



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

House of Commons Debates

Official Report
(Hansard)

Volume 151 No. 284
Friday, February 16, 2024

Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, February 16, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1000)

[*English*]

CANADA EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE ACT

The House resumed from February 14 consideration of the motion for second reading of, and concurrence in, amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-35, An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in debate today with respect to the early learning and child care act, as well as amendments sent to this place from the other place.

There are many things to speak about today since this bill is back before the House. First of all, the amendment that the Senate has sent back to us relates to the importance of linguistic duality.

My maiden name is Godin. This is the first time I have had the opportunity to talk about early childhood learning. My father, Claude Godin, may or may not be watching this today. I would like to take an opportunity to say I wish his French-language skills had been imparted to me. That would have been great. It would have been really nice to have my French heritage given to me because it would have saved me a lot of learning here and it would have given me a better sense of connection to my culture, my country and the importance of linguistic duality. In fact, it has been through my time in Parliament, being able to interact with colleagues from francophone areas in the country and with francophone constituents, that has imparted to me how important it is for children in our country to have opportunity to have access to early education in the language of their choice. That is why it is so important for this amendment to be debated here today.

I am looking at my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier's comments. He spent a lot of time in debate making a lot of points that I agreed with. He found it unfortunate that the Liberal government was against this amendment, it had to go to the Senate and it is back here and we are having to debate the importance of it. This was really a lost opportunity for the Liberal government. It could

have dealt with this in the first iteration of the bill. My colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier raised this point in House debate: Does this actually raise questions about the government's commitment to linguistic duality? As somebody who has a very personal experience with understanding why it is so necessary for Canadians to have access to linguistic duality in education from an early age, I would agree with those comments.

There are other issues that have come to light about this bill since it was last debated in this place. I would like to speak on behalf of my constituents in Calgary Nose Hill. I point to challenges in implementation of the bill that were raised in previous debates that the government did not address, which are now really coming to light, are made real and are impacting parents. When this bill was last debated, many of my colleagues raised concerns that it could have a perverse outcome and could actually reduce the number of child care spots in the country, and we are starting to see that happen.

At the end of January, there were several articles that came out after Alberta child care facilities took part in rolling closures to protest the \$10-a-day program. It is not that these facilities oppose affordable child care. They oppose the fact that the government's implementation of this bill did not foresee or take into consideration the costs that facilities would have to absorb, making it unaffordable for them to deliver services to their clients, the parents. The Association of Alberta Childcare Entrepreneurs stated that the job action of rolling closures was meant to draw attention to issues that come with offering parents low-cost child care without ensuring that the cost of delivery is still covered.

An article states:

"It's been underfunded from the beginning," said Krystal Churcher, the chair of the Association of Alberta Childcare Entrepreneurs. "There is not enough funding to ensure that the level of quality is going to be continuing on..."

● (1005)

As I have put on the record before, Conservatives support access to affordable child care. That is not in question. The way the Liberal government has structured this program has become overly bureaucratic and has not adequately valued the labour of child care in all of its forms.

When I last spoke on the bill, I talked about the fact that the way the bill is structured and the way the funding mechanism is structured would not give access for parents who work in the gig economy and may have hours that are not conventional nine-to-five jobs. It would not provide for access to child care for people in those situations in an adequate way.

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Also, people in rural communities are in similar situations. Frankly, the bill also does not adequately value the labour of child care provided by parents, grandparents, extended family members or neighbours who may pool child care resources to take care of one another's children or grandchildren because of the lack of affordable child care spaces in other ways, but that caregiving component has no value in the bill, under the current Liberal government.

If we are going to, in Canada, as a very regionally, ethnically and economically diverse country, maintain the unity of our pluralism, we cannot set forward principles on child care that do not universally value the labour of child care provision equally, and the bill before us would not do that. In spite of all the time the Liberals have had to enhance these offerings, they have failed to do so. To me that speaks to a lack of creativity, a lack of innovation and a worn-out government that has really overstayed its welcome.

When I think about younger Canadians in my constituency, work for them looks a lot different than work looked for their parents or their grandparents. The reality is that for somebody seeking a spot under the Liberals' current formula under Bill C-35, if they are working shift work or in the gig economy, they are not going to have the same access to care as somebody who is providing professional services, like bankers or lawyers, who are working traditional nine-to-five hours. Those people are also in a position of privilege, because they have usually had a different level of education or they might have access to networks, that other people might not have access to, to get into these child care facilities. That does not speak to universality and valuing the labour of child care.

What I fear, because the government has failed to correct these deficiencies in the way the bill is currently outlined, is that, as we start measuring the outcomes of spending over a two, five or 10-year period, we are going to see a big disparity between bankers and lawyers, who have the networks to get into a child care spot and work nine-to-five hours, versus people who are working multiple jobs in a gig economy and who are already having trouble making ends meet.

With that, I also want to talk about a fact. I did read through the debate on the amendment that happened earlier this week, and I noted that the minister purported that the bill would provide transparency to Canadians on outcomes. It would do none of that. I want to outline what the government must do. I am going to put this on the record now, because I know a future parliamentarian will want these figures. I bet the Parliamentary Budget Officer will want these figures. The Auditor General may want these figures, because we need to be able to manage value for money.

The government has talked a lot about spending on Bill C-35, but it is not talking about the opportunity cost of how this spending could perhaps have been used in a different structure to provide better universality of care for Canadian parents.

• (1010)

So, in terms of transparency, as a parliamentarian there are data points that I cannot find. For example, how many children are currently enrolled in a \$10-a-day spot in total and broken down by province or territory? It is impossible for parliamentarians to find out the number of children who have access to the spot and then

measure it against the needs in a region. If we want to be able, as parliamentarians, to measure the efficacy of this large amount of spending, then we should have access to that data.

The other concern I have is that there is no data on the average income of parents who have the \$10-a-day spots. The government has not put means testing in the bill, and I am concerned that these spots will be disproportionately going to higher-income Canadians as opposed to lower-income Canadians or Canadians who might be in the gig economy or in shift work. The fact that the government is not measuring this and is not talking about this tells me that we are going to have a problem in the future.

The other piece of data that we do not have is how many \$10-a-day spots are for flexible child care outside of the hours between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. If the government wants to stand up and say that the bill would provide universal access to child care, then, again, as I said earlier, it should take into consideration all the forms of work and work arrangements that we see in Canada. We are starting to see a major shift in economic modality in the country.

I still feel like there are many people in the public service who perhaps might be providing advice to the government who are saying, "Well, let's structure it around a nine-to-five job", because that is what they know. However, the reality is that, outside of government, nine-to-five hours are few and far between now, and even people who have nine-to-five jobs, because of the inflationary crisis, are having to pick up second or even third jobs. We know a lot of people might be working in a \$40,000 or \$50,000-a-year traditional nine-to-five office job but then are driving for Uber or Eats in the evening. There are a lot of people who have side hustles who could have access to income and economic productivity who do not have access to child care under this formula.

The other key component that the government is not measuring adequately speaks to the problem in Alberta that I just mentioned. How many additional child care workers are needed to achieve the number of spots that the government promised would be created? I have not seen the government provide any sort of analysis to show that there is an adequate plan in place to train and retain child care workers to provide the services it promised. There is a lot of money going into the creation of this bureaucracy, but if we do not have the labour to provide the services, then it is all for naught.

I would also point out that if the government is not doing this analysis and not projecting forward on it, this problem is going to be compounded as we see an aging baby boomer population, and there are many people in my generation who are now feeling squeezed between parental care, child care and, in some cases, grandchild care. So, as we see more of a demand for care for seniors, it will be competitive labour for child care, and the government needs to be measuring those statistics in order for Parliament to be able to determine whether or not this is an adequate or right expenditure, because this is not a cheap program.

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Speaking to the concerns raised by child care workers in Alberta, the government has not been transparent on the average wage of a child care worker who provides \$10-a-day day care. Again, why is this data necessary? First of all, it is necessary to determine whether the government is considering fair wages in the context of a \$10-a-day day care provision. Second, it is needed to ensure that, when we are looking at labour supply over a long period of time, we have the data on at least what the wage floor would be so that cost and potential cost overruns or cost expansion of this program could be adequately assessed. Provincial governments are going to need this data as well.

The last component is that if we are seeing an average wage to fill these positions, it needs to be much higher than what the government has forecasted. The government will not have adequately costed out the entirety of the program either, which also puts a burden on provincial governments.

● (1015)

The other components of data that the government has not provided in its analysis to Parliament, which I do not think it is measuring at all, are how many of the \$10-a-day spots are located in urban areas versus rural areas. I think that the government has, through many different policies, created more of a wedge between urban and rural Canada, when it should be trying to knit these parts of the country together for national cohesiveness, for economic outcome and just for social cohesion. To create a disparity between availability of child care in urban versus rural areas is wrong. The government should be providing data to the public on whether that disparity exists and, if it does exist, how it plans to correct the program so that that delta does not get worse over the years.

There is also the fact that the government has not been forthcoming. It does not seem like the government cares about tracking this information. It did not put any of this information forward in committee study. The government's tone and tenor on the debate has been "this is the only way for the state to have a role in child care in Canada". That is fundamentally flawed, but the extent of that flawed nature can only be measured with this data. I think that is why the government is hiding it from Canadians.

I just want to take, for the record, extreme exception to the minister's comments that somehow this bill was providing transparency. It is a very Orwellian thing she said. None of this data is available to the public. Child care, labour, unions, child care providers and parents need to have this data to plan for the future.

I will close with this. Over the last eight years, we have seen an unprecedented cost-of-living crisis in this country that has been exacerbated and has been made worse by the extreme level of deficit spending by the Liberal government. In so many situations, we have just seen abject waste: \$250 million to a company that has two employees who have done no IT work and that is in the basement of a cottage. How many other things have we seen like the WE Charity scandal? There has been so much waste with the Liberal government that any expenditures the government is making now have to be evaluated with rigorous data against the outcomes of what the government is purporting the program would do.

My concern, based on what we have seen in Alberta, has to do with the lack of transparency on data and the lack of the principle

of universality. The government cannot be making the inflationary crisis worse by putting forward expenditures that are not directly impacting, in a positive way, every person in this country. That is why data is so important.

The government does have an obligation to parents to address the inflationary crisis. We can talk about child care all we want, but the reality is that child care is one of many issues Canadians are facing that they were not facing eight years ago: out-of-control mortgage prices; out-of-control rent prices; not even being able to buy a bag of groceries for less than \$100. These are all things that make children unaffordable. As we see global fertility rates, we need to ensure that we incentivize Canadians to have children. Addressing a wide variety of issues around that, affordability writ large has to be a bigger part of the conversation.

Again, I am dismayed that the government does not have better data on these outcomes. I am dismayed that it has not addressed the concerns of child care operators in my province. I certainly hope that the government will be doing a better job of this so that future governments will not have to correct the mistakes that Canadians will have paid for.

● (1020)

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for her speech this morning on this vital bill and vital support to constituents and to Canadians as a whole. My office is getting calls from parents saying there are no spaces available. It is great to have \$10-a-day day care, but they need the spaces for the kids to be able to go there. People, at one time, would probably have had a neighbour, an aunt or uncle, or a grandparent look after the child, but the \$10-a-day day care allows kids to be with kids and to enjoy that kind of camaraderie, I suppose, to a certain extent.

I wonder if she is hearing the same things at her constituency office that I am hearing at mine.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I guess it is an Atlantic Canada and Alberta problem.

To re-emphasize what my colleague said, the problem is so acute in my province that unions that represent child care workers say that they might have to close facilities because of the inadequacies in the way this bill, Bill C-35, was structured. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Liberal government to address that.

To my colleague's point, child care is not a homogenous thing. We cannot expect it to be a homogenous thing because parents will raise their children according to their values, their traditions and their economic circumstances, so we cannot present nine-to-five, \$10-a-day day care as a panacea. We have to value child care labour equally, be it provided by somebody next door, a grandparent or a parent, and this bill would not do that.

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[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, Quebec's public child care system has proven its worth. Because of this system, many women have been able to quickly return to the labour market with peace of mind. Without this program, many Quebec mothers would be deprived of rewarding careers.

Members are saying that the program the government is currently proposing is inspired by Quebec's program, which has proven to be successful over the years and even decades.

I would like to ask my colleague to explain the differences between the child care program proposed by the federal level and the Quebec program that will actually make the federal program ineffective, whereas Quebec's program is very effective and has such a good reputation.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, first of all, I would point my colleague to the substance of the amendment we are debating today. I find it disappointing that the Liberal government did not demonstrate a commitment to linguistic duality in the first instance of Bill C-35. The other place had to propose an amendment to correct that, which, I am sure, is as important to my colleague as it is to me.

The other thing I would like to do, since I have the opportunity, is to thank the hard-working people of Alberta, who have contributed to the equalization program for so many years and have provided opportunities for provinces that may have benefited from that program.

• (1025)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, we constantly hear across the floor how the Liberal government supports small business, yet I know in my riding and in rural Canada businesses exist for day care, and they are really struggling because they are not recognized as being valued in this whole process. They offer various hours and are in communities where shift work is a real challenge.

I would like the member to clarify again how important it is that the government take another look at the importance of being all-inclusive with its program.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I love this question because it gives Parliament an opportunity to thank the unsung heroes of Canada: home-based day care operators. It is usually someone on a cul-de-sac or in an apartment block who takes in children in the neighbourhood, allowing them to play and to grow up together, putting in long hours, being flexible for parents and really being the neighbourhood mom or dad, grandma or grandpa. The fact is that the government has not recognized that foundational part of Canadian culture, which, frankly, is also part of our pluralism. There was cultural diversity on my street where I grew up with kids, and grandparents would share child care duty. That is how we got to know one another. This is such an important component.

I again want to underscore that Bill C-35 would not truly provide the concept of universality in child care. It would not value all forms of child care equally, particularly those forms of child care

that my colleague mentioned: those small, home-based businesses that have provided income for so many people and a lifeline for support, a trusted place to provide child care that is close to home. I thank them and, frankly, shame on the government for not recognizing their value in an adequate way.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I do not see in this bill how the individuals the member talked about are being prevented from accessing these programs.

Can she tell us where in Bill C-35 she sees the impact of not creating that equality? I see that equality would be better achieved because of things like what it would do for indigenous families and how indigenous families could better support each other so that indigenous women could also enter the workforce.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague that in any program seeking to provide universality, equality of access for indigenous persons has to be paramount.

To her question about whether Bill C-35 would provide true universality, it would not. Grandparents, who might provide unpaid labour at home, are not valued in this bill. The parent who works in the gig economy, shift work or part time, would likely not have access to those spots. In fact, it would be high-income Canadians who work nine-to-five jobs who would have access to these spots and would push out access to lower-income Canadians who need it the most. The government has put no safeguard in this bill to safeguard that at all, which is problematic.

Also, I fundamentally believe that the way this bill is structured undervalues the labour of child care, even those providing those spots for nine-to-five jobs, as we are seeing in my home province of Alberta with rolling closures. In no way, shape or form would this bill achieve true universality. My party, my colleagues, firmly believe that the provision of child care should be valued in all of its forms and that parents should have access to the workforce through access to affordable child care. This bill leaves a lot to be desired.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am at a loss for words this morning.

For 25 years, we have been demonstrating that early childhood centres benefit women. It is very difficult for me to accept that my colleague is trying to find small flaws in our system.

I am beginning to wonder whether she is familiar with Quebec's early child care system at all.

• (1030)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, again, I voted in favour of Bill C-35, but 2000 called and wanted its child care program back. This is not a bill that acknowledges the current economic reality in any part of our country with regard to the changes in how people work. This is a bill that was developed to provide child care in 2000, and there have been many gains made; our pluralism has grown and has changed in so many ways. This bill truly does not recognize how diverse our country is and how people work. It does not recognize the differences between urban and rural communities. It does not recognize the labour of grandparents who might be attempting to come to the country to provide child care for recent new Canadians.

The role of Parliament is to look at current economic conditions, to see where the football is going and to try to make sure government expenditures are addressing the needs of the population, not 20 years ago, but today and into the future. If we know how people work has changed, then it is incumbent upon us to ensure the program reflects that. Again, this is why it is so important for the government to track the data I mentioned.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Milton.

We all know that affordability is a top-of-mind topic, so let us consider early learning and child care through that lens. Before the early learning and child care agreements with all provinces and territories were finalized, daily child care fees ranged from \$20 to \$48 a day per child. Those dollars could go a long way in a grocery store or to keep children active in sports or other activities. Child care fees have been dropping across Canada, and we are continuing to work hard with our provincial and territorial colleagues to meet our March 2026 goal of a \$10-a-day, on average, fee for children under the age of six in licensed child care.

Affordable child care means hundreds of dollars every month in the pockets of Canadians of all income levels. Affordable child care means money for nutritious meals on the table as prices at grocery stores remain high. Affordable child care means money for clothing and other necessities.

Carolyn Ferns, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care's public policy coordinator put it perfectly: "Affordable child care is life-changing for families and for our communities. It is great to see the collaboration between the federal and provincial governments making that a reality for Ontario families." Of course it is a reality not just for Ontario families; it is also a reality for every family in Canada with young children, whoever they are, wherever they live and regardless of their income level.

Let me share just a few of the testimonials parents have taken the trouble to write to members and to the government as they realize the financial relief affordable child care is bringing to them. Most are accompanied by expressions of enthusiasm and emphasis, such as multiple exclamation points or capital letters.

The first one is, "My daughter on Vancouver Island found out yesterday that her daycare will be charging \$10/day. This is huge for families! Thank you to the federal and provincial [governments]

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for collaborating on this excellent legislation. It truly puts families first." The next is, "Just paid our January day care fees. Under \$500! This is a 55% reduction from last year. This is going to make such a huge difference for so many families." The third one is, "Our infant's day care fees have dropped \$500 per month, and on the 26th at her [18-month anniversary], it will drop an additional \$200 (two hundred!) per month. Probably one of the largest pieces of legislation to personally affect me in my lifetime."

Here is another one: "I will not benefit from this as my kids are grown and I remember paying \$650/month for child care on a salary of \$1,200/month back in the 80s. But I am so very, very happy that young families are benefiting from this." The last one is, "It was absolutely surreal to see my day care fees drop from a high of \$167.25. As of [January], we will be paying less than 50% of that, on a path to \$10." It is clear from these and many other social media posts, interviews and comments that families in Canada are thrilled and, in many cases, astonished that affordable early learning and child care is finally here.

The Government of Canada has made an historic investment of nearly \$30 billion over five years to build a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. We have done so in collaboration with provincial, territorial and indigenous partners, all of whom deserve enormous credit for their willingness to work together to give every child in Canada the best possible start in life, and in so doing, to bring financial and emotional relief to millions of families from coast to coast to coast.

• (1035)

Child care fees have been reduced across the country, and by 2025-26, the average fee for regulated child care spaces across Canada would be \$10 a day. As families across the country are realizing, there are no losers here. It is a financial win for families regardless of their income level. Since 2015, the Government of Canada has delivered real improvements to make life more affordable for Canadians. There is no better example than the progress we have made on the new ELCC system. As of 2025-26, a minimum of \$9.2 billion would be provided every year, on an ongoing basis, for affordable early learning and child care, and indigenous early learning and child care.

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The return on this investment for families with young children is obvious and is supported by evidence. Of course, we can look to the overwhelming success of the Quebec early learning and child care system, which is now ingrained in the social fabric of that province. When we speak about affordability, it is perfectly appropriate to ask whether the country as a whole can afford it. The answer is a resounding yes. This is a plan to drive economic growth, to increase participation in the workforce, especially among mothers who want to pursue professional ambitions or further their education to get better-paying jobs.

It is one of the many investments the Government of Canada remains committed to, investments that increase our economic growth and Canadians' quality of life. Independent studies show that our early learning and child care system could raise real GDP by as much as 1.2% over the next two decades. Further, a range of studies have shown that for every dollar spent on early childhood education, the broader economy receives between \$1.50 and \$2.80 in return. That would be a huge return on our early learning and child care investment.

