



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

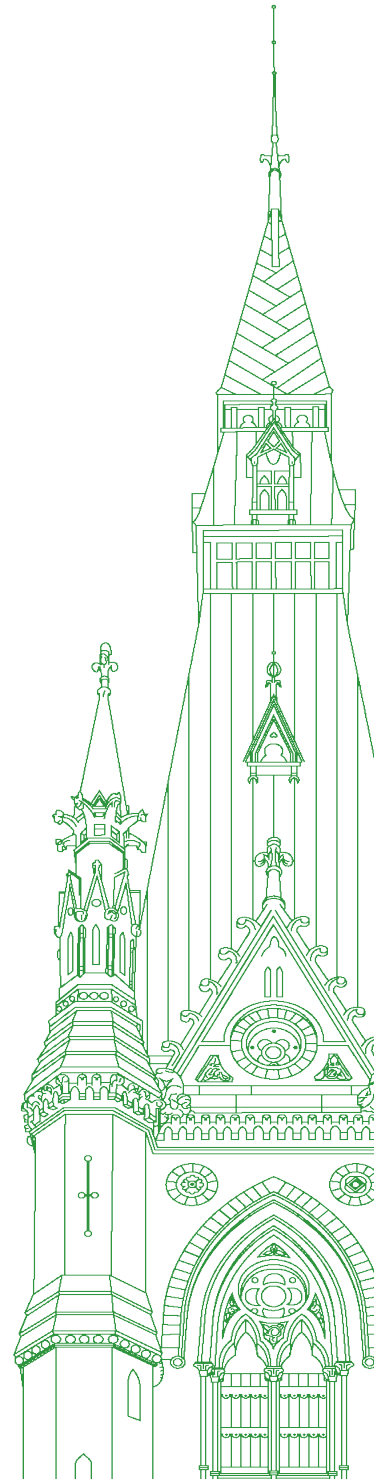
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

House of Commons Debates

Official Report
(Hansard)

Volume 151 No. 288
Thursday, February 29, 2024

Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 29, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

● (1000)

[English]

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED INSUFFICIENCY AND INACCURACY OF RESPONSES TO ORDER PAPER QUESTIONS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the point of order raised on January 31 by the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan and the question of privilege raised on February 9 by the member for Edmonton Strathcona concerning the government's responses to their written questions. While they were raised distinctly, given the procedural similarities of the two questions, the Chair intends to provide a single ruling.

[Translation]

The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan shared his concerns about the accuracy and completeness of the government's response to Question No. 2155. The member claimed that the response tabled on January 29, 2024, failed to identify the sub-implementing partners who are involved in delivering aid to Palestinian refugees. He argued that his question was seeking information about all organizations providing Canadian aid, which implies both implementing and sub-implementing partners.

[English]

By way of a question of privilege, the member for Edmonton Strathcona made a similar complaint, expressing dissatisfaction with multiple elements of the government's responses to three of her written questions, namely, Questions No. 2068, 2069 and 2070. She argued that the inadequacy of the responses was so glaring that it interfered with her ability to carry out her parliamentary duties, including holding the government to account.

She contended that the government specifically failed to answer several sub-questions embedded in the larger questions and that one response appeared to contain the wrong information. She asked that the Chair review her questions and the responses in conjunction with relevant procedural authorities and precedents in the hope that her complaint rises to the level of a prima facie question of privilege.

On February 12, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons tabled a revised response to Question No. 2070, stating that inaccurate information had been provided in the initial response; this was due to an error. He also stated that the Minister of Foreign Affairs had apologized to the member for Edmonton Strathcona for this mistake.

[Translation]

Members have frequently complained to the Chair about their dissatisfaction over government responses to their written questions. There are abundant precedents from past Speakers' rulings on these kinds of grievances. I would refer members to the Debates of April 25, 2022, at pages 4310 and 4311, for such a similar example.

While the Chair can empathize with the frustration that members may have about not receiving the type of information they think should be included in a response, precedents show that the Chair cannot direct the government to respond in a given way.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, third edition, at pages 529 and 530, summarizes the situation:

There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review government responses to questions. Nonetheless, on several occasions, Members have raised questions of privilege in the House regarding the accuracy of information contained in responses to written questions; in none of these cases was the matter found to be a prima facie breach of privilege. The Speaker has ruled that it is not the role of the Chair to determine whether or not the contents of documents tabled in the House are accurate nor to "assess the likelihood of an Hon. Member knowing whether the facts contained in a document are correct".

● (1005)

[English]

Having reviewed the specific concerns raised by both the members for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan and Edmonton Strathcona, the Chair is not of the view that their complaints deviate from similar ones in the past. As such, I am left with little option but to apply established precedents consistent with the approach my predecessors have taken.

Consequently, I do not find that there is a prima facie case of privilege concerning the request made by the member for Edmonton Strathcona, and I consider the matter closed for both submissions made to the Chair.

*Routine Proceedings**[Translation]*

That being said, the Chair notes the comments made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House after he supplied a revised response to Question No. 2070. He acknowledged that it is the right of members to have the best information available to do their important work.

[English]

As many Speakers before me have done, I would emphasize the essential purpose written questions serve in our parliamentary institution. Not only are Order Paper questions an important part of our accountability mechanisms, forcing the government to justify its choices, but their responses are also instrumental in helping members to better understand the government's programs, activities and expenses. When members receive complete and accurate answers to their questions so they can make informed decisions, it serves everyone, including those who elected us.

The Chair therefore strongly encourages the government to follow through on its statement and provide to members the best information available.

I thank all members for their attention.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1010)

[Translation]

COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay upon the table, pursuant to section 10.5 of the Lobbying Act, a report on investigation from the Commissioner of Lobbying.

Pursuant to Standing Order 32(5), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

* * *

[English]

MAIN ESTIMATES, 2024-25

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting estimates for the financial year ending March 31, 2025, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Main Estimates, 2024-25.

* * *

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a certificate of nomination and biographical notes for the proposed appointment of Konrad Winrich

von Finckenstein to the position of Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

* * *

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That, in accordance with section 81 of the Parliament of Canada Act, R.S.C., 1985 c. P-1, the House approve the appointment of Konrad Winrich von Finckenstein as Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, for a term of seven years.

[Translation]

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

It is agreed.

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

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

DEPARTMENTAL PLANS, 2024-25

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the departmental plans for this government, representing 90 departments and agencies, for 2024-25.

* * *

• (1015)

FEDERAL TAX EXPENDITURES

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, on behalf of the Minister of Finance, a document, in both official languages, entitled "Report on the Federal Tax Expenditures" for 2024.

* * *

PHARMACARE ACT

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-64, An Act respecting pharmacare.

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

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, entitled “Act Now: Preventing Human Trafficking of Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People in Canada”. I would like to table this.

Through this study, we saw 55 witnesses, received 57 briefs and travelled the greater Toronto area, including Peel, as well as Vancouver, Sault Ste. Marie and Halifax.

I would like to thank the women who have taken part in this, specifically, the analysts and clerks. We had two incredible clerks who worked on this, Stephanie Bond and Danielle Widmer. We also had incredible analysts who were able to help us: Dominique, Clare and Alexia.

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

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to present a supplementary report on behalf of my Conservative colleagues. We felt that the report did not contain enough regarding training for police and judges, nor did it speak to the absolute torture endured by those who have been trafficked.

I am saddened to report that some of the perpetrators and the users of human trafficking are abusing children as young as nine years old. We need to ensure the laws of these crimes fit. The penalties, right now, do not fit the crimes. We would like to ensure that these measures are reviewed so that we can protect all our citizens, especially the most vulnerable, and those are our children.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to table the Bloc Qu  b  cois's supplementary report.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, the Bloc Qu  b  cois prepared a supplementary report to reaffirm that health falls under Quebec's jurisdiction and that the federal government needs to respect that.

Consequently, Quebec can implement major programs to raise public awareness of human trafficking, its forms and its impacts on women, girls and gender-diverse people. Quebec can also ensure that educational materials and training manuals are distributed to the province's vulnerable populations, law enforcement and front-line service providers.

Investments in support services for victims, such as counselling services that take into account the victims' trauma and cultural realities, legal aid and safe housing for victims of human trafficking also fall under Quebec's jurisdiction.

The Bloc Qu  b  cois strongly opposes the compartmentalization of human trafficking victims because all lives are equal and every-

Routine Proceedings

one must have equitable access to services, regardless of their ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity.

To wrap up, with respect to the funding of organizations and initiatives that help people, especially indigenous people, Black people and immigrants involved in the sex industry, including victims and survivors of human trafficking, as well as sex workers, the Bloc Qu  b  cois insists that this funding be in the form of transfer payments to ensure Quebec's jurisdictions are respected. These services should therefore cover the much broader areas of law, justice, health, mental health and addiction.

Finally, the Bloc Qu  b  cois is opposed to implementing a procedure to expunge convictions prior to 2014 associated with consensual sex work.

● (1020)

[English]

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I move that the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, presented to the House on Wednesday, September 27, 2023, be concurred in.

I appreciate the opportunity to stand and speak on this very important report entitled “Food Security in Northern and Isolated Communities: Ensuring Equitable Access to Adequate and Healthy Food for All”.

Just to give a quick summary, in general, right across the country, no matter where one lives, food security has become a major issue. We see food bank usage at record highs. In fact, some food banks are running out of food before the lines get through the facility. It is a very challenging time for many Canadians, and it is even worse, if members can believe, in the north, especially in our territories.

For example, this report states, “Food insecurity is generally defined as a situation that exists when people lack secure access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food. In 2017–2018, 12.7% of Canadian households were food insecure”.

As I mentioned right off the top, it is worse in the north. The report states that roughly “4.4 million” households, “12.7% of...households” right across the country, “were food insecure”. Let us look at the north: the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. It has reached as high as “16.9%” in the Yukon, “21.6%” in the Northwest Territories, and “57%” in Nunavut. That is absolutely incredible. It goes on to say that among Northerners, Indigenous peoples are particularly at risk of being food insecure.

Routine Proceedings

One of the recommendations from this study, and what the committee heard, is that, unfortunately, the nutrition north program that is available shows that the program itself and the changes the government has made to it are not meeting the needs of northerners.

As I mentioned, I will be splitting my time with the member for Kenora, who has great insight into this subject as well and who wants to share his thoughts.

One of the biggest factors of the increase in the cost of food is of course the carbon tax. We see the newly elected Premier of the Northwest Territories calling for relief from the carbon tax. We know that when farmers, truckers and grocery stores, etc., are forced to pay the cost, those costs are passed along to the consumer. This continues throughout the chain and increases the cost of absolutely everything. Unfortunately, food prices are impacted by this at a level and at a time when Canadians are struggling to pay their bills. Inflation is out of control. The cost of everything is up, and the government refuses to take any sort of action or to show any kind of compassion for the people who are suffering.

The government says that people will get rebates, but it had to rebrand this rebate because Canadians were not actually buying it. They noticed that somehow the rate at which they were taxed through the carbon tax was quite disproportionate to the rebate, which leaves a very good question: If it is taxing people, raising the cost of everything, giving them a bit back and expecting them to be grateful but not actually helping the environment, why bother taking it from them in the first place? Why not leave that money in their pockets? Why not stop bribing people with their own money? Let them keep it and make the best decisions they can, and they will. Consumers will always make the best decisions based on their own situations.

I think that is one of the key disagreements between the official opposition and the government; the government believes that it knows all and that it is smarter than the 40 million or so Canadians out there. It can have a central plan to make everything work, and eventually, we will reach utopia. This is not happening. Canadians are suffering. They are going hungry. They are skipping meals. They are lining up at food banks at rates we have never seen before. Food banks are running out of food. In the north, the rates of food insecurity are even worse.

• (1025)

When we think about it, why is there no action? We would think the government would act, especially when people are suffering. We listen to the tone of the Prime Minister when he responds. We bring up the cost of a dozen eggs, a loaf of bread or a litre of milk, and all we hear, other than about the so-called rebate, which we know does not equal the amount people are spending, is that the Liberal government is working on it.

We have a report that was tabled in the 43rd Parliament, in June 2021. The program is still not working, and the cost of food is getting worse. People are suffering even more. However, the government is not impacted by that. Those connected to the Liberal government, those who get the contracts for nothing and for whom money goes out the door, they are not impacted by the price of those items. Regular, everyday people are impacted, and that is the problem.

When pressed on it, the Liberals just ask for three things. They wanted unlimited time, unlimited resources and, of course, unlimited money, and they will eventually figure it out. At the end of the road, will it be worth it? It probably will not be for the average Canadian, but it might be worth it for those who are lobbied and lawyered and connected to government. They will reap the benefits, but the average person will not. We are seeing that again in the north.

I do not think there is anybody who could actually justify paying more in interest on our national debt than we do in transfers of health care dollars to the provinces. I do not think there is an argument that would actually make sense. The government does not seem to think it matters. It keeps spending. It keeps putting the future on the credit card. That is not responsible, despite programs that could easily be looked at.

We talked about the green slush fund many times in the House, in many speeches. The green slush fund is where billions of dollars have been thrown, and it looks like it has just been given out to those who are connected, who are well-lawyered or who lobbied government. The infrastructure bank has yet to produce anything of substance, but it has received ridiculous amounts of funding. The list goes on. We have arrive scam in the news, again and again, where two people in their basement seem to have made off like bandits with no real accountability. We have reports coming out that the indigenous consultation on the arrive scam app was not actually done through indigenous people.

The government keeps saying one thing after another, not actually living up to what it should be doing, yet food insecurity in the north continues to get worse. Money is being spent in higher amounts than ever, especially when we look at Crown-Indigenous Relations and look at Indigenous Services Canada. The spending is up, but the outcomes are down. There is actually more money going into those two departments, but Indigenous Services Canada, ISC, is only hitting 27% of its actual targets in its own departmental plan. It just tabled a new departmental plan today. We will have to see if it is any better. What private sector corporation would be able to succeed if it was only hitting 27% of its goals? I do not think many would. The government is looking at it and proudly saying it is throwing x amount of dollars at x amount of programs, but lives are not improving.

Going back to the study recommendation, it is recognizing that the nutrition north program will not solve food insecurity in the north. We have to look at other options. Economic reconciliation is something we talk about in a great capacity on this side of the House, because we believe that indigenous peoples have been left out of this conversation for far too long.

• (1030)

Having indigenous participation in the economy is key to its success as a nation. We are talking about an indigenous population that is motivated, well-educated and, according to the stats, a very young population. They want to be included, but have been left out for far too long. Therefore let us unleash the powers of these entrepreneurs. Let us stop with the government-knows-best, Ottawa-knows-best approach that we have had for 150-plus years and that has failed for those 150-plus years.

We have put forward a potential option for first nations communities that want to participate in their own economy. As I said, many do; they are just constrained by the Ottawa-knows-best approach. There is the first nations resource charge, which allows companies that are doing business on first nations lands to, instead of paying Ottawa for the federal taxes, pay the first nation directly. It is a far more efficient way for tax dollars to have maximum effect, the velocity of the tax dollar, than the current method. Currently, a resource company does business on first nations lands, leaves the community, comes to Ottawa and goes around the cotton candy machine. First nations have to come to Ottawa and ask for the tax dollars back in the form of programs and services that are not working, and then they get only a share of the funding back.

Therefore let us eliminate parts of the broken system, for one thing with the optional first nations research charge, which was actually developed by the First Nations Tax Commission. It was an indigenous-led proposal that we were able to have great success adopting and promoting. I know that when we are in government, very soon, we will be able to implement this and actually create a difference in the lives of indigenous peoples.

When we look at the north, we look at food insecurity. Processing is an issue—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member is sharing his time, so his time is up.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

• (1035)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is encouraging to hear that the member feels that the government should be listening to indigenous community leaders, considering the lack of attention that was given by the former Harper regime. The member commented a great deal on the nutrition north program, which delivers literally tens of millions of dollars of support to make things like groceries a whole lot more affordable.

