying sending the kinds of munitions that would actually help Ukraine to win this war.

When we talk about the Liberals' record, it is clear that they want to seem to be updating a trade agreement that already exists without actually putting into it the things that the partners would need. I think the crux of the matter here is that they also refuse to fix the bill.

When the bill went to committee, the member for Dufferin—Caledon brought numerous amendments that would have helped this proposed act. First of all, we agreed that if the Liberals removed the references to carbon pricing and carbon leakage, then the Conservatives would willingly support this agreement, but the government has refused even though, like I said, Ukraine already has made its decisions about what it is going to do about carbon tax. It is a sovereign nation and has every right to do that. We should not be putting that into a trade agreement.

● (1015)

The member also brought in an amendment that would provide energy trade and nuclear technology like small, modular reactors. This is really important. There is an energy crisis and an energy opportunity going on in Europe right now and every time they come and ask for our help, Canadians, who want to help, are surprised to see the Liberals refuse.

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Germany wanted to give us \$58 billion for our LNG. They said there was no business case for that, so Australia took that deal. The Netherlands wanted to do a deal with us, and we said there was no business case, so Qatar took that deal. Japan also wanted to deal with us. The list goes on and on of opportunities where we had the wherewithal to really help, and we refused.

All those amendments that were brought here have been turned down. I do not know why they would not accept one that talks about nuclear technology. That is very green technology. It should fit in with what the Liberal government is proposing to do.

The other amendment they voted against is really troubling. It was an amendment to increase defence supplies to donate to Ukraine. Ukraine is running out of munitions, and we have a lot of munitions that are not currently being used across the country that could be repurposed and sent. However, the Liberals voted against that amendment, as did the NDP. It is the NDP and the Liberals standing together to not support Ukraine. I really do not understand how they can stand up every day and not know their own record on not giving Ukraine what it needs.

Another troubling thing they voted against was an amendment to have the Business Development Bank of Canada support projects in Ukraine to develop its own munitions manufacturing capacity. I think that would have been a concrete way that Canada could have helped. We are already sending billions to everyone in the world. Who needs it more than Ukraine that is currently at war with Russia, which is a threat to the whole western world? I have no idea why the Liberals will not give the Ukrainians what they are asking for. That is really the discussion that we are having for.

We already have a free trade agreement. We are going to do trade with Ukraine. Conservatives are dedicated in supporting Ukraine, but we are not going to force a carbon tax regime to make things worse than they already are. We will let Ukraine deal with whatever it wants to put in place with its sovereignty. Meanwhile, we want to give Ukraine what it is asking for. It is asking Canada to help with LNG. It is asking Canada to help with munitions. It is asking Canada to help with financial aid to support projects to rebuild its nation. Those are the kinds of things that should be in a free trade agreement between Canada and Ukraine if we want to modernize the one that is already there, but they are not.

We continue to see, in my riding, the difficulties that Ukrainians are having when trying to rescue other people who are coming here. As the ravages of war are advancing, there are still people who want to come, and the Liberals have not made that process any easier. I think if they really want to help Ukrainians, they should recognize that there is a huge need.

There is need in other areas where we could be of help. We have a lot of armoured ambulances, for example. We are not using them. We have replaced them, but the other ones are still there. They need an oil change maybe and a new set of tires. Those are the kinds of things we could be sending to Ukraine. They are hauling people around in broken-down cars because they have no ambulances left. Those are the kinds of things I think we should be thinking about.

I will wrap this up where I started. Conservatives unconditionally support Ukraine. We stand with Ukraine. That was clear from 1991

when we recognized its independence. It was clear when President Zelenskyy was here asking for our help. My colleague Candice Bergen stood in this place and unequivocally said that we support Ukraine. Our current leader has said that we unequivocally support Ukraine. That is the record. That is the correction of the misinformation and disinformation from the members opposite. We need to help Ukraine.

• (1020)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member who just spoke is wrong. President Zelenskyy came to Canada last September to sign a trade agreement. That was why, during a time of war, he came to Canada. It was to sign a trade agreement. He asked parliamentarians here, all of us, to support the Canada-Ukraine trade agreement, as did the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, as did 1.3 million people of Ukrainian-Canadian heritage and others. They want all members of all political parties to get behind it and to vote in favour of this legislation.

Why have members of the Conservative Party chosen to abandon Ukraine when Ukraine has asked for the support of this legislation?

• (1025)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, the member opposite is wrong. Conservatives absolutely support Ukraine. We have absolutely said that if the language about carbon pricing is removed from this agreement, we would sign on and would like to add a few more things that Ukraine is asking for, like LNG, like munitions, like some of the ambulances that we have and extra equipment. Things that were seized that belonged to Russia would be an advantage to Ukraine.

There are a lot of things we would like to do, but we certainly do not want to inflict a carbon tax on it that is already doubling costs in Canada and causing unaffordability.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton for her speech. I want to start by saying that, in her speech, my colleague mentioned that the Conservatives support Ukraine unconditionally and that they are not against Ukraine, contrary to what people are saying. That is not entirely true. At least, that is our perception.

Everyone knows that the Conservatives are all about perception. The perception is that they are voting against this bill simply because it mentions carbon pricing, which goes against their current ideology. That is very unfortunate, because they are voting against the good things that this agreement will do.

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That said, my question is about something else. There is a fight against corruption in Ukraine. The Ukrainians have made a firm commitment to fight corruption. Canada has made the same commitment in this agreement, notably in article 15.14. However, there were no mechanisms to encourage co-operation or monitor progress.

My colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot presented the only amendment to Bill C-57 that was adopted in committee. This amendment ensures that we will be able to fight corruption together, as this is going to be a major issue during post-war reconstruction.

Despite the Conservative's opposition to Bill C-57, I would like to know what my colleague thinks about fighting against corruption and the tools we need to do that.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, I do not think that the Liberal government can fix anything at all when it comes to corruption, because they are experts in the matter.

We have signed many agreements with other countries and none of them mention the carbon tax. Why does the Canada-Ukraine agreement now talk about that? I do not know. We would support the agreement if any mention of carbon pricing were removed and replaced with something else.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, there is a fairly sizable Ukraine community in my riding, and I want to give a special shout-out to Stefan and Slav, who have worked very closely with me, for doing incredible work in all ways to send money back to Ukraine to help people who are settling here from Ukraine, and in many other functions.

The concern is that they understand Ukraine is a sovereign nation, and one thing that has been very clear in what they are asking of Canadians is to step forward and to provide support. This trade agreement is a fundamental caveat of that ask.

I am wondering if the member hears from those in her Ukraine community how concerned they are that the Conservatives are simply not supporting this when they do not see any attachment to a carbon tax. It just does not make sense to a sovereign nation.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Madam Speaker, I meet regularly with the many Ukrainians who have come here. I want to thank the Save Ukraine Sarnia and Lambton County group and people like Dr. Cassandra Taylor who have provided supports and have welcomed our family of Ukrainians. They certainly know that I and the Conservative Party unequivocally supports them. I would remind everyone that we already have a trade agreement and that Ukraine—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, let me begin by quoting a former colleague of mine, who said, "Ukraine is defending itself against unjustified aggression — the Kremlin's naked attempt to destroy a country's statehood, infrastructure & identity.

"Full collective support for Ukraine's victory is the right legal, moral...military & strategic course of action."

I strongly support this position. Putin's war of aggression is not just against Ukraine. His war machine attempts to undermine the western consensus for democracy, the rule of law and the pursuit of a quality of opportunity.

I will move now to Canada's role in this fight and the substance of this bill. This bill proposes updates to Canada's existing free trade agreement with Ukraine. I support free trade with Ukraine. I do not support every measure in this bill. I take particular issue with the Liberals' inclusion of a carbon tax within the text. That is because, in the Canadian context, the Liberal carbon tax has dramatically increased the cost of living for every single one of the people I represent, all while failing to bring Canada anywhere close to meeting its emissions targets. It is not solving the urgent question of climate change. It is a clearly flawed policy that creates economic harm, and those who adhere to ideology without questions put up roadblocks that have stifled the policy innovation needed to reduce emissions.

I can simultaneously hold the position that I support free trade with Ukraine and the victory of Ukraine over Putin while I oppose a carbon tax. There are tens of millions of other Canadians who feel the exact same way. For the Liberals, the NDP, the Bloc or anyone else to suggest that to develop ways for Canada to support Ukraine I need to capitulate on my position on a carbon tax misses the point of democracy, which is what we are ostensibly trying to fight for.

In a dire crisis situation such as the one Ukraine finds itself in, fighting against the war of aggression being waged by Putin, it is the Liberal government that should have been working collaboratively to find a unified path forward. If its members are unwilling to budge on the inclusion of a carbon tax in this agreement, then the onus was on them to build consensus with the Canadian public and acknowledge we can have internal differences on a carbon tax while supporting Ukraine.

It is a dangerous, deadly game for the Prime Minister of Canada and anyone in this place to repeatedly suggest that, if a Canadian opposes a carbon tax, they must support Putin. This is a disgusting, morally bankrupt and fundamentally anti-democratic politically motivated aspersion that serves only to divide our country at a time when it desperately needs leadership that unifies it. It does not help Ukraine. It does not help Ukrainian diaspora in Canada.

The Prime Minister eschewed this approach when he failed to table this agreement in Parliament 90 calendar days prior to the commencement of negotiations. In February of 2020, ahead of the renegotiation of the CUSMA agreement, the minister at the time made the following commitment "to require that a notice of intent to enter into negotiations towards a new free trade agreement be tabled in the House of Commons at least 90 calendar days prior to the commencement of negotiations." That did not happen in this case. There was no collaborative effort.

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Again, I want to re-emphasize that I will oppose the Liberal carbon tax. It does not help my constituents. It is not reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It is not meeting emissions targets. It is a flawed and failed policy. I will stand here and support Ukraine while saying that anybody who is suggesting we should be making politics over this is actually helping Putin. This line of attack disgusts me because I know the people who are saying these things know better. If they want to earn the votes of Canadians, they should be looking at the issues that are pushing their polls so far south, as opposed to desperately trying to cling to some sort of false narrative that only divides our country. It only helps our country's enemies. It is disgusting, and it seriously needs to stop.

Earlier today the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell would not commit to asking his government to repurpose seized Russian assets. I am not going to stand here and call him a Putin supporter, so no one on the other bench should suggest that, because I firmly, strongly and backed by evidence reject a carbon tax, I somehow support that. This is exactly what the Russian war machine wants. That is the exact narrative it wants, and it needs to stop.

• (1030)

At the same time, what this agreement should be doing is looking at ways to materially help our allies. Just moments ago, the leader of the Conservative Party issued a press release saying that the Prime Minister must send CRV rockets to Ukraine. He is talking about ways that Canada should be sending surplus weapons to help our allies in their fight against Putin. That is a material way we should be helping, not by casting aspersions or trying to divide our country over this issue.

There is another thing that I want to implore every member of the House, as strongly as I can. I am going to read a small paragraph from a colleague in Ukraine, from a note she sent to me. She writes, “The value of frozen Russian assets is estimated to be at least \$320 billion. With no reasonable prospect for Russia paying compensation to Ukraine anytime soon and Ukraine's need for both short- and long-term financial assistance, confiscations of Russian assets become the only just and viable option, especially in view of the fact that up to \$1 trillion will be needed for Ukraine to fully recover. Our partners' tax-payers”, and this is from a Ukrainian MP, should not shoulder the burden of Ukraine's recovery alone, especially as they froze and can use assets of aggressors responsible for the devastation.”

These are senior government officials in Ukraine today. In the past, some of those senior government officials have suggested that Canada's military is impotent. If they are going to take that posture, then, at the very least, Canada should be using the laws that are already in place, which have already been supported by all members in the House, to repurpose seized Russian assets and lead a G7 charge to force western allies to do exactly what Ukraine is crying out for in this case.

Putin's is a war of aggression, and there needs to be compensation for Ukraine. They are the aggressor. At the very least, if Canada is true, and if Canada is going to try to make any sort of case that we are some sort of broker in the world, that we have any sort of relevancy, this is low-hanging fruit. We should be the first

country to do this. We have the legal mechanisms. There is nothing in this agreement about that, absolutely nothing.

The government has had this tool at its disposal for two years now, and it has not moved on this. Am I going to accuse the government of not supporting Ukraine because of that? I could. Instead, I would rather it would move on it.

This is an issue that transcends petty partisan politics and the desperate attempt of a Prime Minister, who is 16 points behind in the polls, trying to cling on to a disgusting life raft for his political gain. We have to work together.

Our global democracy is at stake, folks. Right now, our allies are fighting a war. We have lost the plot here. Honestly, if somebody stands up and dares to question the fact that I will stand up for my constituents against a policy that does nothing to help them, that does nothing to help climate change.

I have watched this debate. I have watched pundits and former colleagues say, “Maybe the Conservatives should just capitulate on this.” Absolutely not. It is the role of the government to build consensus during a time of crisis, and it has failed to do that.

I beg the government to do something that resembles work, and to work with our partners to stop the funding of the Russian war machine by transporting more of Canada's natural gas overseas.

That should have been in this agreement, but it is not. At the very least, today, there is \$300 billion. That is more than the entire sum total of all of the aid that has been sent to Ukraine. Canada could be leading the charge on this. Instead, we have Liberal members of Parliament standing here and saying these things. They have lost the plot. Canadians know this. Canadians are not buying this. Let us do better.

I implore and I beg the government to rethink its posture, both on the carbon tax and its political position on the issue, and on dragging its feet on common-sense measures that Conservatives have been calling for for some time, measures for which there is already consensus in the House of Commons and across the country.