We are hearing loud and clear how thrilled families are that their governments have joined together to bring them significant financial relief. Doubtless, many are beginning to wonder why we waited so long. It is a fair question. As other colleagues have said, in passing this legislation, we would be promising the best possible start in life to future generations of children in Canada. We are on the brink of making history, of cementing together these wonderful provincial and territorial agreements into an enduring testament to our commitment and caring. When we eventually leave office, we can do so with the pride and satisfaction of knowing that we were all part of this great, lasting achievement.

I urge colleagues to give quick passage to Bill C-35.

• (1040)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I think it is pretty obvious, with the way the bill passed the first time through the House, that the House does recognize the importance of child care in this country. We are all in agreement with the bill's intent.

However, I raised in my speech last year something that has really come to the forefront of one of the challenges with the current agreements, which is the impact they are having on the lack of labour and lack of early childhood educators, who are being pulled out of the before- and after-care programs, which help so many parents with the ability to work, in order to fill the demand for full-day day care. I know it has impacted my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. I know it has impacted people even here in Ottawa, where parents who had kids enrolled in before- and after-care programs are now tied because they have to drop their kids off not before 9:00 a.m. and pick them up by 3:30 p.m. It is really hard to find a six-hour-per-day job and be able to make a living.

Has the member heard the same things in his riding?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, one thing the families in Nepean are overwhelmingly in support of is this program, because they see the benefit it brings to their family. It allows them the funds required to help children undertake some sports activities. It has helped families, especially mothers, free themselves up so they

can go back into the workforce. Some of the mothers I know are using the program to help them get better educated for better-quality jobs.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like my colleague to know that I really enjoyed his speech.

For years I was president of the CPE La Fourmilière, an early childhood centre, and I can vouch for the important role we played in helping women enter the labour market and our significant contribution to reducing poverty.

Early childhood centres pave the way to academic success. Children who previously had no access to education are prepared to make the big leap to regular school. Children get to interact with little ones who may have needed a little extra love or security.

I therefore congratulate my colleague, and I want all parliamentarians to know that we hope all the provinces have the same kind of experience Quebec has had.

[*English*]

Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, I am glad to note that the member has personally experienced the economic benefits that educating children at a very young age bring, allowing them to grow up educated and allowing parents to contribute to the workforce generally, not only in Quebec, because of course it is something that other provinces and the federal government have learned from. I have seen it happen in other parts of the world that a focus on children's, and especially girls', education has contributed to the economic development of an entire region, entire community and the entire country. Therefore it is very important that through the bill we would be making up for what was lacking in Canada.

Again, I recognize the contributions of Quebec in bringing this forward as a national priority.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I certainly share the importance of the \$10-a-day child care for many families in my riding, but the problem of course still exists that there is not enough child care available.

I wonder whether the member would agree with me that one of the things we also have to do is make sure that those who work in the child care sector, primarily women and quite often those who are new Canadians, are properly compensated for their skills and for the hard work they do each and every day.

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Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, I fully agree with the hon. member that the people who work in child care should be adequately compensated. It is very much a requirement. This is a collaborative program between the federal government and the provinces, and authorities at all levels of government should work hand in hand to find a means of making sure it is implemented well in every single respect.

• (1045)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a real honour and privilege to stand in the House to talk about a program that has been such an important affordability measure for young families, particularly in my riding. It has also allowed so many women, and so many parents, to get back to work a little sooner than they would have otherwise, leading to the best-ever marks on female engagement in the economy.

It has been a real landmark for Canada, and I am proud to speak to Bill C-35 from the perspective of Milton. As the House has heard us say repeatedly, access to high-quality, affordable and inclusive child care is not a luxury, it is a necessity. That is why our commitment to building a Canada-wide early learning and child care system matters so much to so many.

Since signalling our intention to create that system, the Government of Canada has signed Canada-wide early learning and child care agreements with all provinces and territories to support increased access to high-quality, affordable, inclusive child care, including supports to the early learning and childhood education workforce.

Since then, we have been working closely with our provincial and territorial colleagues to ensure that early childhood educators are the cornerstone of our child care system. I would like to recognize the outstanding contribution of so many of those educators, who continue to work so hard to care for children and support their growth and education. In particular, I would like to highlight the great work of the Milton Community Resource Centre. I visit regularly, and I talk to them about any and all issues that affect early learning and child care. It is one of the largest providers of early learning and child care in Milton and throughout Halton. Without it, there would be so many parents in Milton that would not have been able to get back to work. That impact on the earnings and the careers for members of a family is pretty profound.

When I am walking down the street, talking to neighbours in Milton, I have had so many parents come to me to say that they are saving thousands of dollars a year thanks to the early learning and child care program, which the government provides. It has been huge for a young community, such as Milton, that has so many parents and so many young kids.

Bill C-35 outlines the guiding principles for federal investments in early learning and child care. One of those guiding principles includes supporting the provision of high-quality programs and services through the recruitment and retention of qualified and well-supported early learning and childhood educator workforce individuals. That high-quality early childhood educator workforce is es-

sential to fostering the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of young children.

I can speak from personal experience. I am not a parent, but I have been in those classrooms with some of those kids, and I have seen how amazing the workers are. They are fantastic, and seeing the different personalities among the kids is a lot of fun every time I visit.

More specifically, international studies have shown that children who regularly participate in high-quality early learning and child care programs tend to have higher graduation rates. Later on, they make better decisions, improve their work habits and their grades, make gains in reading and math, are excited about learning and develop stronger social skills.

It is pretty clear to me that when we invest in a high-quality early learning and childhood educator workforce, we are investing in the health, well-being and success of generations to come. That is why we are putting forward this important legislation, to ensure that early childhood educator workforces are supported right across the country, so they can continue to provide children across Canada with the best possible start in life.

It all starts with our agreements with the provinces and territories, where commitments are made to, one, implement evidence-based, quality frameworks, standards and tools for early learning and child care; two, development and implement wage grids for early childhood educators; three, increase the percentage of child care workers who fully meet provincial and territorial certification requirements; and, four, increase training, professional development and other supports for early childhood workforces. These commitments are essential, not only to attract early childhood educators but also, even more importantly, to retain our high-quality workforce.

What does that look like in practice? From coast to coast to coast, the provinces and territories have been working closely to provide better training opportunities, increased compensation and more benefits to their early childhood educator workforce. Let us take British Columbia as an example. B.C. is investing in special training and development to upgrade skills in priority areas to make child care more inclusive, especially for children with disabilities and children needing enhanced or individual supports.

This training also focuses on making child care more culturally appropriate for indigenous children. We know that, in building an inclusive child care system that meets our children's needs, we must meet children where they are and support both current and future early childhood educators at the same time.

Government Orders

That is why the Government of British Columbia expanded its dual credit program for early childhood educators. The dual credit program allows secondary students in B.C. to take post-secondary courses and receive credits towards both high school graduation and a post-secondary program. The program covers tuition fees for the courses, resulting in more affordable training for students in early childhood education.

• (1050)

Let us go across the country to the east, to Prince Edward Island, where more training opportunities have been provided for both current early childhood educators and those interested in joining the early childhood education workforce. The province has also launched a one-time grant to help recruit early childhood educators back to the sector, and these investments are ensuring that early childhood educators on the island have the skills and tools they need to succeed while providing new opportunities to expand the workforce. Further, P.E.I. also increased staff salaries at early year centres across the province as part of a coordinated effort to move the province's early childhood workforce forward. Wage increases are instrumental in P.E.I.'s multi-year plan to support the early childhood sector and to encourage others to pursue a career in early childhood education.

Let us head up to the territories. In the Yukon, the territory has been investing in accelerated education pathways for early childhood educators in partnership with Yukon University. The goal of these accelerated education pathways is to enhance the level of education available for early childhood educators in the territory, which would help increase the quality of early learning and child care across the Yukon. This initiative in the Yukon is a win-win-win. It provides enhanced education, strengthens the workforce and benefits our youngest learners with the most qualified educators. Moreover, early learning educators in the Yukon will be able to customize their training plan, allowing them to continue to work in a licenced program, including in family day homes.

These are only a few of the amazing initiatives under way across the country to support the hard-working and dedicated early childhood educators. These initiatives are made possible thanks to the groundbreaking federal investments of the Government of Canada that we have made in building that Canada-wide early learning and child care system from coast to coast to coast. Our early childhood education workforce is critical to the success of the Canada-wide system, and it is key to Canada's economic prosperity. Our government is committed to building a stronger, more resilient economy where nobody is left behind. We know that access to early learning and child care that is affordable and inclusive is going to help drive our economic growth. It will enable parents, particularly mothers, to enter, maintain and re-enter the job market, and offer each child in Canada the best possible start.

This is why I encourage my colleagues to support Bill C-35 quickly so we can continue to work together to support, grow, develop and engage with the early learning and childhood educator workforce. As I said earlier, when we invest in high-quality early childhood educator workforces, we are investing in the health, well-being and success of generations to come.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bill C-35 prioritizes child care facilities that are govern-

ment run and not-for-profit. It does not prioritize small businesses and entrepreneurs, many of whom are run by women entrepreneurs, even if those locations are licenced and regulated by the respective provincial governments. Why would a Liberal government that touts itself to be a feminist government not prioritize young women entrepreneurs in this legislation?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, our funding agreements with provinces go towards supporting not-for-profit, public and family-based child care. I can say that my experience in visiting with some of those female entrepreneurs in my riding and making sure they have the qualifications necessary to access some of those supports has been really beneficial. In working with well-experienced providers, such as the Milton Community Resource Centre, I know that some of those entrepreneurs have been able to up-skill and scale up, and they have also been able to provide child care spaces for more kids throughout the day.

It is a great success, and I am glad that the Conservatives are considering supporting child care, despite early indications that they might vote against it. This is an affordability measure. It is great for the workforce, and it is also excellent for female entrepreneurs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I represent a Quebec riding. Quebec's day care system has been in place for 25 years. Families really like it and are proud of it. I doubt we could make any sort of changes to it because people are so attached to the system and even take it for granted. It is a fixture in Quebec.

As for the rest of Canada, the program is under development, if I understand correctly. The government started creating the program and then introduced the bill. The program was already in the works and now the government comes strolling in with the bill.

Is this not an admission from the government and Liberal MPs that things are not going well for them and that they expect to lose a lot of seats in the next election?

Essentially, the purpose of the bill is to lock in the program they have created. Ultimately, the program could exist without a bill, could it not?

• (1055)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question and for his interest in this program.

First of all, I must thank Pauline Marois, a leader in this sector. It is important to highlight the leadership shown by both Pauline Marois and the Province of Quebec. We can see it not only in this file, but also on the environment and the fight against climate change: Quebec is a leader. It is important to have a good example of progress in one province and to try to promote the same opportunities in the other provinces and territories.

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, like that of the hon. member, my riding is rapidly growing with lots of young families. What people are finding, whether they are talking about setting up a new public sector child care centre or a non-profit, even as new entrepreneurs, is that they lack the workers.

What is the government going to do to make sure that we increase the compensation that would help attract more people into this important field?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden: Madam Speaker, as we know, there is a worker shortage across the country in various sectors, and that is a challenge, but it is also a great opportunity because, where there is scarcity, I think workers tend to benefit. It tends to increase their wages and provide a bit of competition and more choice for workers. That is the context we are in.

We have very low unemployment in Canada right now, which is certainly a good thing for workers, but it is a challenging for many sectors that are looking to find a more available workforce, so ensuring that it is a competitive opportunity, that early learning and child care workers can aspire to earning a good income, is very important. I know that, when I have worked with the Milton Community Resource Centre, it is very focused on making sure it pays competitive wages. I have also seen that it is providing people with their first jobs and also providing work to newcomers, refugees and all sorts of people who are looking for that work.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House once again to speak to this bill. We do have an amendment coming back to the House from the Senate, which is why we are standing here to speak today.

What makes this interesting, based on how this bill went last time, is that my province of Saskatchewan signed on to its agreement with the federal government in 2021. I hosted a couple of town halls in January, and one of the topics that came up was child care. When we look at rural Canada, rural Saskatchewan and what is available for people who are looking to put their kids into a day home so that they can go to work, quite frankly, there is basically no capacity.

The town I grew up in had a small facility that maybe five to 10 kids could go into. Most kids were raised by a stay-at-home mom where I grew up, but in some of the other towns now, as people are looking to be working, capacity is the number one problem. When I look at the way this program has been rolled out and the way the federal government has put money to the provinces, it has definitely put an overemphasis on creating spaces in the larger cities and the larger centres. In typical Liberal government fashion, it looks

Statements by Members

like rural Saskatchewan, once again, has lost out and has been left behind.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1100)

[English]

SENIORS

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, seniors are at the heart of our communities. Since we were first elected, seniors have been central to our work in government. In Vancouver Granville, I have established a local seniors council to advise me on their priorities.

As part of budget 2024 consultations, the Vancouver Granville Seniors Council shared issues that were important to the members that they would like addressed. From affordability and homelessness to social inclusion, these are issues all Canadians face, and I shared their issues with the Minister of Finance.

I want to thank my seniors council members for their hard work and dedication and let them know that everyone in the House hears them and that we are taking concrete steps, like building over 40,000 homes in Vancouver and launching the Canada dental plan to ensure that every senior and every Canadian has the tools and supports they need to live well.

I look forward to continuing to work with them on their shared priorities. As they have given so much back to Canada, it is our obligation to make sure we take care of our seniors from coast to coast to coast.

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[Translation]

95TH ANNIVERSARY OF ÉCHO DE FRONTENAC

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, for 95 years, the Écho de Frontenac newspaper has been an important part of people's lives in Lac-Mégantic and the Granit MCR.

Founded in 1929 by J. Édouard Fortin, the local independent newspaper was acquired by Louis-Philippe Poulin two years later and has remained in the family ever since.

A truly independent weekly, the Écho de Frontenac gets support from its subscribers and its local commercial partners. I want to pay tribute to Gaétan Poulin, who served as managing editor and publisher from 1967 until his death in fall 2023.

A staunch defender of the French language and passionate historian, Mr. Poulin enforced the values of truth, objectivity and justice at Écho de Frontenac, values that are still in place at the newspaper today. Thanks to the current team at Écho de Frontenac, the young and not-so-young have access to reliable quality content that remains accessible and relatable to its audience.

Statements by Members

It is an honour today to be able to draw attention to the hard work of Suzanne Poulin, who took over as publisher, and that of all the dedicated employees who care about Écho de Frontenac and ensure it showcases local news. Long live this essential witness of the Granit community, and happy 95th anniversary.

* * *

[English]

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, Bill C-273 passed, by a vote of 209 to 115, this week for a second reading in Parliament. I thank all those MPs who spoke up for this bill and for the repeal of section 43 of the Criminal Code.

Canada is finally taking our first steps in joining 65 other countries around the world that have banned the use of force against children. More than 700 organizations across Canada, including every major organization that works for children's health and well-being, have called for the repeal of this legalized use of force against children.

The repeal of this provision of the Criminal Code was one of the first recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Call to action no. 6 of the TRC calls for repeal of the provision, which legalizes the use of force against children. This provision was put in place in 1892, when all kinds of abuses were legal. It is high time to change that and time to repeal section 43.

* * *

WATERLOO REGION CHANGE-MAKERS

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on February 3 we welcomed the Prime Minister to the Waterloo region and the SDG Idea Factory, a hub dedicated to advancing the UN's 17 sustainable development goals. Located in Kitchener, it unites visionary entrepreneurs and organizations to address pressing global challenges.

The Idea Factory is more than an innovation space. It is a catalyst for social and environmental transformation. In supporting start-ups and businesses championing social equity and environmental stewardship, this hub is working to foster global positive change and a better future for all.

The Idea Factory is host to businesses and organizations like LiftOff, the Waterloo Region Community Foundation, ForUsGirls Foundation, K-W Oktoberfest, the Waterloo Region Small Business Centre, Mot Mot Mind, Bring on the Sunshine, and the Community Company to drive transformative change.

We are immensely proud of the incredible work happening in our community and anticipate future contributions from these innovative minds.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, arrive scam is a failed app that should have cost \$80,000 but cost Canadians \$60 million.

GC Strategies, the two middlemen working out of their basement getting \$258 million in IT contracts, never did a keystroke of IT work. It turns out they have been wining and dining senior Liberal government officials.

Another \$150 million was embezzled at the Prime Minister's billion-dollar green slush fund, with hand-picked NDP-Liberal board members funnelling millions to their own companies.

The Prime Minister is not worth the cost and not worth the corruption, but there is hope yet. Conservatives would end the corruption, axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime. Our common-sense plan would axe the tax on everything, for everyone, for good. We would tie municipal funding to housing to make sure more houses get built, not bureaucracy. Conservatives would find savings by scrapping ArriveCAN. We would bring jail, not bail for Canadians. We would bring it home.

* * *

● (1105)

HOUSING

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know we have a housing crisis, and that is why we are investing in the creation of homes nationwide, including in Oakville and Burlington.

In 2023 we announced over \$55 million to build 131 purpose-built rental homes in Oakville, with the funding coming as a fully repayable low-interest loan through the CMHC apartment construction loan program. Last month in Burlington, we announced that the City of Burlington would be receiving \$21 million from the housing accelerator fund, which will create 600 homes in the next three years and 5,000 new homes over the next decade.

This is a step in the right direction for Oakville and Burlington, because we know every Canadian should have access to safe and affordable housing. We are working with developers and municipalities to get more homes built at prices people can afford.

* * *

LABOUR

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my community of Windsor—Tecumseh has a proud history of fighting for workers.

Statements by Members

Last week I joined Unifor workers in solidarity on the picket line at Jamieson Vitamins, fighting for what is fair.

This week, ATU Local 616 fought and won better wages for Transit Windsor workers. I thank them for defending their right to 10 paid sick days, which our federal government introduced.

This follows hard-fought wins by Windsor Salt workers, who stayed strong in their 192-day strike, and the hard-fought historic contracts bargained by Unifor for auto workers.

Unions fight for workers, but they lift our entire community. I was proud to work with unions to deliver the battery plant that will create 2,500 good-paying jobs back home. I am proud to work with unions to deliver programs that make real differences for workers, like child care, dental care and the Canada worker benefit.

Conservatives want to cut programs that help workers. We will continue to fight for workers.

* * *

RURAL CANADIANS

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years, rural Canadians are breaking under the NDP-Liberal government.

The Prime Minister and his radical environment minister have launched an attack on rural Canadians. Rural Canadians rely on their vehicles to raise their families and drive to work, yet this week the environment minister publicly announced that the Liberals will stop building new roads and highways. The minister stated, “Our government has made the decision to stop investing in new road infrastructure.”

Rural Canadians do not have the option to take a subway to work or to the doctor's office. They rely on highways and roads, but the NDP-Liberal government does not care about rural Canadians. That is why the Prime Minister is increasing his failed carbon tax by 23% on April 1. It is clear he is not worth the cost.

Rural Canadians cannot afford the government's plan to quadruple the carbon tax. Only Conservatives will fight for rural Canadians and axe the carbon tax.

* * *

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX PROGRAM

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I encourage all members in this House to get with the program. That is, the community volunteer income tax program, a collaboration between local community organizations and the Canada Revenue Agency to deliver free tax clinics for Canadians.

This collaboration between the CRA and dedicated volunteers across Canada allows us to give back to communities by helping residents to file their taxes. Local organizations across the country run these tax clinics for lower-income Canadians to help make sure they are getting their benefits, like the Canada child benefit, the Canada workers benefit, the Canada carbon rebate and many more cost-of-living measures they may be eligible for.

I am so proud of the positive impact we have made through the CVITP and look forward to repeating this success again in what will be a productive tax filing season this year.

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CARBON TAX

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Prime Minister, it has never been more expensive to feed one's family, own a home and heat one's house.