Could the member reflect on what he believes would make a difference, given the dramatic change in life as a direct result of climate change?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, actually that is where I was going in my speech. As I was just about to say, in Yukon, for example, there is very little processing capacity, so if people have an agricultural operation in Yukon, there is nowhere to actually process the product. If someone has a chicken operation for meat, they have nowhere to send the chickens to be processed. They have to

Routine Proceedings

either do it on site or truck them elsewhere, which can be very stressful on the animals.

That inability to have local processing also contributes to the cost. Of course if people are trucking the animals, they also have to pay the carbon tax. Of course when they heat the barn, they pay the carbon tax. All of these layers add to the cost. I could go on, but hopefully I will get more questions on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, on Monday evening, I attended the parliamentary reception of the National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association, because at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women we are currently conducting a study on women entrepreneurs. Right now, we are seeing a problem, both for women and for others. The recurring theme is the difficulty in accessing credit. That is what we are being told in committee and that is what I was told on Monday evening. That is particularly true for northern indigenous women.

We hear about wanting to develop projects and costs adapted to the needs of communities. How is it that in 2024 access to credit for these communities is so difficult under federal funding programs?

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, I was at the same reception for the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association event to talk about its 35 years of success in providing funding, capital and mentorship to young indigenous entrepreneurs looking to create jobs, wealth and opportunity in their community, either on reserve or off. I think it is great work the organization is doing, but one of the barriers we talk about often on this side is economic reconciliation; that is a key.

There is a very young population in indigenous communities. There is a very educated population and a motivated population, and all it wants to do is have equal opportunity and access to the programs that are available. Unfortunately there are often roadblocks in place, so what we are trying to do, what we are proposing on this side of the House, is to remove the roadblocks and the gatekeepers and to make more economic participation for indigenous peoples available.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague. There has been a total lack of funding for nutrition north.

I want to ask about the economic reconciliation I often hear the Conservatives talk about. I just want to translate what that means: It is economic reconciliation if one believes in their economic and political agenda, but if one does not, they will send in militarized police, as many people recommended in B.C. when we saw some of the blockades happening in opposition to resource extraction. To that point, it is about free, prior and informed consent.

Routine Proceedings

I am wondering whether the Conservatives would have the same enthusiasm for communities or nations that do not want resource extraction or that propose resource extraction with conditions.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Speaker, I believe she is talking about the Coastal GasLink program, but she did not mention it off the top. In that, the elected chiefs of the bands within the Wet'suwet'en First Nation supported resource development. In fact they had band elections, and all the pro-energy candidates actually won those elections over anti-energy candidates, so there was a desire for economic activity to be part of economic reconciliation. Yes, there will be disagreements, but at the same time, there are elected bands saying that they want that to happen. However, we do have to listen to all voices as well.

● (1040)

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know we were all disappointed to learn that the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock's time expired, as he had much more to contribute. However, it is an honour for me to rise to speak to such an important topic here this morning.

As has been highlighted in the discussion thus far, we know that food insecurity is a challenge right across the country, with inflationary spending by the NDP-Liberal government and its carbon tax adding to the cost of living. People right across the country, from coast to coast to coast, are struggling to get by, to put food on the table and to put healthy food on the table, which is an important distinction. It is one thing to be able to afford some food, but to be able to afford healthy food, and culturally appropriate food in many cases, has become a struggle. It is why there have been, unfortunately, two million Canadians visiting a food bank in a single month. In recent statistics it might be even higher.

Eighteen per cent of families across the country are reporting food insecurity. This is really an affordability crisis across the country, much of it the creation of the NDP-Liberal government with its inflationary policies and carbon tax, which is a tax on everything: on the farmers who make the food, the truckers who ship the food and the individuals who buy the food. In fact in 2024, a typical family will have to spend \$700 more on groceries as a result of the government's policies.

As the report we are discussing today has highlighted, this is an issue that is even greater in northern communities across the country, including in northern Ontario and communities I represent in the northwest. There are 42 first nations in the district that I represent, many of which have no year-round road access, so it becomes a challenge to deliver goods to those communities, especially food and healthy food that does not have a long shelf life.

What are communities in the north relying on? They are relying on winter roads, which are not always predictable, depending on the weather we are getting. They are relying on a barge to go from the northeast around the corner to northwest Ontario. They are relying on aircraft, which, of course, with the carbon tax, the so-called clean fuel regulations, and the second carbon tax on top, are getting more and more expensive to operate as well. There is also the pilot shortage. I could go on and on with the issues the government has created, but they all add to the cost of living for northern communities.

Then, of course, when we look farther north to the territories, where, I understand, there is not much road access to communities, the rates of food insecurity are even higher. According to a report put together by Statistics Canada with information from the University of Toronto, 46% of people in Nunavut and over 22% in the Northwest Territories live in food-insecure households. This is a major affordability crisis.

What is the government doing about it? Of course it is making it worse with its inflationary policies and high taxes, but it has supposedly been aiming to address this through nutrition north Canada, one of its flagship programs to address food insecurity in the north. Every single year, the government has been increasing funding to nutrition north Canada. In 2021, it announced \$163 million over three years to expand it.

Every year, the money goes up, but the rates of food insecurity also go up. The government is spending more but getting worse results year after year, driving up the cost of living for people in the north, which is a major issue. Clearly the program is not working. As my colleague who spoke before me mentioned, nutrition north Canada is not going to solve the affordability crisis when it comes to groceries across northern Canada.

● (1045)

There are a number of reasons for that, which the report highlights. When I was previously working on the indigenous and northern affairs committee, this struck me. The mandate of the program is not even to address food security. We learned that from the officials of nutrition north Canada. This does not make any sense. Why would that program exist? It is a subsidy that goes to the retailers. There are a lot of concerns with the transparency of that. There are concerns that it has not been opened up to agricultural producers, that there has not been enough support for local harvesting or the ability for food to be processed in the north. It has a very narrow scope, yet the government continues to invest more and more money into a program that does not work.

Unfortunately, that is a common trend we have seen with the government. We have seen it with nutrition north and we have seen it in Indigenous Services Canada. The government often boasts about the fact that it has dramatically increased funding to Indigenous Services Canada. However, we have seen from PBO and Auditor General reports that the spending has not actually led to an increased ability of ISC, Indigenous Services Canada, to achieve its departmental results. That is why a number of boiled water advisories continue to exist in northwestern Ontario and across the country. Over and over again, we are seeing the government focused on announcements, photo ops and money that is being sent to the bureaucracy instead of doing the real work to ensure that it is getting to the people who need it.

Something that really concerns me is that last year, through an answer to an Order Paper question, we found out that 94% of executive staff at Indigenous Services Canada received massive bonuses, totalling over \$3.6 million. They are failing to meet their targets. They are failing to deliver adequate services to indigenous people across the country, yet they are being rewarded with bonuses. That is a slap in the face to indigenous peoples across the country, including in the north, who are struggling to get by. I am sure the 42 chiefs in my riding, and many across the north, could certainly have come up with a better use for that \$3.6 million that went to the bureaucracy and bloated the pockets of executive staff.

That is completely unacceptable, but that is what we get after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, more spending, leading to higher inflation and a carbon tax that is driving up the cost of living for everyone. It is not just food that it is impacting. Of course, we are speaking about food security with this report, but it is energy as well.

One in five Canadian families are now living in energy poverty. I do not have a statistic for the north off the top of my head, but I am sure common sense would indicate that this would be even higher in the north, where it becomes even more expensive and even more necessary to have home heating and that use of energy.

It does not seem like the government gets it. The government does not understand the pain that its policies are inflicting on people across the country, particularly in the north. Either that or maybe the government just does not care. Either way, it is clear that it is time for a common-sense Conservative government that will axe the tax and make life and food more affordable for people across the north. We will listen to people living in the north to ensure we provide the services that are needed in an efficient manner. We will work toward building economic opportunities that can lead to self-determination and ensure that everyone can live in a food-secure household.

• (1050)

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the important work he has done at the indigenous and northern affairs committees. One thing we heard during this study, as well as at the United Nations permanent forum on indigenous issues, which I was proud to attend along with my colleague last year, was that climate change was impacting northern and coastal communities at a far greater level than everywhere else in Canada.

The member opposite talked about the price on pollution and the problems with the carbon tax. However, we are seeing a very real situation happening in the north. Our communities are not able to sustain themselves the way they have done since time immemorial because of climate change.

Could the member opposite talk a bit about how climate change has impacted the north and what he heard during the study and at the United Nations about the urgent situation that the climate crisis has caused?

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, my colleague opposite is right. Climate change is impacting people in the north. As I mentioned in my speech, winter road access is becoming less pre-

dictable. It is why communities are looking for alternative options to get goods to the north. They hope to be able to harvest more in the north. We certainly need to deal with this issue. It speaks to the fact that nutrition north Canada will be unable to address those issues.

Unfortunately, what we have seen, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, is that it does not have a plan for the environment. It has a carbon tax that is driving up the cost of living, while emissions are continuing to rise, and it is not even tracking the emissions that could be potentially prevented with this carbon tax. It is simply a tax plan, and people in the north recognize that and they see right through it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I also had the opportunity to sit with my colleague at the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. I would like him to speak in a little more depth about nutrition north Canada, which was studied in committee. We hear that it cannot resolve the whole situation of food sovereignty or food security in the north.

Does my colleague see other possible solutions or arrangements? How can the nutrition north Canada program be improved to ensure food security in the north?

[English]

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, I appreciated working with my colleague on the committee in the past.

Of course, nutrition north will not be the “silver bullet” to address this issue. We heard a number of concerns about the transparency of nutrition north. A lot of people do not believe it is properly being passed on, and there should be some mechanisms in place for that. The government also needs to look at whether a similar program can bolster harvesting support in the north, support for food processing in the north, or perhaps even rejigging the program entirely so it does not go to the retailers, but rather it goes to the people or to those who transport the goods.

We have heard a number of suggestions at committee. I think it is clear that something needs to change, and it is important that the government listens to the people in the north, the people who are affected by it, to know what change will be best for them so we can ensure we get it right.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I am quickly reading through the report that was done by the 43rd Parliament. This is not an issue that is new to me; it is quite familiar. I hear about food insecurity all the time whenever I go to my communities. I was surprised to see there was a recommendation in the report that the nutrition north program be evaluated, but, unfortunately, that has not been done.

Could the member share his thoughts on why it would take so long to evaluate such an important program?

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, obviously, the government would have to answer why it is taking so long to evaluate the program. I have no idea. It is something the government should have acted on before we did that report. I would have hoped that it would have acted on it much quicker.

We have heard time and time again that there are problems and concerns with this program. In committee, the government seems to agree with us, but then afterward it sits on its hands and does nothing about it. In fact, it has been increasing funding to this program. It is all about announcements and photo ops and not results with those guys.

• (1055)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, issues of this nature are of great importance. No matter where one lives in Canada, there is a great deal of sympathy and appreciation for the cost of living in northern Canada.

Back in the days when I was an MLA, I recall bringing forward legislation on milk, because of the cost of milk in northern Manitoba and the fact that cola products were far more cheaper. Although my bill never passed, it at least made a point. As much as possible, we do not want products that we consume on a daily basis and take for granted to become so expensive in northern Canada. Often, it is not even a question of price; it is a question of availability. In our cities, we have come to accept that when we walk into a grocery store many products will be available to us, but that is not the case in northern Canada.

How many speeches have we heard, not only today but in the past, about competition? We often talk about the importance of competition, whether it is in Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver, smaller communities in between, Halifax, virtually throughout the country. One reason we talk about competition is because through competition we get better selection, better prices and so forth. Those same principles do not apply to northern Canada.

In northern Canada, one grocery chain covers the Far North. How does that provide for a competitive price regime? A whole lot more with respect to getting the products up north needs to be taken into consideration.

I have weekly discussions in my constituency at a local restaurant. I recall one individual from the University of Manitoba. He has talked about airships for years and has gained quite a bit of support for the role airships could play in providing additional competition and resources to northern Canada. There is now a great deal of talk about how, maybe even in a community like Thompson, airships could get engaged in providing services further north to ensure there is healthier competition and choice of product.

We need to look at ways to ensure there is more food security, more choice and, obviously, a better price point on products that people living in the north need day in and day out. I think the vast majority of Canadians understand the issue and would like more done on that file. The government has moved forward significantly on reconciliation.

Before I get into more details on that, I want to highlight something that took place yesterday and we are witnessing it again to-

day. Members in the House were anticipating that we would be talking about child care, as it is an item on today's agenda.

• (1100)

It is somewhat disappointing, given the very nature of the debates we have been having over the last couple of days, that the Conservative Party has chosen to talk about this issue, without giving any notice whatsoever to members outside of their own caucus. We have a Conservative opposition that wants to highlight a particular issue, yet it does not tell anyone what it wants to debate. That does put some limitations on the debate. I know others who would have liked to contribute to the debate and who maybe have not been afforded the opportunity because of availability, other agenda items and so forth.

If this issue is so important to the Conservative Party, why would it not have brought in an opposition day motion related to the report? It is interesting, the member who spoke previously talked about the nutrition north program. He even indicated in his comments that the government has been constantly increasing the financial resources for the program. We even have members of the Conservative Party making reference to the fact that the government has continued to increase the funding.

A number of issues could have been raised on an opposition day, because then everyone would have had the appropriate notice and time, and specific members who would like to address the issue would be in a better position to do so. We could actually come back with hard numbers, in terms of what has actually been invested in that program.

There are numerous departments that deal with indigenous leaders and communities of the north. I would argue that the Conservatives have done a disservice in two ways. First, they are underestimating the importance of this very issue, by the manner in which they have brought it forward. It is disrespectful to the issue they want to debate. Second, at the same time, they have prevented a debate that members of this House were anticipating from occurring, that being child care.

I made reference to the fact that yesterday we were talking about processes and what takes place on the floor of the House of Commons. The Conservatives were complaining that they would actually have to sit beyond 6:00 p.m. in order to debate government agenda items. They did not want to sit late in the evenings. I argued that we needed the time to have those debates, because of the games that were played by the Conservatives, bringing in concurrence reports in order to prevent debate on government legislation.

I highlighted that yesterday. I have raised that issue before. Once again, we see the Conservative Party playing a destructive role here on the floor of the House of Commons.

• (1105)

The Conservatives are saying that they do not want to talk about child care here today, even though that is what we were supposed to be talking about. Then they took an issue that is so serious and, without any notice to other members, brought it forward.

I am going to wind up my remarks, because I do want to get to debate. I will highlight one thing. I think of the department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, Employment and Social Development Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, Infrastructure Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada, not to mention the many different indigenous groups that want to participate in the discussion. The Conservatives took this opportunity to, in essence, mock the issue and take advantage of an issue in order to prevent the government agenda of dealing with child care, and that is an area that needs to be debated.

The legislation needs to be passed, and that is the reason I would move:

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): 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. Eric Melillo: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Call in the members.