• (1035)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in every trade agreement, there are all sorts of compromises that are made. Sometimes one agrees with something. Sometimes one disagrees with something. One takes a look at the overall agreement in itself. Let there be no doubt, when the President of Ukraine came to Canada to sign an agreement, there was a consensus.

There are individuals, such as Brian Mulroney, a Progressive Conservative, who had the Canada-U.S. trade agreement. I am sure that former prime minister, reflecting on what the Conservative Party is today, is saying it is nothing but hogwash.

There is absolutely no reason for this whatsoever, outside of the MAGA Conservative outlook coming from the United States into Canada, which is actually driving the Conservative Party's position. This red herring the member was talking about is wrong. It is about the MAGA right.

Why will the Conservative Party not support this trade agreement?

• (1040)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, standing up and using a loud, shouty voice does not negate from the fact that the Liberals did not engage in a collaborative approach on this agreement. They did not table it in advance for the House of Commons. They did not try to seek consensus, and I oppose a carbon tax.

The Liberal carbon tax has brought Canada nowhere close to meeting its emissions targets. It is increasing the price of everything for everybody in our country at a time when most Canadians cannot afford it. They are choosing between food and rent.

Yes, I oppose a carbon tax. Yes, I disagree with people, even those formerly of my own political stripe, who suggest that we should not. That is why I am here. That is why I am representing my constituents. I can do that and support strong action by Canada against Russian aggression against Ukraine.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, from the very beginning, we have been listening to the Conservatives explain their position on Bill C-57. I am quite surprised. I am actually having a hard time following them, because it was the Conservatives who introduced the first version of the former free trade agreement with Ukraine.

The new version essentially updates the old one, so there is nothing revolutionary about it. Russia and Ukraine are currently at war. One might therefore expect some degree of solidarity amongst all parliamentarians in saying that it is time to support Ukraine, which is fighting the Russian invasion. Given the current reality, Ukraine needs trade with foreign countries more than ever.

I am trying to understand. The Conservatives keep using the notorious carbon tax as an excuse to oppose this. Is this not a bit deceitful and could it not be seen as bad faith? If they were in government, they certainly would not be making the kind of irresponsible comments they are making right now.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I oppose the Liberal carbon tax. It does not solve climate change, and it increases the cost of everything. If the government wanted to have a consensus-based approach on this agreement, it would have removed it. It is unnecessary and does not need to be in there. It is in there to be a political wedge, and I will stand up for my constituents.

To my colleague opposite, he needs to go talk to his constituents. They do not support a carbon tax either. They do not want to see an increased cost of living because of it. A carbon tax is not worth the cost. We should be supporting Ukraine with measures such as the one the Conservative leader announced today by sending surplus weapons.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am not sure why the discussion is focused on a carbon tax right now. When we are talking about this important issue, I am reflecting on the conversations that I am having with peo-

ple who are arriving in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Government Orders

A single mom and her child were talking with me about the impacts of having to leave behind their families and all that they know in Ukraine. I made a commitment to this now constituent to do all that I can to support Ukrainians at this time. What I am trying to understand is that the leader of Ukraine asked us to sign this agreement. I am not going to pretend to know better than Ukrainians themselves or the leader of Ukraine how to best move forward.

Why would we not support this agreement when the leader is asking us to do so?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, the free trade agreement with Ukraine already exists. The NDP could be pressuring its coalition partners to release frozen assets to Ukraine. It is not doing that right now. That would immediately impact the people that she just talked about, but she should also be trying to lower the cost of living in Canada and fight for climate change by axing the carbon tax.

Mr. James Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak this morning about an issue that is very important to Canada, to Ukraine and to the constituents in my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore. Of course, I am speaking about the free trade agreement between Canada and Ukraine. We are not here debating carbon pricing.

It is my honour to stand today in support of the legislation that would implement the modernized free trade agreement between Canada and Ukraine. As was mentioned already, the modernization exercise for the CUFTA has not only allowed for the addition of new chapters but has also provided an opportunity to update previously existing chapters of the agreement and to reflect the most recent practices in the field of international trade agreements.

Important updates I would like to highlight right from the start are those made to the chapters on labour and the environment. The modernized provisions would commit Canada and Ukraine to the highest standards on labour rights and environmental protection. These updates would help make the CUFTA a fully comprehensive modern trade agreement that levels the playing field while ensuring sufficient flexibility for parties to pursue crucial public policy objectives in these areas. Please allow me to give an overview of the nine modernized chapters of the agreement.

Government Orders

On the matter of rules of origin and origin procedures, Canada and Ukraine agreed to activate and operationalize the principle of cumulation of origin, which would allow the materials originating in other countries that Canada and Ukraine both have free trade agreements with to count toward the originating status of goods exported under the agreement's tariff preferences. The result is that the materials originating from, for example, the European Union; the European Free Trade Association members, which include Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland; Israel and the United Kingdom can be taken into consideration when determining whether the final product qualifies as originating under the agreement and thus benefits from preferential treatment. Concretely, it would give producers greater flexibility in sourcing materials from countries with which Canada and Ukraine both have free trade agreements.

The new digital trade chapter of the modernized agreement is a significant update from the previous e-commerce chapter commitments to improve regulatory certainty for businesses seeking to engage in the digital economy in both markets, as well as those specifically looking to engage in cross-border digital trade between Canada and Ukraine. The chapter now contains ambitious commitments to facilitate the use of digital trade as a means of trade between Canada and Ukraine. It includes commitments relating to cross-border data flows, data localization, source code disclosure, open government data and personal data protection. On this last item, it is worth noting that, for the first time in any of Canada's trade agreements, a provision has been included prohibiting government authorities from using personal information collected from private organizations to discriminate against a person on grounds such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or political opinion.

The modernized agreement now includes a stand-alone competition policy chapter with updated and new obligations to promote a competitive marketplace. The chapter furthers Canada and Ukraine's objectives toward a fair, transparent, predictable and competitive business environment. This is notably done through enhanced obligations for competition authorities on procedural fairness and transparency, as well as new obligations for the identification and protection of confidential information. These new obligations provide assurance that fundamental principles, including the rights of defendants, are guaranteed during competition law investigations and enforcement proceedings.

The monopolies and state enterprises chapter has also been upgraded to include important definitions for state-owned enterprises and designated monopolies, as well as updated commitments on transparency and technical co-operation.

In the modernized chapter on government procurement, Canada and Ukraine have clarified that they would be allowed to take into account environmental, socio-economic or labour-related considerations in their procurement processes. This means it is now clear that the agreement would not prevent parties from adopting domestic policies and programs to support initiatives such as green and social procurement. The updated chapter also includes a new article to ensure integrity in procurement processes by committing parties to have legal or administrative measures in place to address corruption in government procurement. Finally, the updated chapter also

facilitates greater participation by Canadian and Ukrainian SMEs in government procurement.

● (1045)

The upgraded labour chapter in the agreement is robust, comprehensive and fully subject to the dispute settlement mechanism of the agreement. It aims to improve labour standards and working conditions in the two countries by building on international labour principles and rights. Two particularly notable articles were added: an important prohibition on goods made in whole or in part with forced labour, and a stand-alone article on violence against workers. This chapter confirms that Canada and Ukraine are fully committed to the highest labour rights standards and agree to co-operate further in the field.

The modernized environment chapter of CUFTA is the most comprehensive and ambitious ever achieved in a Canadian free trade agreement. For the first time, the chapter includes provisions recognizing the importance of mutually supportive trade and climate change policies, including market-based approaches and trade-related climate measures to achieve green growth objectives. The modernized chapter also introduces new articles to address key global environmental issues, such as plastic pollution and waste, and promotes trade of environmental goods and services and the circular economy. The chapter is reflective of Canada and Ukraine's leadership on trade and environment issues, and of our joint commitment to strengthen our co-operation in the area long into the future.

Last, the new transparency, anti-corruption and responsible business conduct chapter significantly builds upon and improves the 2017 version. It provides a framework for promoting transparency and integrity among public officials and the private sector, while advancing enforceability of anti-corruption laws. Therefore, the new chapter furthers Canada and Ukraine's objective of open and transparent international rules-based trading system that also promotes measures to prevent and respond to corruption. The chapter also includes a new section to encourage responsible business conduct for internationally recognized standards, guidelines and principles.

I thank the House for the opportunity to describe the significant improvements that were made to the existing chapters of the 2017 agreement through this modernization exercise. I believe I have made it clear that these upgrades would be instrumental in making the agreement a modern, fully comprehensive and responsive free trade agreement.

• (1050)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, first, I just have a quick comment. There was a transfer of leadership in the Canadian Armed Forces training mission, Joint Task Force-Ukraine, just a few days ago. I want to thank all the Canadian Armed Forces members who are part of that mission in training Ukrainians, in particular the leadership of Lieutenant-Colonel James Boddy, who is the outgoing commander, and the new commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Ben Rogerson. I had the pleasure to serve with both of those gentlemen in Afghanistan.

On March 22, 2022, I asked about transferring surplus Canadian Armed Forces equipment to Ukraine, in particular, Bison ambulances. Ukrainian forces are fighting right now, on the ground, and rescuing victims and injured soldiers in pickup trucks. Could the member, with his experience as the parliamentary secretary, provide an update on what the government is doing to get that surplus CAF equipment to the Ukrainian armed forces?

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Speaker, I have had the pleasure of working with the member on a number of very important issues, and I have a lot of respect for his approach to politics. I also want to add my thanks to members of the Canadian military because we all know the good, hard work and effort they put in on our behalf.

With respect to the member's question, I would be happy to speak with him off-line, on another occasion, to provide him with all of the information I can obtain. His question was in a positive tone, which is indicative of his approach to politics, in my experience. I say that because we are here to support our ally and friend, Ukraine. With one exception that I am aware of, which has been raised by the official opposition, Conservatives support the agreement. I would hope that the member, with the approach that he has taken to other issues, would be willing to reconsider his position and to encourage colleagues in his caucus to reconsider theirs and to vote with us so we could unanimously support the agreement and get it passed.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the agreement has to be signed now so Canada will be ready to help Ukraine once the illegal Russian war on Ukraine ends. Ukraine's infrastructure and all sectors of economy have been destroyed. Ukraine needs Canada's help in that respect. About \$400 billion needs to be invested. Canadian businesses have the expertise to help Ukraine in all these matters.

I would like to ask the hon. member what Conservatives feel about the need for this agreement now.

• (1055)

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Speaker, as everybody did, I spent time in my constituency over Christmas and in January. I am very fortunate to have a large Ukrainian constituency. It is a community I have known and worked with since I was a child. Over the holidays, I attended many functions. I spoke with community leader and business leaders. I spoke with people approaching me and trying to find ways to work with government and politicians from all parties on how to get the agreement passed, and also, when we pass the agreement, on how we can work collectively toward rebuilding Ukraine.

Government Orders

One thing that was consistent in every single conversation I had with everybody in the Ukrainian community was that they asked why this is happening. They asked why there is not unanimous support for the agreement, and how we get past this. I said that I share their concern and am working toward achieving that goal. People who know me know that I am not a particularly partisan guy. I believe that there are certain issues that are of such importance that partisan politics should have no part in them, and this one of them.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, but I am less proud of the fact that yesterday, in committee, he voted against the bilingualism of the new group.

I have a question for him about the only amendment to Bill C-57 that was adopted in committee. It included a clause presented by my colleague and friend, the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot. This clause requires the minister to constantly monitor the behaviour of Canadian businesses in Ukraine and to table an annual report of his activities to Parliament. We know that article 15.14 of the agreement is about implementing best practices, particularly in fighting corruption.

What does my hon. colleague think of that?

[English]

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Speaker, I am happy to sit down with the member afterward, work through this and talk about the concerns he has raised to see whether we can find a compromise and a solution.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have signed more than 50 trade agreements that have never contained any clause at all about carbon pricing. Ukraine already has a carbon price. I do not know why we would put equal carbon pricing, protection against carbon leakage and all of this kind of stuff into the contract. That is exactly what it does not need. Therefore, why will the Liberals not just take it out? We can then unanimously support the trade agreement.

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Speaker, the short answer is that the Ukrainians want it in there. I do not know what else there is to say in answer to that question. I have spoken with members of the Ukrainian parliament. I have spoken with members of the Ukrainian community. I was in the room when President Zelenskyy signed the agreement. Ukrainians want it in the agreement; it is as simple as that. An agreement is something that is negotiated between two parties in reaching a consensus, and that is what was done here. They want it there, and that is why.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the amendment.

Statements by Members

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

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, we would request a recorded vote.

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to Standing Order 45, the division stands deferred until Monday, February 5, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

MYRA FALLS MINE

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, in my riding of North Island—Powell River, days before Christmas, with no notice, over 300 employees were told that the Myra Falls Mine was shutting down. I sat down with Uni-for Local 3019, which is working hard with all levels of government to protect its workers. Its ask of me was simple: When will the rules finally be fixed in Canada to protect workers' pensions and local small businesses in our community when big projects shut down?

We know that the Bloc and the NDP pushed very hard to get Bill C-228 through this place last year. In fact, it received royal assent in April of last year, so where are the regulations? Where is the government in finally making workers a priority in this country? When will we see workers and their pensions at the top of the list instead of at the bottom?

Workers in Canada do not deserve this. Our small communities have seen these boom-and-bust cycles again and again. The workers and their local communities bear the weight of it. It is time that they were protected. We must get the regulations in place now.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Liberals, my home province of British Columbia is facing a housing affordability crisis, and that is impacting economic development as workers are frozen out of the real estate market. The Liberals' housing announcements in the fall economic statement are nothing more than empty words.