The price of everything is up, and the average family of four will spend an additional \$700 this year on groceries compared to last. Now the Prime Minister is hiking the carbon tax by 23% on April 1, but he is not done there. He is also jacking up the tax on beer, wine and spirits by 5% for good measure.

I do not know if the Prime Minister learned basic reasoning, so let me explain. If we tax the farmer who grows the food and the trucker who ships the food, we tax all who buy the food.

What is the result? Two million Canadians now rely on a food bank and 50% are \$200 away from insolvency, yet the Liberals think rebranding the carbon tax will stop the financial pain. Here is a news flash: It will not.

Canadians live in reality. They know the carbon tax is a tax plan, not an environment plan. Only common-sense Conservatives will axe the tax on everything, for everyone and for good.

* * *

● (1110)

HOUSING

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, the lives of renters, mortgage holders and the unhoused continue to worsen, with crushing costs. The facts speak for themselves. Home prices now outpace incomes by 40%, earning Canada the worst record in the G7. While American rents fall, Canadian rents hit record highs. Canada built fewer homes in 2022 than in 1972, and housing starts were down in 2023. We now have the fewest homes per capita of any country in the G7, despite having the most land to build on.

Statements by Members

Ottawa-funded gatekeepers and punitive taxes add hundreds of thousands of dollars of unneeded costs to the construction of each home. Canada's infrastructure funding should be tied to actually building homes. On top of that, we now hear that the radical environment minister does not even want to build new roads.

Our common-sense Conservative plan will ensure that infrastructure dollars go to the municipalities to get their bureaucracies out of the way, to build homes, not bureaucracy.

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[Translation]

GABRIEL FREDETTE

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Madam Speaker, everyone knows how passionate I am about music and singing, which is why I was delighted to learn that Gabriel Fredette, a young firefighter from Lachute, in my riding, is one of the talented young artists selected to participate in the television show *La Voix*. He was even lucky enough to see all four coaches turn around and ask him to join their respective teams. In the end, he chose Mario Pelchat, one of my idols. His maternal grandfather, who passed away in 2020, loved the artist. Gabriel inherited his love for the guitar from his grandfather, Léopold Dumouchel, also a musician. He began strumming the guitar and writing folk and pop music during the pandemic. What a journey for this talented young man, who seems to have come out of nowhere.

I wish Gabriel all the best and a great, very successful career.

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[English]

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today during Sexual and Reproductive Health Awareness Week to emphasize the importance of menstrual equity, access to contraception and abortion rights for Canadian women and gender-diverse people.

I am happy to see my colleagues join me in celebrating the critical gains made by Canada's feminist movement in its fight for women's sexual and reproductive rights, but we cannot forget that there is still work to be done. It has now been over two weeks since Fredericton's only abortion clinic closed, and the government has done nothing. The Liberals pat themselves on the backs for supporting gender equality but refuse to ensure access to safe abortion, while the Conservatives are actively undermining this right through back-door legislation.

The human right to have safe and trauma-informed abortion care is only as good as the ability to access that right. Leaders must uphold the Canada Health Act and ensure access is available to everyone in Canada.

[Translation]

NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS DAY

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, February 22 is now recognized as National Human Trafficking Awareness Day. This should not be just another day on the calendar, but rather a call to action against all forms of human trafficking. It is one of the faces of modern slavery, usually for sexual purposes or forced labour and slavery. Victims often suffer physical, sexual, financial, emotional and psychological abuse, and often have to live and work in horrific conditions.

Because of the damage and violence human trafficking inflicts on victims, it is linked to severe trauma, and recovering from its impact can take a lifetime. Here are a few statistics to illustrate the severity of this scourge: 93% of victims were born here; 97% are women and children, many of them indigenous.

There are still too many victims. This national day of awareness must empower us to better identify these heinous crimes, vehemently condemn them and to fight them more effectively.

We must take action.

* * *

● (1115)

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, where is the accountability? Where are the funds? What a boondoggle.

In a misguided attempt, the Liberal government tried to control our borders during a pandemic. It wasted at least \$60 million on an app that should have cost no more than \$80,000, and the app does not even work. Without competition, the Liberals handed out a contract for \$20 million to a couple of guys operating out of their basement. Then they decided to throw in another \$40 million for good measure, as well as some nice bottles of Scotch and a couple of fancy dinners for their friends.

This government has wasted \$60 million on people who did no work on an app that does not work. That is Liberal accounting. That is the ArriveCAN scam. It is time to call in the RCMP.

* * *

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in 2010, I was working in Africa when one of my colleagues turned to me and said that Canadian women are hypocrites. I was stunned. She went on to say that she had studied at McGill, and she knew Canadian women had reproductive rights, but it was not good enough for African women. I was mortified, and I decided right then that I was going to run for office and to change that policy.

Not always in this place do we get to come full circle, but three weeks ago, I was in Kinshasa, where I toured a safe abortion clinic funded by Canada. DRC has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, 10%, because of unsafe abortions.

Our commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights is not ideology. It literally saves lives.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Black History Month, I would like to recognize an Ottawa-based organization: AKHRI - Mothers and Daughters Literacy. Its mission is to create lasting, positive, community-based change through basic literacy in rural and underprivileged communities in Somaliland. It empowers girls and women with the power to learn, to be heard, to be seen and to make a difference. I agree that educated, empowered women can change the world.

Successful economic development of a community or a country can be fast-tracked if education is made available to all and, specifically, if girls are educated. I would like to recognize and to thank the team, under the leadership of Anab Mohamed, for its noble and dedicated service to realize AKHRI's mission.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, its arrive scam app that was supposed to cost \$80,000 cost Canadians \$60 million and, just like it, the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister is not worth the cost or the corruption. GC Strategies, the two-person team who worked out of a basement, got paid \$20 million and did no IT work but did take senior Liberal officials out for whisky tastings and fine dinners, which were not worth the cost and not worth the corruption.

Will the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister join common-sense Conservatives as we call for the RCMP to expand the investigation into this Liberal scandal?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to answer this question, which we have heard before and to which we have provided appropriate answers already. I am pleased to remind everyone that the Auditor General not only had the job, but the very important job of tabling a report on Monday, which we have looked at and are obviously very troubled by the findings in that report. We have taken into account all the recommendations in the report, and many have already been put into place for some time.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister said the Auditor General had an important job, but he and all the Liberals voted against her conducting the audit. It was because the Leader of the Opposition moved a motion in November 2022 that we had that Auditor General investigation. Just like that was the right thing to

Oral Questions

do then, calling in the RCMP is the right thing to do now. This is an \$80,000 app that ballooned to \$60 million. We have a two-person firm, working out of their basement, being paid \$20 million, and wining and dining senior Liberal officials.

Will the Liberals end their cover-up and join Conservatives in calling for an expanded RCMP investigation?

● (1120)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is completely right in pointing to the important work of the Auditor General. She did work very hard over the last few months, which is what we expect of her and her office. She tabled an important report on Monday. As she has said repeatedly, she is also completely willing and able to work with all other partners and institutions across the government, including with the RCMP, with which she is already in touch.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, of course the Auditor General is willing and able to do her work, but the problem is that the government refuses to give her the documents she needs to fully account for the \$60 million that was spent on this boondoggle. The Liberals, in the past, have used the executive to shield themselves from an investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, like they did in the SNC-Lavalin scandal. This time, Canadians want to know who got rich, other than of course those two guys who worked out of their basement and who took Liberal bosses out for fine dinners and whisky tastings.

Will the Liberals join our calls to call in the RCMP to investigate this scam?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are very pleased, obviously, to hear the member clearly state that he has full confidence in the abilities of the Auditor General to keep doing her job, including supporting the RCMP when that is demanded by the RCMP.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister is ultimately the one responsible for the arrive scam scandal, his useless app that was supposed to cost \$80,000 and ended up costing 750 times more. No one believes the Prime Minister's excuses anymore.

A former NDP leader said, "The scam of the century: [the Prime Minister] gave millions to a company with four employees". One headline reads, "Arrive Scam: A \$59-million-plus scandal thanks to the [Liberal] government's laissez-faire attitude". La Presse called it "The tip of the iceberg of wasteful spending".

After eight years, who in this government will finally dare to stand up and tell the Prime Minister that he is not worth the cost or the corruption?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, not only should we be thanking the Auditor General for her work, but we also need to read her report very carefully.

The misinformation we are hearing from the other side of the House is unfortunately not helpful and can even be counterproductive. The Auditor General must continue with the serious work she does. We thank her for everything she has done so far, and we are counting on her to keep up the good work.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister is denying the truth. I quoted newspaper articles that have been published since the Auditor General brought to light this scandal that saw Canadians pay \$60 million for an app that should have cost only \$80,000.

Radio-Canada found that GC Strategies, this infamous company that does not do IT work and that was paid close to \$20 million to develop a useless app, actually got a lot more money than that. We are talking about \$258 million.

Will the Prime Minister, who is not worth the cost, give the RCMP and the parliamentary committee access to all of the documents so that we can finally get to the bottom of this matter?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is quite right to talk about cost of protecting the health and safety of Canadians, including during a pandemic that cost tens of thousands of people their lives, including hundreds in his own riding. Millions of people lost their jobs, and we had to protect the integrity of our borders.

Despite how urgent and important this situation was, the Auditor General of Canada clearly indicated that it was unacceptable that public servants from the CBSA did not do their job properly.

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HEALTH

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, last February, the federal government promised to increase health transfers. After a lot of political jousting, it forced Quebec and the provinces to accept six times less money than they needed.

A year later, Quebec has not received a cent. There is already a \$1-billion gap in health care funding this year because Ottawa is withholding the money. Why is Ottawa withholding it? Because the federal government wants to impose conditions.

Will the government finally pay Quebec the money it promised instead of holding patients hostage?

[English]

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government is working very closely with all provinces and territories, including Quebec, to make sure that health care that is much needed for all Canadians is provided. That is why we are so proud to invest \$200 billion over 10 years, to all provinces and territories, to support Canadians in getting the best and excellent health care. We will continue to work with Quebec to ensure that it gets the same care.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, that is not the point. Let me remind members once again that the federal government does not run one single hospital. It has no expertise in health care, but it is withholding the money needed to care for people, because it thinks it can tell health care workers how to do their jobs.

Let me also remind members once again that the federal government is withholding nearly \$5 billion in Quebec taxpayers' money. That is nothing more than our share, plain and simple. Quebeckers want their money to be used for health care, not for Liberal political games.

When will the federal government give us our money?

[English]

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government and the Government of Quebec share the same objective and that is to provide quality health care, guided by the Canada Health Act, to all Quebeckers, whether it is family health, whether it is mental health, whether it is health care for our seniors. We will continue to work with the Government of Quebec closely so that those shared priorities are met, and Quebeckers, like all Canadians, will get the best health care through the federal government.

* * *

HOUSING

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, Canada's federal housing advocate confirmed this week that indigenous peoples are more likely to be forced to live on the streets. This government's lack of action means that indigenous peoples are being intentionally forgotten. In Edmonton, 60% of those living on the streets are indigenous. In Winnipeg, it is two-thirds and in Saskatoon, it is over 90%. In Nunavut, many tell me about overcrowding because of the lack of housing.

Will the minister listen to the federal housing advocate and stop underfunding indigenous housing?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are taking action to address the tremendous lack of safe, affordable housing and housing supports for indigenous peoples in urban, rural and northern communities. The for indigenous, by indigenous approach that guides our housing strategy will ensure successful approaches for communities in need. Since 2016, we have supported the construction, renovation and retrofit of over 30,000 homes in first nation communities and have continued to work with partners to co-develop a 10-year housing and infrastructure strategy. All levels of government must work together to solve this crisis and continue to push for indigenous-led solutions to address these gaps.

HEALTH

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, it has been two weeks since I asked the health minister for his plan to address the closure of Clinic 554, Fredericton's only health care provider offering safe abortions. This government has done nothing. While Conservatives push backdoor legislation, violating the right to a safe abortion, the so-called feminist Liberals failed to address access.

Why is the government denying access to safe trauma-informed abortion care?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am tremendously grateful for the allyship of the member across the way and for that very important question. That clinic is located in my riding. It is an issue that I have been on for many years. The federal government actually has stepped up and has supported research projects to support better data collection to inform our provincial partners, who really hold the pen on this issue. We have also held back provincial transfers, to ensure that the Canada Health Act is upheld. More absolutely needs to be done. Reproductive rights must be ensured in this country, no matter where one lives.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the arrive scam app is just like the Prime Minister: not worth the cost and not worth the corruption.

The Auditor General revealed that an app that did not work cost taxpayers a staggering \$60 million, including \$20 million that went to a two-person company that did no work. Now the RCMP have launched a criminal investigation, but are being obstructed by the Liberals, who are hiding documents.

Will the Prime Minister stop the obstruction and turn over the documents today?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this question has already been answered a number of times over the past few days, and again today. The answer is the same. The Auditor General deserves our appreciation. She has done solid and important work over the past few months, leading to the tabling of a troubling report on Monday.

The good news is that many of her recommendations were implemented some time ago now. However, the work continues to move forward. It is important to ensure that the public service is doing its job properly, even in times of crisis.

• (1130)

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, 60 million taxpayer dollars wasted, fraud, forgery and corruption; that is arrive scam and the Liberals have tried to cover up the scandal every step of the way. They obstructed parliamentary committees, they attempted to obstruct an investigation by the Auditor General and now they are obstructing an RCMP criminal investigation.

Oral Questions

When will the Liberals stop the obstruction and turn over the documents to the RCMP?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I have said before, there is no obstruction here. On the contrary, the Auditor General must have all the documents she needs to do her job, because the Auditor General's work is critical to the integrity of our democratic and parliamentary system. That is why she was given access to all necessary documents over the past few months, and why she is able, as she clearly stated, to provide these documents to any other partner, including the RCMP, upon request.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, the RCMP needs access to the documents so that people can be held to account for this waste. The NDP-Liberal government's waste of at least \$60 million on the arrive scam app, which wrongly put 10,000 people into mandatory quarantine, was so bad that the RCMP are investigating, and it needs access to these documents. After eight years, Canadians deserve better. They deserve accountability and transparency.

Why have the Liberals not released these documents and what are they trying to hide?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a little disturbing to hear the Conservative MPs question the integrity of the Auditor General.

The Auditor General has said very clearly over the past few days that she was not only willing and able to work with the RCMP, but she was already doing so and providing the RCMP with all the information it wants.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, to be clear, I am not questioning the integrity of the Auditor General. I am questioning the integrity of the government that is hiding these documents from the RCMP. Canadians deserve accountability. Somebody needs to be held to account for the waste of \$60 million that went to a shady IT company that had two people working in a basement.

Why have the Liberals not released these documents? Release them now.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are sure that the opposition member is not also suggesting that the RCMP is incapable of doing its work.

The RCMP and the Auditor General operate at arm's length from the government; they can work very well together without any political or partisan influence.

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians are in shock. They paid 750 times more for the ArriveCAN app than planned. The Auditor General is also shocked. She said it is probably some of the worst record-keeping she has ever seen.

After eight years of this incompetent government, ArriveCAN is another example in a long list of abuses. The ArriveCAN app is just like the Prime Minister: It is not worth the cost.

Will he join us in calling on the RCMP to expand its investigation based on the revelations in the Auditor General's report?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are two points that I believe have already been explained well, yet are important to reiterate.

Just a few months ago, Canada experienced the worst pandemic in a century, the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. The public service had to respond quickly and effectively to save the lives of thousands of Canadians; costs were in the billions of dollars per week.

Unfortunately, this work was not done by the book. As the Auditor General stated on Monday, it is unacceptable that people in the public service and at the Canada Border Services Agency in particular failed to do—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government has to answer for this. Were it not for the Conservatives, Canadians would not have found out anything about the ArriveCAN app scandal. It has been chaos since this government took office eight years ago. This Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

The ArriveCAN scandal involves two men in the basement of a bungalow who received millions of dollars to develop an app that should have cost \$80,000. This company received a large share of contracts, many without a bidding process.

It is a free-for-all with the Liberal Party. The Conservative Party wants the RCMP to broaden its investigation in light of the Auditor General's troubling revelations.

Do you have the courage to ask for that?

• (1135)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the hon. member that she must address her questions through the Chair and not directly to the government.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our colleague is quite right in pointing out the essential work of the Auditor General.

We need the Auditor General to do the kind of investigation that she was able to do over the past few months in co-operation with CBSA officials. She did her work. She tabled her report on Monday. Her findings are shocking and alarming. Her recommendations must be taken into account. Most of her recommendations have already been in place for a few weeks.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Auditor General's report is an endless chain of scandals.

That an app estimated to cost \$80,000 should end up costing at least \$60 million is already unacceptable. That the real cost will never be known because of missing documents makes it even more unacceptable. That GC Strategies was in a position to draft the call for proposals itself, to make sure it would win, makes it more unacceptable still.

However, that this two-person company, which delivers no services, has received at least 140 other contracts since 2010 is utterly outrageous.

When will an independent investigation into each of these contracts be launched?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the key word in the Auditor General's report is "documentation". That documentation was flawed, incomplete, improperly stored and unsharable.

Indeed, it forms the central focus of the Auditor General's findings, and that is why we are continuing to move forward with the work that now needs to be done.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, apparently the bookkeeping has been bad since 2010. Maybe this should have been addressed sooner.

The wasteful spending on ArriveCAN continued after the pandemic under the CBSA's new president. At least \$12 million more was invested in contracts with consultants, just for ArriveCAN. Clearly there is still a complete lack of accountability at the CBSA today.

Will the government put the CBSA under third-party management?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank our colleague for the question.

Every day, the Canada Border Services Agency plays an essential role in facilitating and allowing the flow of hundreds of thousands of travellers and billions of dollars in goods.

This was even more important during the pandemic, when Canadians were relying on the arrival of vital drugs, personal protective equipment, and equipment parts that were absolutely essential for businesses, including in the opposition member's riding.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Madam Speaker, the arrive scam app is just like the Prime Minister, not worth the cost and not worth the corruption.

The RCMP is investigating this \$80,000 app which cost more than \$60 million. The Auditor General said it will take a court order for the RCMP to get access to all the documents in this Liberal corruption.

Will the Prime Minister stop his cover-up, not make the police seek a court order, and hand over all the documents, voluntarily, to the police and to Parliament, so Canadians can learn the truth?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is correct when he points to the ability and expertise of the RCMP, the Auditor General and other institutions to work together. They know how to do their jobs.

They do not need political processes that politicians use to do their jobs. The RCMP, the Auditor General and all of the other independent organizations on which Canadians have the fortune to depend know what to do.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Madam Speaker, the institution that is covering up is that Liberal cabinet and that Liberal minister. If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, why does the RCMP need a court order? Release the documents voluntarily. A government with nothing to hide would produce these documents for the police without a court order. The arrive scam app is not worth the cost and the Prime Minister is not worth the corruption.

Will the Prime Minister end this cover-up, release all the arrive scam documents voluntarily, stop the cover-up and turn it over to the police and Parliament, so Canadians can get the truth?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member points to the work of the Auditor General. She has already said in public that she is not only able but very willing to work with the RCMP and any other institution in the government that would like to use her important findings on Monday. The member may want to speak to the Auditor General to understand how she does that. That is for him to decide, but we on this side of the House have full confidence in the ability of the Auditor General.

• (1140)

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, the revelations in the Auditor General's report on the arrive scam app are shocking, and after eight years of this NDP-Liberal government, waste is at an all-time high. Canadians know that, just like the arrive scam app, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost and he is not worth the corruption. Unfortunately, the Auditor General was only able to scratch the surface of this costly corruption. Evidence is being withheld and maybe even destroyed.

It is time to send in the police.

When will the Prime Minister stop the cover-up and call for a complete investigation into the arrive scam fiasco?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, again, I think no one in this House should attempt to display a lack of confidence in the ability of the Auditor General to do her job. I am sure we are all united in supporting the importance and the value of what she does. She needs no advice on the part of politicians. She has full expertise. If they want to provide her with their particular advice, they know how to reach out to her. Otherwise, we can help them connect to her.