• (1150)

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

(Division No. 655)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Ali	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arseneault	Arya
Ashton	Atwin
Bachrach	Badawey
Bains	Baker
Barron	Battiste
Beech	Bibeau
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blaney
Blois	Boissonnault
Boulerice	Bradford
Brière	Cannings
Carr	Casey
Chagger	Chahal
Champagne	Chatel
Chen	Chiang
Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)	Cormier
Coteau	Dabrusin
Damoff	Davies
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diab	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Dzerowicz
Ehsassi	El-Khoury

Erskine-Smith
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser
Gaheer
Garrison
Gerretsen
Green
Hanley
Hepfner
Housefather
Hussen
Iacono
Ien
Johns
Jones
Julian
Kelloway
Khera
Kusmierczyk
Lalonde
Lamoureux
Lattanzio
Lightbound
Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor
Maloney
Masse
May (Cambridge)
McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McPherson
Mendicino
Miller
Morrissey
Naqvi
O'Connell
O'Regan
Powlowski
Robillard
Romanado
Sahota
Saks
Sarai
Schiefke
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sorbara
St-Onge
Tassi
Thompson
Turnbull
van Koeverden
Vandenbeld
Weiler
Yip
Zarrillo

Routine Proceedings

Fillmore
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Fry
Gainey
Gazan
Gould
Hajdu
Hardie
Holland
Hughes
Hutchings
Idlout
Jaczek
Joly
Jowhari
Kayabaga
Khalid
Koutrakis
Kwan
Lambropoulos
Lapointe
Lebouthillier
Long
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Martinez Ferrada
Mathysen
McDonald (Avalon)
McKay
McLeod
Mendès
Miao
Morrice
Murray
Noormohamed
Oliphant
Petitpas Taylor
Qualtrough
Rogers
Rota
Sajjan
Samson
Scarpaleggia
Serré
Shanahan
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Singh
Sousa
Sudds
Taylor Roy
Trudeau
Van Bynen
Vandal
Virani
Wilkinson
Zahid
Zuberi— 170

NAYS

Members

Aitchison
Allison
Baldinelli
Barrett
Beaulieu
Berthold
Bezan
Blanchette-Joncas
Braddon
Brock

S. O. 57

Calkins	Caputo
Carrie	Chabot
Chambers	Champoux
Chong	Cooper
Dalton	Dancho
Davidson	DeBellefeuille
Desbiens	Desilets
Doherty	Dowdall
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Ellis
Epp	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Ferreri	Findlay
Fortin	Gallant
Garon	Gaudreau
Généreux	Genuis
Gill	Gladu
Godin	Goodridge
Gourde	Gray
Hallan	Hoback
Jeneroux	Kelly
Khanna	Kitchen
Kmiec	Kram
Kramp-Neuman	Kurek
Kusie	Lantsman
Larouche	Lawrence
Lehoux	Lemire
Leslie	Lewis (Essex)
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Liepert
Lloyd	Lobb
Maguire	Majumdar
Martel	Mazier
McLean	Melillo
Michaud	Moore
Morantz	Morrison
Motz	Muys
Nater	Normandin
Patzer	Paul-Hus
Pauzé	Perkins
Perron	Poilievre
Rayes	Redekopp
Reid	Rempel Garner
Richards	Roberts
Rood	Ruff
Savard-Tremblay	Scheer
Schmale	Seeback
Shipley	Simard
Sinclair-Desgagné	Small
Soroka	Steinley
Ste-Marie	Stewart
Strahl	Stubbs
Thériault	Therrien
Thomas	Tochor
Tolmie	Trudel
Uppal	Van Popta
Vecchio	Vidal
Vien	Viersen
Vignola	Villemure
Vis	Wagantall
Warkentin	Waugh
Webber	Williams
Williamson— 141	

PAIRED**Members**

Carrie	Deltell
Dreeshen	Guilbeault
LeBlanc	Ng
Plamondon	Rodriguez— 8

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE ACT

MOTION THAT DEBATE BE NOT FURTHER ADJOURNED

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in relation to the consideration of the motion respecting the Senate amendment to Bill C-35, an act respecting early learning and child care in Canada, I move:

That debate be not further adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67(1), there will now be a 30-minute question period. I invite hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise or use the “raise hand” function so the Chair has some idea of how many members would like to participate.

The hon. member for Peterborough—Kawartha.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a shame to hear that the Liberals want to close debate on a subject matter that is impacting families across this country, in every province and every territory. There is article after article talking about the chaos that has been unleashed due to this pipe dream that the Liberals sold Canadians of \$10-a-day child care.

Today, we are forgoing a debate that is an opportunity in this House to bring forth the problem, both from operators and from families who cannot access child care. In particular, I want to mention this stat: 77% of high-income parents are accessing child care under the Liberal child care agreement versus 41% of low-income families. They want to shut down debate at a time when we should be having a very robust discussion on what is wrong in this country, so that we can fix it.

Why? Why would the Liberals want to shut down this debate for families, operators and everyone? This program is already in place, but by keeping this debate open, we would allow people's voices to be elevated so we can hopefully correct those concerns. Why are they doing this?

Hon. Jenna Sudds (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to speak to that question here today. Obviously, Bill C-35 is a bill that is critically important to families, to children and to our partners, our provincial, territorial and indigenous partners across this country.

The bill has been thoroughly studied, both at the House committee and at the Senate committee. I would add that there have been numerous days of debate here in the House, as well as in the other place, both recently, in the winter, and back in the fall. I would also point out that, at the time, all parties voted unanimously to continue to support this work.

The member opposite has proposed that the system is in chaos. I would rebut that. I would tell the member to ask the families who are benefiting from this program, thousands of families across the country who are accessing care now, at least at 50% of the rate, if not at \$10 a day. For those families, it has been incredibly impactful.

Rome was not built in a day. As we do this work together with the provinces and territories, more spaces are coming in line, and there will be 250,000 new spaces as we continue to build this out with our partners.

● (1155)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the day we were supposed to be talking about the Senate amendments to Bill C-35, and the Conservatives have brought forward a concurrence debate with respect to food security in the north, which of course is an extraordinarily important topic. The issue, though, is that the Conservatives are using this as a tactic to delay a very important debate with respect to child care. The way I know this is that the Conservatives have had 10 opposition days when they could have brought forward the issue of nutrition in the north, and they have never chosen to do that.

In fact, when Stephen Harper was our prime minister, I believe that Pam Palmater, one of the indigenous experts, said that the Conservative government had actually set back indigenous relations 100 years in the 10 years that it had been there.

Why is the Conservative Party of Canada so eager to stop women from coast to coast to coast from being able to access child care, something that we know we need for women, for families and, frankly, for our economy?

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about here in the House is the importance of enshrining in law a national early learning and child care system. We cannot overstate how important this work is that we are doing here today and what this means, not only for today's parents and today's kids but for families for generations to come. As my colleague has pointed out, unfortunately we have not seen the support on the other side of the House, from the Conservatives, in moving forward collaboratively to ensure that this system is successful for moms, dads and children across the country.

I have to say it is very disappointing how it is being positioned and how this is becoming a political hot potato. This is truly about children and families and ensuring we do the right thing by them for generations to come.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have an excellent question for the minister.

Just yesterday, the government passed its Motion No. 35, claiming its intent was to improve debate by adding more hours of debate. Then, it stated its intention to introduce a closure motion the very next day in order to limit it.

What is going on with the government? Is it behaving this way because it does not know what to do? It seems to be talking out of

S. O. 57

both sides of its mouth. I would like to know why it is invoking closure today.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

[English]

Truly, this is really about moving forward this important legislation for families and children across the country, as I have already said.

It is worth pointing out that as we have entered into agreements with the provinces and territories and we work with our partners, including our indigenous partners, they are waiting with bated breath, of course, for the certainty of this legislation. As we do that work together and as we focus on creating spaces, it is really important that this certainty is in place.

I would suggest that the work we are doing today is fundamental in moving forward in a speedy way, given the number of days of debate that we have already witnessed for this legislation and that it is incredibly important to move forward, as I said, for our partners and, of course, for families and children across the country.

● (1200)

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, focusing on early childhood development is crucial for building a healthy and stable society. I would like to ask the minister to touch upon the economic empowerment of women, who disproportionately bear the brunt of child care responsibilities, and the fact that increasing their participation in the workforce not only enhances the productivity of the current workforce but also allows for the future prosperity of our nation.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. This is not just good social policy; it is incredible economic policy.

We have seen, to date, the impact of that. We can look back, even to when Quebec first introduced this in 1997. We saw the impact, in that province alone, of women's participation in the workforce. We know now, here, across the country, that we are seeing an increase of participation among core-aged mothers in Canada with young children, with it reaching a record high at 80% last year.

We are seeing the dividends that are being paid by this investment in families and parents here in our economy. It means more parents are able to get out into work, predominantly mothers, as was said by my colleague. I know that these investments today will pay dividends for decades to come.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this important topic of child care, it is really important to mention that the government actually signed agreements with provinces previous to bringing forth the legislation. The agreements are already in place.

S. O. 57

We are seeing the effects of those agreements. One has only to look at the headlines across the country to see the crisis in the child care system across the country and all the closures and issues that are happening. The Liberals are talking about the economic empowerment of women, when in fact many child care locations are run by women entrepreneurs who are licensed through provinces and yet are not a priority of the government. It is right in the legislation. We are seeing headlines across the country of how this is playing out, with the government not including them and not making them a priority.

Could the minister speak to this, about how the government can talk about economic empowerment for women and yet not actually have them as a priority in this legislation?

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Mr. Speaker, quite the contrary to what has been presented by the member opposite, women across this country are rejoining the workforce and are benefiting from this national early learning and child care program.

As was mentioned, we entered into historic agreements, with almost \$40 billion of investments made across this country, with the provinces, territories and indigenous partners. There is a commitment to create a national system, with 250,000 new spaces by 2025-26. We are already seeing 82,000 new spaces created. We have seen every province or territory get to at least 50% in fees and eight provinces or territories get to \$10 a day.

While the Conservatives may be focused on negative headlines, I am focused on the positive headlines. I am focused on the impact that this has had on families across the country that I get to speak to on a weekly basis. Those stories are so touching. When I get to hear what this translates to, whether that is getting back into the workforce or saving for a child's education, these are real people, and this is having a real impact.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech and for her nod to Quebec and its child care system. However, I would like her to return to the debate at hand. She did not answer the question asked earlier by my colleague. Only yesterday, the Liberals wanted to add hours of debate. Suddenly, today, they want closure, limiting debate.

This morning, I met with people from the F  d  ration des communaut  s francophones et acadienne du Canada. I can say that francophone women are especially worried. Yes, the bill's intention is to ensure francophone children can have access to French-language day care services. According to these women, however, that is just a veneer.

I would have liked to have the opportunity to debate a bit more with my colleague. I would have liked to have been able to confirm that the government will do what it takes to ensure children from French communities outside Quebec will have day care services in their language. I would have liked to debate with her, but closure has just been invoked.

• (1205)

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. This bill is very important for every family and every child across the country.

[English]

We are doing critical work here, and this is really important to families and children across the country.

As I mentioned earlier, this law was studied at length here at committee and also in the other place in its committees. There have been many days of debate, and frankly, we need to move forward to give certainty to parents, children and our partners that we continue to do the hard work to move this legislation forward.

I want my colleague to be assured that, with the amendments that have been put forward by the Senate, which are now incorporated into the legislation, families in official language minority communities will be able to access child care no matter where they are, in English or in French. This is a core piece of what we are doing here. It is an important point to pause on and to emphasize that we are ensuring that, no matter where one is, no matter one's economic status, we are providing early learning and child care that is accessible, inclusive, high-quality, and affordable, in French or English.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I would like to thank the member for her important responses.

It really is quite unfortunate that the Conservatives are using tactics to avoid important debate on Bill C-35. What I very much appreciate about Bill C-35 is that it takes a rights-based approach. I wonder if the member could share with us why the Conservatives would avoid ensuring that the bill passes so that rights could be respected.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Mr. Speaker, as we entered into agreements, and as we worked to build this nationwide system, it was incredibly important that we took a rights-based approach and that we worked alongside indigenous partners across the country, along with our provincial and territorial counterparts. I can tell members that, on the ground, it is really translating.

I had the opportunity, just last week, to be in the Northwest Territories to meet with a number of operators, parents and various groups in the territory. It was really phenomenal to see the impact, and to see culturally appropriate early learning and child care that is accessible to families, which is a reality that will be building out, of course, over the next few years across the country. I have to underscore how important and impactful that work is.

This law means that it would not just for the kids today or over the next two years, but in perpetuity. It is a critical piece of legislation that I think all of us in the House should be supportive of. Again, I have to say that it is very disheartening to hear the Conservatives refer to the situation as "chaos", when we see it is really quite the opposite, and it is really quite impactful work.

Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are hearing over and over again about the issues of the cost of living and what that means for day care providers. For example, there is the cost of food, and we have heard about issues in accessing formula. We have heard about lots of supply chain issues that are still happening today.

The government can no longer blame COVID for those issues, yet we have a program here today that is putting day care operators in a spot where they are operating at a constant loss, and it is forcing people to close. They are going bankrupt because they cannot afford to buy the food, pay the wages and buy the supplies that are needed for their system. Right now, we have a bill that would do nothing to address those particular issues.

What does the government have to say about those kinds of flaws in its system? It is great to say that it only costs \$10 a day, but the reality is that these places can no longer afford to stay open.

● (1210)

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Today we are passing into legislation the early learning and child care act, and it is a framework based on the principles of high-quality, inclusive, accessible and affordable child care. My colleague is referring to the mechanics of our agreements with the provinces and territories through which funding flows. We have made a \$30-billion investment with the provinces and territories to roll out this program across the country. As we make those investments, and as the provinces and territories have signed those agreements, they have done so with eyes wide open, realizing the expectations and the commitments they are making, not only to us, the federal government, but also to the families within their province or territory.

There have absolutely been challenges along the way. This is a brand new system, and we are all doing this with the best of intentions and the best of efforts. Of course, there have been some challenges, and inflation is one point, of course, to recognize. However, the provinces and territories are well aware of the expectations of the commitments and the importance of what we are doing together.

I would point to Alberta, which just most recently acknowledged the need to sit back down with operators, review their funding formula and provide cash advances to address some of the cashflow issues operators were having in that province. It is at the discretion of provinces and territories how they roll this out. The mechanics are with them, as to how they fund their operators.

I encourage ongoing dialogue, and the federal government is here to support those conversations and that work, but it is ultimately their responsibility, as they choose it to be and as they want it to be, to then move that forward with the operators in their province or territory.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we talk about how a national child care strategy benefits women. I totally agree, and I find it troubling how the Conservatives are trying to stall the legislation. However, I ask where the worker strategy is. If we want to talk about being a feminist government, we know that the majority of ECE workers are women, primarily from immigrant and other BIPOC communities, but we also know a national child care strategy will never work without a worker strategy, so I am wondering why her government continues to fail care workers, who are primarily women. We should ensure that they have livable wages, pensions and benefits so that it is financially feasible for others to want to pursue a career in early childhood education.

S. O. 57

It is one thing to talk about being a feminist government. It is another thing to be a feminist government through supporting a workforce that is primarily being housed by women.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I have had some great discussions about this bill over the last number of months. I appreciate her commitment to the workforce, and we are also very committed to the early childhood educator workforce. In saying that, we are working with the provinces and territories at our federal-provincial-territorial table to bring forward a workforce strategy to better support the ECEs. Of course, this work needs to come through the provinces. Again, we have made a \$30-billion commitment, but it is on the provinces and territories to then implement this within their jurisdictions.

We are seeing some success, of course, to date. I was in Nova Scotia a few weeks ago, and we are seeing in Nova Scotia's most recent action plan, which we just finished negotiating and signing, a commitment to a wage grid increase in wages and a first-ever pension and benefits plan in that province. We are seeing other provinces do similar efforts. There is absolutely more that needs to be done.

A caveat of course is that we are roughly two years into these agreements, and it is our expectation that the provinces do the work to make sure they make the investments in the workforce so that we have these talented, caring and passionate individuals continue to do the important work of caring for our little ones.

● (1215)

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the last eight and a half years, we have introduced programs such as the Canada child benefit and the dental care program. We have reformed the Canada pension plan, brought in the Canada workers benefit and reduced the retirement age from 67 to 65.

I would ask the minister how this legislation joins the other things we have done in creating a very stable and healthy Canadian society and why this stable Canadian society is required so we can achieve the economic growth that is needed for our country.