Josh, who lives not too far from me, told me that his mortgage payment has doubled over a single year, from about \$3,000 a month to \$5,800 a month, because of the Liberals spending like drunken sailors. Another neighbour says that her family has to leave the province because they cannot find an affordable home.

Conservatives will build the homes, fix the budget, bring down inflation and mortgage rates, and bring home prosperity for all citizens. Let us bring it home.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my community is excited to celebrate Black History Month, with over 20 events across Windsor-Essex honouring the proud history and culture of one of the oldest and most dynamic Black communities in Canada.

Celebrations began with a book launch spotlighting the late Dr. Howard McCurdy, a Black activist, Black scientist and Black icon who served our community with distinction as the second Black member of Parliament in Canada. There are also two concerts by the Windsor Symphony Orchestra at the Amherstburg Freedom Museum, in partnership with River Bookshop. Lana Talbot is hosting an exhibit at the John Muir Branch of the Windsor Public Library.

We can step into Sandwich First Baptist Church, the oldest active Black church in Canada; download the Crossroads digital pass from Tourism Windsor Essex to trace the steps of the Underground Railroad; and take in the delicious Caribbean Flavours of Freedom Annual Black History Brunch organized by the Windsor West Indian Association.

I wish a happy Black History Month to all back home.

* * *

TRANS, TWO-SPIRIT AND GENDER-DIVERSE CHILDREN

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, extreme far right populism is targeting trans children's rights across provinces in order to divide and distract from the housing crisis and the opioid crisis and, ultimately, weaken our democracy. Punching down in this way is the worst form of politics. We must have the courage to stand with the trans and gender-diverse community and commit to not allowing for the continuation of anti-trans violence. It is up to us to find paths forward and fulfill recommendations made by our white paper on trans rights. The government has a moral and legal obligation to uphold the rights of trans and two-spirit people. The closet came to Canada with colonization.

I now want to speak directly to gender-diverse, two-spirit and trans kids who are feeling scared in Canada. They are loved, they belong and we will not allow bigotry to diminish the incredible work of so many trans kids and their allies. We thank the teachers, parents and communities who are doing the hard work of support for children.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BRAMPTON

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I recently sat down with the Brampton Board of Trade, Bhive and the Brampton Economic Development team to discuss the important work our government is doing to promote trade and economic development. This is done through our Indo-Pacific strategy, CanExport, EDC and our Trade Commissioner Service, which provides support to Canadian businesses across our network of missions around the world.

I had the opportunity to meet with Brampton entrepreneurs and industry leaders to hear about their successes and how the trade agreements the government signed enabled them to expand and explore new international markets. Brampton is a leader in economic growth. MDA aerospace, Magna International, Coca-Cola, Pet Valu and Lululemon, to name a few, are all expanding to Brampton, creating thousands of jobs in our city.

As we take on 2024, I am committed to building on this momentum, with a continued focus on attracting record investments, enabling growth through trade and ensuring the residents of Brampton have every opportunity to succeed here in our country.

* * *

• (1105)

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, Canadians are struggling. Its housing plan does not build houses. Rural communities, such as Acme and Bassano in Bow River, are left behind. However, Conservatives will build homes and not bureaucracy by cutting red tape.

Violent crime, rural crime and car theft are up. However, Conservatives will introduce jail, not bail, for repeat violent offenders and keep our streets safe.

Mortgages, food prices and food bank use are up. However, Conservatives will fix the budget and stop this out-of-control, inflation-causing spending.

Farmers such as Rob feed Canadians. He is paying \$15,000 in carbon tax to heat his barn. If the government quadruples it, that is \$60,000 in carbon tax. The Conservatives will axe the tax and bring home lower prices.

NDP-Liberals are just not worth the cost. We will build the homes, fix the budget, stop the crime and axe the tax.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, only when we acknowledge that Black Canadian history is Canadian history can we truly understand and celebrate the rich and diverse heritage of our nation. That is why this year's theme for Black History Month is "Black Excellence: A Heritage to Celebrate; a Future to Build". It reminds us of the contributions, struggles and achievements of Black Canadians, while challenging us to build a more inclusive and equitable Canada.

Statements by Members

Canada's history is marked by the contributions of great ones, such as Lincoln Alexander, Viola Desmond and the No. 2 Construction Battalion. They inspire today's change-makers, who are strengthening our social fabric, including Jean Augustine, Rosemary Sadlier, Patricia and Moses Mawa, and Vaughan's very own Shernett Martin.

Our government is working with Black community leaders to ensure that Black voices are heard and reflected in policies. We are delivering initiatives that empower Black Canadians, including the Black entrepreneurship loan fund and the multicultural and anti-racism program. Together, we are removing systemic barriers and ensuring Black Canadians can fulfill their potential.

Happy Black History Month.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Black Canadian history is Canadian history. The theme for Black History Month 2024 is "Black Excellence: A Heritage to Celebrate; a Future to Build". I would like to acknowledge the contributions that Black Canadians have made and continue to make to Canadian society. I recognize the critical role that countless Black trailblazers, past and present, have played in shaping Canada into the country it is today, and I thank them for it.

My focus has been on building the future through economic empowerment of Black Canadians. The federal government has initiated programs to support Black entrepreneurship. In November, I hosted part of the African Canadian Business Summit on Parliament Hill and participated in a panel discussion on the impact of the Afrodescendant diaspora on the Canadian and African economies.

* * *

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, today is Groundhog Day, but it does not matter if the groundhog sees his shadow. With the Liberals in power, it is always winter. It is like that old Bill Murray movie. For eight years, we have been stuck in a perpetual Groundhog Day. Nothing changes, except that taxes, food prices, housing costs and crime go up.

Statements by Members

Every day, Canadians discover that the Liberal-NDP government is a failure and the Prime Minister is not worth the cost. Groundhog Day reminds us that the long Liberal winter will be over soon.

On this Groundhog Day, Canadians know that spring is indeed coming and, with it, a new Conservative government that will axe the carbon tax, build homes, fix the budget and stop the crime.

* * *

TOM HENNESSY

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, every member of Parliament recognizes that the first honour of this job is the honour of representing their community and those who make it up. Along the way, we meet tremendous people. One of those was Tom Hennessy, who recently passed away at the age of 101. He served multiple campaigns in World War II as a fighter pilot. Later, he continued to give back to our community by becoming a physical education teacher.

I first met Tom in 2022 when he finished his walk of gratitude; that is a walk of 100 miles in support of injured veterans. His example shows that democracy does not happen by accident. It rests on the shoulders of those who came before us. His efforts and those of other veterans have secured our democracy. We can exist in this House of Commons and debate the issues of the day because of people like Tom.

To his family and friends, I offer my deepest condolences. It was an honour to know Tom Hennessy.

* * *

● (1110)

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, the cost of rent has doubled and housing is simply not affordable, if someone can even find a house or apartment to rent. Canadians are being forced to choose between eating, heating and paying their rent, yet the Prime Minister does not think housing is a federal responsibility. His housing minister thinks people can live in a photo op. Meanwhile, the Liberals got fewer houses built last year than were built in 1972.

Only common-sense Conservatives have a plan to build more homes instead of more bureaucracy. We will reward municipalities that build more houses and remove the barriers that hinder construction. The choice is clear: a Prime Minister who is not worth the cost or common-sense Conservatives, who will axe the tax, build homes, fix the budget and stop the crime.

* * *

*[Translation]***CARBON TAX**

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of this Prime Minister, Canadians have never been in such dire straits. Every month, two million Canadians are forced to use food banks simply to be able to feed their families.

On April 1, the situation will only get worse. That is when the Liberals will increase the carbon tax again, showing once again how out of touch they are with reality. The Conservative Party is the only party standing up for Canadians, while the NDP and Bloc Québécois are backing the government as it imposes this punitive measure across the country.

The Bloc continues to mislead Quebeckers by saying the carbon tax does not affect them. The Bloc is wrong. The second carbon tax affects us directly by adding 20¢ per litre to the price of gasoline at the pump, while the first carbon tax continues to affect the price of every item transported to Quebec.

The Conservative Party of Canada cares about this entire country. We will continue to fight the government until this tax and the rest of its inflationary policies are a thing of the past.

Bring back common sense. Vote for a Conservative government.

* * *

LUC THERMONVIL

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, February is Black History Month. Black Canadians have made invaluable contributions to our heritage and helped shape Canada into the country we know it today. We want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the men and women who helped change things in our communities.

I would therefore like to thank and pay tribute to Ottawa—Vanier entrepreneur and philanthropist Luc Theronvil. As the founder and CEO of the Association of Black Entrepreneurs and Professionals of Ottawa-Vanier, a member of the board of directors of the Regroupement des gens d'affaires de la capitale nationale and an active member of CHUO 89.1 FM and the Vanier Muséoparc, Luc works tirelessly to foster the development of Black businesses and support Black entrepreneurs.

Luc also promotes the accomplishments of today's youth and is dedicated to developing the measures and tools that Black entrepreneurs need to succeed.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, the same day the International Court of Justice ruled that measures are needed to prevent genocide in Gaza, the Liberals cut off funding to UNRWA. This is the UN agency providing relief to Palestinian refugees. It is the only organization of its size that is positioned to provide food and aid to civilians caught in this horrific conflict. New Democrats support an investigation into its 12 former staff, but defunding UNRWA and cutting off millions of innocent Palestinians from their only lifeline is collective punishment. It is cruel, and it is illegal.

Two million civilians, over half of whom are children, rely on UNRWA and are facing starvation, famine and continued indiscriminate bombing. The International Court of Justice ordered immediate and effective action to ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance in Gaza. Canada must reverse these cuts.

Why have my Liberals colleagues abandoned human rights and abandoned international law? How can they punish over a million innocent children?

[Translation]

ASSOCIATION GRANBY POUR LA DÉFICIENCE INTELLECTUELLE ET L'AUTISME

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, at the end of last year, I attended the 55th anniversary celebration of the Granby association for intellectual disabilities and autism, or AGDIA, an organization that provides a vital service in my region. It was an opportunity to hear touching testimonials from parents and people living with these realities.

Over the years, the AGDIA has helped break down barriers and taboos regarding the autism spectrum. We have come a long way in the past 55 years, but there are still far too many challenges and prejudices. Today, people with special needs are an integral part of society. Thanks to organizations like the AGDIA, which defends the rights of such individuals, they can now participate in activities, find their passion, socialize and even work. Parents are able to get some respite, knowing their child is in good hands.

Congratulations to executive director Diane Dumont and the entire team for this wonderful event and for all the work that they do.

• (1115)

[English]

CARBON TAX

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, Canadians can no longer afford to pay the price of the Prime Minister's incompetence. His carbon tax is set to increase yet again on April 1, and guess who is going to have to pay for it? It will be the farmer who works tirelessly from sun-up to sundown to put food on our tables; it will be the parents who have to choose between keeping the heat on or feeding their children; it will be the small busi-

Oral Questions

ness owner who has to lay off staff to pay the bills, and it will be the local community centre that has to cut programming because the carbon tax has doubled its monthly expenditures. Meanwhile, the Liberals are raking in almost half a billion dollars of revenue in GST on this carbon tax alone while Canadians struggle to pay for the most basic of life's necessities.

With his reckless spending and unwillingness to help those in need, it is clear that this Prime Minister is simply not worth the cost. It is time for a new government that works for those who do the work and will axe the tax for everyone, for good.

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Vance Badawey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today we pay tribute to Bob Lambe, who is enjoying his first day of retirement from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

After a long and successful career with the Coast Guard and DFO, culminating in his role as the regional director general for the central and Arctic region, Bob felt the further pull of public service. In 2013 he joined the commission as executive secretary and worked tirelessly to improve the organization in ways that positioned it to help protect the Great Lakes and sustain the world-class fisheries found right here in the province of Ontario.

Bob's time with the commission brought tremendous change, as well as improvement to this binational organization. He delivered reliability and sound management and improved the way the commission and governments interface, something that has been universally positive for the Great Lakes.

Bob Lambe has been a once-in-a-generation change-maker. On behalf of all Canadians, I thank him for his service. I hope Bob will enjoy the next wonderful stage in his life with Linda and his family.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, just on the other side of the Ottawa River is Quebec, more specifically the city of Gatineau. After eight years of this Prime Minister, it is in Gatineau that the Liberals' soft-on-crime policies have caused the most damage. Shockingly, violent gun crime has increased by 76% in one year. That is the biggest increase in all of Quebec.

Oral Questions

In Canada, 14,000 violent gun crimes were committed in 2022, the highest in 15 years.

When will the Prime Minister finally put an end to Netflix sentences and stop the crime?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am proud to be the member for Gatineau, and I can say that Conservative policies are what will contribute to increased violence in our communities. We only need to look at our government's firearms measures, which they have firmly opposed for the last eight years. They reject and vote against any measures to properly equip our Gatineau police force and police forces across the country. They vote against all measures that will help reduce crime.

We are here to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do not see how, after eight years of Liberal inaction, the member for Gatineau can be proud that violent gun crime has gone up by 76% in Gatineau.

It is not just gun crime that is causing harm. The housing crisis is as well. Community organizations say that the situation is going to keep getting worse, because more people are going to be evicted from their homes. As the saying goes, everything is connected to everything else. After eight years of this Prime Minister, he is a disaster when it comes to housing.

The Bloc Québécois is certainly not a viable alternative, because it wants to keep the Prime Minister in power for another two years.

When will the Prime Minister start building homes, not bureaucracy?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, yes, I agree that there is a housing crisis in our country. What is the best approach? The best approach is what our government is doing.