Mr. Rick Perkins: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will remind the hon. member for South Shore—St. Margarets that he had an opportunity to ask questions. If he has other questions to ask, he should wait until the appropriate time and not interrupt the minister.

The hon. member for Sturgeon River—Parkland has the floor.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, these Liberals keep making excuses, but extraordinary circumstances are no excuse for extraordinary corruption. After eight years of this NDP-Liberal government, Canadians know that the arrive scam app, just like the Prime Minister, is not worth the cost or the corruption.

If the Liberals had had their way, the Auditor General would not have even investigated this issue at all, and it is now clear to Canadians that these Liberals had at least 60 million reasons to stop this investigation. When will this NDP-Liberal government join us and call for a complete investigation so that Canadians can get the truth?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member is totally right to point to how important the work the Auditor General does is every day. She and her office are fundamental to the operations of our democracy. They are there to help and sometimes to challenge the government in doing the right thing. That is why we are so grateful for her report on Monday. We have already said that we have taken into account all the recommendations she has provided, and many of them have already been in place for a few weeks now.

* * *

GROCERY INDUSTRY

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, Canadian seniors on fixed incomes are struggling very much to afford groceries in a difficult time. The government says it is talking tough with big grocers like Loblaws, but what has that led to? Loblaws is trying to cut a sweetheart deal with Manulife to screw seniors. Loblaws is getting in the way of the grocery code of conduct. Loblaws is getting rid of its discount of near-expired foods, only to replace it later after public outcry. The only thing the government has done is given Loblaws a slap on the wrist and \$12 million for new fridges, so when is it going to get actually serious about doing something to lower grocery prices in Canada?

Oral Questions

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have been there for seniors from the get-go. One of the first things we did was reverse what the former prime minister, Stephen Harper, did on the world stage at the World Economic Forum in Davos. He raised that retirement age from 65 to 67, putting a lot of seniors into poverty. We have increased the GIS. We have increased the OAS. We have enhanced the CPP. Meanwhile, we do not know where the Conservatives stand on the CPP. The leader of the official opposition thinks that he could do better than the CPP board. It is just a shame.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government has given 32 different contracts totalling \$60 million to the same consultants, GC Strategies, for the useless ArriveCAN app. Liberals simply cannot keep themselves from helping themselves, while Canadians can barely pay the bills. At a time when we should be investing in the skills and knowledge of our public service, Liberals would rather hand over millions to private consultants.

Why is the Liberal government giving money to its rich friends instead of investing in the valuable work of our federal public service?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member points to the valuable public service, and he is entirely right; public servants worked extremely hard during the pandemic to protect the health and safety of millions of Canadians and millions of jobs.

That being said, it is not an excuse for a very few of them in the CBSA not to have done their job appropriately. On Monday, the Auditor General was very clear as to why that was not done. We obviously took into account her recommendations. We have implemented many of them and will implement the others in days to come.

* * *

● (1145)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada and the United States have one of the closest and most important relationships of any two nations in the world, and there are millions of Canadians, including countless constituents of mine, who work at businesses that rely on trade with the United States. Let us be frank: The economy and the quality of life of every single Canadian and every single one of my constituents in Etobicoke Centre depend on a strong economic and trading relationship between Canada and the U.S.

Could the Minister of International Trade share with Canadians how our team Canada engagement strategy will defend Canada's interest in and with the United States?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when President Biden addressed this chamber, he said that Canada and the United States could do good things. If we work together and if

we stand together, we will rise together. That is the approach that the Minister of Innovation and I are taking with team Canada and our U.S. re-engagement strategy. I am looking forward to working with the member for Etobicoke Centre and am counting on his expertise.

The trade between Canada and the United States is really impactful to our economy, and I know that this work will continue.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the environment minister has left the high-way of common sense and taken the off-ramp to Fantasy Island. He will say yes to spending \$400 million to promote skateboarding to fight climate change, but no to a bridge whose closure has cut the village of Bolsover in half for three long years. In Parks Canada's own words, The bridge is of "national historic significance."

Creating a longer commute will not save the environment, so when will the minister realize that roads will not pave themselves, and fund the bridge in Bolsover?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, yesterday I made the comment that the hon. colleague takes a non-partisan approach to issues, and he does, which is why I am surprised that he continues to maintain the approach he does today. He knows very well that the government has invested in over 8,500 bridge, road or highway projects across the country. We are proud that has happened, and it needs to continue.

However, directly to the member: Which of the almost 4,000 projects in Ontario is he against?

We will continue to fund these projects.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary knows that he is not to address members directly but through me.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member opposite, but I do not think he should be telling the residents of Bolsover that they should not believe their lying eyes.

The bridge has been out for three long years. It was built in 1902. It is 42 metres long, is of national historic significance and is owned by Parks Canada. The minister said that no more roads and bridges will be funded by the federal government, and suddenly Parks Canada announces that the bridge will not be funded.

If the member opposite wants to prove me wrong, and I really hope he does, will the minister commit today to funding the Boundary Road swing bridge in Bolsover, yes or no?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I regularly participate in question period, and this is the first time I have heard the member raise this particular issue. I am sincere when I say that I am happy to talk with him after question period to learn more about his particular concern.

However, which of the almost 4,000 road, bridge or highway projects that have been funded just in the province of Ontario alone, where the member is from, is he against?

The Conservatives want to starve communities of infrastructure funds. We will not allow that. We will continue to help communities.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Takla First Nation is a rural and remote community in northern B.C. It has been asking the government for a safe and sustainable road into its community for eight years. The existing road is often impassable, leaving Takla without access to critical emergency services like fire and ambulance.

Were the two ministers of indigenous affairs aware that the radical Minister of Environment and their government were no longer funding critical road infrastructure, or did they find out through Monday-morning media like the Takla First Nation did?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member used specific language that is not really acceptable in the House. I would ask members to restructure their sentences so they are more acceptable.

• (1150)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there is \$223 million for 736 road, bridge and infrastructure projects in British Columbia, where the member is from. How many did he vote for? He voted for zero. Where is his support for his constituents and his province? I know he is a sincere member. I have heard him speak in the House many times. I am not sure what has happened, whether he has been whipped to not support the particular projects that I mentioned for his province. It is a shame.

We will continue to work with municipalities, towns and cities to ensure that they have the infrastructure dollars, including for road, bridge and highway projects.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, this Prime Minister's radical environment minister is starting a war on cars.

He said that the government had decided to stop investing in new road infrastructure. The radical environment minister did not clarify his remarks. Rather, he went even further, adding that the government planned to block major projects. My constituents would be very pleased to have a third link.

Why is the Liberal government attacking workers in my community and in the region who are just trying to get to work?

Oral Questions

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member talks about a war on cars. I want to talk about something that the government is taking seriously and is doing for Canadians when it comes to cars that are being stolen in their communities, which is an issue in my riding.

Last week I attended the summit to combat auto theft, where stakeholders came together: representatives from the police, industry, insurance, CBSA, ports and all levels of government. All of them agreed that the way to solve the issue is through coordination and co-operation, not through slogans.

We are taking the issue seriously and we are taking action.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, we are saying no to the Chalk River nuclear waste dump.

The federal government cannot condone burying nuclear waste on the banks of the Ottawa River, a source of drinking water for millions of Quebecers. The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission did not listen to Quebecers. The Montreal metropolitan area and its 82 cities are against the project, as is the City of Gatineau. These two entities represent 4.5 million people, half the population of Quebec.

Given that there is no social licence for the Chalk River Project, will the minister reverse the decision?

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources and to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her important question.

The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission is independent and does not approve projects unless it knows for certain that they are safe. We are looking at the issue with Canadians. We will protect the environment. We will hold consultations. The commission's independence is important.

The government is not the one deciding on these projects. Canadians do not want politicians to decide on these projects. We have an independent expert body that holds consultations and ensures that projects are safe. We will move forward. Right now, a judicial review is under way. We are waiting for the results of that.

Oral Questions

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to talk about the commission and its approval of the Chalk River project. In its consultations, it forgot to mention that 4.5 million Quebecers are opposed to this project, as are indigenous communities. It also forgot to mention that one of the commissioners who approved the project is a former employee of the Chalk River plant.

As for the federal government, it keeps forgetting to mention that it is the one that appoints the commissioners, so it is responsible for the dubious approval process. The feds are the ones who are jeopardizing Quebec's drinking water with a nuclear dump.

Will the government stop hiding and say no to Chalk River?

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources and to the Minister of Official Languages, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I disagree with the Bloc's question. There is an independent commission of experts studying the decision. Canadians want to know that there are experts who will study the decision and carry out consultations. Canadians have made it clear that they do not want politicians making this decision.

The government is not involved. We have an independent commission of experts continuing to carry out consultations. It will make sure the site is safe.

* * *

• (1155)

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Oxford dictionary defines a fool as a person who acts unwisely or imprudently. It is ironic that the Prime Minister chose April Fool's Day to increase his carbon tax by a whopping 23%, increasing the misery that many Canadian families face. The tax is not a joke.

After eight years of the Prime Minister, and now with his plan to quadruple the carbon tax, he is just not worth the cost.

Will the NDP-Liberal government cancel its April foolish carbon tax increase?

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, unlike the Conservatives, who deny that climate change exists, and who want to take money away from Canadians, what we are doing with the rebate is putting money back in their pockets. That is \$1,100 to Ontario families, \$1,800 to Alberta families and \$1,200 to Manitoba families. The list goes on.

I would just like to ask the opposition whether it makes common sense to deny climate change and to cut benefits for Canadian families, including the carbon rebates.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before I go to the next question, I just want to remind the member who spoke earlier that he is not to say something indirectly that he cannot say directly. The previous question was saying indirectly what he cannot say directly. I just want to caution him on that.

The hon. member for Calgary Confederation.

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Madam Speaker, that is just bloody foolish. She just does not—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Calgary Confederation, as long as it was on the minister's response.

Mr. Len Webber: Madam Speaker, the minister's response was just bloody foolish. She does not understand that if one taxes the farmer who grows the food and taxes the trucker who ships the food, then one taxes the people who buy the food. Already a typical family of four will have to pay \$700 more in groceries in 2024 than last year. The carbon tax makes up a quarter of their home heating bills. The NDP-Liberal government is not fooling anyone anymore with its April Fool's Day tax hike.

Can we not all agree that now is not the time for higher taxes? Axe the bloody tax.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to remind—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I am sure the hon. members want to hear the answer.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the colleague opposite that in the ag committee last week, one of Canada's foremost experts on food policy, Sylvain Charlebois from Dalhousie University, said, "we don't see evidence of that", talking about the impact of carbon pricing on food in Canada. Actually, they invited him to speak at the ag committee. I think we have it here.

The Bank of Canada has said that pricing pollution is not having a material impact on inflation in Canada. It is less than half of 1%. We know that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister blew over 60 million taxpayer dollars for his arrive scam app in a corruption scandal that is looking worse day by day. His NDP-Liberal government is also going to force grocery, gas and home heating prices to go up on April 1 as it increases the carbon tax another 23%. After eight years of being scammed and robbed by the Prime Minister, Canadians know that he is not worth the cost or the corruption.

Why will he not just admit that his income redistribution scam is toast, and just axe the tax?

Oral Questions

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hypocrisy of the Conservatives is just off the charts. Conservatives use the hardships of people who are in food bank lineups for political gain, but when it comes to actually helping Canadians they are nowhere to be found. They adamantly oppose every real solution we put forward. They have said no to a grocery rebate. They are delaying competition reform. They voted against a framework for implementing a national school food program. It is appalling. Just a couple of weeks ago, we learned that the top adviser to the Leader of the Opposition, Jenni Byrne, is a lobbyist for Loblaw's. Canadians can tell whose corner they are in and it is—

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are proud of our Quebec businesses, which create jobs and support economic growth.

The member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord underscored the importance of funding Quebec businesses in parliamentary committee, and yet the Conservatives voted against our funding measures.

Can the minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec tell us how our government's programs are strengthening supply chain development and resilience?

Hon. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions has been in existence for 50 years. In that time, the agency has injected billions of dollars into the innovation, growth and productivity of thousands of Quebec businesses.

The Conservative Party members from Quebec say they want to support businesses, but they voted against Canada Economic Development funding, which supports regional economic growth.

I will continue to work with the member for Lac-Saint-Louis on behalf of all regions in Quebec and all Quebec businesses.

* * *

[*English*]

TAXATION

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, after eight years, the NDP-Liberal government is going to raise the tax on beer, wine and spirits, again on April 1 for the eighth year in a row. Most Canadians can barely afford to eat, heat and house themselves and we know that this Prime Minister is not worth the cost, but our brewers, vintners and distillers know that the current government is harming their industries. For once, will the Liberals cancel this year's undemocratic automatic 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 ensure a continued competitive environment for brewers and vintners. That environment is one that allows for people to go out and buy their beer or buy their wine, or whatever they wish to do with their free time. In this country, we want to ensure continued success, and what do we see? We see a very low unemployment rate that is lower than what was the case before the pandemic, and a better GDP rate as compared to before the pandemic. The Conservatives want to cut EI. They want to cut CPP. They want to cut the dental benefit and the child care benefit; all of them, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary wants to help Canadians and help industry by raising their taxes eight years in a row. Canada's taxes on beer, wine and spirits are already among the highest in the entire world. Brewers spend more than twice as much on production tax as they do on wages for their well-paid unionized workers, proving that this Prime Minister is not worth the cost to Canadian jobs. If the current NDP-Liberal government cannot give happy hour back to Canadian consumers, will it at least axe the automatic tax increase on industry, exporters, small businesses, unionized production workers, retailers and restaurant servers?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I said, we will continue to do everything we can to ensure a competitive environment for brewers, for the vintner sector and for all Canadians.

However, it is interesting: The member talks about unions. That is what stood out in his question. The Conservative Party is the party of unions all of a sudden? I could not think of anything less true. Throughout the Conservatives' tenure in office from 2006 to 2015, they did everything they could to ensure that unions had no power and no role in this country's decision-making. We have engaged with unions. We have engaged with labour. We will continue to do exactly that.

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, this Prime Minister is just not worth the cost. On April 1, he will once again be raising his carbon tax by 23% on gas, groceries and home heating. Also on April 1, he will be raising his excise tax on beer, wine and spirits by another 4.7%. When will this Prime Minister stop his cruel April Fool's Day jokes and give Canadians a break?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am quite interested in the member opposite's question, because what he is effectively saying is that he is not in favour of people in his province receiving \$1,500 in the carbon rebate that our government is putting back in the pockets of Canadians. That is \$1,500, along with rebates across our country of \$1,100 in Ontario and \$1,200 in Manitoba. The contrast is clear—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Kitchener South—Hespeler has the floor.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this April, residents of Kitchener South—Hespeler will be receiving their first quarterly installment of the Canada carbon rebate.

Can the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada share with this House how these rebates are reducing emissions while making life more affordable for Canadians in provinces where the federal backstop system applies?

• (1205)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canada carbon rebate is increasing. An Ontario family of four will receive \$280 per quarterly payment throughout the year. What we are doing is making big polluters pay more for their pollution.

What the Conservative Party wants to do is make pollution free for those big polluters, like oil companies that are making record-level profits. Not on this side of the House. We will work to continue fighting climate change and supporting Canadians through the Canada carbon rebate.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, a 75-year-old Palestinian Canadian is stuck in Gaza, and he is in poor health and he needs medical care. He went to Rafah and no Canadian ambassadors were there to help him leave. His son, my constituent, told me that his father has been used as a human shield by the Israeli military to force Gazans out of their homes. He is worried sick.

The government has had four months to secure the safe passage of Canadians out of Gaza. Other countries have done it, so why can the government not ensure the safe return of Canadians and their families from Gaza?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her advocacy. I know she reached out to the minister about this case yesterday, and other MPs have reached out to me personally about this case.

We are in constant contact with our consular officials in the region. We are also in contact with the relevant countries and with COGAT, which is the body that is in charge of whether people can leave. We are deeply troubled when we hear stories of these Cana-

dians who are unable to leave Gaza. We will continue our advocacy and we will not stop until we get all Canadians home.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Madam Speaker, in Toronto, auto thefts have increased by 25.4% and half a billion dollars' worth of cars were stolen last year. Because the government was asleep at the wheel, our cities are less safe and experts are projecting car insurance premiums could be going up by as much as 25%. On average, that is an extra \$600 a year that people cannot afford. Auto theft summits make for good photo ops, but what people need is action. The government must put up serious roadblocks to combat thefts.

Will the government finally give police and the CBSA the tools, funding and personnel they desperately need to keep us safe?

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is unfortunate the hon. member calls the summit that was held last week a photo op. I and my colleagues were there and actually heard from stakeholders. We heard from insurance companies, and I spoke to one of the chiefs of police who said that not only is this important but that we need to do this more often and formalize these kinds of dialogues. The only way we will solve the problem of auto theft is by working together, by working with insurance companies and working with border services, and making the kinds of investments like \$120 million to Ontario through the initiative to take action against guns and violence, which the minister just introduced recently, and \$28 million to support the work of the CBSA.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), and consistent with the policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled, "Amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005)" adopted at Geneva on May 28, 2022.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, the mighty OGGO, in relation to the motion adopted on Wednesday, February 14, regarding a request to the Auditor General of Canada to conduct a performance audit on the contracts awarded to GC Strategies.

* * *

• (1210)

PETITIONS

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition on behalf of constituents.

I rise, for the 32nd time, on behalf of the people of Swan River, Manitoba, to present a petition on the rising rate of crime. The community of Swan River is consumed with unprecedented levels of crime because of the Liberal government's soft-on-crime laws, like Bill C-5 and Bill C-75. Bill C-5 allows criminals to serve their sentences from home, and Bill C-75 allows violent offenders to be in jail in the morning and back on the streets in the evening.

The people of Swan River are calling for jail, not bail, for violent repeat offenders. The people of Swan River demand that the Liberal government repeal its soft-on-crime policies that directly threaten their livelihoods and their community.

I support the good people of Swan River.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES OF CANADA

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Madam Speaker, today I rise to table a petition on behalf of correctional officers in Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon and surrounding areas, who are concerned about the prison needle exchange program currently being operated by Correctional Services Canada.

Drugs and drug paraphernalia are considered contraband in prisons, yet the Liberal government is forcing our correctional officers to simply turn a blind eye and allow dangerous drugs to be used inside of prisons.

These correctional officers are calling on the government to immediately cancel the prison needle exchange program, stop permitting the use of illicit drugs in Canadian prisons, and focus efforts on helping inmates recover from their addictions.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am bringing forward two petitions today.

The first petition is in regard to the fact that all of us in this House know that the level of domestic violence and violent crime across Canada has risen significantly under the Liberal government.

It is also well established in this House and across Canada that the risk of violence against pregnant women is greater, and yet the

Routine Proceedings

government fails to bring in any legislation that impacts our Criminal Code in this regard.

The petitioners, upset that the government has turned a blind eye to Bill C-311, are calling on the Liberal government to legislate the abuse of a pregnant woman and the infliction of harm on a preborn child as aggravating circumstances at the sentencing point, within our Criminal Code.

PORNOGRAPHY

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is in regard to sexually explicit and demeaning information depicting sexual violence online that is absolutely available to young people.

It is made available for commercial purposes and is not protected by any effective age verification methods. Apparently, the Parliament recognizes that the harmful effects of increasing accessibility of sexually explicit materials online for young persons is an important public health and public safety concern.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the House to adopt Bill S-210, the protecting young persons from exposure to pornography act.

CANADA-UKRAINE FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is my honour to rise in this House to present a petition signed by 75 members of the Canadian-Ukrainian community in the Waterloo Region. They are calling on all parliamentarians to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to Ukraine by supporting Bill C-57, the updated Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement, which was requested by Ukraine. This will assist Ukraine in its rebuilding efforts after the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Vladimir Putin.