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Mr. Speaker, undoubtedly, this government has done more for families and women than any other government in history, and I am incredibly proud to be part of that government and that work. This legislation, Bill C-35, is, rightly put, just one piece of the hard work we have done to support women and families.

S. O. 57

I look to the Canada child benefit, a program that families can rely on each and every month, like clockwork, to support them and deposit funds into their bank accounts for whatever their families may need that month, whether it be additional shoes for Johnny, extracurricular activities or saving for their post-secondary education. We have been there for families and have demonstrated that, not only with legislation but also with others, such as the Canada child benefit, which was pointed out, and many other programs. I would point to the most recent Canada dental benefit and pharmacare, which was just recently announced.

We continue to do the hard work to introduce incredible social policy that is also really smart economic policy, enabling parents to get into the workforce by supporting them in their day-to-day challenges because we all know that raising kids is not easy work.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot today from the minister, and it is unfortunate that, after our pointing out the hardships and chaos that has ensued, she wants to just look at the toxic positivity or gaslight the operators and families that are truly suffering.

People are benefiting from this program, but there are more people not benefiting. It is interesting that the minister says Rome was not built in a day, but the reality is based on the sustainability of the \$10-a-day child care that has been set up by the Liberals. This will be destroyed within five years because the sustainability is not in place. Infant care programs are shutting down, and centres are robbing Peter to pay Paul because they cannot afford it. Their fees have been capped for people at home. Any business owner knows this. Their fees have been capped, and now they cannot increase their fees, but the costs have gone up.

When is the funding coming to fund this? Every province and territory says they need more money. Where are they going to get that money from?

Hon. Jenna Sudds: Mr. Speaker, I am really glad to sit on this side of the House, where we invest in families and continue to do the hard work. We recognize that, from day one, it is not going to be perfect and not everyone is going to access it, but that does not mean we would abandon it. It does not mean we would stop. It means we would work harder. This is important work. With rose-coloured glasses, I hope the member can see the light in the work that is happening here.

Undoubtedly, creating a national child care system is about families. It is about investing in our children. She speaks of the funding formulas. I have shared that this is a \$30-billion investment on our part. The funding formulas are the responsibility of the provinces and territories. We can see where there are challenges, as we most recently saw in Alberta. It sat down with operators, figured it out and made advances in recognizing their cash flow issues. It is renegotiating its funding formula. This is the work of the provinces. We are there to support them and help fund them with \$30 billion, but ultimately, they need to do that work.

It is so incredibly unbelievable to me that there are folks in the House, like those on the Conservative benches, who continue to throw shade and discourage those doing the hard work, such as the operators and the families dropping their children off day in and day out, when we need to focus on getting the work done together.

• (1220)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask, in response to the minister, for unanimous consent to table the documents to show that there are not more women entering the workforce—

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

The question is on the motion.

[*English*]

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

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 656*)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Ali	Anandasangaree
Angus	Arseneault
Arya	Ashton
Atwin	Bachrach
Badawey	Bains
Baker	Barron
Battiste	Beech
Bibeau	Bittle
Blaikie	Blair
Blaney	Blois
Boissonnault	Boulerice
Bradford	Brière
Carr	Casey
Chagger	Chahal
Champagne	Chatel
Chen	Chiang
Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)	Collins (Victoria)
Cormier	Coteau
Dabrusin	Damoff
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diab	Dong
Drouin	Dubourg
Duguid	Dzerowicz
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith	Fillmore
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fragiskatos

S. O. 57

Fraser	Freeland	Cooper	Dalton
Fry	Gaheer	Dancho	DeBellefeuille
Gainey	Garrison	Desbiens	Desilets
Gazan	Gerretsen	Doherty	Dowdall
Gould	Green	Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Ellis
Hajdu	Hanley	Epp	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Hardie	Hepfner	Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Holland	Housefather	Ferreri	Findlay
Hughes	Hussen	Fortin	Gallant
Hutchings	Iacono	Garon	Gaudreau
Idlout	Ien	Généreux	Genuis
Jaczek	Joly	Gill	Gladu
Jones	Jowhari	Godin	Goodridge
Julian	Kayabaga	Gourde	Gray
Kelloway	Khalid	Hallan	Hoback
Khera	Koutrakis	Jeneroux	Kelly
Kusmierczyk	Kwan	Khanna	Kitchen
Lalonde	Lambropoulos	Kmiec	Kram
Lamoureux	Lapointe	Kramp-Neuman	Kurek
Lattanzio	Lebouthillier	Kusie	Lake
Lightbound	Long	Lantsman	Larouche
Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	Lawrence	Lehoux
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacDonald (Malpeque)	Lemire	Leslie
MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Lewis (Essex)	Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Maloney	Martinez Ferrada	Liepert	Lloyd
Masse	Mathysen	Lobb	Maguire
May (Cambridge)	McDonald (Avalon)	Majumdar	Martel
McGuinty	McKay	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	Mazier
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod	McLean	Melillo
McPherson	Mendès	Michaud	Moore
Mendicino	Miao	Morantz	Morrison
Miller	Morrice	Motz	Muys
Morrissey	Murray	Nater	Normandin
Naqvi	Noormohamed	Patzner	Paul-Hus
O'Connell	Oliphant	Paupé	Perkins
O'Regan	Petitpas Taylor	Perron	Poilievre
Powlowski	Qualtrough	Rayes	Redekopp
Robillard	Rogers	Reid	Rempel Garner
Romanado	Rota	Richards	Roberts
Sahota	Sajjan	Rood	Ruff
Saks	Samson	Savard-Tremblay	Scheer
Sarai	Scarpaleggia	Schmale	Seebach
Schiefke	Sgro	Shields	Shipley
Shanahan	Sheehan	Simard	Sinclair-Desgagné
Sidhu (Brampton East)	Sidhu (Brampton South)	Small	Soroka
Singh	Sorbara	Steinley	Ste-Marie
Sousa	St-Onge	Stewart	Strahl
Sudds	Tassi	Stubbs	Thériault
Taylor Roy	Thompson	Therrien	Thomas
Trudeau	Turnbull	Tochor	Tolmie
Valdez	Van Bynen	Trudel	Uppal
van Koeverden	Vandal	Van Popta	Vecchio
Vandenbeld	Virani	Vidal	Vien
Weiler	Wilkinson	Viersen	Vignola
Yip	Zahid	Villemure	Vis
Zuberi— 167		Wagantall	Warkentin
		Waugh	Webber
		Williams	Williamson— 142

NAYS

Members

Abouttaif	Aitchison
Albas	Allison
Arnold	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Bergeron	Berthold
Bérubé	Bezan
Blanchette-Joncas	Block
Bragdon	Brassard
Brock	Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins	Caputo
Chabot	Chambers
Champoux	Chong

PAIRED

Members

Carrie	Deltell
Dreeshen	Guilbeault
LeBlanc	Ng
Plamondon	Rodriguez— 8

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

*Government Orders**[English]*

SECOND READING AND CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

The House resumed from February 16 consideration of the motion in relation to the amendment made by the Senate to Bill C-35, An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I am continuing my speech on child care, and in the earlier part of it, I went through some of the challenges with the child care system and outlined them.

I would like to go through some proof points, which are actual emails I received from constituents. I will try to read these as clearly and as unredacted as possible, but obviously, for personal reasons, for names and other things, I will skip over those parts.

The first one says, “Good evening. I’m hoping you can assist us with daycare funding. My daughter is a mother of 3 year old twins. She has...children in [a day care provider right now] and was told [that] funding would be available by October. [However] She has had no further information and unfortunately the employees are unaware of when the funding [will] be available. As you can imagine having children in daycare is costly. My daughter pays \$100.00 a day. Is there someone...I can reach out to for answers?”

They tried very hard, working through the government, to get this \$10-a-day day care spot, but to no avail, still, to this day.

The next letter reads, “I’m writing to you [today] as a concerned mother of an 8 month old baby. I have been a [RN]...for [over] 10 years. The state of availability of licensed day care spaces in Ontario is appalling.”

I will read this unredacted, good and bad. She wrote, “It is fantastic...the government is working towards \$10...daycare to improve [the] financial accessibility for all. However, the planning behind this rollout has been abysmal. Did the government not consider the immense increase in demand that could not be met with the already lacking spaces in the licensed childcare industry prior to [the] rollout?! The wait lists were already lengthy. We added our child to multiple wait lists at 20 weeks pregnant, being told [that]...we might...already [be] too late to secure a spot for him at one year for me to return to work”.

Just to clarify, she put herself on the list at 20 weeks pregnant so that she could have a spot when the child, who was not born yet, was a year old, and she was told that she was too late.

She went on to write, “I am now less than four months away from my return to work and have no idea when I can return to work due to the lack of day care spaces for my child. As a registered nurse, I am eager to return to work to support [people in my important work], but may be delayed due to being unable to access appropriate...child care for my infant. The plan for \$10...daycare requires significant infrastructure...for years prior to being able to achieve it.” I paraphrased a little because I did not want to give away the specifics.

That is an insightful comment. In order to achieve something, one has to plan. My father used to tell me all the time, when I was a youngster, that if one fails to plan, one plans to fail. I think that this is borne out here.

The email continues to read, “New centres must be built. RECE’s must be trained. Supplies must be purchased.” I will paraphrase here, because I do not want to give away the specific area. She wrote that her community is growing quickly, so that need is even more acute. She goes on to write, “Both of these issues combined are compounding the problem and creating disaster[s] for families who are planning...for their children so they can return to work. I can only imagine how...other health care workers or first responders are in the same situation. This is only compounding our health care and first responder shortages. [I’m asking] you to please advocate for the development of infrastructure to support this rollout. Also, consider creating area based...lists, rather than...[individual]”.

These are all relatively recent emails that were just quickly pulled up by my staff.

● (1310)

One person writes, “I am pleased to see the media is finally reporting on the disastrous roll out of the Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act. I am so tired of listening to [the Prime Minister] bragging about saving Canadian[s]...thousand[s] of dollars in child care expenses when I know [this to be] a fallacy.... This became an issue [and a] concern for me in 2022 with the birth of my third grandchild in St John’s [Newfoundland]. This was about the same time as [Newfoundland] signed on...the federal program; \$10...day care sounded so promising. Little did my daughter know how difficult it was going [to be] to find day care at any cost. At that...time my older daughter in Ontario was looking for day care for her 3 year old. She became [number] 90 on the wait[ing] list...at the local school’s publicly funded [centre]”. She wrote that she would like to thank the member from Peterborough for advocating so strenuously on their behalf.

She went on to write, “I am a firm believer in the value of accessible day care for all Canadians but I also believe [that] parents should have the option of...private care for their children. I realize a number of Canadians do not support tax funded day care. Many of these are people who do not value women’s work and don’t connect the dots when their hip surgery is cancelled because there[s] no ER nurse available. My [Newfoundland] daughter became very active [in an organization]”, which I will not reveal, “[where she works for and advocates for child care].... There are so many Liberal missteps for the Conservatives to address but I think it is time to address child care. As well as an issue for young families it is [an issue for] grandparents [as well]. It [is] also a federal issue as...provinces and territories are raising concerns.”

This person's daughter said, "I really wish [the member for Carleton] would come out on...attack [on] child care." The email reads, "I can't agree more. I believe it is time for Conservatives to [take an even stronger stance, holding the Liberals to account]."

Those are just a couple of emails I received, and I could read many more emails on the state of child care. Like everything with the Liberal government, it is great with photo ops but poor on delivery.

I also had a meeting in the last constituency week with the Otonabee-South Monaghan Food Cupboard in Keene. The context is of course parents and grandparents being unable to find child care, but in some ways the crisis is even more serious for many Canadians as they are facing insecurity as never seen before. Numbers have already increased significantly year over year, but in just the last four months, the number of children now being fed by the Otonabee-South Monaghan Food Cupboard has gone from 19 to 30 to 31 and then to 37. That is in an extremely small catchment area. The number of children going to a food bank at the Otonabee-South Monaghan Food Cupboard has doubled, and this is the kind of story we are hearing across the country.

The Liberal government promised a strong and prosperous economy, and it has failed. It promised \$10 day care, and it has failed. It is time for a common-sense Conservative government.

• (1315)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is one issue on which we cannot trust the Conservative Party. This is a good example of a hidden agenda. All one needs to do is to look at the last federal election. The leader said that they were going to tear up the whole child care plan the Liberals brought forward. Then they say some nice things post-election about it, and I think they might have even voted once in favour of the legislation.

Canadians have a right to know exactly what the Conservative Party's position is, at least today, on child care. Do they support the federal program, or do they not?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I would put that question directly back to them. Do they support child care? Clearly, they do not, actually. I already have the answer.

Did they not just hear the litany of emails I just read? Canadians are not only unable to afford child care, but also unable to access child care. There are many dads and moms in my riding who want to return to work but cannot because they cannot find accessible child care. In this economy, it is particularly difficult because it means their families may not have the opportunity to eat at the end of the month.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqagtittiji*, I would like to start by saying that prioritizing is not eliminating.

The member mentioned a constituent email he received where they said that they were concerned about private care not being available. Can the member please point to where in the bill it specifically prohibits private care?

Government Orders

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, the Senate has openly said that it does not want private child care.

We need to value all forms of child care, whether it is a wonderful, licensed facility, of which there are a ton in Northumberland—Peterborough South that try to do their best but do not have enough spots or whether it is a grandma in the neighbourhood who takes care of not only her grandchildren but also a couple of other children and provides incredible child care. We need to thank all child care providers, as they are doing an amazing job raising the next generation of Canadians.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the member's intervention on this issue.

This is from a B.C. CTV news story that reads, "Our initial study intended to only interview low-income women who were single moms accessing those \$10-per-day spots," said Dr. Lea Caragata, director of the school of social work at UBC and co-author of the study. "After six months of intensive recruitment, we could only find 13 across the province."

Billions of dollars have been allocated by the government with the whole idea that those who need it the most would get the support they need, yet this study by UBC shows only 13 in my province. We are the third-largest province in this great country.

Could the member elaborate on how the government continually says one thing but does another?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, of course we want all Canadians to have access to affordable child care, and that is a reasonable and meaningful goal. However, as another member talked about, if we are prioritizing, we need to focus on those who are in the most vulnerable situations, those who are trying to climb up that economic ladder and those who desperately need that income. The Liberals have failed those individuals, those moms and dads. It is not only that there is no child care available to them, even if it is unaffordable, but also that they are facing, if I might say, tax rates of 50% or 60%. We are holding Canadians in poverty. The Liberals are holding Canadians back.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, to be very clear, the Conservative Party does not support the \$10-a-day child care program that the Government of Canada has negotiated with the different provinces. I find that shameful. I would challenge the member across the way to be crystal clear and to explain why the Conservative Party does not support the program.

Government Orders

• (1320)

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, to be crystal clear, the Liberal government does not support \$10-a-day child care. I just read a number of emails. It does not exist. It is like unicorns or Pegasus; it just does not exist.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the other Peterborough, the not-as-great but really close—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think there should be any fighting about areas.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Mr. Speaker, in all seriousness, though, my colleague, who is a dad, knows this. It has already been brought up once today by another member from British Columbia. It was a great point.

We have the facts now, coming out of the chaos that has endured as a result of this failed policy by the Liberal-NDP government, that 77% of high-income parents are accessing this program versus 41% of low-income families.

How does the member feel about that? What are his thoughts on what is supposed to be a universal program, when we see that the people who need it most are not accessing it?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I will not dignify the Peterborough comment with a response. Other than that, I have great respect for the member. She has done a wonderful job, and I hope she caught, in one of the emails, that one of my constituents thanked her specifically for all the fantastic work she has done.