● (1120)

[English]

What have we done since certainly this fall but also throughout our tenure in government? We have let more homes be built in this country and put in place serious measures to work with municipalities. In fact, we have an agreement with the Province of Quebec that will lead to thousands more homes being built. This is the housing accelerator fund. Throughout the country we see that as well. It is an approach that incents more building, all types of building. The Conservatives want to tax building.

[Translation]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, people are lining up for housing. After eight years of this Prime Minister, he is not worth the cost of waiting. People are lining up at airports and passport offices, and waiting for hours on the phone for EI cheques. Even food banks have wait lists. Folks at Quebec City's La Bouchée généreuse said that in a modern, wealthy society like ours, it does not make sense that families have to turn to food banks when the parents are working.

Will the costly Bloc-Liberal coalition finally listen to reason and support our motion to cancel the April 1 tax hike?

[English]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, they say they have the backs of Canadians. It is interesting and hypocritical for them to point arguments like that out time and again.

What did we learn yesterday? We learned that the chief adviser to the opposition leader has served as the chief lobbyist for Galen Weston and Loblaws.

Today we learned something else. The opposition leader ought to get in touch with his deputy leader, who served as a lobbyist for Walmart, the grocery conglomerate. They want to talk about competition in the grocery sector, but they vote against it every time. It is no surprise.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I can assure members that, unlike the Liberals, if Ms. Byrne had hauled the grocers in for a round table, prices would be lower by now.

The reality is the Liberal-NDP coalition has nobody outside itself to blame for high grocery prices, because of increased tax and deficit spending. This inflationary crisis was caused by it, so I ask a simple question: Will its members support our motion to cancel the increase in the carbon tax on April 1?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Madam Speaker, what we see today is an illustration of the hypocrisy of the Conservative Party. Their deputy leader is lobbying behind the scenes, behind the curtain, for Walmart of all places, one of the major players in our grocery sector.

On their grand Pooh Bah, the person to whom they all must pay absolute homage, it turns out as we speak her firm is getting a paycheque from Loblaws, as we debate competition in this chamber and as the Conservatives vote against every measure.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is really spectacular to see what these Liberals will do, knowing how far behind they are in the polls. The reality is they are behind in the polls because they are not helping Canadians make ends meet. They are making it worse for them.

What we need to do is axe the carbon tax. We need to build more homes.

There is a motion in front of Parliament that would make life more affordable right now for Canadians. Will the government support our common-sense motion to stop the carbon tax increase on April 1?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, an economist from the University of Calgary specifically found that if the carbon price and the carbon rebates that are sent to Canadians were cancelled tomorrow, the people who would most benefit earn more than \$250,000.

If we are concerned about affordability, on this side of the House, we are looking out for the everyday Canadians. On that side of the House, they seem to be looking out for the top 1%.

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[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Madam Speaker, once again, the French language is getting second-class treatment in this Parliament. Yesterday, the Conservatives and the NDP, supported by one Liberal who lost his way, decided in committee that the commissioners appointed to review miscarriages of justice will not have to be bilingual.

Once again, these parties are turning their backs on francophones in Quebec and Canada. Justice is supposed to be bilingual, and Canada is supposed to be bilingual. Will the government ensure that the members of the miscarriage of justice review commission are bilingual?

[English]

Mr. James Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am the so-called lost Liberal the member is referring to. I was at that committee. I voted the way I did and I am proud I did. I stood up for unilingual French-speaking citizens in the province of Quebec. I stood up for English speakers and minorities across the country in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario.

The commission is going to be bilingual in nature. It is going to be available for people in both official languages, and that is the most important thing in that bill.

I think what was decided yesterday was absolutely right and stands for exactly the principle the member is advancing.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Madam Speaker, what we have just heard is appalling. Once again, this Parliament is devaluing francophones on the pretext of promoting diversity.

Let me repeat: French is not an obstacle to diversity. In this country, French is a facet of diversity and the francophonie is di-

verse. The reasoning used is even more flawed in connection with justice, because both official languages have the force of law. Anyone unable to understand French is just plain unqualified to interpret the law in Canada.

Who among these parties will finally explain to their colleagues that this makes no sense?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I can assure the member and all parliamentarians in the House that this government is dedicated and solemnly committed to ensuring full compliance with the Official Languages Act in all areas under the Government of Canada's purview, including the administration of justice. The member can rest assured that French will remain alive and well as long as this government is in power.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, toxic drug overdoses have devastated countless communities, like in my riding. Campbell River just witnessed the worst year on record for toxic drug-related deaths, having the fifth-highest rate of deaths in British Columbia.

People need a plan and a federal government willing to act. Liberals drag their feet and offer up patchwork plans while Conservatives try to criminalize our loved ones who are struggling.

Canada needs a health-based plan for harm reduction and treatment with a timeline. What is the holdup?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I agree with the member that, when it comes to issues around substance abuse and addiction, we need to bring a thoughtful health care approach to that. That is why we continue to work with the provinces in making sure we are bringing a health care approach to people who are facing mental health and addiction challenges so we can look after them, unlike what Conservatives want to do, which is to throw these people into jails and treat them not like humans but as criminals, which is absolutely wrong.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, people who took CERB in good faith are now being punished by the government. While everyday Canadians are struggling to pay for food or rent, the Liberals have decided to punish them by clawing back low-income benefits in an effort to recoup CERB money that Canadians desperately needed to survive.

Clawing back benefits from people who already cannot make ends meet is cruel. Why are the Liberals going after families struggling to put food on the table while giving wealthy CEOs a free ride?

Oral Questions

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have been clear from the outset that if the situation of repayment arose, we would treat all cases individually and fairly.

We were also clear that we would show flexibility and recover overpayments without any interest or any penalties. To prevent undue hardship, flexible repayment options are available. Individuals can establish a repayment schedule based on their financial situation and their ability to pay.

We will continue to take a responsible approach to ensure a fair process.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, farmers and consumers know that the Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

Increasing the carbon tax only increases the cost of goods in stores. For those farmers who cannot pass on the exorbitant carbon tax, it destroys their bottom line.

Will the Liberals reject the Senate's amendments and restore Bill C-234 to its original state, removing the carbon tax on farmers and lowering the price of food for Canadians?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives love to talk the talk with farmers, but when it comes time for action, they are always missing in action.

Every time they were in power, the Conservatives slashed funding for farmers, something they do not like to talk about. They slashed \$200 million that was directed to farmers.

On this side of the House, we added 25% more dollars in our agreement with the provinces, money that is going directly to farmers. As the hon. member knows, there is a partial rebate available for the issue that he has raised.

• (1130)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Madam Speaker, these ministers must do a lot more than just mouth Greta's catchphrases.

Grain commodity prices have dropped 20% to 40% in the last few months. Localized drought and flooding always takes its toll. The price drop is because prairie farmers have had one of the best yielding crops ever, but there is no more profit. Suppliers, banks and governments are the only winners. Quadrupling the carbon tax on farmers' inputs will be devastating.

Will the Liberals stop playing games and give farmers the break they need?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are not playing games, and I wish the member would stop misinforming this House.

Obviously, farmers have faced droughts. We get that. We understand. Why? It is because of climate change. Twenty-one percent of grains in 2021 did not make it to the market. There are programs in place, like AgriStability.

I hope the member is lobbying extremely hard to the member of the official opposition to make him understand that slashing AgriStability while he was at the cabinet table was not a good policy for farmers. On this side of the House, we are supporting farmers. We are putting more money in their pockets. We are making sure that, when they face droughts, programs are available for them.

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is common sense. When farmers are taxed for having to dry their grain or heat their barn, the government is making it much more expensive to produce the food we all eat.

Jim, a poultry farmer from my riding, is paying \$5,000 a month in carbon taxes to heat his barn. The Prime Minister always thinks that he knows best. He thinks that food just teleports to grocery stores, that it magically appears on plates, and he even thinks he can run Jim's farm better than he can.

How much more does he suggest Jim should be paying to heat his barn when it is -40°?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am always happy to rise to answer a question on farming. I am glad the member raises supply management. Our government has supported supply management throughout its mandate. For eight years, we have supported supply management, and \$4.5 billion is available for supply managed farmers.

Obviously the member raises an important question. We understand that climate change has a huge impact on the availability of land and the crops. It has a huge impact on the profitability of farmers. We just hope that the member can lobby his Leader of the Opposition to make sure that he does not slash budgets that are available for farmers.

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wish we could spread answers like that on farmers' fields so that at least they could benefit from some of that fertilizer.

This NDP-Liberal government is costing Canadians through high food prices, once again showing how out of touch it is. Not only did the radical environment minister admit to pressuring senators to gut Bill C-234, but farmers are getting another carbon tax on April 1. After eight years, the Prime Minister has proven that he is most certainly not worth the cost.

Will the Liberals reject the Senate's amendments and completely remove the carbon tax from farmers to lower food prices for Canadians?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is an associate member of the finance committee. Yesterday, the Governor of the Bank of Canada appeared there and made it clear that carbon pricing is not a fundamental factor in inflation.

What is important is the fact that we have to get behind the idea of competition. The Liberal government has put forward a measure that would advance competition in the grocery sector. We know why Conservatives do not support it. Their chief adviser is on the side of Loblaw's, that party is in the pocket of Loblaw's and they are in the pocket of Walmart, it seems. Their deputy leader has been a lobbyist for them. They do not believe in competition in the grocery sector. They do not believe in Canadians.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bill C-234 is back in the House after Liberal-appointed senators stalled and gutted this crucial legislation. This bill is vital for exempting farmers from the carbon tax and would ease the high cost of Canadian food. However, as the carbon tax is set to quadruple, farmers will pay \$1 billion by 2030 and will push food prices even higher.

Will the Liberals scrap the Senate amendments, remove the carbon tax from agriculture and make food more affordable for everyone?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that farmers feel the brunt of climate change and natural disasters day to day, and that is what is increasing food prices when we see how they are being impacted by natural disasters.

We are taking action to fight climate change and at the same time support farmers. In each instance where we were supporting farmers in the last votes, the Conservatives voted against. They voted against \$25 million going to Fort McMurray—Cold Lake to support agricultural workers in that field. Why are they standing against supporting farmers to fight climate change?

• (1135)

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Madam Speaker, with an answer like that, I am not surprised Canadians cannot afford food, in a country where two million citizens are relying on food banks monthly. It is baffling to see the NDP-Liberal coalition push to quadruple the carbon tax. When we tax the farmer who grows the food and the trucker who delivers the food, Canadians are stuck with higher food prices.

Bill C-234 in its original form promises immediate relief. Will the Liberals discard the Senate's alterations, lift this tax burden and help Canadians afford their groceries?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the first thing the Conservatives did the last time they formed government

was to get rid of child care right across our country. That impacted affordability.

We have a national child care program that is reducing the cost of child care to \$10 a day. The Conservatives were sending hundred-dollar cheques to millionaires. We brought in the Canada child benefit that gives up to \$619 a month to the people who need it the most. In each instance, we are there to support families to put food on the table; they are not.

* * *

[Translation]

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, the January 18 loan forgiveness repayment deadline for the Canada emergency business account proved how little the federal government cares about our entrepreneurs.

Unfathomably, this week the Liberals were celebrating the fact that 80% of businesses have repaid the loan. This means that 20% of SMEs cannot pay it back. One in five SMEs that took out the emergency loan is now facing bankruptcy, and the government thinks that is good news.

Do the Liberals really think that 180,000 potential bankruptcies is good news?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, once again, we are there to support SMEs in a number of ways.

Yes, the emergency business account was very important during COVID-19. We extended the \$60,000 loan with a forgivable portion. Up to 80% of people have already paid it back. There are still measures in place for repayment over three years. The minimum payable amount is the 5% interest, which translates into \$250 a month. There is a whole range of measures.

I would remind members that if we had not offered the wage subsidy, many businesses would not be here today, but thanks to us, they survived.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, while the Liberals pat themselves on the back, they are ignoring all the sacrifices made by the businesses that have paid back their loans.

There are people who have stretched their line of credit to the limit. There are people who have risked losing their own home. All that because the government refuses to assess the files on a case-by-case basis, because it refuses to guarantee the loans with financial institutions, because it insists on adding \$20,000 in debt to businesses that are already on the brink.

Would it be so hard to offer a bit of flexibility to our businesses?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, during COVID-19, if we had not been there with the Canada emergency business account, with the wage subsidy and with rent assistance, thousands of small and medium-sized businesses would not have made it.

We have come through COVID-19, the economy is recovering and conditions are perfectly reasonable for loan repayment. Some 80% of businesses have already paid back their loans. They still have until the end of March. Those who have to extend for another three years will have to pay only 5% interest, which is an extra \$250 a month.

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[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of this NDP-Liberal government, so many of my residents struggle to pay for gas and groceries, particularly seniors on fixed incomes, single parents and persons with disabilities. We can fight this made-in-Canada inflation by supporting the Conservative leader's motion to cancel the April 1 carbon tax increase.

Will the Liberal and NDP caucus members vote to stop this increase to help struggling Canadians, or will the Prime Minister simply whip them all?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, it seems the Conservatives have some explaining to do. While they are taking acting classes and talking about the plight and affordability of Canadians, the leader of the official opposition's chief strategist is getting rich off the back of Loblaws as a lobbyist. We now know that while the Conservatives act for their videos, they are voting against Canadians' interests, and against affordability and competition for grocery prices. While the Conservatives take acting classes, we are acting—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, the only ones who are not acting here are us on this side, being responsible and saying what our constituents are feeling.

The Prime Minister recognized the pain that his carbon tax caused and exempted home heating oil from it last fall, but this did not occur in my home province. The B.C. government said that it wanted an exemption for home heating oil from the NDP-Liberal government similar to its climate plan.