I am pleased to report to the community that the bill was, in fact, passed last week with the support of all members of Parliament, save and except for members of the Conservative Party.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind members that they are to give a summary of the petitions and not give additional information such as their points of view, or use it as an S. O. 31.

Presenting petitions, the hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove.

• (1215)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by 75 people in my community to draw Parliament's attention to the plight of Pakistani Christians, who were persecuted for their faith, who did not receive protection from their government and who have fled to Thailand, where they continue to face persecution while they wait for their Canadian visa applications to proceed.

Government Orders

They are calling upon the House of Commons to create a special status for Pakistani asylum seekers, who continue to suffer mistreatment in Thailand. They ask for the renewal, with increased urgency, of the Government of Canada's 2016 recommendation, made in Thailand, on the need for asylum seekers to have access to legal status.

A number of people who signed this application are themselves refugees from Pakistan via Thailand. In these circumstances they are very happy to have Canada as their new home, but they remain concerned for those left behind.

NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions to table today.

The first petition is from residents in my community of Kelowna—Lake Country and the surrounding area. It refers to natural health products, NHPs, as being basic, everyday products. The changes Health Canada is looking at making will cause consumer prices to rise significantly and consumer choice to decline drastically when inflation is at an all-time high and access to health care is at an all-time low. Health Canada recently proposed new and significant fees to import, manufacture and sell NHPs at the same time as it is implementing new labelling laws.

The petitioners are calling on the Minister of Health to work with the industry on adjusting Health Canada's proposed cost-recovery rates to accurately reflect the size and scope of the industry. They say that the new regulatory changes should be considered only once the self-care framework is adjusted and backlogs are cleared, operations are running efficiently, and there are policies and procedures in place to ensure the stable operation and selection of natural health product choices to continue for Canadians.

CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition that I have today is with respect to the carbon tax. The petitioners talk about the combination of carbon tax 1 and carbon tax 2, which means that Canadians will pay an extra 61¢ for each litre of gas. This is making life more expensive for Canadians in a cost-of-living crisis, so the petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to have the House recognize the failure of carbon tax 1 and to immediately cancel the clean fuel regulations.

FIRST RESPONDERS TAX CREDIT

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to present a petition on behalf of my constituents who are firefighters and in industries related to firefighting. They are very concerned about the very poor provisions for volunteer firefighters and the very low tax credit, which they believe is not large enough to support volunteer firefighters. They are particularly needed in rural communities, which do not necessarily have the fiscal capacity to support a full-time firefighter force.

The petitioners are asking the government to implement changes to support volunteer firefighters, and they are also calling on the House to pass Bill C-310 to raise the tax credit for volunteer firefighters.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Ms. Lisa Hefner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion for second reading of, and concurrence in amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-35, An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in the House, and it is great to be able to speak to such an important issue as what we are talking about here today, which is child care and, in particular, the Senate amendments.

I guess the fact that we are back here today goes to show, and I am sure my colleagues would agree, that there is always room for improvement when we are looking at any piece of legislation, but it is especially true when we are dealing with an NDP-Liberal government, such as we are now. That is what we tried to tell its members during the regular process of debate the first time through.

If the Liberal government decides it wants to involve itself in something, it really needs to make sure it gets things right and does not create a mess of things. As usual, it chose not to take its responsibility seriously. Instead it tried to blame us and play political games at the expense of Canadian families. It claimed we were delaying the bill, when we were simply doing our job as the official opposition.

Our Parliament is set up in certain ways for a reason. We have to consider and review what the government does carefully, or else there is trouble. Look at what happens when we do not. Was it a delay when a few months went by for senators to go through the bill and add this amendment? As a result, we are having another round of debate and a vote in the House.

Government Orders

In this case, that is probably a good thing. Many people from each party agree that the bill will be better for it. If we consider that it is dealing with child care, which is a complex and important issue, I think it is fair to say there are other things we also need to consider. We do not have to worry about a delay so much as the Liberal government making big announcements and rushing through legislation so it can try to look good and feel good about itself.

Canadians living in the real world have a lot of problems to face. They are counting on us to deliver solutions in the right way. Along with protecting official language minority communities, which is now reflected in Bill C-35, Conservatives proposed other amendments, which were rejected by the NDP-Liberals, including an amendment that would have basically done the exact same thing that we are debating here today with this Senate amendment, which was voted down previously by the NDP-Liberal government at committee.

The government's lack of respect for parents is quite apparent. In different ways, we have heard members of the Liberal-NDP government suggest that parents do not have the right to raise their own children. Recently, one of its members went so far as to say that there is no such thing as parental rights. There is a dangerous idea the far left has that seems to be gaining ground on that side. The Liberals think children should belong to the state and not to their parents.

• (1220)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not believe we have quorum in the House.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): We will count the members.

And the count having been taken:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): We now have quorum.

Resuming debate. The hon. member can continue his speech. He has 15 minutes remaining in his time.

[*English*]

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, now they all come running back in to hear this marvellous speech, despite the heckles from the NDP guys over here.

Thankfully we have not gotten to the point yet where they want to get us to, but when we hear people deny the primary role of parents to raise their own children, that is the line of thinking that will start to take us in a dangerous direction.

Our approach to child care must respect parents and their choices. We cannot expect the NDP-Liberal coalition to get things right if they do not have that solid foundation to begin with.

Child care is crucial. Canadian parents know it better than anyone. As Conservatives, we want to meet the needs of families and we understand how valuable and important it is to do so. It is common sense. Especially in today's world, which moves at a rapid pace, we need to maintain and support the family unit.

Children are a gift. Those of us who are parents know how much they change our lives. They give us purpose and direction. They bring joy and pride as they grow up, despite some of the difficulties that we sometimes have to go through as parents with our kids. Not to sound too cliché, but our kids are the future of society. That is why it is so important that we provide the right support to parents as they raise the next generation.

There are people out there looking for options that are affordable and help to build the lifestyle they want for their family.

For many, it is a struggle. I have heard about it in my own riding, which is largely rural. Last month, at a town hall in Eastend, as I was talking about at the beginning, I was asked about the lack of access and spaces in our area. It confirmed for me that not much has changed since I was part of another town hall in Maple Creek a couple years ago, where one of the prominent issues was also child care.

I would say that, as the most rural province, Saskatchewan is in a unique situation. We have so many small towns that are so spread out. There is an especially stark contrast between urban and rural. Access to child care is linked to our access to workers. Business owners in the southwest are struggling to hire, but it was not because of a shortage of applicants; it was a shortage of day care facilities where potential hires could have their kids taken care of. Unfortunately, these interviewees moved on, got another job outside Maple Creek, and left these businesses still wanting.

What is sad is that Maple Creek is just a phenomenal town. Houses are still decently affordable, the school is great and it is not too far from the Cypress Hills. It is a quick drive to some major centres in Alberta and Saskatchewan. It is just an all-around great place for a family, yet people are choosing to not raise their kids here, in part because they cannot find access to child care.

We wanted to see this bill include a wide range of child care options that should be available to parents. That is what the NDP-Liberals rejected.

One of the amendments that we had proposed was to make sure we included all types of providers, private providers, home-based providers, alongside public and not-for-profit providers, just to make sure that all types of home care options were eligible.

In fact, in Saskatchewan, there are over 87,574 children under age six in our province but the majority of them are not in licensed care and receive no benefit from the implementation of the government's child care strategy.

Government Orders

This government has a one-size-fits-all approach for parents. This bill says to Canadians, “It is okay. Do not worry about it. Let the government take care of your kids.” That is basically it. This bill overlooks many families who want to have some other options, including stay-at-home parents. Many Canadians do not want that approach from the government; they believe that what is best for their family is that they stay home with the kids and live off one income.

By no means is it easy. I am speaking from my own personal experience. It requires determination and sacrifice but for my family, and for thousands and thousands of Canadians, the right decision is to have a stay-at-home parent.

Last time I spoke on this bill, I shared my own family’s experience with stay-at-home parenting, and I would like to touch on that point once again.

Shortly after my wife and I were married, and while our first child was on the way, we sat down and discussed how we could make it work for my wife to be a stay-at-home mom, because that was something that she truly wanted and was near and dear to her heart. We also thought that this is what would be best for the kids in the long run. The decision to live on one income was definitely an adjustment. We got by for nearly a decade, until she went back to work in 2019, when the kids were old enough.

I would suggest that we were better off for it. We had adventures driving our old minivan. We had to make decisions on buying older, well-used vehicles, to make sure that we could make ends meet. These were definitely part of the joy, and the struggle at times, of deciding to live on one income and have my wife be a stay-at-home parent.

• (1225)

Yes, Conservatives supported this bill because there are Canadians in different situations who make other choices, and they are looking for support, too. Not all Canadians can survive on one income. We know that and get that, especially with the cost of living crisis spiralling out of control because of the government. However, for those who are able and choose to do so, they are completely overlooked by the Liberal government. Instead of supporting Canadians who choose to live as independently of government as possible, the government continues to throw program after program at Canadians, as if they cannot run their own lives.

Last June, the member for Milton said to me, “When women go back to work, they tend to earn money and pay taxes, and that pays for programs like this. I would like the member to appreciate that.” However, I did not need him to tell me that. There are mothers who work and contribute to our economy. My point is that parents are more than just simply taxpayers. The family is the basis of society, not the government. Strong parents make stronger families and, all together, they make for a strong society. If a woman does not want to go back to work after she has kids, we should not just let her, we should help her.

For the member to consider that women are nothing more than a taxpayer is a frightening insinuation. Does the Liberal government just view Canadians, especially Canadian moms, as just a source of income? If so, that is really worrying. The state is not the be-all and

end-all solution for everything. Parents do not get up in the morning and head out the door to their jobs while thinking with pride about the taxes that are going to be carved out of their paycheques, but rather about how to pay for the food that their children are going to eat or how to pay for the mortgage that puts a roof over their heads, how they are going to save enough money to hopefully go on a vacation or maybe to have their kids sign up to play hockey, to put their kids in gymnastics or to have their kids take music lessons. Those are some of the finer things we are able to do as Canadian citizens. We cannot put a dollar value on parenting, and it is certainly not \$10 a day.

Parenting, for many of us, is something in our bones, what we were created for. The government is looking at Canadians and thinking about its return on investment, not about how it can support Canadians living life the way they want to, including as a stay-at-home parent. A mother who chooses to leave the workforce is not an extra cost to society. She is not a burden or a strain or a negative, by any stretch of the imagination. Moms are not a commodity to be given a dollar value. People have tried to determine the hourly cost of motherhood, that a mom’s work is worth about \$180,000 a year. The work of a mother is absolutely priceless. We cannot put a dollar value on it.

This line of thinking, with the government’s belief that women must get back to work to pay their taxes, inherently devalues that work, the sacrifice and the unconditional love that mothers give. While child care might be \$10 a day with the rollout of this bill, there can never be a price put on being a mom, or a dad, for that matter. Our kids are our future, and their youngest years are the most important years of their lives. Do members not think that mom and dad should be with them as much as possible during that time frame? The role of the government is to act in the best interests of its citizens, so why are we not doing everything in our power to ensure our children have the strongest start possible?

As I said, this bill, Bill C-35, is narrow. It ignores and leaves behind other child care options. Back home, we know that many families share child care responsibilities. Family friends are all brought to someone’s house and a stay-at-home parent takes care of them for the day. There is no government intervention, no subsidies, just community coming together to find a solution to their needs.

Canadians who rely on others for their child care, people from their church, their neighbours, their co-workers, should be encouraged to do just that. They should not be forced to put their kids into a government-sanctioned day care. For the private child care groups put together between friends, for the stay-at-home moms who choose to leave the workforce because they see the value in spending every day with their kids, the Liberal government leaves them wanting.

Government Orders

The government must do more to tackle affordability and to enable parents to spend time with their kids. Parents know their kids better than anyone and will love their kids more than anyone else ever will. The government should not encourage the separation of child and parent, but should be actively working toward a country in which parents can spend as much time with their kids as possible. The 53% of child care centres in the country that are unlicensed are, therefore, excluded from this legislation and so, too, are the 35% of parents whose children are not in child care as they would rather stay at home with them.

• (1230)

Whether one is from urban or rural Canada, Vancouver or Swift Current, Toronto or Shaunavon, child care is something all Canadians need. Whether it is private, at a co-op, maybe over at one's grandparent's house, it could be a stay-at-home parent or a group of parents who have agreed to a cycle of taking care of the kids. However it presents itself, we know that Bill C-35 before us overlooks nearly all those people, and that does not even consider the fact that this scheme does not do anything to create new spaces. It is not growing access, which for people in the southwest matters the most.

In Saskatchewan, only 10% of kids aged zero to 12 have access to day care, either full time or part time. For the ages between zero and six, the ages managed by the agreement between the Government of Saskatchewan and the Government of Canada, that is just under 18%. For example, there is one day care facility in Saskatoon that has 90 spots available in its day home. Its waiting list had 1,900 people on it, which is 1,900 kids and families who are being overlooked by the Liberal government. Sure, the government might be trying to make day care more affordable, but if Canadians cannot get their kids into the day care, where is the benefit?

Across the provinces, we see some different approaches when it comes to delivering access to education, for example. When I came here to Ontario, I heard something in the news about how the multiple school boards work. It sounds different from the arrangements we have made in Saskatchewan or from how education funding is delivered in Alberta. Each province is responsible for its own needs in that area. We need to see the same respect shown to provinces when it comes to early child care as well.

I also want to say something my Quebec colleagues might appreciate. I hope we can work together to find some common ground whenever possible. Our friends in Quebec already have their own child care system, which has been running for decades already. I have to admit that I am not completely familiar with all the details of child care in Quebec or with the discussions they are having about it in that part of the country, but they genuinely do seem to be happy with it. However, that was long before the government in Ottawa brought forward its version of a program for national child care at the federal level. The government should not take the credit for what Quebec is doing. It also should not assume that what works in one province will work exactly the same in other provinces. There are different histories, cultures and values to consider.

The choice of parents matters the most. We need to expand their choices and not limit them, including through an affordability cri-

sis. At the end of the day, a lot of the problems they face come down to the fact that this is a country where people can barely afford to live at all. After all, 51% of Canadians are \$200 away from bankruptcy. Most women in Canada are having fewer children than they want, and it is partly because they cannot deal with the economic burden that comes with parenthood. The root of the problem is not child care; it is affordability. It is the fact that Canadians are not earning enough money to raise a family. The current government should not be putting a band-aid on the problems created by the government with social programs. It needs to address the very real concerns faced by Canadians so that they can have the kids they want and that they can raise them however they want, without the government telling them exactly what it is that they are supposed to be doing.

• (1235)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to re-engage my friend and colleague in conversation about child care.

The member did quote one thing I said to him in this debate, I think at least six months ago. What we were talking about then was the fact that the Liberal government brought forth changes to the Canada child benefit, which allows parents the choice to go down to one income and to have their Canada child benefit fill in that gap quite dramatically. That then allows a parent to parent from home. They can take maternity or paternity leave, and they can rely on grandparent support, as my colleague pointed out. However, throughout his speech, my colleague from the Conservatives continually pointed to big government programs and subsidies, and I could not help but think he was talking about the Canada child benefit.

Now, the member talked about a time in his life when they made a decision as a family to go down to one income, and it was a bit more challenging than it would have been if both parents were working, and I acknowledge that. However, there are two things. Would it not have been great if there was a subsidized child care program available so that when it was time to do chores, shopping or anything like that, there was a little extra help of \$10 a day? Would it not also have been good if, in his speech, he acknowledged the role that the Canada child benefit played in affordability?

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question, but this is the problem; there is no surge capacity or flex capacity in day care. Day care is not just a simple thing where one can drop one's kid off for an hour or two and hope that they will be looked after. That is not the way it works. People are struggling to even find spaces for their kids for the hours of work. To think that one could just drop one's kid off for an hour or two, that is not possible.

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This is how my wife and I decided to raise our kids. We take our kids with us everywhere. It is part of the process of raising a kid. When I came home after work, I would take my turn to be with the kids and to make sure that they were either napping or that their diapers were changed. I would do all the things I could so that my wife could go and do some things she wanted to do. That is the role of having two parents actively engaged in the house. That is something this program does not take into consideration.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Paupé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke about his family at length. From what I understand, this worked for how they saw things in his family.

However, I have looked at the statistics, and in Saskatchewan, more than 27% of families are single-parent families. We know that single-parent families have lower incomes. It is much more difficult for these families.

In Quebec, the introduction of early childhood centres helped in combatting poverty, especially among single-parent families. I would like my colleague to tell me what he thinks of that. It seems to me that it would be a good idea to provide child care services to the entire population. Those who make other choices can go ahead and do that, but this is a good way of reducing poverty.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, I am happy that the member raised that point, because I do think that a part of the Canadian population that gets forgotten about probably more than any other is single mothers.

I think that if the program had been focused on ensuring that those women were prioritized, that would have been a better direction to go with a program like this. If we are going to be subsidizing day care nationally, I think that would have been a much better approach to take because that is a segment of society that is looking to get more help than people who still have two parents in the home. I think that making sure we are focused on the right groups, the right segments of society, is what the government needs to do more.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am always humoured when I see some of the Conservative males talk about the plight of the single mother. I actually was one. In any case, he spoke a lot about unpaid care work that is done by women, and primarily by women, as I would agree, such as child-rearing and looking after aging parents. One of the reasons I put forward a guaranteed livable basic income was to provide income for unpaid care work.

I know the member spoke a lot about his partner and about how the amount she should be paid is \$180,000 a year. I was wondering whether he would support his wife's supporting my bill and giving her a guaranteed livable basic income so she could live in dignity and not in poverty while she raises his kids at home.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, my wife gets her dignity through the fact that she is able to be a mother. She is raising her kids. She does not get her dignity through government handouts to her. That is not where she derives her value from. My wife knows

that the value she brings to our family unit is from the way she raises our kids and the way we purposely sat down together to formulate that plan so she could have the best possible opportunity to go ahead.

We did that without government intervention because we do not think it is up to the government to tell us how to spend our money and how to raise our kids. Again, my wife gets her dignity not from the government but from the things she is able to do and contribute, which is raising our kids. Now she has the freedom to be able to go back to work; she has done that and continues to be the most amazing mother to our three kids.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I love how my colleague speaks about his wife and his children. Knowing him on a personal level, I know how valuable his children and family life are to him.

Going back to what he was talking about with the single moms, we have the stats here right now coming out of the child care program. I will reiterate what he was saying; 77% of high-income parents access child care, versus 41% of low-income families. Does he think we should be prioritizing those people who are most vulnerable and who need this most but who are not getting access to it fairly?

It is proven through the stats that the \$10-a-day child care program by the Liberals and NDP is not equitable. What does the member have to say about that?

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, that is another excellent point, and I do need to thank the member for all of the time, effort and hard work she has put into this particular topic. I know it is something she is very passionate about, as a fantastic mother.

When the government is designing and developing programs, that is who they should be targeted to. The government should be looking after people who are the most vulnerable and people who are the most at risk. When we hear alarming statistics, such as that people whom this program should be geared toward are struggling to even find a space, let alone access to the program, that is very alarming.

There are other government policies out there that disproportionately affect and impact single mothers. One of them is the carbon tax, and there are also the clean fuel standards and the clean electricity standards the government is putting forward. Single mothers are listed as the most vulnerable to be impacted in a negative way by those standards, yet the government is plowing ahead with them anyway.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will take this opportunity to highlight that, in my province of New Brunswick, advocates have been calling for decades for access to a public child care system. They are really excited to see the advances that our government has made. Of course, we need to be there to support providers as this transition occurs and moves us to where we really want to see access to \$10-a-day child care.