We need to put help where it is needed most. If we are prioritizing, as I said, it behooves us. John Rawls the famous philosopher once said that if we go back to the zero position, in other words, if we did not know how and where we would be born, we would want to do everything in society to help the most vulnerable. The Liberals are holding people back, keeping them in poverty and preventing women from returning to the workplace when they want.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's child care system works. It was put in place over 25 years ago by our esteemed premier at the time, Pauline Marois.

I would like to ask my colleague a question. Every day, his party, which aspires to power, makes no bones about the fact that it will cut services to communities, invest more in oil and cut taxes. If they are going to make cuts to all of the government's revenue streams, where are they going to find the money to support early childhood centres when they are in power?

[English]

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I make no apologies for our support of the Canadian energy sector. In fact, the sector is required to fund social policies and social benefits. Without the revenue from the Canadian energy field, this country would be in financial ruin. We would not be able to support many of the great programs we have.

We need more Canadian energy. We need the economy to grow stronger so we can have more social programs to help vulnerable people work their way up from the bottom to the top.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Mr. Speaker, as you can see, I am very happy to get up all day, every day to elevate the voices of the families that have been left out by this failed Liberal-NDP policy, in particular, families with kids with special needs. We know that both neurodivergence and the need for the labour force to accommodate these kids are going up. When fees are capped, as they have been under the Liberal-NDP program, we are seeing those most vulnerable suffer.

Has my member for Northumberland—Peterborough South heard these stories? Have his constituents shared with him how kids with special needs are missing out, particularly with this program?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, we have heard stories.

I would like to take this moment to talk briefly about Clare from my office. She is a very special employee. I tell her every time I see her that she is my favourite. She has Down's syndrome, but because of the gift of an amazing raising and child care, and being an amazing person, she works her heart out every time she is at our office. She does great work for the people of Northumberland—Peterborough South. We need more people like Clare.

• (1325)

Mr. Dave Epp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member for Peterborough—Kawartha used a term that I do not think is quite appropriate. She said, “my member for Northumberland—Peterborough South”. I just want to put on the record that he is everyone's member, not just hers.

The Deputy Speaker: That does not really sound like a point of order, but it is a great point of debate.

* * *

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

(On the Order: Orders of the Day:)

February 9, 2024 — Resuming consideration of the motion of Mr. Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques), seconded by Mr. Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île), — That the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Science and Research, presented on Thursday, June 15, 2023, be concurred in.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, having said that, I was fascinated by the previous point of order.

However, my point of order is based on some discussions among the parties. If you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, the remainder of the debate pursuant to Standing Order 66 on Motion No. 52 to concur in the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Science and Research be deemed to have taken place and all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division be deemed requested and deferred pursuant to Standing Order 66.

As indicated, there were discussions among the parties; I believe you will find agreement.

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

It is agreed.

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

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

CANADA EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE ACT

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

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, I am honoured to rise on Bill C-35, an act respecting early learning and child care in Canada.

I am proud to represent Nunavut and to be the critic for indigenous issues and northern affairs.

I thank my colleague and friend, the member for Winnipeg Centre, for her leadership in ensuring that Bill C-35 will positively impact Inuit, first nations and Métis.

Early learning and child care are of particular importance to indigenous peoples. Canada used all the resources it could to rob indigenous parents of their children. It used churches, RCMP and Indian agents. Indigenous children were sent to residential schools, and intergenerational trauma still exists because of Canada's genocidal policies against indigenous peoples. Amidst this, it has taken decades for this bill to finally reach this stage, which is so close to passing.

I thank the member for Winnipeg Centre for reminding us, in her speech, about who was instrumental in this. I echo her gratitude. She stated:

Generations of feminists, trade unionists, child care workers and advocates made this victory possible. They never, ever gave up the fight. They did not give up after the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women's recommendation for a national child care program was ignored by the government of the day. They did not give up after the 1993 Liberal red book promised national child care, only for that government to pursue deep cuts to social programs instead.

New Democrats who have fought for this include the mayor of Toronto, Olivia Chow, and the current member for London—Fanshawe.

What would Bill C-35 do? It would ensure a long-term commitment of federal funding to provinces, territories and indigenous groups. It would provide the opportunity for a national system of early learning and child care. It would indeed help ensure that parents across Canada have access to affordable, accessible and high-quality child care, now and into the future.

Government Orders

The NDP fought hard to ensure that Bill C-35 takes a rights-based approach. Because of our work, it includes acknowledgements of the obligations that Canada must adhere to international human rights conventions and declarations.

For example, the third paragraph of the preamble affirms critical international instruments, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

I return to the importance of passing Bill C-35. We all know that difficulty finding day care impacts the ability of parents to work.

• (1330)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I always enjoy hearing from my colleague from Nunavut; I just want to ask if she was intending to split her time.

The Deputy Speaker: We were asking the same question.

The hon. member for Nunavut.

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Uqaqtittiji*, I do plan to split my time with the member for Edmonton Strathcona

As I said, Bill C-35 would open the opportunity for a national system of early learning and child care.

A 2022 Statistics Canada study found that 38% of parents were changing their work or study schedule and 37% were working fewer hours. Bill C-35 would allow more parents to get back to work to provide for their families. This would benefit women, who are disproportionately impacted without this bill. We need Bill C-35 to become law.

The NDP will keep fighting for Canadians, unlike Conservatives, who make cuts, and Liberals who are forced to act only to avoid an election.

Today, the Conservatives tried to delay the important debate on C-35. They used a report from the 43rd parliament on food security issues as a delay tactic. They only pretend to care that nutrition north is not working. If they really cared about indigenous issues, they could have used any of their last 10 opposition day motions to debate nutrition north. Instead, they are playing games by making last minute changes to the orders of the day and obstructing important changes that could benefit many indigenous peoples, as well as the passage of Bill C-35.

Government Orders

I am proud that Nunavut was one of the first territories, along with Quebec and the Yukon, to commit to providing \$10-a-day child care. More impressively, this milestone was achieved 15 months ahead of schedule. With the youngest population in Canada, it should come as no surprise. Ten-dollar-a-day day care does exist. Coupled with the high cost of living and other challenges, affordable child care is especially important to Nunavummiut.

Much work will be required after the passage of Bill C-35. There will need to be major investments for improving infrastructure in indigenous communities. Many first nations, Métis and Inuit communities lack the facilities for early childhood education. With crumbling buildings and overcrowded homes, there is nowhere to open a day care.

It is not just early childhood education; there is a severe infrastructure deficit across primary, intermediate and secondary schools in indigenous communities. In Pond Inlet, Arviat and many other Nunavut communities, schools are overcrowded. The communities desperately need investments in new schools. I heard from Pacheedaht First Nation members, who have to bus their children for hours in each direction because there is no school in their community. Even with existing schools, they do not have the resources to provide the same level of service as schools in non-indigenous communities do.

I take this opportunity to remind the Liberal government that it must both reverse its decision to sunset Indigenous Services Canada programs and fill the major infrastructure gaps. In combination, the lack of investments will result in over \$14 billion that will force indigenous peoples onto the streets in the future. It will force indigenous peoples to remain addicted to substances and to remain on the margins of society.

The federal government must make additional investments to ensure that Inuit, first nations and Métis communities can build the infrastructure they need to provide culturally appropriate early childhood education.

• (1335)

An amendment was later added to address a potential charter issue, as minority language education is a right under section 23 of the Constitution. As parliamentarians, we have learned that there is an increasing lack of French-language child care services outside of Quebec. The amendment to clause 8 of the bill would ensure the federal government maintains funding for official language minorities. I am sure the francophone community in my riding will be very happy with this amendment. I am glad to see the amendment pass so this important legislation can go forward without potential legal challenges.

While there are two official languages in Canada, hundreds of indigenous languages remain. In order to keep indigenous languages alive, languages must be passed on to children at an early age. Governments have obligations to meet the obligations set out in the Indigenous Languages Act.

I highlight the recent court decision on Bill C-92, which was another big win for indigenous rights. Bill C-92 reaffirms Inuit, first nations and Métis rights to make decisions regarding their own

children, youth and families. This includes culturally relevant child care services in their own languages.

For these reasons, I urge parliamentarians to support the passage of this bill.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I find my hon. colleague's excellent speech very inspiring. I would ask her if she would like to share with the House again her intergenerational lens on the appalling and genocidal residential school system. The defined webs of intergenerational love and caring I find inspiring. I wonder, if I have gotten it at all close to the mark, would she be willing to share that again?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Uqaqtittiji, I am reminded of the conversations I had with my constituents, Bernadette Dean and Annie Curley, who reminded me that it is so important, as we continue to talk about intergenerational trauma, that we need to start shifting that focus to having discussions about intergenerational love. This bill is one of the opportunities to ensure we are passing on intergenerational love from parents to children and child care to children.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I picked up on the member's comment earlier today when there was an attempt by the Conservative Party to prevent Bill C-35 on child care from being debated, which I know is important in all regions of the country. She has commented fairly extensively on the benefits of the program. The Conservatives tried to do that by introducing the northern food allowance and the importance of food up north. I thought that was somewhat tragic, because it is an important issue and would make a nice opposition day motion.

I wonder if the member would expand on both because it was raised a little earlier, and I know her origins are in the north.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Uqaqtittiji, I am always appalled at question period about how many resources other parties have to address issues. When I finally get my chance to ask questions in question period, I always ask about investments that go to Nunavut and indigenous communities. However, for the Conservatives, for example, a lot of their questions are limited to the carbon tax or something that does not advance the recognition and importance of indigenous peoples.

The two different topics that we are discussing today are so important. We should not be playing games, pretending to care about alleviating poverty against providing early child care and early child care development for all Canadians. It was quite an injustice to watch this morning and I really hope the Conservatives take more care in fighting for the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as the rest of Canada.

Government Orders

• (1340)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleague to speak with her colleague about what we fought for in committee. The Conservatives were the only ones who put forward and supported an amendment for UNDRIP to ensure that first nations had access to their own child care rights.

The initial version of Bill C-35 made no reference to official language minority communities. The Conservative amendments were introduced during the clause-by-clause review by the HUMA committee and they were voted down by the Liberals, which the NDP supported.

Therefore, I would ask the member to say that the Conservatives have been the only ones standing for families and parents, including indigenous peoples and first nations, to do what they feel is best with their children and to give them the choice. Therefore, why are New Democrats supporting the Liberals?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Uqaqtittiji, I would remind the member that it has been the New Democrats who have been able to get the most results for Canada in the 44th Parliament. We are the ones who were able to get dental care. We were the ones who got pharmacare. The fourth party in this 44th Parliament has gotten the most for Canadians. We are the ones who have been ensuring that indigenous rights are being respected.

I do appreciate that the member has worked closely with my friend and colleague, the member for Winnipeg Centre. She has shared that with me and I do appreciate the commitment she has to ensure the bill does pass. I hope she has the support of her party to ensure Bill C-35 becomes law.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always very difficult to speak after the member for Nunavut because she is such a force within our caucus and such a champion for the people she represents. It is an honour to be in a caucus with her.

Today, we are talking about Bill C-35 and the amendments that have been brought forward. I want to start by talking about just how vital child care is in our country and what a fundamental thing it is to provide real child care across the country in an affordable way that women and families can access.

During COVID-19, I worked with the member for Timmins—James Bay to look at ways that we could have an economic recovery after the slowdown that happened during COVID. One of the things we heard constantly, whether it be from financial institutions, chambers of commerce, or labour groups, was the need for child care and the importance of it, that child care was the best thing we could do for economic recovery.

That is one piece of it, but I am a woman and I have children. I remember the struggle of finding child care. I remember how difficult it was to find quality child care, to be able to afford quality child care, to ensure that my children were cared for so I could return to the work force. I know for so many women across the country that this was not possible.

Having child care come forward after so many years makes me think of people like Irene Mathysen, who pushed so hard for child

care. I think about the member for Winnipeg Centre who has been absolutely tireless in this fight for child care for women. I think about these champions within the labour movement who have moved this forward over decades and decades. The fact that we now are here and have this program in place is fundamental.

I am not going to lie. This is not a perfect program. We have heard from labour leaders who say we need a workforce strategy to go along with this program. We need to ensure that the workers who are working in child care centres are adequately paid, are adequately trained and are given the resources they need so that child care spaces are available. There is a lot of work to continue to do. The idea of getting child care to people is fundamental.

The New Democrats have always known how important child care is. It is why, in my province of Alberta, Rachel Notley was the first premier to pilot a \$25-a-day child care. It was wildly successful, but, of course, the Conservatives were elected under Jason Kenney and they cut that. Right now, the premiers of B.C. and Manitoba, again, New Democratic premiers, are championing and prioritizing the \$10-a-day child care. Therefore, Canadians in those provinces will have that program in place.

Of course, the Conservatives in my province have, once again, fumbled the ball. As we all know, Danielle Smith would rather pick a fight with the federal government—

• (1345)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Maybe you could remind members that we are federal members of Parliament discussing federal government policy and business.

The Deputy Speaker: I will remind folks of relevance to the amendment we are discussing today.

The hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, the relevance of course is that I am a representative for the people of Edmonton, which is in the province of Alberta, and I am speaking about the delivery of child care in Alberta, so it is very relevant to what we are talking about.

I understand why the Conservatives do not want to talk about this. They do not want me to bring up the fact that Danielle Smith dropped the ball on child care, that she took the money and refused to give it to the child care workers, and, in fact, that child care centres had to do a one-day strike in January to actually get the money that was owed to them because the Premier of Alberta withheld that from them. I will point out that this is the same premier who has now said that she would not support a pharmacare program, the same premier who is attacking trans kids, the same premier who promised us she would not touch our pension and is now doing that, and the same premier who for some unbelievable reason is now saying that renewables are more dangerous for our economy than oil and gas. However, that is different. I will get back to child care.

Government Orders

We are talking about the idea of ensuring that this program is available across the country, ensuring that every Canadian, and from my perspective as a representative of Alberta, particularly Albertans, is able to access quality child care, not in concert with our premier and our provincial government but despite our provincial government. This is the state of affairs that we are in.

Frankly, I do think that the premiers and the people of B.C. and Manitoba have a much more likely chance of getting that quality child care, because clearly the premiers in those provinces have prioritized the needs of women, families and the economy to ensure child care is available to women.

I also want to talk a bit today about the amendment that was brought forward, which talks about access to official language child care. Members will not be surprised that I am going to talk a bit about Campus Saint-Jean, which is a facility in my riding.

The French quarter of Edmonton is in Edmonton Strathcona. I am a very proud representative of the French quarter, and Campus Saint-Jean is a wonderful institution. It is in fact the only institution in western Canada that trains teachers and child care providers in French so that they can meet the obligations of the Canadian government, that we all have across the country, to ensure that Canadian families can have their children educated in the language of their choice.

Something that many in the House may not know is that Alberta has the fastest-growing francophone population in the country. More than 261,000 Albertans have some knowledge of French, making French the second-most spoken language in the province after English. I do not know if members know this as well, but Alberta has the third-largest francophone minority population in Canada, after Ontario and New Brunswick. Therefore, we have a significant French population and the training to ensure that those child care workers and teachers are trained and are able to provide that education in French in my riding. It happens at Campus Saint-Jean.

Of course, this is the same university that Jason Kenney tried to cut funding to and the federal government had to step in. Just to be fair, the federal government did step in and Campus Saint-Jean continues to give extraordinary service to our community, ensuring that teachers can have a good education to provide those services.

Today, as we stand here, I want to make it very clear that the New Democrats have been standing up for child care and pushing for it for decades. We have been working with labour leaders. We have been working with members of the public. We have been talking to our constituents.

Child care is a vital piece of our economic recovery. It is a vital piece for making lives better for families and for women across the country. It is a vital piece of ensuring that life is more affordable for people around the country.

For that, I am very supportive of this bill. I hope that we can get everybody within the House to support the bill.

• (1350)

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member went

through the history of many of the attempts to get child care funded at the federal government level and ensured for Canadians. The member left out an important name, Ken Dryden, who was minister at the time when we developed a robust plan for child care.