I support the Conservative leader's common-sense plan to axe the tax for all Canadians but at the very least, British Columbia should be treated fairly. If B.C. requests it, will the Prime Minister approve its request?

• (1140)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of En-

ergy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, British Columbia has been a leader in fighting climate change. In fact, it brought a price on carbon pollution before the federal government did, and it has been a true partner throughout every step. We will continue to work with the Province of British Columbia to make sure it supports Canadians with the greener homes grant and other programs, and we continue to support every measure for Canadians to have cleaner fuel.

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Madam Speaker, a tax on a farmer is a tax on food. It is that simple. Canadians know that rising carbon taxes make everything more expensive, and they overwhelmingly know that after eight years the current NDP-Liberal government is not worth the cost. Conservatives know a carbon-tax hike on April 1 will make food even more unaffordable. That is why we put forward a sensible motion to cancel this tax hike.

Do the Liberals even know that their carbon tax hike will continue to drive up the cost of food?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a bit funny that members on that side are talking about affordability. My hon. colleague has brought up a good point. The chief strategist for the leader of the official opposition is a lobbyist for Loblaws. Loblaws is the only grocer asking not to be part of the grocery code of conduct, which is something the Conservatives supported. They were supportive of the grocery code of conduct. Now I am wondering if it is an official policy of the Conservative Party of Canada that it is no longer supporting the grocery code of conduct because its chief strategist is the lobbyist for Loblaws.

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Madam Speaker, the current government just does not understand how badly Canadians are struggling, including in my city of Calgary. Statistics Canada recently reported that it costs more to afford basic goods and to live a moderate standard of living in Calgary than in any other major city in Canada. It now costs more to live in Calgary than it does to live in Toronto or Vancouver.

Will the Liberals stop their April 1 carbon tax increase that will make gas, groceries and home heating even more expensive, or will they pile more costs on Calgarians?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have worked, as members know, with the City of Calgary on a range of matters, including getting more housing built through the housing accelerator fund.

However, I find the hypocrisy in the Conservative position stunning. The Conservatives continue to talk about the vulnerable when we know what they would do if they were in office. They would cut pensions. They would cut EI. The Canada child benefit would be cut. Regarding dental care and child care, the Conservatives have never been for it. They talk about homelessness. Let us be serious. They do not believe in dealing with homelessness because every time they had a chance to vote for measures that would deal with it, they voted against it, as recently as a few weeks ago. They are not serious.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, Gaza is the most dangerous place to be a journalist. There have been 122 journalists killed in Netanyahu's onslaught. Mansour Shouman, a brave reporter in Gaza, a Canadian and a fellow Albertan, has been missing for over a week. Eyewitnesses say that he was taken into custody by the Israeli army. His mother is worried sick and said that the government has not done enough to keep her informed about his whereabouts.

Can the government commit to Mansour Shouman's mother and all his loved ones that it will do everything in its power to bring him home?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for raising this issue today and thank the many members who have sent me concerns about this particular case. When it comes to this case, I want to state very clearly that consular officials at Global Affairs Canada, as well as in the field, have been in touch with the family.

The minister talked to the family this week and assured the family that we are doing everything we can to find out this person's whereabouts. We are considering every possibility of engagement on this case. We will continue to do that. I am not able to go into further details due to privacy concerns but if one has more concerns or questions, please contact me directly.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, Canadians cannot keep up with their home heating costs. Switching to a heat pump makes life more affordable while tackling the climate crisis, but the current Liberal program is riddled with problems and is almost impossible for rural and lower-income Canadians to access. The Liberals are threatening to cancel this program and are leaving people out in the cold with higher home heating bills and with no option to switch. This makes no sense.

Why will the Liberals not make big oil pay what it owes and use the funds to fix the heat pump program?

• (1145)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an absolutely amazing thing to see how popular the greener homes grant

has been, as well as the greener homes loans. Canadians across the country have been taking this opportunity to better insulate their homes and to switch to heat pumps, all of which reduces their heating bills at the end of the day, at the same time as protecting our environment. We have a continued commitment to work toward green buildings right across our country. We will be having an update soon. Please watch for it.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Madam Speaker, earlier this week, I had the pleasure of joining the ministers of justice and of public safety in York Region to announce \$121 million in funding to combat guns, gangs and organized crime in Ontario. In the city of Vaughan and in many big cities across the country, auto theft is a growing problem and one that is becoming increasingly violent.

Can the Minister of Public Safety please reassure my constituents and all Canadians and tell us how the government plans to tackle this issue?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Vaughan—Woodbridge for standing up for safety in his community and joining the Minister of Public Safety to address auto theft, which is a serious problem that requires collaboration and an all-hands-on-deck approach with our provincial and municipal partners.

Canadians are understandably concerned for their safety, and they expect elected officials to put their partisanship aside and work together. That is why our government is working with local partners, including the police, while the Leader of the Opposition insults the individuals who have taken an oath—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

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HOUSING

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of this NDP-Liberal government, the doom and gloom in the housing market is worse than ever. Fewer homes were built last year than the year before. Vacancy rates are at all-time lows, and rent is at an all-time high. Instead of removing the gatekeepers who block building, the Liberals cut them big cheques. In fact, the first four photo ops the housing minister took cost Canadians \$300 million.

Oral Questions

How much longer will they be cutting big cheques before a single home gets approved or even built?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a good rapport with the colleague opposite. We work together on the HUMA committee, but it is hard to take him seriously in the House today when we know that recently he has voted against 99 units of housing for his own community. At 520 Isaac Street, and he can go down there as I am sure he knows where that is, 99 units of housing have been built as a result of the Liberal government's funding. That is what the national housing strategy is doing. Across the country, we have seen that 125,000 people who were very close to being homeless are off the streets, and 70,000 people who were homeless are off the streets with wraparound supports. We—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka.

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is hard to take that parliamentary secretary seriously, because he knows full well that with regard to these big expensive photo ops in Mississauga and Toronto, for example, more housing than ever is getting blocked despite them.

Merely weeks after the Prime Minister's \$471-million photo op in Toronto, the gatekeepers there said “no” to new housing right next door to a new transit station. Mississauga got a big \$113-million cheque after having blocked 17,000 units in 2023. This photo-op Prime Minister is failing Canadians. He is not worth the cost.

When will this government stop buying housing photo ops and start—

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

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if he wants to see the results of the national housing strategy, again, I will remind him to go down to 520 Isaac Street in his riding. He can see the results: 99 units of housing. As far as the other points raised, he is talking about the housing accelerator fund. Yes, we have concluded agreements with 30 communities that will incentivize zoning changes that lead to the construction of duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, mid-rise apartments, row houses and more.

That is how we get Canadians housed. That is how we bring down costs. They want to put taxes on the construction of apartments. In addition, they want to continue measures that will not go ahead with getting more housing built in this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, the housing crisis in the Lower St. Lawrence region continues.

After eight years of this government, the region has no available housing, so rents are skyrocketing. Housing costs are increasing by 7%, sometimes even 10% or more. These figures are very alarming.

They are far higher than inflation, and sometimes significantly higher than wages. That suggests renter households may be getting poorer. Why is the Prime Minister doing nothing to lower the cost of housing?

• (1150)

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, does anyone know what will not incentivize rental housing construction? The member knows. I am talking about their policy of putting the GST back on the construction of new rental apartment buildings. That is their policy. It is in their bill. That is their leader's proposal.

The people who build housing are telling me that removing the GST will incentivize the construction of thousands of housing units. Maybe the member should get his facts straight.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, according to what the Governor of the Bank of Canada said yesterday, this Prime Minister's spending is keeping interest rates and inflation high. That will inevitably drive up the cost of housing, mortgage renewals and rent for Canadians and Quebecers in the coming months.

After eight years in office, this government still does not understand that it would just be common sense to balance the budget in the foreseeable future.

Will the government take action to balance the budget in a predictable manner in the next budget?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it would be interesting to look at the Conservative Party's history when it comes to taxes.

[English]

We know that deficit after deficit is the story of the Conservative Party. In fact, now we see a AAA credit rating and the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. We co-rank third in the OECD when it comes to attracting foreign direct investment. Deal after deal has been concluded by the Minister Industry, including in my region of southwestern Ontario and St. Thomas, specifically, and in Windsor, to see electric vehicle battery plants built. That gets Canadians working. Of course, we see also a very low unemployment rate.

* * *

[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Speaker, after four press conferences to tell us she was going to announce good news in January, the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard threw us mere morsels, what some might call fish food.

Saying that the government is opening the redfish fishery is a bit of a stretch. The government announced a quota of 25,000 tonnes, nearly 60% of which is allotted to big 30-metre vessels. Fishers feel that this is a 30-year step backwards. This is the government's transition plan after reducing shrimp quotas to a meagre 3,000 tonnes, to be shared with the Maritime provinces. That does not even amount to half a trip per boat. There is no long-term vision for protecting the resource or for the small inshore fishery ecosystem.

Seriously, what exactly is the minister's plan? Is it to wipe out fishing in Quebec?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the situation for our shrimp fishers in the Gulf of St. Lawrence estuary is dire.

I think everyone here agrees that no one wants to catch the last shrimp. That is why, following extensive consultations, I announced a significant decrease in quotas for the next shrimp season. This quota will ensure a modest fishery while allowing shrimp stocks to recover.

In the face of climate change, our government will continue to offer solutions to our fishers, such as buddy-up arrangements.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Speaker, the overpopulation of redfish, the main predator of small fish and shrimp, demonstrates an appalling lack of vision and a great deal of contempt for the expertise of fishers and for the fisheries economy in the regions.

Fishers deserve a real transition plan. Instead, we are back to what destroyed the ecosystem 30 years ago. A plan would include financial compensation to support the transition and the workforce, a strategy to market redfish and new products, and well-thought-out, long-term, concrete prospects for pelagic species, shrimp, groundfish, seals and algae.

When will the minister finally come up with a truly sustainable plan to ensure the survival of Quebec's fisheries?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it was very good news to announce the reopening of the commercial redfish fishery in 2024 after a 30-year moratorium.

Today is Groundhog Day. The Bloc Québécois is finally seizing this opportunity to come out of its burrow after a long six-month hibernation, during which it asked no questions about fisheries.

One thing is certain. The Bloc Québécois only shows an interest in fisheries when it is fishing for votes.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, children under 18 in British Columbia can now be prescribed fentanyl. It is reported that parents do not even need to be told or agree. Toxic drug overdose is now the leading cause of death for youth in British Columbia.

Oral Questions

It is also reported that addiction experts have criticized protocols, stating that they are deeply inadequate and do not provide a minimum age for when youth can receive recreational fentanyl.

Will the NDP-Liberal government put an end to its dangerous drug policy experiments that are putting deadly fentanyl into the hands of children?

• (1155)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Conservatives are trying to spread fear and confusion.

Here are the facts: No kids have been prescribed fentanyl in B.C. Under the guidelines, there are additional precautions in place when it comes to prescribing to minors. The most important relationship in managing one's health is with a health care provider.

Harm reduction is health care. We are working to save lives.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday it was absolutely shocking when, first, B.C.'s top doctor said so-called "safe supply" is landing into street-level trafficking and ending up in the hands of children.

Then the Liberal minister responsible for safe supply came to committee and doubled down on the unwavering Liberal-NDP commitment to their deadly drug policy experiments. It is absolutely unbelievable. The government's addictive drugs end up in our kids' hands, and the government endorses it.

Will the NDP-Liberal government end its deadly drug policy experiment and get the drugs out of our kids' hands?

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, prescribed safe supply is a valued intervention and a necessary life-saving intervention. It helps connect to social supports, and it is part of the continuum of care. We take the safety of all Canadians seriously, and we will continue to approach the toxic drugs and overdose crisis from both a public health and a public safety perspective.

*Oral Questions***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, crime is up nearly 40% across the country. The Liberals removed jail time for car theft in Bill C-5, and since then, car theft is up 300% in Toronto and 34% overall in Canada.

The Prime Minister is not worth the cost or the crime. Every six minutes, a car is stolen. Insurance rates have risen as much as 50% at a time when Canadians can least afford it.

Common-sense Conservatives will bring back jail, not bail, for criminals. Will the Liberals?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting how the Conservatives are just waking up to the issue of auto theft in this country. This is something we have been working on with our local partners, including police.

While the Conservatives sit here and talk tough to cameras, just over 50 days ago they actually voted against over \$80 million that would go precisely to combat the issues that the member is raising.

They talk tough, but there is no action when it comes to actually dealing with crime in this country.

* * *

[Translation]

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that families across Canada, including those in my riding of Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, are struggling with the cost of living. The Canada child benefit is a source of support for families in my community.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families and Children tell the House how this important benefit is helping all Canadian families?

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that important question. We know that many people are struggling financially, and that is why we have programs like the Canada child benefit, which was specifically designed to support those who need it most.

The Canada child benefit has helped lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty since 2016 and it is indexed to the cost of living. Parents can now count on amounts of up to \$7,437 for children under the age of six and up to \$6,275 for children under the age of 17. This support is essential—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

[English]

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years the NDP-Liberal government is not worth the cost or the corruption. The Minister of Industry conveniently claims that until recently he had no idea about corruption and self-dealing at the Liberals' billion-dollar green slush fund. We now know that his predecessor, Navdeep Bains, was informed as early as 2019 that the company of the Liberal-appointed chair had received millions from the fund in a blatant conflict of interest.

In the face of that, how is it possible that the minister had no idea?

● (1200)

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me be clear. As soon as we found out about these alleged allegations, ISED acted quickly. The Minister of Innovation has already accepted the resignation of the CEO and the chair.