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Unfortunately, the member also decided to take a swipe at the most vulnerable and speak about the issue of the guise of parental rights. I would like to ask him that question with regard to what is happening in Alberta. In consideration of parental rights, what does the member say to the parents who want gender-affirming care for their children but can now no longer access it because of government imposition?

• (1245)

Mr. Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, it is important to say that the member is misrepresenting what is going on. For parents who want gender-affirming care, the government will not be standing in the way. The Premier of Alberta has made that abundantly clear.

What people do not want to see is the government forcing, swaying or moving the conversation a certain way without parents being part of the conversation. This is because parents, not the state, are the first caregivers for our children. That is the most fundamental thing that people need to know understand. We know that parents need to always be at the table when it comes to decisions for their own children. My biggest point is that parents need to be number one as the caregivers for children. That is what we are focused on.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it looks like the Liberals have chosen to not continue speaking to this, so I am very proud to rise to speak on behalf of the residents of Kelowna—Lake Country. I will be splitting my time with the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland.

Amendments were brought forward from the Senate on Bill C-35, on child care, which is why we are here today. I would like to recognize the member for Peterborough—Kawartha and her team for all of their work on this bill, as well as for reaching out to parents and child care providers across the country. I would also like to recognize our Conservative members on the human resources committee. They brought forth common-sense amendments on this bill that were not accepted by the NDP-Liberal coalition. I will speak to that shortly.

Child care is an issue of great importance to many families in my community and the operators who run these centres, as they are taking care of our most important asset, our children. I want to thank them for the vital and important work that they do. As a working mom, I can say that child care was very important to me and our family. That was back when maternity leave was only six months.

I have unfortunately heard from many residents of Kelowna—Lake Country about the shortage of day care spaces, as well as the unaffordability of child care. I have also heard from operators, often young female entrepreneurs, of the challenges they are facing as well. If not resolved, these challenges may put them out of business for good, leaving families struggling to find a child care space that does not exist.

As the Conservative vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I am very familiar with Bill C-35, as it came before Conservative colleagues and me at that committee. We have to remember that this legislation is coming after agreements were already signed and implemented with the provinces.

Conservatives have also offered several other amendments at the committee stage to correct serious failures in this legislation. These are faults that have been apparent from the beginning of this NDP-Liberal government's approach to child care. Sadly, those amendments were voted down, and as a result, we are now seeing many of the consequences of their approach.

Parents are now facing wait-lists that have not gotten better. Child care centres are being forced to close their doors forever. The wealthy are getting access to \$10-a-day child care spaces. The Liberal child care plan had no means testing. In fact, it does not even tie to whether the parent who is looking to access the \$10-a-day child care even works or wants to work.

Let us look at the numbers. A Fraser Institute report, published just this month, showed that 77% of high-income parents access child care compared to 41% of low-income families. It should also be common sense that a high-income household does not need the government subsidy to access the same level to child care that a single working mother would need.

Accessible child care should be available to all working women, but many people are questioning how these government programs are good for working women and the families that need access to affordable child care. Despite the claims from the Liberals that their child care plans would allow more women to be in our workforce, that same Fraser Institute study found that labour force participation for women in September 2023 has dropped when compared to participation in September of 2015. This report also said, "There is also little evidence that the federal government is achieving its [second] goal of boosting the labour force participation of women with children."

After eight years of high taxes, high inflation, high interest rates and more debt, we can add fewer women with children working to the NDP-Liberal government's list of accomplishments. Young women have also suffered. The Liberal's most recent labour force survey, published in January of 2024, showed that over the last year, the employment of young women has cumulatively declined by 4.2%. Outside of the pandemic, that is the lowest it has been since the year 2000, which was, interestingly, under the last Liberal government.

The young female entrepreneurs in the child care sector have been left behind. These are operators who are often working extended hours and days compared to the many large not-for-profit operators. Even if they are fully licensed from the provincial government, they operate within and follow all provincial regulations. The so-called feminist Liberals have not made them a priority to access the federal funding to bring down costs to the parents they serve. It is right in the Liberal legislation.

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• (1250)

We have quickly discovered that these female entrepreneurs are not a priority in the NDP-Liberal government's child care plan. What they envisioned was that they could build something for themselves, a child care program that could be flexible for night-time or weekend workers, better available to rural working families and cater exclusively to children with special needs. These are exactly the types of choices parents are asking for.

Ottawa has a role in helping build out child care in Canada, but it cannot do that if it only looks to work against the headwinds of what the real demands are and local situations are of working families.

The NDP-Liberal agreements have been opposed to the kinds of child care that often allow more flexibility, such as what women entrepreneurs provide. They may provide different availability and attainability to preferred government-run or not-for-profit centres. If these operations have challenges to staying open, the numbers of child care spaces will actually decline.

This is not the fault of any child care worker or any organization in the child care sector, whether it be private, public or not-for-profit. It is the fault of a badly designed government program.

I recently met with a well-run, not-for-profit child care centre in my community. This experienced operator was equally frustrated with the system. She talked about the bureaucracy that has been created that is making it very difficult for both her organization and parents to wade through.

The fact is that, since the Liberal government started its child care program, we have seen fewer children in child care in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, the number of children under the age of five in child care fell by 118,000 between 2019 and 2023, which is a decrease of 8.5% nationally. Statistics Canada also showed that 26% of parents of children under the age of five who were not using child care reported that their child was on a wait-list, which is 7% higher than it was in 2022. As well, 47% of infants younger than one year not in child care were on a wait-list, which is an increase of 38% compared to early 2022.

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC said that there were 130,000 licensed child care spaces in the province and that 75% of children aged zero to 12 are not able to access them.

A common-sense Conservative government would bring common sense back to child care policy. Only Conservatives would fight for equal access to child care and choice for parents. We support all forms of child care, and this is something we tried to put in through amendments at the committee stage with this legislation, whether it be for traditional day care centres; centres with extended, part-time or overnight care; nurseries; flexible and drop-in care; before- and after-school care; preschools; co-op child care; faith-based care; unique programming to support children with disabilities; home-based child care; nannies and shared nannies; au pairs; stay-at-home parents; guardians who raise their own children or family members; or friends or neighbours who provide care.

The NDP-Liberal government has only brought costs, crime and crisis to families. After eight years of the Liberal Prime Minister,

housing prices have doubled, food bank usage is at its highest, violent crime is up 32% and inflation is creating financial anxiety. There are 22 people dying each day by the opioid crisis, and our health care system is in shambles.

On top of this, in B.C., with the federal Liberals supporting B.C. drug policies, people taking their children to parks have to deal with open drug use. I spoke with a child care provider recently who told me that they often walk the kids to a local park to play, and though they scan the park before the children play, they are often terrified that they may have missed something because they often find drug paraphernalia.

I do have quite a number of articles from over the last month. I will just reference a couple because I know I am running out of time. First of all, Castanet said that the Kelowna child care crisis is being “amplified” and “not helped by government fee program.” Another headline reads “Edmonton daycares closed” due to protest. Another reads, “Child-care costs are dropping across Canada. But some families are still waiting years for spaces.” These headlines go on on, and these are headlines from just over the last month.

• (1255)

Conservatives will honour the existing provincial child care agreements. However, we will work toward fixing what the government has broken, so parents will have the choice and flexibility that the NDP-Liberal costly coalition has not allowed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives change their tone from one speech to the next. Earlier today, we were treated to an episode of *Father Knows Best*, where the woman stays at home and the man goes to work. There are lots of different approaches, mentalities and ways of doing things. I do not think that we should judge other people's choices.

That being said, the early childhood education program has proven its worth in Quebec. It has allowed many mothers, often single mothers, to pursue their careers and professional goals. It is also a choice that deserves respect. We should consider extending the same opportunity to all women and parents outside Quebec, so that they can enjoy the same benefits as women and parents in Quebec.

Would my colleague not agree that we can let people choose to have one parent stay home and care for the children while the other goes to work, but also offer everyone the option, to the extent possible, of allowing both parents to go to work while their children receive proper care from specialized educators doing an excellent job?

[English]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Speaker, certainly it is all about what is best for families. Every family will be different, whatever its choice is going to be and whatever its situation is.

I know there have been a lot of references to Quebec's system being the model. In fact Quebec has a different system than other provinces have, but I do recall hearing testimony at committee that said there are still a lot of children on wait-lists, even in Quebec. Therefore we need to work toward having the maximum amount of availability and flexibility, not only within the child care system but also for families.

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her work on this file. I have a couple of questions regarding contradictions I have heard coming from the other side on the topic of child care.

The Conservatives will acknowledge a worker shortage and will acknowledge the need for choice, but they will skip over, gloss over or perhaps just not acknowledge the fact that the program is directly responsible for a couple of things: It is filling the gap for a lot of sectors that were looking for workers, and it has also led to the highest-ever female participation in the economy, which is something worth celebrating because it is all about choice and affordability for families.

Therefore, will the member opposite not acknowledge that our changes to the Canada child benefit have benefited families greatly from an affordability perspective, and that the early learning and child care program right across the country, which was negotiated with each province for individual differences, has led to great affordability changes for families right across this country?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Speaker, first of all, what the member is referencing is not factually correct. Statistics Canada actually shows that female participation is down, so I am not sure what old statistics he might be looking at.

We just have to look at the headlines over the last month. What we have seen is that the child care system is in crisis and that the policies the government has put together have not made a substantial difference. In many ways, when we look at the numbers, we see they are actually worse.

I will also note that I just find it incredibly interesting that the spokesperson whom the government has speaking to this very important child care bill today, which basically affects families and especially women in the workforce, is someone who does not have children himself.

• (1300)

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, from what I understood, the member was saying that the bill would discriminate

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against a certain type of care. I wonder whether she could point to where in the bill it talks about this discrimination. What I understand is that the bill states there needs to be a prioritization for public over private child care, and that it would not prevent any other care from being addressed by the bill.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of regions in the country, especially in rural areas, that may not have government-run or large not-for-profit centres, and in fact a lot of care providers are in smaller entrepreneurial-type situations and focus on cultural needs. Therefore there is a huge gap that this would not address.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise to speak on Bill C-35. I want to start by addressing some of the amendments that were put forward by the other place.

In the initial part of this bill, there was no reference to official language minority communities, and it was Conservative amendments, made during the clause-by-clause review at the Standing Committee on Human Rights, that introduced these safeguards for our very important minority-language communities. We know that early child care is a crucial period for language learning and for the identity development of children. Access to French language early child care services is so necessary as a condition for the transmission of languages that have been transmitted by families over generations.

Several examples demonstrate the necessity of including these provisions in the bill. In Alberta, out of the so-called 1,500 new day care spaces announced by the government, only 19 were being allocated for francophones. That constitutes only 0.013% of all spaces, despite francophones representing 2% of the population of Alberta. It is important to protect these communities and their part in Canadian heritage that helped to build this nation, whether they be francophones in Alberta or anglophones in Quebec.

I want to talk about the great francophone heritage of my community. A gentleman, Ben Van De Walle, who is the son of the late, great member of Parliament from my area, Walter Van De Walle, who represented the great francophone communities of Morinville, Rivière Qui Barre and Legal. We have a very strong francophone identity in Sturgeon River—Parkland, and the Conservative amendments would go a long way to preserving our French-language heritage in our region.

Now that I have addressed these amendments, I want to talk about what I see as the unravelling disaster we are seeing because of the Liberal government's failed approach to child care. The proposed legislation and the current agreements made by the government with the provinces are failing to provide universal access to affordable child care and would cost far more than the government has estimated.

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Small businesses are the backbone of our society, and the predominantly female entrepreneurs who are courageously trying to build businesses and build their livelihoods through providing child care are under attack by the Liberal government. The excessive red tape and regulations of the Liberal government are preventing day care entrepreneurs from opening new spaces and expanding their businesses. They cannot get the funding because the government will not fund new spaces.

This is making child care less accessible, and it is all because of the Liberal government imposing a one-size-fits-all model on a very complex sector of our economy. In the words of some child care operators, the Liberal government is essentially expropriating and nationalizing their businesses. I will use the words of one operator from Fort McMurray who said that, basically, they will “have no business” under the Liberal plan.

One of the government's tired talking points is its insistence that it has evidence-based policies. A more appropriate term would be evidence that is selective that corresponds with its ideological agenda. Let us go over some of the facts. As of the statistics published on February 6, just a short time ago, 77% of high-income parents have access to child care, and this compares to only 41% of low-income parents who have access to child care. It is a yawning gap.

I find it somewhat comedic that a Bloc MP earlier talked about how great this program is for single mothers. The University of British Columbia did a study in that province, in which it contacted all the child care centres to find out how many low-income single mothers were benefiting from this program. Across the entire province of British Columbia, it found 17 who were benefiting. There were only 17 single mothers benefiting, in the province of British Columbia, from the Liberals' failed day care policy.

Since 2019, the number of children under the age of five in child care has fallen under the Liberal government by 118,000 spaces. This is a decrease of 8.5% nationally. There was 46.4% of parents who reported difficulty in finding child care in 2023, which is up from 36.4% of parents in 2019. This is a problem that existed before the government's policy, but it is a problem that is only getting worse under the government's failed policy.

In fact, I personally know people who can only get one of their two children in child care, and they have to stay home to take care of the other children. These people are nurses and other skilled workers who cannot pursue their careers because the current government has made it more difficult for them to access any child care. It does not matter if it says it is affordable. If I could get 50¢ gas at the gas station, that would be great, but if there was never any gas at the gas station, it would not matter how affordable the price was.

Why is child care so expensive? We know that the key costs for child care, according to the operators, in order of magnitude, are labour costs, the cost of the facilities and the cost of food and other supplies.

• (1305)

Child care is a labour-intensive operation. The cost to create a space that is appropriate for children and the accompanying mortgage, rental costs, insurance costs and maintenance costs are ex-

remely significant. Finally, the cost of food and other supplies has increased dramatically under this inflationary government.

What is a factor in all three of these costs? It is high inflation, which has increased the cost of labour, rent, mortgages, insurance and food at the local store. The price of food has gone up by 12%. Child care operators are not immune from these costs. They do not get some special discount at the store because they are child care operators.

The fact is that the Liberal government, through its inflationary policies, is driving up the costs to care for children in Canada. At the same time that it is driving up all of these costs, it is short-changing child care operators by only giving them a 3% annual increase in their funding. They cannot support children when food prices are going up 12%, when wage costs are going up, and when mortgage costs are doubling and tripling, and rental costs are tripling. They cannot support these children with only a 3% increase from the government.

The Liberal government is expecting these predominantly female business owners to eat these costs. Consequently, it is causing them to shut down their business, to reduce spaces and restrict access to child care for Canadians.

In the child care sector in Alberta, we are already seeing the consequences of this inflationary agenda. Last month, parents in my riding were unable to get child care, because of closures in protest of these Liberal policies. Operators have described these agreements as underfunded and inflexible, and say that they threaten the financial viability of operators by placing fee caps and other restrictions on facilities that are struggling with these increased costs.

The owner of My Happy Place Daycare, in Stony Plain, Alberta said:

Right now, we are stuck between a rock and a hard place...Just being closed for the day has a huge impact. Imagine what would happen if day care centres across the province started closing their doors because they're going bankrupt.

I fear that because of these Liberals' ideological approach to child care, that is a future that we are seeing coming very quickly.

The proposed solution for inflation by proponents of even more government intervention in early child care is, no surprise, more inflationary spending. The government has tried to raise the wages of child care workers, but this is putting us into a wage spiral, because other groups that are competing for child care workers, such as school boards, are also raising their wages in order to compete for these workers.

In one case I spoke to a mother who worked in child care previously, before the government's policies were in place. She worked in child care because she received a significant discount for her own child's care at that facility. Once the government brought in its policies, her day care operator got rid of the discount, as it was not necessary anymore. She lost her incentive to work in child care. She has left that sector. Now there is one less child care worker.

I have spoken with child care operators who have had to pay increased rents and mortgages on their facilities. As everyone knows, mortgages and rental rates are skyrocketing after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, particularly in the last year.

Under agreements the government has signed, child care operators are limited in the costs they can bill the government toward their rent and mortgage. Since they are mandated to only charge families a fixed price, there is no way these operators can make up the difference other than by reducing other costs. What are these costs? It is food and craft supplies. Do we really want to talk about reducing the quality of the food and the quality of the programming for our children, just so these day care operators could make up the costs of skyrocketing mortgages and rents, because the Liberal government will not support them?

What is actually happening now is that they are just choosing to shut down instead. They do not want to provide subpar care for children under the Liberal policies, so they are just shutting down altogether. It is terrible to see.

The laws of supply and demand mean that the government must either restrict the capacity of day cares or dramatically increase funding beyond what it has already promised. The first option is unfair. We cannot prevent people from accessing child care. Yet, what we are seeing is that it is predominantly middle- and high-income families that are getting access, and low-income families are being left out. This is backed up by research from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, which reported that the Liberal plan is not sufficient to meet the demand for child care. In fact, it will fall short in providing spaces for 182,000 children.

I said earlier that we have lost 118,000 spaces since 2019. The Liberal government is well on its way to meeting at least one of its goals, which is the reduction of child care spaces. It has reduced this number by 118,000, and the Parliamentary Budget Officer says it is going to 182,000 under the Liberal policies.

That is what we are already seeing in Alberta. Operators are struggling to stay open. They are closing down. They are reducing spaces. It is lowering accessibility for families.

● (1310)

We cannot continue going down this road. We need a new way to move forward. We need to support all child care operators, regardless of the model that they choose. We need to provide not only affordability for families but accessibility for families, and we are not getting it under this failed NDP-Liberal policy.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (deputy House leader of the government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the member brought up grocery prices.

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I am curious as to how surprised he was when he found out that a paid lobbyist regularly attends his caucus meetings in order to provide strategy to the Leader of the Opposition, somebody who is directly profiting from the crisis that people are faced with, the inflation as it relates to groceries.

If he would rather not answer that question, then I would just encourage him to pivot to something else.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, I am not afraid to answer that question, because, after eight years of this Liberal-NDP government, I am surprised that Loblaws even needs lobbyists, considering how much this government has given them: free refrigerators paid for by taxpayers and skyrocketing increases to grocery prices. This government has been in the pocket of big grocery stores.

As I said in my speech, it is the children who are suffering. The child care operators cannot afford to provide quality food for our children under the Liberals' failed policies.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is very simple.

Did I understand correctly? Will the Conservatives vote against the bill on the pretext that a program like this is not perfect? They will not bother to enshrine in law something that has worked for Quebec for 25 years and that could be good for others. Is that correct?

[*English*]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. Conservatives are not against the principle of affordable and accessible child care for children. There is no issue with that.

The question is, how do we provide affordable and accessible child care?

There needs to be a balance. Clearly, under this government's policy of so-called \$10-a-day child care, which nobody can access, particularly low-income families, accessibility has become a real problem that it is not dealing with.

We know from the province of Quebec that there are hundreds of thousands of children who are not able to access subsidized child care. It is a real problem in the province of Quebec. It is a problem across the country, and we need to deal with this accessibility problem.

Without accessibility, affordability does not matter.

● (1315)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke to the issues that still surround this day care program from the perspective of the people who are trying to use it.

I know that in my riding we have one community, as an example, that is rural, with a lot of people who work shift work. There are three businesses there, run by women, that do not have the opportunity to get the provisions that other organizations do.

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Can he explain, possibly, to the House why it is that the Liberal government is against day cares in which women have the opportunity not only to care for children, which we are innately good at overall, but also to run a very profitable and successful business doing that?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, dealing with the challenges in rural communities and raising children in rural communities is very important. I think it has been left out by the government. I want to be clear. It is predominantly small and medium-sized enterprises that are suffering under the Liberals' day care policies. The big box day cares, the Starbucks of day cares, are not suffering.

In fact, they are actually benefiting, because when the small and medium-sized players are going bankrupt under these government policies, it is the bigger businesses with the deeper pockets that are able to make the biggest gains.

What we see is that, in rural communities, these big box day cares do not want to set up.