I am wondering what the member's thoughts are with respect to how that was lost when Jack Layton, the former leader of the NDP, pulled the plug on that minority government. We went to the polls and entered the deep, dark ages of the Harper government, where we had to take this time to get back to a decent child care program.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier about some of those champions of child care, and I brought up some of the previous members of our caucus and many in the labour movement who have fought so hard for this. I think that those people today are very excited that we have child care.

The member is talking about a budget that happened well before my time, and so I will not comment on that. I certainly hope all members of the House can recognize the value of child care, that we can stop having the delay tactics that we are seeing from the Conservatives, and that we can actually move forward and get this passed as soon as possible.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec is a pioneer when it comes to this model of early childhood and child care centres. We are truly proud of that. It has helped so many women return to work. The comments in many studies at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women confirm the need to provide child care services.

Bill C-35 includes the principle of ensuring that francophone children and those from Canada's francophone communities can benefit from child care services in their language.

Does my colleague agree that we must pressure the government to ensure that this is more than just a nice principle in the bill, that it is truly enforced, and that money is set aside to ensure that child care services are provided to francophone children across the country?

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, absolutely.

[Translation]

My apologies for not speaking in French now.

[English]

This is something I have stood on in the House multiple times. I raised the issue that, for minority languages outside Quebec, and English in Quebec, we need to make sure that families are able to educate their children in the language of their choice. However, in western Canada, that is very difficult to do. One of the challenges is that we do not have enough training facilities to train the child care professionals and the teachers that we need to ensure that the French language is available.

About one-seventh of those who wish to educate their children in French in Alberta are able to do so right now. We have a massive population who want to ensure that their children get the benefits of being bilingual or having a French education who are not able to access that, because we do not have the capacity to train those teachers. It is a problem and I think the federal government should work as closely as possible with different provincial governments to ensure it happens.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the lovely province of Alberta.

The member brought up the point of what a lot of people are doing. We saw this and we predicted, as Conservatives, that the federal government, the Liberals, set up the provinces to take the fall for their incompetence.

On the group that the member was referencing, they were very courageous and actually walked out in protest to this failed program. They said, “We haven’t been heard. These issues are not being taken seriously and we’re really struggling to just keep the lights on. I’m not sure how to continue past the end of January at this time.”

The association wants a new funding model that would give money directly to the parents, and they are, in particular, talking about the federal government. To the member’s point that this is a mismanagement of the province, what about all the other provinces and territories across this country that are having the exact same problem?

• (1355)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I have two points on that.

First of all, we know that Danielle Smith kept half the money back and did not give it to the child care providers. Many of them were almost on the brink of bankruptcy before they could actually access that funding from the premier. That is quite well known, and I would hope that the Conservatives recognize that.

The other thing I would say is that in my speech I referenced the fact that I think there are real challenges with this child care program. It is not that we do not need to have a child care program and not that we need to delay, but rather that this child care program needs to be improved upon. One of the ways I talked about is to make sure that we have a workforce strategy. Labour unions across the country have asked for a workforce strategy, and that is one of the ways that we could be working to improve a program, making

Statements by Members

sure that it is more accessible and that is better able to meet the needs of all Canadians.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona for her very pointed intervention. I also want to thank my hon. colleague for Nunavut for her previous intervention.

The member for Edmonton Strathcona just spoke about a workforce strategy. The current government talks about being a feminist government, yet it continues to fail to put good workforce strategies forward for professions that are primarily done by women, including child care. The majority of ECEs are from BIPOC communities and are still being forced to live with wages that are not livable, and without benefits.

Could the member share with me why it is critical to listen to leading organizations to develop a workforce strategy? The premier of Alberta’s plan is to not support child care and the Conservative Party is trying to stall the implementation of a national child care plan; how are those actions anti-feminist and anti-women?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I just want to take a moment to once again thank the member for Winnipeg Centre for the incredible work that she has done on this legislation. The fact that we have this child care bill before us goes, in a large part, to the work that the member for Winnipeg Centre has done. I am so grateful for all that she has done.

However, I will say that when she asks about a workforce strategy, one of the ways we make legislation good in this place is we listen to experts, we listen to people who are experts in those fields. Child care workers have been asking for this, labour leaders have been asking for this. Those are the people we should be listening to. A truly feminist government would listen to those experts in the child care sector.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Black History Month, let us celebrate Black excellence in the contributions of Portia White, a gifted classical singer whose voice transcended racial barriers. Her legacy is one of musical excellence, as well as tenacity and bravery. Portia defied societal norms, becoming the first Black Canadian concert singer to achieve international fame.

Art has the power to break barriers. Now Portia’s niece, Sheila White, has captured this spirit in her book, *The Letters: Postmark Prejudice in Black and White*. Blending fiction with historical fact, Sheila tells the incredible story of her parents’ interracial marriage in the 1940s, when it was forbidden for a white woman to marry a Black man.

Like her aunt, Sheila reminds us of the importance of resilience and courage through a triumphant tale about racism, bigotry and love. Let us draw inspiration from such stories and strive to build a society free of racism.

Statements by Members

● (1400)

RARE DISEASE DAY

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the rarest day of the year is upon us once more. February 29 appears once every four years, and it is quite a fitting day to mark this occasion.

My family is affected by two rare diseases. Three of my living kids have a rare chronic kidney condition called Alport syndrome. My youngest daughter passed away from Patau syndrome in 2018.

Since I rarely do haikus in the chamber, here is one for Rare Disease Day:

February's untold stories, Rare blooms, unique tales told, Hope's flame in hearts hold.
Whispers in Parliament, Rare voices echo, Unity calls.
Advocacy's stand, Empathy's firm command, For unseen struggles, we demand.
Legislation sought, For rare tales, medicines brought, help in battles fought.
Through research we strive, minds open wide, Bright tomorrows guide.
Rare Disease Day calls, Echoes in the hearts it seeks, Voices of compassion speak.

I join all parliamentarians in marking this Rare Disease Day.

* * *

CHILD POVERTY

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to use my voice in this House to raise awareness on the issue of child poverty.

As a mother, I understand the importance of a healthy, safe and nurturing environment for children to live, learn and grow. Childhood is the most formative developmental period in an individual's life, and it deserves to be protected, yet according to the recent child poverty report, in 2021 nearly one in six Canadian children were denied the right to an adequate standard of living, and this number is even higher for indigenous and racialized children.

It has been no less than 34 years since members of Parliament voted to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000. It is 2024, and our time to act is now. We can expand access and eligibility to the Canada child benefit, which has already proven successful in reducing child poverty rates; we can establish a national school food program, mitigating the immediate impacts of food insecurity on children's learning outcomes; and we can fight for a universal livable income to ensure parents do not have to choose between paying rent and feeding their child.

We owe it to the one million Canadian children suffering under our watch to do better. I ask my colleagues in this House to join me in calling for an end to child poverty.

Every child matters.

[Translation]

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF A RIVIÈRE-DES-MILLE-ÎLES BUSINESS

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of all the successful businesses in my riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

Today, however, I would like to recognize a particular company that is one of Saint-Eustache's finest assets: Vignoble Rivière du Chêne, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

As we know, Quebec's climate can be harsh and sometimes makes life difficult for our farmers and vineyards. Quebeckers are a resilient, innovative bunch, and Vignoble Rivière du Chêne is a brilliant embodiment of these values. The business has been growing steadily since 1998 under the watchful care of its owner, Daniel Lalonde, and his dedicated team. They have developed an impressive product line that includes more than a dozen different wines.

I can attest that Vignoble Rivière du Chêne holds a special place in the hearts of our region's people. Happy 25th anniversary to a company that has become the pride of our region.

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[English]

PAROLE BOARD OF CANADA

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the tremendous work done by Kerri Kehoe, who is present in Ottawa today. Kerri has bravely spoken out after being viciously sexually assaulted as a child. Two others were victimized before the offender killed a mother of three.

Kerri has not sat idle as a victim. She has been engaged in ensuring her tormentor is never granted parole. Right now, he is in minimum security without any fences. He had a parole hearing last year. Though he was recommended for escorted day passes, the Parole Board declined them.

A victim advocate has determined that Kerri's rights were violated in the parole hearing process. She sought help from her MP, none other than the member Kingston and the Islands, and he would not even meet with her. The Liberals and Kerri's MP may have abandoned her; other Conservatives and I will always stand with her and other victims.

• (1405)

[Translation]

58TH QUEBEC GAMES

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from March 1 to 9, Sherbrooke will host 2,500 young athletes aged 12 to 17 from 19 regions of Quebec for the 58th Quebec Winter Games. Although Sherbrooke hosted the summer games in 1977 and again in 1995, this is the first time it will host the winter games.

A major provincial sporting event like this requires a great deal of organization. I would therefore like to acknowledge the work of the organizing committee, chaired by Jocelyn Proulx, and thank the 2,500 volunteers who will be pitching in to ensure that these young athletes enjoy a safe and unforgettable week. The Quebec Games are first and foremost a sporting event, but they also present exciting cultural programming for the athletes and the people of Sherbrooke to complement the competitions.

I wish our young athletes and the people of Sherbrooke all the best for the 58th Quebec Games.

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[English]

WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I want to draw the House's attention to the ongoing tragedy of gender apartheid.

In states around the world, most notably Afghanistan and Iran, women and girls are oppressed by regimes that seek to segregate them from society and treat them as second-class citizens. They are violently harassed, prevented from accessing quality employment or education, and threatened with severe violence or prison terms if they resist the sexist paternalism of these odious regimes.

Today I rise to take this opportunity to thank the over 40 Afghan and Iranian activists who have arrived here in Ottawa to speak to MPs and senators to advocate that Canada agree to codify gender apartheid as a crime against humanity. At 4:30 there will be a reception to meet with these extraordinary advocates.

* * *

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN AND THE LAW

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the National Association of Women and the Law, also known as NAWL. This organization has worked tirelessly to advance feminist law reform in Canada and break down barriers to justice for women.

Its feminist legal analysis and advocacy have impacted countless Canadian laws, most notably in relation to family law, sexual assault legislation, the Canadian Human Rights Act and sections 15 and 28 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. More recently, NAWL worked to strengthen gun control legislation by bringing forward women's voices, and supported amendments to the Divorce Act to protect women and children facing family violence.

Statements by Members

On February 29, NAWL will celebrate at a reception and awards ceremony in Ottawa that I will attend. I invite all parliamentarians to join me in recognizing NAWL's achievements and saluting its mission for a future with substantive equality for all women in Canada.

* * *

CARBON TAX

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while common-sense Conservatives will axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime, the Prime Minister is not worth his cost, crime or corruption after eight years.

With heartless indifference, the Liberals are turning a blind eye to the affordability challenges Canadians are facing, threatening a 23% carbon tax hike four weeks from now. Four weeks from now, hard-working Canadians' paycheques will buy even less food to feed their families, while a Conservative bill, Bill C-234, which would have saved our farmers \$1 billion in carbon taxes and provided relief to families at the grocery store, is being ignored by the Liberal-NDP government.

The Climate Change Performance Index now ranks Canada 62nd out of 67 countries, further proof the carbon tax has done nothing to address climate change, because the carbon tax is not an environmental plan but a tax plan that is deepening the misery and despair of Canadians.

When common-sense Conservatives form government and serve the people of Canada, we will restore Canadians' confidence and axe the tax.

* * *

KEY TO THE CITY OF BRAMPTON

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as Black History Month comes to an end, I rise to pay tribute to Marc Andrews, a long-time Brampton resident with a remarkable life of leadership and community service.

After a brief professional stint in the CFL, Marc served five years as an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces and completed a UN peacekeeping tour in Cyprus, retiring as a captain and a paratrooper. Marc then joined Peel Regional Police as a constable, rising through the ranks to detective, then staff sergeant, inspector and superintendent, earning an MBA along the way. Six years ago, he was appointed as deputy chief.

Congratulations, Deputy Chief Marc Andrews, for being honoured last night, becoming the first member of the Peel Regional Police to be awarded the key to the city of Brampton.

Black history continues to be made. Happy Black History Month!

Statements by Members

● (1410)

ARRIVECAN APP

Mr. Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while common-sense Conservatives will axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and bring home safe streets, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost, the corruption or the chaos.

GC Strategies, a two-person company, designed the arrive scam app, which did not work, which we did not need and which wrongfully sent 10,000 Canadians to quarantine, resulting in their missing work and time with their loved ones. The app was supposed to cost only \$80,000, but the Auditor General has confirmed that it cost \$60 million. Public officials refuse to show up at committee. Emails have been deleted, and now the RCMP is investigating.

Yesterday, the Liberals continued their cover-up corruption by voting against our common-sense motion to release all documents related to the arrive scam app.

What are they hiding?

Only common-sense Conservatives will get to the bottom of this new Liberal scandal and bring home accountability for Canadians.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, we know they are not worth the cost. We know they are not worth the corruption. We now know they are a risk to Canadians' safety.

Just a few years ago, thinking back, the Prime Minister mused about how he admired the basic dictatorship of China.

We now know that Beijing's agents infiltrated a top-level lab to steal sensitive secrets, including the genetic code to Ebola.

The CSIS reports, quoting PHAC, "Dr. Qiu represents a very serious and credible danger to the government of Canada...due to the potential for theft of dangerous materials attractive to terrorist and foreign entities that conduct espionage to infiltrate and damage the economic security of Canada."

However, under the Liberal Prime Minister, nothing was done to protect Canadians.

Canadians have had enough of this corrupt Liberal government, which is now actually a threat to the security of Canadians.

* * *

ALAN REDWAY AND JOHN GODFREY

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people of Don Valley West are mourning the recent loss of two giants, the Hon. Alan Redway and the Hon. John Godfrey. As parliamentarians and citizens, they have left indelible marks. They were models of graciousness, intelligence and passion.

Alan Redway distinguished himself as mayor of East York and as a Conservative member of Parliament. A true red Tory, he served as minister of state for housing, and, from his home in Leaside, he remained a committed advocate for food security and housing. He

offered advice and support with good humour and grace, and he always encouraged me to stay true to what he called our shared values.

John Godfrey, my immediate predecessor, served the people of Don Valley West in this place for 15 years, as well as serving Canada as minister of state for infrastructure and communities.

An educator, administrator, journalist, environmentalist, husband, father and friend, his life was committed to public service.

Together, the two of them inspired me and, I think, inspired everyone in the House with their good works.

* * *

MEMBER FOR ELMWOOD—TRANSCONA

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour a distinguished NDP colleague, the steadfast servant of Elmwood—Transcona. As the hon. member steps down from his parliamentary seat, we reflect on a remarkable tenure, a tenure defined by a commitment to his constituents, a passionate advocacy for workers' rights and a relentless pursuit of justice, defined best by his prairie brand of democratic socialism.

The always honourable member's proud roots in Winnipeg, deeply entwined with his family's legacy of public service, laid a foundation for his principled approach to governance.

He brought to the House and our caucus a rare combination of intellectual depth and practical wisdom, shaped by his background as an electrician and proud member of IBEW Local 2085.

His voice in Parliament has been one of reason, compassion and solidarity, especially for those on the margins of society.

My brother has always been more than just a friend and a colleague, and his presence here will be profoundly missed.

I thank him for his service and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

PIERRE FOURNELLE

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to an exceptional man from my riding of Laurentides—Labelle.

He is a rare gem who has been volunteering in amateur hockey and baseball in the community of Sainte-Agathe for over 60 years now. Pierre Fournelle was awarded the Lieutenant Governor's Medal for Exceptional Merit in January. He clearly deserves this impressive honour.

Thanks to his passionate involvement and dedication, Mr. Fournelle has spread his love of sport to the young people who have come into contact with him. For decades, he has enabled thousands of young people to benefit from quality sports facilities. Despite his venerable age, he remains active and involved in the community.