We take these allegations extremely seriously, which is why we are following proper due diligence. Our government is committed to ensuring that organizations that received government funding adhere to the highest standards of governance. We are committed to getting to the bottom of these allegations.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, that is nonsense. Not only had the minister's predecessor been informed of self dealing on the part of the Liberal-appointed Chair, but the minister sent officials to attend each green slush fund board meeting, in which board members funnelled more than \$20 million taxpayer dollars to their own companies. The minister claims he had no idea.

Either the minister is grossly incompetent or he is misleading Canadians. Which is it?

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is just another example of the Conservatives being willing to say anything to oppose us in fighting climate change. They want to slash the funding to this organization that Parliament and the House voted for over 20 years ago. We are sticking to the facts and to the due process. We will continue fighting to get to the bottom of this.

TAXATION

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, on April 1 this Liberal-NDP government is going to automatically raise the tax on beer, wine and spirits for the eighth year in a row without even a vote from elected MPs.

When a simple treat like sharing a bottle of wine with a loved one becomes unaffordable, Canadians know that after eight years, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost. Will the Prime Minister stop this automatic annual tax increase and bring back happy hour for Canadians?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we will continue to work with the beer sector and vintners to ensure that they are competitive.

In fact, if we look at the wider Canadian economy, what do we see? We see a lower unemployment rate than existed before the pandemic. There are more jobs working now than before the pandemic.

That party continues to put forward an austerity agenda that would do what? It would cut pensions, cut EI and cut the Canada child benefit, dental care, child care, all of it. The Conservatives do not believe in the social programs that have upheld this country in so many different ways. They do not believe in Canadians by extension. That is what I have to say to that.

HOUSING

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the federal government can get more housing built by working with municipalities rather than insulting mayors like the leader of the official opposition does.

Through the housing accelerator fund, we are working with the District of Squamish to fast-track the construction of an additional 200 homes over the next three years and over 1,300 homes over the next decade, and these are not just any homes. These are affordable rental and missing middle homes that the municipality has determined are badly needed in the community.

Can the parliamentary secretary of housing, infrastructure and communities please tell residents of Squamish how we are working with local partners to get more housing built faster at prices they can afford?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to do exactly that, but let me first say that the member's tireless advocacy led to agreements like the one completed with Squamish. In fact, other MPs on this side have also worked to ensure outcomes through the housing accelerator fund.

I have talked about it before, but it bears repeating. This is a fund that ensures incentives on the municipality's part to change zoning, which will lead to more building in return for federal funding. What do we see as a result? We see duplexes, fourplexes, triplexes and mid-rise apartments. All of these will lead to 500,000 homes being built over the next decade and 78,000 homes built over the next four years. That is how we get housing going.

Oral Questions

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, northern Manitoba is seeing temperatures above zero. We have had weather that is unheard of these last two months. Thousands of people in our region depend on ice roads to survive. Because of the warm weather, some roads have not opened and others will not last the season.

The Liberals have failed to act quickly to combat the climate emergency that is hitting indigenous communities the hardest. Investments in climate adaptation are needed now: an airport for Wasagamack and all-weather roads for St. Theresa Point, Oxford House and York Landing.

When will the Liberals finally act to deliver these life-saving investments?

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for her question and for her dedication to this file.

Indeed, indigenous people all across Canada, and especially in northern areas, are feeling the brunt of climate change faster than people in other areas. I was at the United Nations last year, where they told our government this. The government is willing to work with their community and indigenous communities to make sure they have all the services that all Canadians have in Canada.

● (1205)

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, Ind.): Madam Speaker, on December 2, 2022, and on February 15, March 23 and March 25, 2023, I asked the government a question concerning a 30-year old tax law that penalizes Canadian businesses, despite the fact that they use only local products that are good for our health.

Life is getting more and more expensive, and eating healthy is becoming harder and harder for families. By addressing this situation, the government would be helping people to buy healthy food that is less expensive while putting an end to an injustice that forces SMEs to compete unfairly with multinationals.

Will the Minister of Finance take action on this file?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. I am aware, and we are working together to try to come up with a solution. We want to help our local businesses to operate under the right conditions, in a good environment for doing business. This situation is a bit complex and we cannot change it overnight, but we will continue to work with him.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

PETITIONS**FARMERS' MARKETS**

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of the people of Bow River, calling on the government to institute a national farmers' market nutrition coupon program. The number of families who experience food insecurity has increased by more than 12% since 2021-22. In March 2023 alone, nearly two million people visited a food bank.

The government must axe the tax to find solutions, and this is one of them: a national farmers' market nutrition coupon program.

FIRST RESPONDERS TAX CREDIT

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers put their lives on the line for their fellow Canadians. They give their time, training and efforts, and they also allow municipalities to keep property taxes lower than if paid services were required.

I am presenting a petition calling on the government to increase tax credits for these essential volunteers and to support Bill C-310.

UKRAINE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling today a very timely petition. Constituents in my riding have signed a petition asking for all parliamentarians of all political parties to get behind and vote in favour of Bill C-57, which would implement the Canada-Ukraine trade agreement.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today, but prior to that, I have a point of order. There was a missing statement from ministers today, which is that the great prognosticator from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Wiarton Willie, predicted an early spring this morning.

The first petition is from constituents in my riding who are calling for the House of Commons and the Government of Canada to reverse the law extending eligibility for MAID to people with mental illness as the sole medical condition.

PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I am presenting is to do with online verification for access to pornography on the Internet. Petitioners are calling upon the House of Commons to adopt Bill S-210, which seeks to protect young persons from exposure to pornography.

FIRST RESPONDERS TAX CREDIT

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am here today on behalf of the amazing volunteer firefighters across my riding, as well as the search and rescue folks who volunteer a considerable amount to Canada. I want to thank them because we know that volunteer firefighters make up 71% of Canada's total firefighting essential first responders.

Right now, the tax code of Canada allows volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers to claim \$3,000 in tax credit for 200 hours of service. Petitioners would like to see that raised to \$10,000. The member who put forward Bill C-310, the member for Courtenay—Alberni, noted that municipalities and communities get to keep their property taxes lower because they do not need to pay for the services of these volunteers. People put their lives on the line for us; it is time we do the same.

● (1210)

UKRAINE

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition today on behalf of residents in my community.

To summarize, the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel measures were in place to help Ukrainians and their family members come to Canada as quickly as possible. However, the program excludes many Ukrainians who came to Canada under the program who do not have family residing in Canada.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to make available a specialized permanent residency pathway for Ukrainians currently in Canada that does not require them to have a family member in Canada who is a Canadian citizen or permanent resident.

FIRST RESPONDERS TAX CREDIT

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Sasamat volunteer firefighters protect Anmore and Belcarra. Coquitlam's search and rescue volunteers also put their lives on the line for their fellow Canadians. They give their time, training and efforts. This also allows municipalities to keep property taxes lower. If their services as required were paid, this would be optimum, but at the moment they are giving their time and their expertise as volunteers.

I am presenting a petition calling on the government to increase the tax credits, at the very minimum, for these essential volunteers, and to support Bill C-310.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House at this time, you might find unanimous consent to call it 1:30 p.m. so we can begin private members' hour.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

LOWERING PRICES FOR CANADIANS ACT

The House resumed from November 6, 2023, consideration of the motion that Bill C-352, An Act to amend the Competition Act and the Competition Tribunal Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to address the chamber with respect to Bill C-352, which would amend the Competition Act.

I think we all agree in the chamber that a stronger competition enforcement regime would be good for all Canadians. The bill proposed by the New Democratic Party, while receptive to the need for change in competition law, and generally aligned with the government's overall direction to date, must, however, be examined in light of the vast number of changes that overlap with and have already been introduced by Bill C-56 and Bill C-59.

Bill C-56 became law in December 2023, while Bill C-59 remains under consideration by Parliament at the present time. Bill C-56 implements, and Bill C-59 would implement, an overhaul of the Competition Act following the extensive consultations undertaken in 2022 and in 2023. The government received a great deal of input throughout its consultations, bolstering the knowledge gained over the years of stewardship over this law. The amendment packages assembled in its two bills address most of the issues identified in the law that historically made it weaker than regimes of Canada's closest partners. That would no longer be the case.

Modernizing the Competition Act is a necessary step in making Canada's economy more affordable for consumers and more fair and accessible to business. The government's extensive commitment to competition law reform was led by Bill C-56, the Affordable Housing and Groceries Act, followed by Bill C-59, the fall economic statement implementation act, 2023. Both of these bills are directed at enhancing affordability and competition, and together they represent the most comprehensive reform package to the Competition Act in decades. They respond to the submissions of hundreds of very different stakeholders, including businesses, legal experts, academics, non-governmental organizations and the commissioner of competition himself.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-56 implemented a set of targeted but critical amendments, following especially from the Competitions Bureau's market study on Canada's retail grocery sector. As members already know, Bill C-56 brought much-needed changes such as allowing information to be compelled under court order in the course of a market study, helping to remove barriers when diagnosing potential competition issues.

Bill C-56 also repealed the efficiencies exceptions for anti-competitive mergers and collaborations, and in so doing eliminated what many observers consider to have been the single biggest contributor to corporate concentration in Canada. The bill further allowed for better prevention and remedy of the abuse by larger players of their dominant position by requiring only proof of anti-competitive intent or effects to prohibit certain forms of conduct. This more appropriately allocates the burden of proof, as compared to the previous test, which significantly limited the number of instances where the bureau could intervene.

Finally, Bill C-56 addressed harm from collaborations between non-competing parties that are designed to limit competition. Once this provision is in effect, the bureau would be able to review any type of collaboration whose purpose it is to restrain competition and seek a remedy, including an order to prevent the activity where competition is being substantially harmed or is likely to be. This would be especially impactful on restrictive covenants between grocers and landlords, allowing more grocers to set up shop near competitors.

Bill C-56 was, of course, amended in committee through a multi-party effort, incorporating several of the elements in Bill C-352 that now no longer require consideration.

Bill C-59 represents an even more substantial overhaul in our competition enforcement regime, addressing a large variety of aspects of the Competition Act. The amendments would give the Competition Bureau a longer period to detect and address anti-competitive mergers that are not notified in advance, helping to address "killer acquisitions" in the digital market. The bill would broaden the bureau's review of competitor collaborations to include those that harmed competition in the past, and would allow for financial penalties to be sought when necessary.

Private Members' Business

• (1215)

Importantly, Bill C-59 would facilitate private actions against a broader range of anti-competitive or harmful practices and empower those affected to seek financial compensation in many cases. This improvement would complement the bureau's work in protecting the marketplace. The bill would also ensure that costs awards would not be ordered against the commissioner of competition in the vast majority of circumstances, another element addressed by Bill C-352.

The bill also includes anti-reprisal provisions, which would ensure that co-operation with the bureau or participation in legal proceedings could not be punished by stronger businesses. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that Bill C-59 would strengthen the law's testament of greenwashing the false advertising of sustainability claims while also facilitating environmentally beneficial collaborations that would not harm competition. Moreover, it would ensure that a means of diagnosis or repair could not be denied in a way that would harm competition.

All in all, little remains in Bill C-352 that has not already been addressed. On the contrary, Bill C-59 includes several elements missing from this private member's bill. The government's consultation saw over 130 stakeholders raise over 100 reform proposals. All submissions made by identified groups are publicly available, and the government published a "what we heard" report synthesizing them. This public process has been a key source of input to help us develop reform proposals. We are confident that the measures included in government bills comprehensively address the needs expressed by Canadians.

In conclusion, I think it is fair to say that the ambition of Bill C-352 correctly reflects the importance Canadians place on having a strengthened competition law framework. However, all of the major issues it raises have been or are being substantially dealt with through Bill C-56 and Bill C-59. As such, I would encourage members of the House interested in advancing competition reform to prioritize the rapid passage of Bill C-59.

• (1220)

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to continue debate on this very important private member's bill that deals with amending the Competition Act to address the woeful lack of competition in our country, particularly a growing lack of competition that has occurred after eight years under the Liberal government.

I was very disappointed to hear the previous Liberal speaker talk about how the Liberals intend to not support this legislation. They expect Canadians to trust them and trust that their legislation has all the solutions needed to solve the competition problems, but many of the competition problems, as I will show in my speech, have been caused by the amount of consolidation that has happened in the Canadian marketplace under eight years of the Liberal government.

For example, Canadians pay the highest cellphone bills in the developed world, three times more than Australians pay and twice as much as our neighbours in the United States. I remember how hard the previous Conservative government worked to bring new wireless players into the Canadian market to help bring down prices for

Canadian consumers. All of this hard work was unravelled under the Liberal government with the merger of Rogers and Shaw, which eliminated a major new entrant into the market that was providing much-needed competition.

We can also look at our banking sector, which is extraordinarily controlled by six large banking firms, and we have seen yet another takeover in the banking sector that has further consolidated Canadians' mortgages under a relatively few number of very large companies. Finally, we can look at the amount of consolidation happening in our airline sector, with Canada being dominated by just two large airlines representing 85% of the market, and there are more mergers coming. The government is even going after some of the new players with tax bills that are threatening to take new players out of our airline market.

When the Liberal government came to power nearly a decade ago, Canadians had a choice of eight Canadian grocery chains and now, after eight years of the Liberal government, the market is dominated by just three Canadian companies and two American multinational corporations. These are not signs of a healthy, dynamic and competitive marketplace. They are signs of a country that has an outdated approach to competition. The reality is that this is a Canadian problem. While the Liberal government blames international trends for the increasing prices we are seeing at the grocery stores and on our cellphone bills, the fundamental problem is the lack of choice that Canadians have and it is forcing Canadians to pay more.