We are not only seeing an accessibility problem in the cities, where people cannot access care; we are seeing a complete child care desert in our rural areas. That is clearly not acceptable in a country that values its rural regions.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard the arguments from our Conservative counterparts, always talking about the state of women-owned businesses. What they seem to fail to recognize is that this sector of the care economy also depends on many female workers, yet this member of the Conservative Party talked about a wage spiral, as though inflating wages, increasing the wages of workers, is somehow a bad thing.

Is it his economic theory that this sector depends on the exploitation of women workers in order to provide affordable child care?

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Speaker, I think some of the member's outrage is somewhat misplaced. I am not against people getting the best possible wage they can negotiate to do the job they want to do, but we have to recognize that we are in an economy where there is high demand for care workers. We have demand for early childhood educators in the school sector and in the day care sector, and when wages go up in one sector, they need to go up in the other sector. What we are doing is creating a spiral, but we are not addressing—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member.

[*Translation*]

We are way over time.

The hon. parliamentary secretary on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Mr. Speaker, in response to the member for Kelowna—Lake Country's suggestion that since I do not have children I am a bad advocate or spokesperson for early learning and child care, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to table evidence of Canada's record labour force participation rate for women.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are rising today to talk about amendments to Bill C-35. All 338 of us value child care and the tremendous work of moms, dads, grandparents and other individuals who love and take care of children from coast to coast to coast.

Before I even commence my speech, I would just like to thank all the parents and child care providers from coast to coast, whether they are a grandma at the end of the street, a dad staying home to make sure their kid gets the love they want or a provider at a licensed child care centre working an extra half-hour or 45 minutes to wait for parents who are held up at work. Really, there is no more critical work than helping our children develop and become that next great generation.

I want to talk a bit about statistics, because they were mentioned earlier in the debate. When it comes to child care, the current stats from the Fraser Institute's report published on February 6 are that 77% of high-income parents report that they have access to child care, whereas 41% of low-income families have access to child care. It really strikes me that this legislation does not have any particular dedicated support for those who are most vulnerable.

Those children are not only fighting the challenges that all children are fighting, whether that is bullying or the challenges of growing up; they are also fighting poverty, and this legislation has no support for those children who are having to brave those incredibly difficult challenges that poverty brings with it. While we are giving 77% of high-income parents access to child care, we are only giving it to 41%, which is less than half, of those children who are fighting through all the additional struggles in addition to the challenges of poverty.

Also mentioned before was the labour participation of women. According to the same report, in September 2023, it was at 61.5%. Compare that to 2015 under Prime Minister Harper and the Conservatives, it was at 61.7%, so the participation of women in the labour market has declined. Those are the numbers on that, so hopefully that ends the debate right there.

On top of that, according to another Fraser Institute study published on February 6, the employment rate of female youth is on a strong downward trend since February 2023. The cumulative decline of 4.2% over the period is a huge number. That is hundreds and thousands of young women who are not getting into the labour force. This is the lowest it has been since May 2000, excluding the pandemic, according to the labour force survey of January 2024.

This program is, of course, predicated on the fact that it would enable parents, both men and women, but if we call a spade a spade it is predominantly women, get back into the workforce, if they so choose, and the numbers just do not bear that out.

Government Orders

Some more numbers for members are 47% of infants younger than one year and not in child care were on a wait list, increasing from 38% in 2022—

• (1320)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Madam Speaker, I just asked to table record labour force participation rates, and I was denied by the Conservatives, so I would ask that, if the member opposite—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): That is a point of debate and not a point of order. The hon. member already attempted to table the document, and there was no unanimous consent. I suggest that the hon. parliamentary secretary visit all the parties of the House to try to obtain unanimous consent before he comes back to attempt to table the document.

The hon. member for Northumberland—Peterborough South.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I would say that the Liberals have actually foregone speaking times in this debate. If the member wants to jump in, he should talk to his whip.

Last but not least, Sharon Gregson of the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. says that while there are 130,000 licensed child care spaces in the province, 75% of children aged zero to 12 are unable to access them. It does not matter how inexpensive child care is if parents cannot access it. It is a fantasy.

I have seen this in my riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South. Numerous parents have come to or called our office and said, “Mr. Lawrence, we heard through the media that there would be \$10-a-day day care,” and I have had to report to them that, unfortunately, there are a very limited number of spots, and most Canadians cannot access them. That is from the parents' perspective.

Let us hear what the child care providers have had to say. This is from a report in Global News about two weeks ago:

A number of Alberta child care facilities shut their doors Tuesday, protesting what they say are problems with the \$10-a-day child-care program.

The Association of Alberta Childcare Entrepreneurs said the job action is meant to draw attention to the issues that come with offering parents low-cost child care without ensuring the cost of delivery is still covered.

“It’s been underfunded from the beginning,” said Krystal Churcher, the chair of the Association of Alberta Childcare Entrepreneurs. “There is not enough funding to ensure that the level of quality is going to be continuing on at a high level in this province.”

“You can’t even buy coffee and a muffin for \$10 a day,” said Churcher. “We’re walking out in protest.”

We see, all the time, grandstanding from the government: big spending announcements and big plans. Although admittedly it is just tangentially related, I recently had the opportunity to ask the housing minister in finance committee about his housing accelerator program. I asked what I would have thought was a very straightforward, easy question for him to answer: How many houses has the housing accelerator built? I asked two or three times but did not get an answer until finally the minister admitted that the housing accelerator is not there to build houses. That is pretty much a word-for-word quote. The housing accelerator is great at building bureaucracy and the government is great at doing photo ops, but it is not

delivering child care for Canadians and it is not delivering housing for Canadians.

I could go on, but I would like to talk about the substance of the amendment to Bill C-35. The original terms made no reference to the official language minority communities, a very important group. We need to protect our official languages. We need to make sure that French continues to grow. I attend my French classes every day because I believe it is absolutely critical we all take this seriously and help grow the beautiful French language.

The Senate proposed an amendment to the bill to include a reference to OLMCs in section 8 to eliminate any ambiguity before the courts. I will remind the House that section 8 reads:

The Government of Canada commits to maintaining long-term funding for early learning and child care programs and services, including early learning and child care programs and services for Indigenous peoples. The funding must be provided primarily through agreements with the provincial governments, Indigenous governing bodies and other Indigenous entities that represent the interests of an Indigenous group and its members.

Bill C-35 unanimously passed through the House last year. When it made it to the Senate, Senator Cormier, an Acadian who has stood up for francophones in the past and continues to do so, wanted to add the words “official language minority communities” to the first sentence of the section, which states, “including early learning and child care programs and services for Indigenous peoples,” and he divided section 8 into two paragraphs.

• (1325)

The first paragraph sets out the government's financial commitment. The second paragraph outlines the mechanisms the federal government will use to provide the funding. Adding the words “official language minority communities” after the word “including” does not detract from any rights of any other minority or of indigenous peoples, but seeks to eliminate any ambiguity before the courts.

Early childhood development is incredibly critical for kids. As I said when I started my speech today, and as we heard many speakers talk so eloquently about, as a government, we need to put children first. We need to make sure that we put out solutions and programs and that we do not limit or impair the ability of parents to raise their children.

I look forward to continuing the dialogue and the discussion on this topic and to celebrating—

• (1330)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I apologize for interrupting. It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS***[English]***CRIMINAL CODE**

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC) moved that Bill C-321, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (assaults against persons who provide health services and first responders), be read the third time and passed.

He said: Madam Speaker, it is a great honour to rise once again in this chamber to speak to a bill that is near and dear to my heart. I rise today to speak on behalf of the hundreds and thousands of brave men and women who are our hometown heroes; they are our nurses, our health care workers, our firefighters, our paramedics, our first responders and our correctional officers.

Bill C-321, an act to amend the Criminal Code, assaults against persons who provide health services and first responders, would amend the Criminal Code by adding section 269.02, which would make an offence against a health care provider or first responder an aggravating factor upon sentencing. Our health care providers and first responders need to be assured that if they are attacked, assaulted or harassed while on the job, there is a strong legal mechanism in place to deliver them justice. As it stands today, that protection simply does not exist.

Bill C-321 would serve three main purposes: one, it would be a powerful deterrent to those who seek to commit violence against our frontline heroes; two, it would signal to frontline workers that we value them, that we are looking out for them and that the justice system will protect them; and three, it would help throw weight behind a national conversation that needs to be had to start making these workplaces safer. To put it more simply, Bill C-321 is about protecting those who protect us. The importance of this legislation cannot be overstated.

Our health care providers and our first responders truly are Canadian heroes. They put their lives and their personal safety on the line each and every day. How many people can say that same? We have fallen far when it is okay to hunt and to target firefighters, who are just trying to save lives; to hunt and to target nurses and paramedics, who are simply trying to provide care to the sick and wounded? These are our frontline heroes, and the reality is that they have to deal with these traumatic occurrences each and every day.

Firefighters, police officers, correctional officers, nurses and doctors put on their uniforms each and every day to serve us and our families. They do so knowing and expecting that they are going to face violence and harassment. They heal our wounds. They run into burning buildings. They run toward danger when others run away. They dedicate their lives to protecting us and those we love: our neighbours, our friends, our families. Who protects them? Right now, there is no one.

Everyone deserves a workplace free from violence and abuse. When one starts a career in health care or as a first responder, one does so to serve one's community and to make a difference. Nowhere in the job description does it say that one should be signing on for a life of violence, abuse and harassment. When did vio-

lence in the workplace every become the norm? We cannot tolerate this any longer. We have to act.

Many of our great men and women, nurses and paramedics, firefighters and correctional officers have shared their personal stories with me, and I am sure they have done the same with many of our colleagues as well. We cannot turn on the TV or scroll through social media without seeing yet another story of a violent attack on a paramedic or a nurse.

Recently, I visited a medical facility, and I witnessed the aftermath of a bloody assault on a nurse. It was horrible to see this young nurse absolutely battered. All that nurse was trying to do was to take the temperature of a patient. When I spoke with the supervisor of that particular nurse, I was told that it was the second incident of violence in a month. It is crazy how far we have fallen when our paramedics have to put on bulletproof vests just to start their shifts and to make it through a shift.

● (1335)

When we hear those stories we do not know how to respond. It is difficult to imagine the things they go through. It is hard to hear. What I know is that we need to act. We need to do everything in our power to make a difference in these heroes' lives. Whether they are a nurse, a personal care worker, a paramedic, a firefighter, a correctional officer or a psychiatric nurse who is simply performing their duties, they are all facing increasing rates of violence on a daily basis. We need them to know that they are cherished and that someone is looking out for them. We need them to know that there is somebody who is fighting for them.

We as parliamentarians can be their champions. We have the sole constitutional power to create law, and we must use that power to demonstrate to the world that in Canada, violence perpetrated against health care providers and first responders is unacceptable. We will not stand for it. On the contrary, we will stand firmly against it.

To anyone watching or listening right now, I urge them to go look back at the witness testimony from when Bill C-321 was at the justice committee. Some of the stories these brave paramedics, nurses and firefighters have shared with us were absolutely horrific. I would like to highlight some of the testimony for my colleagues here now.

Testimony from Dr. Elizabeth Donnelly, associate professor at the University of Windsor and a member of the violence in paramedicine research group reads:

Violence against paramedics is wildly under-reported, primarily due to a culture of under-reporting and this idea that tolerating violence has become an expected professional competency.

Violence reporting [has been slowly] increasing, and while it's still under-reported, our research has found that paramedics are reporting violence every 18 hours, are assaulted every 46 hours and experience violence that results in physical harm every nine days.

Linda Silas, President of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Union, said this:

The facts are shocking...In 2023, a pan-Canadian survey of nurses was done. Two-thirds reported incidents of physical assaults over the past year and 40% of those nurses reported physical abuse more than once a month while engaged in their duties.

She also said:

Exposure to violence predicts negative mental health outcomes, including PTSD...78.5% [of nurses] report symptoms of burnout. Similar data is seen with public safety personnel.

Danette Thomsen of the B.C. nurses union said:

What about the nurse in rural B.C. who, last January, entered a female patient's room and was attacked? Can you imagine being held over a chair, receiving punch after punch, with handfuls of your hair being pulled out, while waiting frantically for help to come from the RCMP?

Paul Hills, president of the Saskatoon Paramedics Association and a member of the International Association of Fire Fighters, speaking on the daily experience of paramedics across Canada, said this:

We normally start our 12-hour shift with a team briefing. We check our trucks and then it's go, go, go. We rarely have any breaks. That means no breakfast, no lunch and no supper as compared with the average worker, not to mention all while experiencing some of the most horrific and heart-wrenching situations that exist in society—incidents involving children being stabbed by their parents, or families tragically dying in motor vehicle [accidents].

He went on:

Personally, I've had my life and those of my family threatened by gang members. I've had machetes and knives pulled on me. I've removed guns from patients while attending to their medical needs.

Mr. Hills continued:

In Toronto just two weeks ago, a firefighter attempting to put out a fire in an encampment was attacked with a six-foot piece of PVC piping and hit in the face for no reason whatsoever.

In British Columbia, interactions with overdose patients have become violent or aggressive once we've rendered medical care to save their lives.

In Winnipeg, a firefighter got stabbed in the back while attending to a patient on a sidewalk.

I could spend the rest of the hour sharing real-life events—my partner here could as well—of violent acts or near misses, but the takeaway is that it's real. It's happening right now.

If that is not enough evidence, I am not sure what is, but the violence that our health care providers and first responders face on a daily basis has hidden consequences that go beyond the physical risks. There is a growing body of research showing that increased violence is correlated to higher rates of depression, anxiety, stress, suicidal ideation and burnout.

● (1340)

Critically, exposure to on-the-job violence has been strongly identified with a rising intent to leave the job. We live in a time when we need our health care providers and first responders more than ever, but our nurses, paramedics, firefighters and more are looking to leave their jobs rather than continuing to suffer the abuse they experience. The violence and abuse they constantly face leads to fear, to fatigue and to burnout; and it leads to serious morale and recruitment issues. Why would they not want to leave? How are employers going to recruit somebody with that type of job description, under those conditions? Why should we expect people to keep

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fighting, day in and day out, for us, with no thanks and no appreciation, if we cannot fight for them?

Our frontline heroes need our support. They need recognition. They need our help. Bill C-321 is the necessary first step to work toward those goals. Many parties have a role to play in addressing this crisis, and those actors and those parties need to step up to the plate. Talk is cheap. As parliamentarians, we are limited in offering solutions, but what we can do we should do. We can do our part by amending the Criminal Code and passing Bill C-321 into law now. I do not think it is a controversial debate. We all want to come together on this in a non-partisan fashion to get things done for our health care providers and our first responders.

We have already heard speeches and witness testimonies that Bill C-321 is complementary to the changes made in the earlier Bill C-3, and we know that Bill C-321 came out of the 2019 HESA recommendations from the report on violence against first responders. We know that the relevant stakeholder groups are overwhelmingly supportive of this legislation. If the status quo on an assault charge were a sufficient deterrent, this debate would be irrelevant, but clearly, as so many witnesses have testified before the justice committee, there is nothing currently in the law that acts as a strong enough deterrent for the increasing rates of violence experienced by health care providers and first responders.

That is why the International Association of Fire Fighters has publicly and vocally supported the legislation, and it is far from the only one. The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, the Paramedic Association of Canada, the Ambulance Paramedics of British Columbia, the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers, the Ontario Paramedic Association, the Paramedic Chiefs of Canada, the Manitoba Association of Fire Chiefs, the Saskatoon Paramedic Association, the British Columbia Nurses' Union and the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions have all thrown their considerable weight behind this bill. It is imperative that we listen to what these stakeholders are telling us. They are asking us for help, and they are asking us to work toward a solution together.

There are countless regional, provincial, national and international organizations that have come on board, and we know that the Canadian public is highly supportive of this initiative as well, as was reported from an Abacus Data poll conducted in November, which showed that 83% of Canadians support making assault against health care providers and first responders a more serious offence in the Criminal Code.

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We must take this first step toward showing our frontline heroes that we hear them, that we are here for them, that we value them immensely, that we will always have their backs, that we appreciate them and that we will fight to protect them. That is our duty. Our health care providers and our first responders need to know that Parliament, the House of elected officials and, more important, the justice system have their backs and will not let them slip through the cracks any longer.

• (1345)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is an important bill. It is a very timely bill. Just the statistics and anecdotes that were shared are just heart-wrenching, and we certainly want to support our frontline workers at every opportunity.

The member mentioned that this is an important first step and as a deterrent in our Criminal Code, it is certainly important. How do we make sure that Canadians across the country are aware of this change, that they know it is there to protect those nurses, doctors and firefighters whom the member spoke of and that they know it would have those extra penalties so that the deterrent would have the impact we want it to have?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, just the strength alone of all the associations that have come on board will help carry that message once this bill passes. However, let us not look too far past even today. We know that this bill, if passed here in this House, has to go to the other chamber. We need this bill to pass as soon as possible. The next critical step is to ensure we get swift passage at the Senate and royal assent. Only then, when this bill becomes law, can we then start saying that we are protecting those who protect us. Then we start working on the messaging.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is clear New Democrats always support the notion that all workers should be safe. The member from the Conservative caucus has gone on at length about this bill. I do not feel the need to recapitulate his arguments. I am not clear this will necessarily be a deterrent, but nevertheless here we are. We do have to make sure our first responders are adequately protected.

I believe all workers deserve to be protected. This House visited Bill C-46 back in 2015, and it was particular to transit operators. I am wondering if the hon. member would agree there needs to be a revisiting of that piece of legislation to include all transit workers in order to provide the same consideration for safety in the workplace for frontline workers, not just first responders.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, it is interesting our hon. colleague brings up transit workers and the issue of violence against them when there is legislation in place that does already protect transit workers. Whereas, Bill C-321 needs to be passed to protect those who protect us.

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, I will take this opportunity to help the member understand my question. It is clear he did not. What I said was the legislation covered transit operators, and I wondered if he would take the consideration to all transit workers, which would include the people who are cleaning up in stations or anybody who is around the system. This gives him an opportunity perhaps to better understand my question and reflect on a more adequate answer.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, I am not familiar with Bill C-46, the bill that he is referring to. If he wants to talk about that further, perhaps as a PMB bill, another PMB he would like to put forward, I will work with him on that as well.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member's passion for the safety of first responders is a credit to him. We support his bill. I know there is only a moment left, and I would like to give him a moment to provide more emphasis or to talk about anything he did not have time to get to in his speech.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, I do not think we can say thanks enough to those who put their uniforms on every day knowing full well they are going to experience absolutely the worst of society. They put their uniforms on to serve us and our families. With the increasing rates of violence, they now have to be worried whether they are actually going to be able to return home to their families. Imagine the traumatic toll it takes on someone to worry they are going to be violently attacked over the course of their day when they are just doing their duty, just doing the job they want to do and serving their country. That is what they face each and every day, and it is horrible. We need to pass Bill C-321.

• (1350)

Mr. Vance Badawey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first I want to thank the member for Cariboo—Prince George for bringing the bill forward.

I am honoured to speak to Bill C-321, an act to amend the Criminal Code with respect to assaults against persons who provide health services and first responders, and to the amendments made by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

I also want to thank the committee for its work in developing the bill into a more inclusive and robust legislative measure, one that reflects our collective commitment to the welfare of health care workers and first responders, who put their life on the line each and every day to keep Canadians and our communities safe.

Bill C-321 seeks to address the increase in violence against those who provide health services and against our first responders. It was originally tabled proposing to do so by enacting inclusion of an aggravating factor that would apply to assaults against health care professionals and first responders, as well as cases involving the uttering of threats to the same people.

As a result of its deliberations, the committee concluded that the scope of victims who would be protected by this bill needed to be expanded in recognition of the diversity within our health care services sector. Bill C-321 was amended to replace references to “a health care professional or a first responder” with “a person who provides health services, including personal care services, or a first responder”. This change was made to the proposed aggravating factor, as well as to the preamble and to the title of the bill. This is the same language from Bill C-3, which the Government passed in 2021.