I admire his lively spirit and hope that his volunteer work will be a model for future generations.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister is not worth the corruption or the cover-up.

The Liberals fought tooth and nail to prevent Canadians from getting the documents that told the truth about the massive security breach at Canada's top-level laboratory, and we now know why they were so eager to cover them up. The documents revealed that the Liberal government allowed two scientists who were a very serious and credible danger and a realistic and credible threat to Canada's economic security, to compromise the Winnipeg lab.

CSIS reported that one of the scientists intentionally transferred scientific knowledge and materials to China to benefit the PRC. The Prime Minister has said he admires China's basic dictatorship, so it is no surprise that under his watch the regime in Beijing was allowed to infiltrate what was supposed to be one of Canada's most secure facilities.

Only a common-sense Conservative government will stand on guard for our country and make sure this never happens again.

* * *

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Markham—Unionville, I rise today with great pride on this final day of Black History Month.

Throughout this month I have had the immense pleasure of attending numerous events, both here in Ottawa and in my community of Markham. As we reflect on the struggles and triumphs of Black Canadians, we are reminded of their immense contribution to every aspect of our society. From arts and culture to business and politics, Black Canadians have shaped our nation in profound ways.

I thank all my constituents in Markham—Unionville, as well as organizations like YRAACC and MACCA, for their work during the month of February, and I give my heartfelt wishes for a very happy conclusion to Black History Month. I hope this month has been a time of learning and celebration and, above all, a reminder of our shared commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government neglected national security. It hid things. On top of that, it is still not taking responsibility. Yesterday, the Minister of Health said that none of the senior officials involved in supervising the scientists who were fired would be held accountable.

If none of the senior officials are responsible, who in cabinet will be?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, it is very important to say that the Public Health Agency of Canada is independent, especially when it comes to national security issues. Our government set up a process to ensure that all the information is available.

It is very unfortunate that two Canadian citizens who were eminent scientists did those bad things. The RCMP is investigating. That is very important.

[English]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada-China committee, in 2019, could have done exactly the same job as the ad hoc committee did. We could have had the documents three years ago.

The CSIS assessments released yesterday make it clear that the PRC is and was actively recruiting top Canadian scientists to plunder Canada's research and intellectual property. The assessments also make clear that the PRC wants to weaponize civilian research for military purposes against us and our allies.

Knowing what we know now, will the government halt all collaboration between Winnipeg's National Microbiology Laboratory and any entities and individuals in the People's Republic of China?

● (1420)

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that an attack on our national security by a foreign nation, be it China or Russia, represents an attack on democracy. It represents a direct attack on every member of the House. I share the member's outrage that China or any other country would attempt to interfere in our process.

The Public Health Agency, which is one of the most respected agencies in the world, hired two Canadian citizens who were eminent and well-known scientists in Canada, but who lied. It is the Public Health Agency that discovered that. It is the Public Health Agency that fired them. That is why there is now an RCMP investigation about their actions.

Oral Questions

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the documents reveal a shocking disregard for Canada's national security. They reveal a government that is completely asleep at the switch on national security and the machinery of government. They reveal government employees collaborating with Beijing's government and with the biological weapons unit of the People's Liberation Army.

Equally shocking are the health minister's comments. He said yesterday that there was no evidence of actual breaches at the lab and that no sensitive information actually left the country. The documents say otherwise.

Does the minister stand by those comments?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the two Canadian scientists in question were well-known for their work in virology and had spent their time working on health treatments for those who were suffering from viruses. With respect to collaboration, there is absolutely no evidence of the thing that the member is suggesting. I do not think that it is at all appropriate to suggest that they were involved with weaponization or things of this nature.

The Conservatives have all the documents. They can see all of the information. We have waived all the normal considerations, not only of national security but also of employee relationships, that are normally kept confidential. It was our government that did that. That is why they have this—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a scientist working with Ebola at Canada's only level 4 lab collaborated with a People's Republic of China army major general. Sadly the story does not end there. Dr. Qiu was able to gain access to the lab for students from China and, it gets worse, for a scientist from the Academy of Military Medical Sciences, the research arm of the People's Liberation Army, known to work on biology-enabled warfare.

How did so many citizens from a hostile superpower gain access to Canada's top lab? Is it because the Prime Minister admires China's basic dictatorship?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some will attempt to turn national security concerns into partisan games. That is unfortunate.

Let me just give an example. The exchange concerning Ebola in 2019 was done in the context of trying to work with China and other countries on finding solutions to Ebola, which exists in so many different parts of the world. At that moment in time, in 2019, the relationship with China was in a different place. The information that was shared was through legitimate channels. It has nothing to do with this issue. It was absolutely known and handled with complete control.

I think it is very important to not mis-characterize national security for partisan interests.

The Speaker: I would like to remind all members to ensure that they do not direct language that would be unparliamentary at any of their colleagues.

The hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister's comments are reckless and untrue.

Before March 31, 2019, the PRC did not have a containment level 4 lab. How can I be so specific about the date? It is the date on which a scientist at Canada's top lab, the National Microbiology Laboratory, shipped dangerous pathogens including the Ebola virus to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. This scientist had a history of visiting and collaborating with the PLA since 2016.

When did the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister know about the espionage and blatant violation of our sovereignty, and when did they decide to cover it up?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the exact opposite of a cover-up. It was the current government that created the process that released the documents. Conservatives actually refused to participate in the process.

The second thing I will say with respect to our national security interests is that it is essential, when we are dealing with national security, to recognize two things: that the party opposite is saying it would support partisan interference into the Public Health Agency of Canada, and that if it were in government, it would see that political interference into the process as acceptable.

No, it is done at arm's length, and rightfully so. It is the Public Health Agency of Canada that identified these Canadian citizens, these eminent scientists, who were lying, and took action.

* * *

● (1425)

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec Court of Appeal has just handed down its ruling on the state secularism law, Bill 21. There is a fair bit of consensus in Quebec on this legislation. Quebecers want a clear separation of church and state, which is what the law guarantees.

Now that the Quebec Court of Appeal has rendered its decision, it is clear that the next step will be the Supreme Court. We saw it with Bill 101, and we will see it again with Bill 21.

What we are asking Ottawa is simple: Can it stay out of it, either directly or indirectly, because Quebec knows what is good for Quebec?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's question. Obviously, the Quebec Court of Appeal has just handed down its ruling. I will read it, and we will reflect on it.

However, I want to emphasize the same message that we have always emphasized. We will always be there to defend the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. If this decision goes to the Supreme Court, we will be there to intervene.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): I will say it again, Mr. Speaker: Quebec knows what is good for Quebec.

We know that French is not only our official language, but it is also our common language and we need to protect it. We know that gender equality is non-negotiable, just like we know that the best way to protect religion is for the state not to have any. That is what Bill 21 is all about. There is a general consensus on that in Quebec.

Will the Liberals, who say they do not like to bicker, commit to not going against the will of Quebecers on Bill 21?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister and our government have always said, we will be there to defend the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The charter protects freedom of expression, but also freedom of religion and the right to equality.

That being said, if this ruling ends up at the Supreme Court of Canada, we will be there to intervene.

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[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the ArriveCAN drama never stops. When we told the Liberals they could ask the public service to do the work that was required, they said it was not possible. It turns out that the ArriveCAN contract was awarded to a DND employee, so a public servant actually did do the work.

Under the Liberals, public money going to private consultants has tripled. Why are they trying to give Conservatives a run for their money on how much money they can waste on private consulting?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question is an important one.

As soon as we were made aware that the CEO of Dalian was a DND employee, we took immediate action to suspend all contracts with Dalian, and I can confirm for the House that all active contracts with Dalian have been suspended. I can also confirm for the House that the person in question has also been suspended.

The matter will be thoroughly investigated.

The Speaker: Colleagues, once again I ask that you please be respectful of the questions that are asked and, of course, of the answers given, for many reasons. One reason is that members who require the use of translation cannot hear if members are shouting.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Burnaby South.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a family of six, including a pregnant woman, is living under an overpass in Montreal. The family has been evicted from their apartment and they cannot find affordable housing. This is the result of the Liberals and Conservatives losing over a million affordable housing units.

Oral Questions

Are the Liberals ashamed of their record or are they too out of touch?

Hon. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that every person in Canada has the right to a roof over their head. That is a fundamental human right.

We have doubled funding to communities in order to fight homelessness and ensure everyone has a place to call home. We know there is a lot of work to be done. However, unlike the Conservatives, we are not going to insult municipalities to get that work done. We have to make sure we work with everyone to find a lasting solution to homelessness in Canada.

* * *

● (1430)

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost, the crime, the corruption or the cover-ups. After the Liberals hid the Winnipeg lab documents from Canadians for over three years, we finally know why they blocked Parliament. We know Dr. Qiu had “close and clandestine relationships with...entities of the People's Republic of China” and collaborated with military scientists.

The People's Liberation Army is a known security threat to Canada, so why did the Prime Minister cover up the breach of national security instead of arresting the spies?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will answer the first part of the answer, as I suspect we are going to have other questions on the second element.

On the first order, the first offer was to have all parliamentarians to look at the documents through NSICOP. That was an immediate offer. Some opposition members said that was not a good answer, because they wanted to make sure that if there was a need for redactions to be released, there would be a process.

I, as House leader at that point in time, suggested an ad hoc process that would ensure that an independent arbiter would make the decision about releasing the documents. I would remind the member again that it is an independent decision of the Public Health Agency to make redactions. I am sure he is not suggesting that anything other than that should happen.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House leader actually sued the Speaker.

Oral Questions

Dr. Qiu maliciously shared technology materials from the Winnipeg labs with Major General Chen, one of Beijing's top commanders at the Academy of Military Medical Science. The academy is described in the CSIS documents as "the highest medical research institution of the People's Liberation Army of the PRC" and as having offensive biological weapons capabilities. One of its objectives is "transforming the results of basic civilian research into military applications" and "development of military biotechnologies". The Chinese military can now make more biological weapons and potentially use them against Canadians and our allies.

Why did the Prime Minister cover up this national security threat?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already said that the documents first were released, and then the additional redactions were actually commenced by us.

The second point is that the member says "maliciously", but we do not know what the intention was. That is the purpose of an RCMP investigation. These are individuals whom I am deeply concerned about, like the member opposite is. In having followed due process, we understand what they did.

With respect to the Chinese government, the military itself, the government, academia and scientists are all part of its military. That means that any connection they had whatsoever would have touched that, and so I think it is careful—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Colleagues, it is hard for the Chair to hear the response. If members are not satisfied with the response, sometimes the best opportunity is just to listen to it in silence and let it stand on its own.

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman has the floor.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the health minister should actually read the CSIS document that describes all the breaches that were made and the espionage that was carried out.

At the Prime Minister's top public health lab in Canada, Beijing military scientist Dr. Yan was given unfettered access to all the labs and the computer systems at the Winnipeg lab, which were covertly shared by Dr. Qiu with Beijing. Instead of stopping this espionage, the Prime Minister decided to cover it up.

Why did the Prime Minister put his admiration for the basic dictatorship of the Communist Party in Beijing ahead of the public safety of Canadians?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to step back and really consider what the Conservative Party is saying here.

At the time they were hired, these two Canadian citizens were eminent scientists who were well published and well regarded throughout North America. The fact that they lied and misrepresented themselves is reprehensible—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I will ask the member for Miramichi—Grand Lake to please keep his comments to himself. He will have the floor when he asks a question.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Mark Holland: Mr. Speaker, I would hope they are not suggesting that, if they had been in power, they would have interfered politically, and been able, through clairvoyance, to know that these eminent scientists, who at that point in time we had no reason to believe were anything other than Canadian scientists who were doing good research, and gotten rid of them before this happened.

● (1435)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, we read the documents concerning Winnipeg's National Microbiology Laboratory, and the worst is confirmed: There was indeed infiltration by the Chinese Communist Party.

Based on its own assessment, the Liberal government allowed a person who is "a very serious danger and a realistic and credible threat to Canada's economic security" to access and compromise the level 4 lab.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he is trying to protect himself instead of Canadians?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when China, Russia or any other country threatens Canada, it is an attack on our democracy, on the House of Commons and on every member here. That worries me a great deal.

That is why we have put in place policies to further strengthen public safety and to ensure that national security is not compromised.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the minister know that the Prime Minister has said that he admires China's basic dictatorship?

Does he also know that the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg is working on some of the most dangerous viruses in the world and that the scientist who was fired shared sensitive intellectual property and dangerous pathogens, such as the Ebola genetic sequence, with the Chinese Communist Party?

Does the Prime Minister understand that he put our national and economic security in jeopardy?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians watching at home are seeing today is deplorable. National security should not be a partisan issue.

We have no lessons to learn from the Conservatives when it comes to protecting national security in research and science in Canada. Our government has done more than any other to protect science, to protect intellectual property, to help our universities and our research centres by identifying security risks.

In January, we published a list that tells research institutes not to do business with entities that might act to the detriment of the Government of Canada.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware that, on March 31, 2019, the Ebola and Nipah viruses were sent to Beijing on Air Canada? Does the minister know that?

Does he know that viruses that are used as weapons of war were sent to a country that is building an arsenal of biological weapons? We know that Dr. Qiu conducted joint research with Major-General Chen Wei of China's People's Liberation Army.

Does the Prime Minister realize that his government screwed up by helping a country that is developing biological weapons and putting people in danger?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, instead of talking about the facts, what the opposition Conservatives are trying to do today is politicize national security. I think Canadians' health and safety is the primary responsibility of every MP here.

As I said in January, we have published a list of entities that Canadian research centres should avoid doing business with in the interest of protecting national security and intellectual property. Everyone watching knows that we will always be there to protect Canada's national security.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec Court of Appeal has clearly ruled that Bill 21 is constitutional and does not pose a problem. It recognizes the right of Quebecers to adopt rules to ensure the secular nature of the Quebec state. The matter is closed, unless Ottawa and a few opponents decide to continue challenging it.

What will the Liberal government choose? Will it respect the will of Quebecers and the Court of Appeal ruling, or will it pick a fight with Quebec again?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that our government is firmly committed to defending the rights and freedoms protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression and religion and the right to equality.

Our government has clearly expressed serious concerns about the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause on a number of occasions as well. If this case goes to the Supreme Court, we will be there to intervene.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, respecting the charter is a good thing. Respecting court decisions would also be a good thing.

Despite what the Liberals say, there is nothing wrong with Bill 21. It is constitutional and absolutely legitimate. It is one of the pillars supporting the kind of peaceful co-existence that Quebecers

want. Five years on, we see, as the courts see, that everything is fine and that the Liberals' fears were unfounded.

Will the government respect the Court of Appeal's decision and promise to hold off from directly or indirectly challenging Bill 21?

• (1440)

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister and I have already said, our government is committed to defending the rights and freedoms protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression and religion and the right to equality.

We have also said on a number of occasions that our government has clearly expressed serious concerns about the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause. If this case goes to the Supreme Court, our government will intervene.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing. The Liberals want secularism to be odourless, colourless and tasteless. They want Quebecers to adopt a secularism that means nothing and is inconsequential.

However, the separation of church and state does mean something. It means that every single person's beliefs and non-beliefs will never interfere in their interactions with the state. That is the purpose of Bill 21, and it has real implications that may require the use of the notwithstanding clause. The Court of Appeal recognized that.

Will the government acknowledge that the use of the notwithstanding clause in the case of Bill 21 is not only constitutional, but entirely legitimate?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister and I have said, we are firmly committed to defending the rights and freedoms protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression and religion and the right to equality.