The Competition Act is in desperate need of reform. It is rooted in a history of an industrial policy that sought to protect large Canadian companies from foreign competition, but it does nothing to promote competition domestically. In fact, I am not sure if the goal of having these companies protected so that they can grow is being achieved in this country because they are so protected that we are not seeing the innovation we need in this country to really develop the next level of technologies and practices.

Canada's weak competition laws allow a very few cartels to dominate whole industries. They shut out competitors, they drive up profits and, in this process, consumers are the obvious victims. They pay more for goods and services, which are not always of the best quality. This lack of choice leaves Canadians with no other options.

This does not just affect consumers. Indeed, the impact of this failing Competition Act has immense consequences on small and medium-sized producers. I come from an area that has a lot of farmers. We know that these big companies dictate prices to these farmers, and that really has an impact on them as well.

My riding is also home to one of Canada's largest family-owned grocery chains, Freson Bros., which was founded in 1955. I am very proud that Freson Bros. is in my riding. It has a number of locations across Alberta. I believe it is the largest grocery store chain that is not part of the major grocery store chains in Canada. It is really known for its high-quality products. It has excellent butcher shops. It has its own brand of sourdough, which is listed in one of the bread museums in the world, I believe in Belgium. It has developed a made-in-Alberta sourdough bread. I am very proud of that. People can walk into any Freson Bros. location in Alberta and they will immediately sense the high standard of care and quality that it puts into all of its products. This is a great example of a made-in-Canada business that promotes excellence and craftsmanship in its field.

Sadly, many smaller companies like Freson Bros. face immense hurdles to participate in the market. This high concentration of control among the very large companies has entrenched players that have become price setters in the market. When the Loblaws and the Walmarts of the world dictate what the prices will be for the products on the shelves, it is the smaller players that end up holding the bag and paying higher prices.

• (1225)

Let us take Coca-Cola, for example. Loblaws controls 62% of the Canadian market for Coca-Cola. That means that Loblaws effectively determines what the price is, not only for consumers, but for what all the other smaller players and distributors are paying as well.

How can smaller companies compete with these tactics? The answer is that they cannot. In any grocery store aisle, we can be sure that the amount smaller grocery stores pay for items like soda and other products is higher than that paid by the major players. It is a huge competitive edge, and while it may save consumers a couple of cents at the stores, it comes at the cost of eliminating real competition that would create long-term better prices for consumers.

I would ask my colleagues in the government what happened to their concerns over the middle class and those working hard to join it. After eight years of the government's reckless spending and fiscal incompetence, we know for a fact that hard-working Canadians are worse off. They are taxed more than ever, and they are paying more for these basic goods and services that they need to live their lives. As we have seen, Canada's weak competition laws continue to serve the interests of the large, established players, to the detriment of new players.

I want to talk about one very specific aspect of the competition rules that I do not think has been talked about enough. One of those aspects is the term "restrictive covenant" in real estate development. My colleagues may ask, what is a restrictive covenant? It refers to a situation in which a developer buys land, intending to build a grocery store and other businesses, such as a strip mall, for example. They will often be approached by one of the big players, saying they want to put their location in the area and that it will attract all these other ancillary business people who want to be involved. Attracting a big store like a Walmart is a big draw for a lot of small business owners who want to build in these big parking lots and these well-attended locations.

Private Members' Business

The operators of the Walmarts and the Superstores of the world do not want to enter a development if they think they are going to face competition. Therefore, on the one hand it is completely fair that a grocery store operator does not want to have another grocery store right next to them in the same parking lot, but it is not fair when they have restrictive covenants that say nobody can start a small butcher shop or a small boutique bakery because there is a bakery or a butcher shop in the grocery store; they pass these restrictive covenants that say that no other business can engage in any business that the grocery store is engaged in.

What we are doing is sterilizing the business sectors in our communities, and it is because of these restrictive covenants. That is really preventing a lot of small and medium-sized butchers and bakers and other business owners who compete with the grocery stores from getting into these developments and producing their superior boutique products. This is an area of the Competition Act that we need to look at much more deeply, because it is not only giving a huge advantage to these big incumbent players but also really hurting our small and medium-sized enterprises and our consumers.

As members can see, our current competition laws are seriously lacking in sophistication and are a major contributor to the problem. Far from creating competition, the current regime allows for the proliferation of monopolies all across our economy.

The Competition Bureau has said that we need to encourage foreign companies to enter the Canadian market. I am not necessarily against foreign companies, but I am wondering why the minister is spending so much time burning up the phones to try to bring a big new foreign player into the Canadian market, when we have not even addressed the rules and the barriers that are preventing great Canadian companies, like the Freson Brothers of the world and other companies, from being able to compete in the Canadian market. Why can we not remove the barriers so that we can allow a small or medium-sized Canadian business to become a big grocery player, rather than always having to look abroad to bring in another grocery player? As the Freson brothers told me in a text message, innovation is at the heart of small and medium-sized businesses. Survival is the driver, and community is the beneficiary.

Private Members' Business

I would like to support this update to the law. There are a lot of things in here that could help. I look forward to its passing and being studied at committee, because it is companies like Freson Brothers and other small grocery stores and boutique bakeries and butchers that are the real fabric of our community and that make our communities so special and unique. We need to do everything we can as parliamentarians to create a business climate that promotes Canadian innovators, Canadian investment and Canadian jobs, and that creates the competition we need in this country to ensure that we have a dynamic marketplace that will provide the benefits this country so sorely needs in this troubling economy.

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, strengthening the Competition Act is important, and some of the proposals in Bill C-352 aim to do just that.

For example, the enactment amends the Competition Act by increasing the penalties for certain anti-competitive acts. It also amends certain aspects of the merger review process, such as how gains in efficiency and market concentration are taken into account.

Furthermore, it requires the Competition Tribunal to make an order to dissolve or prohibit mergers that result in an excessive combined market share. It extends the limitation period for merger reviews from one year to three years. Finally, it amends the Competition Tribunal Act to remove the Tribunal's power to award costs against the Crown.

All of these things are positive, and that is why the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-352. However, I would like to remind members of one very specific situation.

Last fall, Bill C-56 was debated, amended and then passed. Half of that bill dealt with amendments to the Competition Act. Members will recall that to get the NDP to support a gag order, M-30, the government amended Bill C-56 to include several items from Bill C-352. A number of items from Bill C-352 therefore ended up in Bill C-56.

What is more, there was a big chunk of Bill C-352 that was missing from Bill C-56, so I brought it to committee and it passed. The committee chair ruled the amendment inadmissible, but his decision was overturned by all of the committee members, across all parties. That reversal was not challenged in the House.

There are many good things in Bill C-352, but the bulk of it was already passed last fall. I therefore question the relevance of debating this bill again, given that its substance has already been passed by the House.

Much like in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, all that is left is the marlin's carcass. Poor Santiago. We are going to vote in favour of that carcass and conclude in committee that the substance of the bill has already been passed.

[English]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am so happy to be standing up for Canadians today on Bill C-352. This is finally addressing the anti-competitive behaviour that has been going on in Canada for decades, which has

been supported by the present Liberal government, and the Conservative and Liberal governments before it.

These governments have been back and forth, ping-ponging the government status in this country for decades, and they have done nothing about the fact that consumers have been getting ripped off in the market. I want to thank the member for Burnaby South for raising this important debate in the House of Commons to finally address the lack of competition in this country and the overpriced goods and services that Canadians need to survive.

Canadians woke up this week to the news that corporate control of their medication was a reality. Loblaw and Manulife have potentially colluded together to limit access to life-saving medication for people in this country. Galen Weston is involved in Loblaw. We all know that. Galen Weston has been to committee many times about the skyrocketing price of groceries. We all know that Mr. Weston made the statement that these kind of profits are fine and there is nothing wrong with taking these kind of profits. Meanwhile, Canadians, people in my riding, are struggling to put food on the table.

Galen Weston, as an individual and as an influencer in the Canadian economy, has already got a disproportionate amount of control over people's ability to eat in this country. Now, we are in a situation where Galen Weston and the Loblaw company are going to have even more control over whether or not people, their family members and their friends have the medication they need to stay alive. This is serious business.

Although the competition board oversees anti-competitive behaviour, it has not had the teeth to enforce or make changes. I have been in this House all morning, and I heard the Conservatives say that they are there to create a business climate. This is the moniker of the Conservatives, and this is how they have won elections in the past. They talk about how smart they are on the economy, how smart they are on business and how they are going to make business so great.

I can say that the Conservatives are complicit in the fact that people are paying too much for their groceries, too much for their cell-phone bills and too much for their medications. I could go on. The Conservatives work for corporations, and they have no idea how to run an economy.

There is something that bothers me as a woman standing in this chamber. I am a woman who spent 25 years in the grocery industry, many of those years as a business analyst, and many of those years out in the field as a salesperson working in Europe, the United States and Canada. However, because I am a woman, my voice is not heard and they think I do not know what I am talking about. The Conservatives, on their bench, have a number of members who are men, who talk down to me and speak to me like I do not know what I am talking about, when they have never had a job outside of a fast food restaurant chain.

I do not appreciate it. Canadians do not appreciate it. The Conservatives now and in the past, and the Liberals now and in the past, have been hoarding the profits that belong to Canadians through their taxes, and those Canadians should have access to medication and dental care when they need it.

• (1235)

In addition, they should have a national food program, so no child in this country goes to school hungry. Conservatives like to say that kids go to school hungry because their parents cannot afford food. It is true. Families are having a hard time affording food. Do members know why? They are starved of time and wages because of the policies of five decades of Conservatives and Liberals.

I know amazing parents who do not have time to get their children a healthy meal in the morning, at lunchtime and in the afternoon, because the capitalist-driven Conservatives and Liberals made the decision that they wanted those parents to work 12 to 14 hours a day. I think about the nurses and women who are working in the care economy, in long-term care homes. I think about the immigrants who come to this country to work in families, in people's homes, and are paid the minimum; they do not get status for themselves or their family, and their work is precarious. If they dare speak up and talk about the terrible working conditions they are forced into, they might get deported. It is tragic, yet Conservatives have the gall to stand up in this House today and say they are creating a good business climate and are concerned that too many people are going to the food bank. This is legislated choice and legislated poverty that was perpetuated by the Liberals, started by the Conservatives and continues today.

I will go to the Canada disability benefit. I cannot believe that I am the only one who receives daily messages from people with a disability in this country who are living in poverty and getting displaced by these corporate Conservatives and Liberals, who have decided that the best thing we could do is to upzone every property in this country, give it all to the developers to build luxury condos and stick seniors out in tents on the street. I note that the member for Edmonton Griesbach has been talking about this for a very long time. People are living in tents in -35°C weather. I think about the member for Nunavut, who talks about no investment in housing. People in Nunavut are sleeping in shifts in a two-bedroom home where 12 people live.

It is disgusting that these governments, Liberal and Conservative, have done this for decades. As the Prime Minister walks down Sparks Street or Wellington Street, he can see that people are homeless and struggling. What does the government do? It starts to claw back people's CEBA. For low-income people, who needed CEBA and their government benefits, the government has decided to claw back the government benefits now so that they can repay their CEBA. However, the corporate CEOs who are not paying their fair share of taxes, who took the wage subsidy and gave it to their shareholders, are fine.

Members can see that I am a bit upset, because I listened in the House today to some of the debates and I even heard my Bloc colleague say that this debate did not matter. For Canadians, this debate matters. The anti-competitive law is an antiquated law. It has not been looked at. It is putting Canadians at risk.

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I can tell members that it would not stand in any other country in this world that one person, someone like Galen Weston, could have so much influence over what we eat or what medications we can take and, in general, control the narrative of what Liberals and Conservatives will say in this House.

Therefore, today I am going to stand up for the NDP and say that we are there, working for Canadians. No other party in this House is.

• (1240)

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I am pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents in Nunavut.

The leader of the NDP, the member for Burnaby South, has tabled a particularly important bill that can have benefits for Nunavummiut. Bill C-352, an act to amend the Competition Act and the Competition Tribunal Act, is of interest to us because it is all about lowering prices. I thank him for tabling Bill C-352, because there is too much corporate control in Ottawa.

I like the way that the leader of the NDP put it. He said, "The corporate-controlled Conservatives set up a system that continues to benefit wealthy CEOs. The big lobby Liberals continue to protect the interests of those greedy CEOs."

The leader of the NDP clearly understands the realities experienced by my constituents, and the NDP join him in this fight to stop greedy CEOs who exploit Canadians.

As the fourth party in the House, we have fought the hardest and got the most results for Canadians. Bill C-352 is yet another example of what an NDP government would look like: It would make changes in federal systems that make it easier for Canadians to afford food, to afford the cost of living and, indeed, not be punished by corporate greed.

Competition is particularly challenging in Nunavut. The merger of First Air with Canadian North has seen the impacts of the lack of competition. If this bill had been in place during the First Air and Canadian North merger, anti-competitive rules would have been stronger. There would have been a better review of the merger, including how gains in efficiency and market concentration would be taken into account. I believe that the merger of the two airlines would have been prevented given that this merger resulted in an excessive combined market share.

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The merger between Canadian North and First Air is not likely to restore competition in the airline industry in Nunavut. I challenge Nunavut Crown corporations to buy into the airline industry and to increase the market share. Canadian North, while Inuit owned, is owned by two corporations outside of Nunavut. I will admit, while I appreciate the services provided by Canadian North, it is the lack of competition that allows astronomical prices, like a person from Grise Fiord in my riding going to Ottawa at the price of over \$11,000. The distance between Grise Fiord and Ottawa is only 3,461 kilometres. For a similar distance, between Ottawa and Victoria, British Columbia, the price of an airline ticket is \$500. In the alternate, I challenge Air Canada and WestJet to increase the market share of the airline industry in Nunavut.