This change in language would ensure that all individuals involved in providing health services, from nurses and doctors to personal care workers, abortion providers and administrative staff, benefit from the same protection against assaults and the uttering of threats while in the performance of their duties.

The committee's amendments also align with the changes brought about by our government's former Bill C-3, which received royal assent in 2021. The amendments ensured that it would be an aggravating factor for any offence of assault or uttering threats to be committed against a person who, in the performance of their duties and functions, was providing health services, including personal care services.

Former Bill C-3 also enacted new offences prohibiting intimidating and obstructing conduct directed at those providing or seeking health services. Bill C-321's proposed changes would expand criminal law measures to include first responders. This reflects our denunciation of workplace violence in these critical sectors, whose workers should never fear for their own safety or feel intimidated as they are coming from and going to work.

The changes are about recognizing the diverse roles of those individuals who contribute to our safety in our health care systems, and about our recognition that they deserve to work in an environment free from the threat of violence. They should never be the target of death threats, whether in person or through social media campaigns designed to intimidate and frighten them, yet this is happening each and every day.

The need for such comprehensive protection is based on the statistics and stories emerging from various sources. For instance, the 2019 report by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health revealed that in just one year, 61% of nurses experienced abuse, harassment or assault.

• (1355)

Firefighters and other first responders have also reported an increase in acts of violence during emergency responses. Behind these numbers are real people facing real threats, impacting not only their physical safety but also their mental health and job satisfaction, as well as, may I add, their families and the people close to them, and their neighbourhoods.

Bill C-321's proposed amendment to the Criminal Code signals to the courts that sentences should be increased to further denounce assaults committed against persons who provide health services or who are first responders. It also acknowledges their invaluable service to society, which sometimes makes them vulnerable to violence while carrying out their duties.

Additionally, this bill, with a broader scope, would provide a clearer response to conduct that disproportionately impacts women and particularly racialized women. By extending protection to all health service providers, Bill C-321 also supports the larger goals of promoting gender equality and safeguarding the rights of minority groups.

The available information regarding violence against first responders, while not extensive, clearly indicates that women in these

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roles face a heightened risk of gender-specific violence, including instances of sexual harassment and assault.

Our first responders and those in health services are working selflessly in the most trying circumstances to save lives and care for critically ill patients. Their commitment to public service often comes at a personal cost, a cost that should not include violence.

I know that the government remains steadfast in its commitment to addressing the serious issue of violence against health service providers and first responders.

Supporting Bill C-321, as amended by the committee, is a demonstration of our commitment to protect the well-being and dignity of those who serve our communities.

I want to note that it is Sexual and Reproductive Health Awareness Week. It is important to note that this legislation, as with the former bill, Bill C-3, will protect abortion providers. We have seen rises in attacks on abortion providers in various parts of the world and we want to avoid that here in Canada.

I am happy to see this bill provide another level of protection to those providers in Canada. Violence affects more than just the physical well-being of first responders and health care workers. It also has lasting consequences on their mental health. The challenges of the pandemic have intensified pre-existing problems, such as burnout and occupational stress injuries, which are often a result of traumatic experiences, including violence and abuse encountered in the workplace. These work conditions influence the decision of these crucial workers to remain in their jobs, and remain serving our communities.

This bill, in its amended form, is part of a broader conversation about how we, as a society, value and protect those who work in challenging and often dangerous environments. It challenges us to think about the kind of support and resources we provide and how to ensure that every worker in Canada can perform their duties without fear of violence or harm.

Let us honour the work of the people who provide health services, including personal care services and first responders, with actions that match their dedication.

We will continue to work to keep all Canadians safe. I urge all members to support Bill C-321 to pass, ensuring that our first responders and health care workers are protected, and that this goes to the Senate for its approval.

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• (1400)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, my mother was a nurse, my father was a volunteer firefighter, and I have a son who wants to be a police officer. I have been personally aware of the violence that we are talking about my entire life, so the bill introduced by my colleague from Cariboo—Prince George is very important to me.

Bill C-321 seeks to amend the Criminal Code to consider the fact that the victim of an assault or an act of violence is a health care worker or a first responder to be an aggravating circumstance.

The Bloc Québécois has amply demonstrated its support for such a measure. It is clear to us that health care workers and all those who work to keep us safe every day must be protected in the line of duty. If their job can be considered an aggravating circumstance during a crime, if it can help to prevent offenders from attacking them, if it can serve as a basis for harsher sentences for offenders or if it can serve to dissuade offenders from committing such acts of violence, then we are in favour of this solution. Although Bill C-321 is a partial solution, it is solution nonetheless.

I would like to talk about the principle of prevention, which I believe should also be looked at as a primary measure, an essential measure for protecting health care providers and first responders before even considering the rise in assaults that we have seen against them—in the hope that the this rise is only incidental and will not continue any further—or before even talking about aggravating circumstances, as we are currently doing with the study on Bill C-321. Prevention also has its place.

Like all my other colleagues who have spoken in the House, I think that all workers have the right to work safely. I am talking about the security that protects their physical integrity, but also their mental integrity because violence takes many forms and is not just physical. It might be wishful thinking on my part and on that of my colleagues, but I think that we need to reach for this goal and strive for workplaces that are free from any form of violence. In my opinion and that of the Bloc Québécois, that is the heart of the problem: We need to focus on eliminating all forms of violence instead of just punishing those who commit or perpetuate it.

It is true that eliminating violence is a massive undertaking if we consider, as I just mentioned, that it has been on the rise over the years. Studies show that since the pandemic, it has just kept increasing. The problem has been exacerbated.

I want to share a few figures from the field of health care. I will stick to health. For example, data from the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail, or CNESST, and the Institut national de santé publique du Québec, are unequivocal. They show that 933 assaults or violent acts were committed against health care personnel in 2012 and that 1,994 were reported in 2021 in health care workplaces across Quebec.

I would like to add, as many have, including my colleague from Cariboo—Prince George, that this is just the tip of the iceberg. These are the cases that have been reported. As in many situations of violence, including partner violence, we have the numbers that

correspond to what people have been willing to share, but we do not have them all.

We talked about prevention. My colleague also talked about the idea of opening up the discussion, making this subject public. Perhaps putting it in the public arena would make people aware that they have experienced forms of violence. It might also help them report violent incidents. In short, we are seeing a steady increase. In the figures I just mentioned, the numbers have more than doubled in 10 years. That is a massive increase.

I would also like to mention the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, which studied the subject and published a report in 2019, if I am not mistaken, on the issue of violence in health care.

During that study, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions mentioned that 61% of its members who participated in the survey said they had experienced violence. That is just among those who took part in the survey. The percentage may be higher. Still, that is 61% of members who have experienced harassment, assault or violence.

• (1405)

In 2014, 1,676 paramedics responded to a similar survey, and 75% of them reported being victims of violence. In 2010, according to the College of Family Physicians of Canada, one-third of survey participants said they had experienced this kind of violence.

Whether it is one-third, three-quarters or two-thirds, it is too much. My colleague also talked about a case of violence. I would like to share a story that happened when I was younger and has always stayed with me. As I said, my mother was a nurse. Even little kids realize when something is not right. It makes us reflect on this violence in the workplace and on the fact that some jobs may be higher-risk. A nurse was dealing with a patient who was agitated and aggressive and became violent. He decided to kick her. He kicked her in the stomach. This violence was entirely unjustified. The nurse in question was pregnant. She did not lose her baby, but she had to be hospitalized. Guess what? She decided to stop working as a nurse after that incident.

I wanted to put that on the record. All incidents we could describe here are shocking. They amount to gratuitous violence. They may all seem similar in many ways. This story illustrates the impact they can have on people's lives, on their integrity, physical health and mental health. We talked about this earlier. They also have an impact on the profession overall and on society at large. It really is a domino effect. No one is spared the consequences of such violence. As a child aware that her parent was exposed to risks at work, I experienced those consequences myself to some degree.

Private Members' Business

Although this should not be the only argument, the shortage of health care workers in the sector is a factor worth considering. Health care professionals and first responders have better things to do than worry about their safety on the job. They should not feel that they have to protect themselves, or worry that they might encounter this type of situation. It is hard to promote a profession when we allow violent situations like this to continue. How can we say that we value a profession if we stand idly by while the people who practise it are at risk?

The statistics I quoted are very real. These are the folks who work in our hospitals and suffer the consequences of this violence. Of course, the quality of the environment has an impact on the quality of care. I was talking about prevention earlier. The government has a duty to transfer money to Quebec. That is not the only solution, but when it comes to prevention, we need a properly funded and subsidized environment to be able to give all health care workers a break. Here, again, I am focusing on health care. This is not a justification, but we need to reduce the level of frustration that patients in the health care system are feeling.

I see my time is running out. I think I could talk about this for another 10 minutes. I must have prepared for a 20-minute speech. I am really interested in this issue. All this to say that we support Bill C-321.

I would like to use the last few seconds of my speech to express my deepest gratitude to all health care workers, to those working behind the scenes, and to firefighters and paramedics. I want to thank those who are known as first responders, who do just about everything. I also want to thank our correctional officers, many of whom live on the north shore. I would like to thank them for the work they do. They deserve more than just recognition. They need to be valued, protected and supported, and I will see to that.

• (1410)

[*English*]

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I acknowledge we are on unceded Anishinabe Algonquin territory. I do so while representing my riding of Nunavut. I rise to speak to Bill C-321, an act to amend the Criminal Code regarding assaults against health care professionals and first responders.

I thank the member for Cariboo-Prince George for tabling his private member's bill. Since I joined this house in 2021, I have observed that the member is passionate about mental health.

The content of Bill C-321 brings forward debate about the circumstances of health care workers and first responders. This amendment, if it passes, would require the courts to consider their position as an aggravating circumstance, therefore possibly impacting sentencing.

What does this mean? It means a few things. First, it means that there has already been a trial and the judge is now considering the length of a sentence according to an offence. In their considerations, the judge must consider both the aggravating and mitigating factors. There exist sentencing principles, including circumstances of the individual, evidence from different facts and similarity to other decisions. Much of these form the consideration in determining how long an offender may be sentenced for.

The other aspects of consideration are the mitigating factors, which are considerations to lower the sentences. These include, for example, if it is a first time offence or if there is an addiction or mental illness. If there are to be any amendments regarding aggravation in sentencing, there should be an equal consideration for mitigating factors.

Addressing violence must be improved. Using the courts is not the right approach. I question the potential effectiveness of this bill in protecting health care professionals and first responders. I question this bill and whether it addresses the increasing incidences in violence that we are told are occurring across Canada.

The criminal justice system in Canada is already flawed. It is a penal system that does not do justice for too many already. Currently, section 269 of the Criminal Code outlines the penalties for causing bodily harm to another person. The penalties can include, for example, imprisonment for up to 10 years, depending on the severity of the offence.

Before I begin the next part of my speech, I must first honour the memory, family and friends who knew Joyce Echaquan.

I struggle with this proposed amendment because there are too many stories like that of Joyce Echaquan's, an Atikamekw woman who livestreamed the abuse she experienced at the hands of hospital staff who should have been there to save her life, not abuse her. Later, it was learned that Joyce Echaquan died of pulmonary edema, an excess of fluid in the lungs. Ultimately, the Quebec coroner's inquiry concluded that racism contributed to her death.

Joyce Echaquan's story is one of too many. According to the Government of Canada's website, there are inequalities in health of racialized adults in Canada. The website says, "Racism influences access to health promoting resources. Populations who are racialized in relation to a 'white' or non-racialized social group experience stressors including inter-personal and systemic discrimination throughout the life course".

In Canada, racialized people are more likely to be exposed as perpetrators in this system. According to the Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, among those who were discriminated against, 21% of indigenous people and 16% of Black people said it was when they were dealing with police, compared with 4% of non-indigenous, non-visible minority people who experienced discrimination.

Private Members' Business

● (1415)

In his debate, the member for Cariboo—Prince George shared that some 92% of nurses have experienced physical violence during the course of their jobs. When I hear this, I hear the need for all of us to work better together to make overall improvements and to address violence as a preventative measure, not as a punitive one.

While I completely agree that health care workers and first responders must have a safer working environment, they, too, must play an active role in creating that safe space. The criminal justice system must not be the go-to for this solution.

I appreciate past attempts in addressing this area, including the work by the NDP. Unfortunately, those past attempts may not have been viewed from a trauma-informed lens. Those past attempts may not have considered that most of them enter the health care and the criminal justice system because of Canada's continued effects of Canada's genocidal policies. I do not disagree that health care professionals are not important. The criminal justice system protects them too. They are not excluded from protections through the criminal justice system.

Health care professionals and first responders can have any kind of reason to enter that workforce. They do so wanting to help people in pain and to help those who need treatment. As a caring field, we hope, as individuals, that all of us would be cared for. However, for racialized Canadians, unfortunately, this is not an automatic assumption.

When the House of Commons committee studied this area and tabled its report, "Violence Facing Health Care Workers in Canada", I am not sure what contributing factors it explored that might be leading to the increases observed. I do not discredit any of its work, I only ask that there be closer attention paid to how Canada's lack of investment has led to increases in the exposure to these circumstances.

I only ask that there is an acknowledgement of how systemic racism might be perpetuated by accepting the bill before us. It would not address violence in the workplace, which is what the intent of the study tried to address. I would ask this Parliament and this government what they have done to implement the other recommendations made in the standing committee report.

I also highlight the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action, which has offered solutions, including calls to action 18 to 23. I would also remind parliamentarians about the MMIWG calls for justice. I highlight 10.1, which calls for the mandatory training of Crown attorneys, defence lawyers, court staff and all who participate in the criminal justice system.

I will conclude by sharing some quotes.

The Canadian Centre For Justice And Community Safety Statistics states, "Discrimination or victimization based on individual characteristics that are visible parts of identity can also have broader ramifications beyond the individual who is targeted."

In a CBC article, the Minister of Indigenous Services said, "The systemic racism endured by Indigenous people in Canada's health care system exists because the system was designed that way.... Sadly this is not shocking to me.... Racism is not an accident. The

system is not broken. It was created this way. And the people in the system are incentivized to stay the same."

● (1420)

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-321, a bill which would amend the Criminal Code to protect and defend our men and women serving on the front lines.

The bill is led by my dear friend, a fierce advocate and the Conservative shadow minister for mental health and addictions, the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George. In my short time on Parliament Hill, I have seen his advocacy for the mental health and well-being of Canadians in action in our time at the health committee, from seeing him fight for Canadians with addiction issues to watching him bring in a life-changing program, the 988 suicide crisis line that will save thousands of lives. We know his legacy will be one of saving lives. I cannot think of anything more honourable or noble than that.

However, his work here is just beginning. Today he is bringing forward legislation to protect our nurses and paramedics, and all those on the front lines. They are the very people who risk their lives every day to protect us, and I could not be more proud to stand to shoulder to shoulder with him as co-sponsor of the legislation.

I have three reflections on the bill: the frontline heroes in Calgary, what the legislation brings to the table, and why it is needed now. In my city, there are thousands of people, from Bridlewood to Evergreen and all the way to Lakeview, who work in these jobs. Every day, they wake up and go to work, saving lives and supporting those who need it the most. Sometimes they have to endure the heartbreak of losing the people they care about. On top of that, these folks are barely scraping by due to an increasing cost of living and a gut-wrenching carbon tax. I know this because during my campaign and in the 24,000 conversations I had, I heard their stories. I saw the pain in their eyes. These are my neighbours, the heroes of Calgary Heritage. They work in some of the most honourable professions in our country, and Canada must do better in showing them how valuable they truly are.

Private Members' Business

This brings me to my next point: what the legislation brings to the table and how it would protect our heroes. The bill, if passed, would amend the Criminal Code to consider an assault against a nurse, paramedic, firefighter or other frontline worker, including health care staff, an aggravating circumstance upon sentencing. With this amendment, the legislation would give greater teeth to our prosecutors seeking justice for workers assaulted, abused or violated on the front lines. It would send a message to the bad actors thinking they can walk into an emergency room, an ambulance or a care home, and hurt our frontline workers. Finally, it would ensure that the perpetrators of these horrific acts are put behind bars.

What is the urgency behind passing the legislation? More and more of our people on the front lines are reporting increased abuse, violence and assault every year. In fact, we know from the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians that over half of emergency department nurses are physically or verbally abused in any given week, and 43% of hospital nurses will be sexually harassed or assaulted this year. The number of violence-related, lost-time claims for frontline health care workers has increased by almost 66% over the past decade.

The cost of this is absenteeism. Nurses often have to seek care or therapy because of the trauma they experience. This means that the people who care for us when we need it the most are unable to do so because of the abuse they have faced. We know that in 2016, the annual cost of absenteeism for nurses due to illness or disability was nearly \$1 billion. For paramedics, 75% of them reported experiencing violence, many suffering from psychological wounds in the form of stress, anxiety and PTSD. Every time these heroes go to work, they know they may not come home. They should, at the very least, know they will not be subjected to violence or abuse from the people they serve, care for and protect.

It is time for us to do the same and serve them. Bill C-321 would do just that by protecting those who protect us. It is common-sense legislation and long overdue. To my colleagues across the chamber, this need not be a partisan undertaking. Let us come together to pass the legislation and change the lives of our heroes on the front lines.

• (1425)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George has five minutes for his right of reply.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Calgary Heritage. I have known him only a short time, but I value his friendship and truly respect the work that he does alongside all of us in this House.

We had an opportunity here, from all sides of the House, at report stage, where all parties unanimously supported Bill C-321. The bill is not the be-all and end-all, but sends a clear message to the public and the judiciary that the protection of those who protect us is important. It sends a message that we need to be standing up for those who stand up for us.

We know that 83% of Canadians support making assault against first responders a more serious offence in the Criminal Code. Eight out of 10 Canadians believe that violence against paramedics is a

problem in Canada, including 31% who believe it is a major problem.

Rates of violence against nurses, health care workers and first responders are growing at an alarming rate. Bill C-321 will provide much-needed support for those on our front lines. This legislation is a tangible way that we, as parliamentarians, can show those on the front lines that we care, that we respect them, that we do not condone violence in their workplace. We need to let them know that we have their backs. We need to let them know that we are listening. Bullying, abuse, racial or sexual harassment, and physical assault should never and can never be considered just part of their job. These workers care for us at our most vulnerable time and I think we have the responsibility to care for them in return. We need to send a message that violence is unacceptable.

I really hope we can get this passed as soon as possible. We do not need to have an extensive study in the Senate. We have heard from witnesses. We have studied the matter extensively at committee. What we need now is action.

A good friend of mine sent me a text this morning. Do members know that Australia has adopted a very similar law to what we have as Bill C-321, except it is making it even stronger? It is setting mandatory minimums when first responders are assaulted. This comes out of the violent machete attack on a paramedic in Australia. Obviously, we do not go that far yet. This bill is just a start. It sends a message that we are listening. It sends a message to the judiciary that we take violence against first responders and health care professionals seriously.

I hope Madam Speaker and all my hon. colleagues will support this bill at third reading when we get back from the constituency week so that we can get it passed as soon as possible.

Before I close, I want to thank my colleagues from all sides of this House who have offered their support and their feedback. I value it.

We need to send a message that violence is not acceptable. It is not part of the job description. They do everything in their power to save our lives, to keep us healthy, but they are exhausted and fear for their safety and their lives. They need to know that we have their backs, that someone is fighting for them. They need to know they are valued. Passing Bill C-321 and ensuring its swift passage through the Senate toward royal assent is the very least we can do.

Private Members' Business

I am going to end with this simple message. Our frontline heroes are there when we need them the most. They answer our calls for help. Should we not answer theirs?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 2:29 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

Accordingly, the question is on the motion.

[*Translation*]

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.

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded vote.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 98, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 28, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[*Translation*]

It being 2:29 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday, February 26, at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:29 p.m.)

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