The airline industry is our lifeline. The health care system is too lacking, resulting in multiple millions of dollars spent on airline tickets for my constituents to attend everything from the most basic doctor appointments to more complicated and lengthy procedures only available south of Nunavut. A direct impact of the merger includes the cost of groceries and the cost of alleviating poverty.

Recently, the Minister of Northern Affairs showed that he will cut a portion of the nutrition north program that directly helps people to feed each other. The Minister of Northern Affairs is opting to subsidize CEOs and larger for-profit corporations by keeping that portion without review and without consideration for alleviating poverty.

When the Conservatives were in power, food prices went up by 25%. What does this mean? Here are some examples of some prices that went up: ground beef went up by 128%; coffee went up 89%; apples, and we all know that the Conservatives love apples, went up by 43%.

● (1245)

When the Conservatives were in power, what went down in that same period were the taxes that corporate grocery stores paid, that is, the Conservatives gave massive tax giveaways to the richest corporations, hurting Canadians and benefiting their rich friends.

It does not have to be this way. The leader for the NDP, said, in introducing this bill:

That is why we are putting forward our bill, the lowering prices for Canadians act, which would bring down prices for Canadians, take power away from those greedy CEOs and give it back to the working people.

The NDP is fighting for Canadians who are suffering the increasing cost of living allowed by the Liberal government. The Liberals and the Conservatives will show their commitment to Canadians when they vote on Bill C-352.

I ask the same questions that the NDP leader asked:

Do they stand with their rich CEO friends or will they stand with working class Canadians? Will they stand with workers, families and people who are having a hard time buying groceries?

As our leader did, I too invite the Liberals and Conservatives to stop listening to their CEO friends, start listening to working Canadians and support our bill to bring down prices for all Canadians. This NDP bill would stop mergers that end up hurting Canadians, like the merger of Rogers and Shaw, which reduces competition, increases prices and means a loss of jobs.

This NDP bill would increase penalties for consumer scams and help grocery stores by protecting them from the anti-competitive tactics used by big chains.

This NDP bill would give the Competition Bureau more power to crack down on abuses such as price gouging and would stop mergers that reduce competition and hurt Canadians.

As a result of greedy corporations making huge profits, Canadians are struggling. When we ask Canadians, they agree. They believe the number one reason driving up the cost of groceries is more money going into the pockets of rich CEOs.

The NDP leader believes, as do I, that we need more competition and not less. I believe we need more protections for consumers and not more power for CEOs. That is exactly what our bill would do.

● (1250)

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):
Madam Speaker, I want to thank my two colleagues who spoke before me. I really appreciated both of their interpretations of this particular bill and the meaning that it has.

I am here today to speak to our leader's bill, Bill C-352, which talks about amending the Competition Act and the Competition Tribunal Act to increase competition and lower prices for Canadians.

My husband's culture is the most northern Coast Salish in Canada. Their nation is Homalco. One of the things that they and their teachings are very clear in is that greed is actually considered a profound illness. If a member of their community shows greed in holding on to wealth, there is a lot of work done to help that person not be in that place of greed. The reason they feel this is an important issue is that the core value of their community is "together we are stronger". If somebody is suffering, then it is a weight upon all of us to make sure that we lift that person up and support them in the way that they need to be supported.

Unfortunately, that is not the system that we currently see in Canada. I think most Canadians know the reality that the system is rigged to support the very, very wealthy, the one per cent people of Canada. We see this not just in Canada but also in many other countries. We know it is extremely unfair. What bothers me the most about how our system is rigged right now is that the wage earnings of everyday Canadians continue to be stagnant, while the very wealthy are seeing huge increases in their wage earnings and their incomes. We have seen this in a lot of statistics. This tells us that everyday Canadians are going to continue to struggle, because the greed in this country is out of control. That is where we are.

We can look at what is happening in our grocery stores right now, where people are really struggling to be able to afford the basic things they need to feed their families and to be treated with dignity. I bring this up a lot in this House, but I think there should be a bar of dignity in this country. I believe that fits in with the teachings from the Homalco people. They understand that everybody deserves dignity. If somebody has a strength or a weakness, they find a way to celebrate what is good and strong. They find ways to support and love through those weak moments. We are not seeing that right now. We are seeing a lot of people who are doing everything right. They are following the rules that they think are fair. They see themselves falling further and further behind. That makes me think of a lot of young people, who are worried about the fact that they may not be able to afford a home or to ever have a livable wage that will give them the ability to build the things in their life that they want to build.

As we look at this system and acknowledge that it is rigged, the worst thing that we can do is to say we should just not have a system to address that. I like to believe the best of people. I tend to be a fairly trusting person. I believe in the essential good in everyone. However, I also know that, if there is a system that does not keep engaging and making sure that things are fair, there are people who would turn that system to feed themselves at the expense of other people. That is what we have right now.

We are watching people like Galen Weston walk away with multimillion-dollar raises while the workers at Loblaw's cannot even afford to buy groceries at the store they work in. We are seeing more people struggling to pay for basic groceries, but we are also seeing much higher outcomes and profits for these grocery stores. It is frustrating that we can see this out-of-touch Liberal Party that calls them in and says to them nicely, "Can you stop raising your prices? It's really hurting the Canadian consumer". That is talk, but it does not actually say that it is not fair and there is going to be something put into place that makes it fair.

Then we have the corporate-controlled Conservatives. They, quite honestly, have 50% of their governing body as lobbyists for greedy CEOs. That is whom they are talking to. That is their leadership. That is who is helping them plot their own course, moving forward. This worries me, because it means that everyday people doing everything right are continuing to be marginalized because our systems do not hold those folks to account.

• (1255)

What would this bill do? The first thing it would do is increase penalties for price fixing. We all know about this. We know sometimes prices are fixed and consumers are paying way more than they should. When I look at this, it reminds me of the reality that Loblaw's recently tried to decide that instead of selling almost-expired food at 50% off, it was going to take only 30% off. It is nickel-and-dime people who are struggling and doing their best every day to get by, and taking away every opportunity for something they can afford.

The other thing the bill would do is help smaller grocery stores by protecting them against anti-competitive tactics from bigger players. Let us be honest. We all know this, especially people in small businesses. When there is a player in town that is a really big

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corporation with tons of resources, it can undermine them really easily. We need something in place that keeps things on a level playing field.

We also know that businesses that are within a certain radius of a big grocery store and offer a lower price for the consumer are told they cannot do it, because it is anti-competitive. What happens is that those businesses have to raise their prices, even though they could give it to somebody at a lower price. That is wrong, and it is those big corporate giants coming for people who work hard, care about their community and try to make things affordable, and taking away their ability to do that. The bill would fix that.

The bill would also give the Competition Bureau more powers to crack down on abuse like price gouging consumers. This is a real thing. The Conservatives will tell us it is all just about the carbon tax, but when we look at the stats, which I will get to a little later, we see a huge amount of corporate profits made in the last little while. Even with taxes going up, these corporations are still drawing in way more than they did back in 2020. That worries me and tells me they are using this opportunity to mislead Canadians and tell them they need to pay more, even when they do not need to. That is because we do not have strong enough anti-competition laws in this country.

The other thing the bill would do is stop mergers that decrease competition and hurt Canadians. We have just seen this, with Rogers taking over Shaw. Rogers promised it would not raise its prices, and what did it do? It just recently raised prices.

One of the things about Canada that concerns me is that we do not ever see a government, whether it be Liberal or Conservative, take on this real issue of competition and make sure that when people are getting scammed, it does something about it. Governments are just too nice, because they know where their money comes from. That is what I will say in this House. It is shocking.

Right now, there are five companies for grocery stores: Loblaw's, Sobeys, Metro, Costco and Walmart. They dominate. There are little ones every once in a while, and in B.C. we lost some of those small grocery stores, which have been picked up by Sobeys. This is shocking. It means those five just talk to each other and decide how much they want to get out of a certain area. There are no more little grocery stores on the corner, doing their best to keep the costs down. The big grocery stores can just wipe them out.

That is what is happening in this country, and the consumers are paying. The people who work the hardest are paying the most. A person who is making \$250,000 a year is not going to care if the grocery store prices go up, but someone who is making only \$20,000 or \$30,000, and there are a lot of seniors living on that amount in this country, is certainly going to feel it. They are going to be making terrible, terrible decisions that no Canadian with any ounce of dignity here could see taken.

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I want to remind everybody that margins generally increase by one to two percentage points. This is where it has been at. Now we are seeing huge increases. We know that the three largest grocery stores combined, Loblaw's, Sobeys and Metro, in 2022 made more than \$3.6 billion in profits. While everyday Canadians are suffering, the reality is that we do not have a system that is going to be making it fair for everyday Canadians.

I hope everybody in this House supports this bill, so we can make things fair for Canadians, because they certainly deserve it when they are doing everything right.

• (1300)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in support of Bill C-352, which seeks to amend the Competition Act and the Competition Tribunal Act to increase competition and lower prices for Canadians.

In order to do this in a way that builds confidence for Canadians, one must understand the philosophies of the Liberal and Conservative parties. Canadians are going to be shocked to find that they are actually quite similar in their approach to the market and how the needs and wants of Canadians are met or not met, in many cases.

We know that Canadians across the country, both unionized and non-unionized labour, are falling further behind, yet they are doing everything right. Some of them have to pick up extra jobs or take a side gig while missing time with their families, not having the chance to see their kids off to bed or being able to see them in the morning. They are just working too hard.

No Canadian, no matter where they are, from coast to coast to coast, should have to work more than one full-time job in order to put a roof over their head, food on their plate and to make sure their kids have what they need. That is the promise that New Democrats have been consistent about. We know that the material wealth and the material need of Canadians is paramount to how they participate in our democracy.

Our great tradition in Canada is a democratic one that says that each and every one of us, no matter who we are, where we live, how much we make or who we love, has a chance to participate, that Canada is our home. As a matter of fact, Canadians from every corner of our country have died for this promise. Those who bravely fought overseas during World War II fought the terrible, fascist regime of the Nazis to stand up for the very basic principles that we all stand for today. Those principles say that we should be able to participate in our democracy without hindrance and without discrimination.

However, we have not done the work to ensure that the social rights of those individuals are met so that they could actually enjoy the democratic rights that they are granted. How do we fulfill the social rights of Canadians? It is particularly important to delineate the wants and needs of Canadians. It is important to ensure that we have housing, food, clean water and an environment where we can actually breathe fresh air. These are not things that Canadians should lack or have to beg for. They should not have to work four jobs for these things. They should just work one and be able to get the social supports to exercise their democratic rights.

The Conservatives and the Liberals have an interesting philosophy when it comes to the market. They say that we should just incentivize every single billionaire out there to do the government's job of helping people. We spoke, for example, to the real estate executives in our country. They have been clear that they cannot solve the housing crisis we are seeing in Canada. I wish that the Liberals and Conservatives would listen to that.

Those who are motivated to make money in the housing sector have said that they cannot create the conditions for all Canadians to have a home. When we hear that, it is up to social democrats to then say the failures of liberal policies, both the liberal policies of the Conservatives and the liberal policies of the Liberals are actually challenged, that we introduce the social democratic principles that are important to ensuring that they get the true wealth transfer that is required to exercise their democratic rights.

It has often been commented, especially today in the 21st century, particularly by my generation, that there is a lack of understanding of that in this place. We no longer debate these principles. All we hear from the Conservatives is slogans, four of them. They will not even speak about the fact that their philosophy to motivate the private market is failing here at this stage that we are in in capitalism, which is the ultimate late-stage capitalism that has billionaires and oligarchies across our country controlling the exclusive means of production.

When that happens, what we see is price fixing, price gouging and people falling behind. I wish that my Liberal and Conservative colleagues would take this seriously. Instead, what we are going to hear for many more months to come from every single Conservative on that side is four slogans. Those four slogans will be said over and over again. They will not even engage in the reality of their tradition of working with the Liberals to pat the backs of their lobbyist friends. Now they are upset because we are calling that out.

• (1305)

Conservatives and Liberals are upset because they will not admit that, for consecutive decades in our country, they have benefited from the immense tax breaks they have given their friends. It is very clear that the chief strategist for the Conservative Party, a lobbyist for Loblaw's, is in this exact position. I am sure that the strategic advice from the Conservatives' chief strategist is to not take into account the reality that her boss, Galen Weston, is gouging Canadians and fixing the price of bread.

We need more courage in this place in order to understand these circumstances and to bring forward good ideas because Canadians are running out of hope due to not hearing solutions. They are hearing the problem. To give credit to the Conservatives, I think they have done a good job outlining the concerns and the feelings of Canadians. That is something we agree on. We agree that Canadians are falling behind. We agree that Canadians are being price gouged. We agree that housing is more unaffordable now than ever, but we disagree with the solutions.

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We know that taking four cents off a \$100 basket of groceries is just not going to cut it. Cutting the carbon tax is four cents off a \$100 basket of groceries. GST is higher than that. New Democrats are consistent in our approach that the immense record profits of these companies that are not held accountable need to be reined in. We need to break up these oligarchies. We need to support our small and medium-sized businesses. We need to fill the social gap that exists when we allow megacorporations to continue with their never-ending and continuous appetite against working people in our country.

I invite members of both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party to engage with New Democrats in this debate in a meaningful way beyond slogans. They need to present more solutions. This is one of them, and we hope they support it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the motion.

[*English*]

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

• (1310)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 7, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[*Translation*]

It being 1:10 p.m., the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 1:10 p.m.)

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