We have also said on a number of occasions that we have serious concerns about the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause. If this case goes to the Supreme Court, our government will be there to intervene.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister is not worth the cost or the cover-up. For three years, the Prime Minister covered up a terrifying national security breach at Canada's highest-security lab, hiding the fact that the head of special pathogens was actively collaborating with top Beijing military scientists engaged in biodefence and bioterrorism.

In the face of that, will the Prime Minister accept responsibility for this colossal failure on his watch?

Oral Questions

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have answered that question on numerous occasions, but let me address the proposition at the start of that question when the member said we are working together with another political party. He does not want to do that, and I get it. He is used to making partisan points and not reaching across the aisle to collaborate.

What happens when we collaborate and work together? We get national pharmacare. We get the ability to say to those who have diabetes that we have their backs and they would have medication. We get to say to women that we are going to give them real freedom, freedom over their sexuality and freedom over their reproductive rights. That is what happens when members stop focusing on partisan politics and start focusing on results.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a disgraceful answer from the minister.

A national security culture begins at the top with the Prime Minister. This is a Prime Minister who said that he admires Beijing's basic dictatorship. This is a Prime Minister who, over the past eight years, has repeatedly ignored Beijing's interference. In the face of that, is it any wonder that, under the Prime Minister's watch, top Beijing military scientists had unfettered access to some of Canada's most sensitive biological secrets?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the first order, that is not true. What is true is that the Public Health Agency of Canada, which is one of the most respected agencies in the world, and which was there for us throughout the pandemic, is entirely responsible for its operations.

The truth is that there were two individuals hired. They were Canadian citizens, eminent scientists, who were well known and well respected across Canada and around the world, who lied to the Public Health Agency of Canada. The Public Health Agency of Canada then took the very responsible action of firing those individuals and turning the matter over to the RCMP. They are currently under investigation.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton had the opportunity to ask two questions. I am certain he could speak to his House leader to ask for more questions in the House, but until that time, I would ask him to wait until he has the floor.

The hon. member for Hastings—Lennox and Addington.

● (1445)

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the evidence speaks otherwise. After eight years, the Liberal-NDP Prime Minister is worth neither the cost nor the cover-up. He cannot be trusted to keep our people safe.

Yesterday the entire nation was shocked to learn that the government granted two People's Liberation Army assets full access to secret research in a top secret Canadian lab. This represents the biggest security breach since the Cold War, and it happened under the Prime Minister who famously said he admires China's basic dictatorship. How can Canadians trust this Prime Minister, who fails to take national security seriously?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the representations made by the member are inaccurate, and I would invite people to read the documents, which have been fully redacted.

However, this is the contrast with a party that is focused on partisanship and differences. The member opposite talked about working with another party and what that might accomplish. What about dental care? When we focused on co-operation, we were able to get dental care for this country. We were able to make sure that nine million Canadians, including three million seniors, will have access to dental care. They are voting against that. They are against that. Are they against pharmacare? Are they against the other fruits of co-operation that come from—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Colleagues, those of us who have the ability to speak both languages have a clear advantage in the House in that we do not require headsets, but for those of us who do require them, it is very difficult to hear the questions and the answers if there is too much noise in the House. I ask all members, out of respect for their colleagues, to please listen to the answers and the questions.

The hon member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

* * *

HOUSING

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the number of people unable to find an affordable place to live in Nanaimo—Ladysmith is staggering, and what have the Liberals done? They have cut the Reaching Home funding to Nanaimo by 60%, and the Conservatives' plan is to gut funding and leave it up to rich developers, who just so happen to be their biggest donors.

Nanaimo needs more support, not less. The mayor of Nanaimo is calling for federal support. Will the minister provide the funding required for truly affordable housing in Nanaimo?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to take up this specific matter with the member after question period to know more about that specific case in Nanaimo, but I will say that the federal government is absolutely committed to ensuring there is greater supply.

Supply is always what underpins a housing crisis, in this country and every other country that is experiencing exactly that. We need to see more being built, and that is why we have incented the private sector by lifting the GST on the building of rental apartments. We have moved forward in working with municipalities to see zoning changes, where so much of this is dealt with, in terms of affordability.

PHARMACARE

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats are delivering diabetes medicine and devices and contraceptives for all Canadians today. Free contraceptives would be life-changing for women across the country, but shamefully, Danielle Smith said that she does not want that for Albertans. My constituents are outraged, and the Conservative leader, when he was asked by the media about this, literally ran away so he would not have to talk about fairness for women.

Will the government ensure that it signs agreements with all provinces so all women and all Canadians have access to the—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, access to medication for diabetes is not just a question of social justice, it is a question of saving lives. It is a question of prevention. It is a question of reducing costs enormously across the country. Specifically with Alberta, I have had very constructive conversations with Adriana LaGrange, who has been willing to work, compromise and find that common ground.

Unfortunately, across the aisle, that is not what we see. Today, the leader of the official opposition, the Conservatives, ran away when asked if he would support diabetes medication. He refused to answer whether he would slash contraceptives for women. The Conservatives are already against dental. I would really like to know where they stand on pharmacare.

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• (1450)

[Translation]

NEWS MEDIA INDUSTRY

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, newsrooms and journalists are one of the pillars of Canadian democracy. In our rural communities, local media play an even more fundamental role. In December, the Minister of Canadian Heritage reached a historic agreement with Google, which committed to giving newsrooms more than \$100 million.

Can she tell the House when and how newsrooms, and local media outlets in particular, will be able to access this money?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite months of opposition from the Conservatives, last year we passed the Online News Act, which allowed us to strike a historic deal with Google. That deal means Google will pay \$100 million to local news organizations. Those funds would never have been made available if it were up to the Conservatives alone.

I am pleased to say that Google launched its open call process yesterday to ask eligible news organizations to come forward to benefit from this payment. Canadians can rest assured that, on this side of the House, we will always stand up to the tech giants to make them pay their fair share and behave like good corporate citizens.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

The Speaker: I would ask the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier to refrain from speaking until he has the floor.

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[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister must be confused, because it is not Conservatives making a link between these scientists and threats to national security. It is the government's own security agencies saying that these individuals were collaborating with foreign entities that presented a threat to the security of Canada.

We are talking about research with pathogens and deadly viruses, while, at the same time, these individuals were on the payroll of the People's Liberation Army and the communist regime in Beijing. Rather than inform Canadians and come clean at the outset, the government went into overdrive to cover it up.

How can the Prime Minister be so callous and selfish that he would try to protect himself rather than the security of Canadians?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to answer my colleague. Canada shows leadership when it comes to national security. That is something the Conservatives will not do.

Let me refresh their memory, because they tend to be selective when it comes to the facts. On January 16, we announced that we would ban funding for research in sensitive areas. There are 100 entities around the world. We work with our Five Eyes allies. We work with research centres in this country. We work with universities.

Canadians know that we will always put national security first and defend the interests of Canada.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals want to give themselves a gold star that finally three years later, after fighting, kicking and screaming to keep these documents hidden, that now they have been released only because Conservatives demanded it. Let us remember the facts. They ignored and refused to comply with four parliamentary orders. They took the unprecedented step of taking the Speaker of the House of Commons to court to keep these documents hidden. Then they called a snap election hoping it would all go away.

If this was all just an administrative issue, then why the cover-up?

Oral Questions

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the first order, one of the things that is disturbing about what the member is supposing is that if he were in government, and I hope that does not happen, they would interfere in the redaction process and they would be involved in it. We obviously did not do that, particularly not with national security.

The member opposite and I had a conversation about this. First, I suggested immediately that they see the documents at NSICOP. They said that was not good enough. Therefore, I created an ad hoc committee. The ad hoc committee gave them the opportunity not only to see the documents, but put to an independent arbiter whether or not they should be released publicly. We did that together. The documents were released. They are now before us.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is a known admirer of China's basic dictatorship.

Over the past eight years, he has allowed research with the Chinese army. He has allowed the Chinese Communist Party to interfere in our elections. He has turned a blind eye to intimidation of the Chinese diaspora.

With the release of the Winnipeg lab documents yesterday, we learned that the Prime Minister also allowed a person who represented “a very serious and credible danger” to compromise Canada's national security.

Will the Prime Minister finally admit that he tried to hide the documents to protect himself, not to protect Canadians?

• (1455)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, people watching at home must be wondering where the Conservatives were on January 16. I am sure people are wondering.

On January 16, we announced that, as a government, we would stop funding research—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: May I encourage hon. members who do not have the floor to wait until it is their turn to speak?

That way, we can have a discussion. I am not encouraging discussion across the aisle.

The hon. Minister of Innovation.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I hope the Conservatives will listen.

On January 16, we banned research work in sensitive areas with approximately 100 entities around the world. We have worked with our allies to protect science, intellectual property and the work done by our universities.

We will always be there to defend national security.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, where was the minister in July 2019 when two scientists were expelled from Canada by the security agencies? Where was the minis-

ter then? It was not last January; it was in 2019. That was over four years ago.

What we learned yesterday is that the Prime Minister ignored four orders of Parliament to produce documents. He took the Speaker of the House to court. This is unprecedented in the history of our country, and it is the worst cover-up in the history of our country.

Why did the Prime Minister want to protect himself instead of defending the national security of Canadians?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people watching at home must be truly appalled.

We just explained to the Conservatives yet again that the Prime Minister and all government members on this side of the House take national security seriously.

On January 16, we banned not one but 100 entities from working with Canadian research centres, universities and colleges on sensitive research. That is exactly the type of measure that we need to take to defend Canada's interests.

We will always be there to defend science.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to health, Quebecers want care, not threats.

A year after forcing Quebec to accept an increase in transfers that cover only one-sixth of our needs, the federal government is threatening to steal \$900 million from Quebec if it does not meet the government's conditions by March 31. The Liberals are once again playing political games at Quebecers' expense and with Quebecers' own money.

When will the Liberals stop holding patients hostage and start paying Quebec the money it is entitled to?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Bloc Québécois is always trying to pick a fight.

When I spoke with Minister Dubé from Quebec, it was clear that his objective was to co-operate to find a solution. In our health care system, I think that Canadians and Quebecers want politicians, elected members, who look for solutions, not pick a fight. That is why I am sure that we will reach an agreement with Quebec.

PHARMACARE

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, federal pharmacare is not necessarily just around the corner.

Bill C-64 talks about a principle “to consider when working towards the implementation of national universal pharmacare”. In other words, it is basically just another election promise. Frankly, the NDP got bought off cheap.

If, after discussing a principle to consider when working towards implementation, Ottawa actually were to someday end up with pharmacare, which Quebec already has, will Quebec be able to opt out with full compensation?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, this year, for the first time in the country's history, anyone with diabetes and anyone who need contraceptives will get what they need. This is such a historic announcement. It is going to make a difference for a huge number of people across the country, even in Quebec.

Yesterday, I had a good conversation with Minister Dubé about this. I am sure we can reach an agreement with Quebec as well.

* * *

• (1500)
[English]

CARBON PRICING

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, common-sense Conservatives will axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime. After eight years, the Liberal-NDP Prime Minister is not worth the cost, the crime or the corruption.

Never before in the history of this great nation have so many people had to resort to food banks. Thousands are now resorting to dumpster diving because they can no longer afford the cost of food.

Will the Prime Minister show some compassion and cancel the April 1 carbon tax hike?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that colleague is from Ontario where I am from and the climate rebate that Ontarians will receive is over \$1,100. That is for a family of four. I am not surprised, though, to hear that member and the Conservatives continue to bring up these points. They want to take money out of the pockets of Canadians.

Today, historic legislation was tabled in the House of Commons with respect to pharmacare. The Leader of the Opposition ran away when asked if he would support pharmacare. When it comes to student loans and helping students, and when it comes to EI and pensions in particular, the Conservatives are nowhere to be seen. They want to make cuts. They are a party of austerity.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are getting back far less from the government than they are paying in hard-earned taxes.

According to Second Harvest, this year will see a 30% rise in the demand for food charity in some regions. Where I live in southern Ontario, we produce food to feed the entire nation, yet so many

Oral Questions

families there still do not have enough income to cover basic food expenses.

Why will the government not do the right thing and cancel the 23% carbon tax hike on April 1 so that Canadian families can afford food again.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that gloom-and-doom member who wants to take Canada out of the UN needs to know a bit of good news for a change. We have had many months of good news for Canadians. Just recently, Statistics Canada announced that in January we gained 37,000 new jobs, and there are one million more Canadians working than before the pandemic. The unemployment rate is at 5.7% and wage growth is outpacing inflation, and that is even more true for women. We would think that member would care about such things.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, common-sense Conservatives would axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime, because after eight years, Canadians know that the Prime Minister is not worth the cost, crime or corruption.

Life has never been more expensive in this country. One million Canadians will be relying on food banks this year alone and still the Prime Minister is hell-bent on hiking the carbon tax by 23% on April 1.

Why will the Prime Minister not cancel his carbon tax increase and help make life more affordable for Canadians?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have had enough of the gloom and doom coming from over there. The Conservatives are deliberately ignoring the truth about how our government has supported Canadians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, 2.3 million Canadians have been lifted out of poverty since this government took office and started caring about Canadians by putting supports in place that those guys had spent all their time cutting. Families throughout Canada have seen their child care fees slashed, in many cases down to \$10 a day, thanks to this government and Bill C-35 that we are getting ready to pass today.

Oral Questions

• (1505)

HEALTH

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Black Mental Health Week begins next week. It is a time to amplify Black voices and support equity in mental health. It is time to correct the disproportionate lack of Black health researchers, so we can deliver culturally appropriate mental health solutions. It is time to act to improve the wide gap in health outcomes for many Black Canadians that is the result of historical and systemic anti-Black racism.

Can the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions tell us what her department is doing to improve access to culturally safe and informed mental health services for Black communities across the country?

Hon. Ya'ara Saks (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is such a tremendous advocate on so many issues that matter to Canadians. Black communities across Canada continue to experience social and economic inequities, which have persisted for far too long and have negative impacts on people's mental health. We know there is more work to do and we are committed to doing it together.

Through programs like the mental health of Black Canadians fund, we are supporting organizations to develop culturally safe, focused, knowledge-based programs with the capacity to improve the mental health of Black Canadians and meet their needs. We will keep working with the Black community across Canada.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, common-sense Conservatives will axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime. Meanwhile, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister, Canadians know he is not worth the cost, the crime or the corruption.

Just yesterday, we learned that in the Prime Minister's \$60-million arrive scam, one of the contractors who was paid millions is actually a bureaucrat for the NDP-Liberal government. That is why common-sense Conservatives passed a motion in this House, demanding that the government produce all the documents on the Prime Minister's scandal. Will he stand in this place and commit to releasing every last page?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 24 hours after we became aware that the CEO of Dalian was a DND employee, we took action. We have suspended all contracts with Dalian. We have suspended the employee and launched an investigation of how this person became an employee of DND in the first place.

We will act to ensure that we protect the integrity of our institutions and our government.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us say this a little louder for those in the back. We are looking for a commitment from the government to release every page of those documents. After eight

years, it is very clear that the Liberals and their NDP-Liberal Prime Minister are not worth the corruption. This is a \$60-million scandal, with people in their basements getting paid \$20 million and not doing any IT work. Now we have the minister's staff getting paid millions of dollars while Canadians are lined up at food banks.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michael Barrett: I will ask this loudly so that the minister can hear it: Will they commit, standing in their place, to getting Canadians money back for their corruption?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will simply remind the member opposite how quickly we acted. This information came to our attention yesterday. Since that time, we have suspended all contracts with Dalian. We have suspended the member and launched a thorough investigation to determine how this individual came to be employed.

We are—

The Speaker: I expect all colleagues to have respect for each other and to wait their turn to be recognized by the Chair. At that point, when they have the opportunity to speak, I also request that all people listen to them.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to repeat what I have already said, except to remind the members of this House that, when this information came to our attention, we took immediate action. We took the steps necessary to protect Canadians' interests and to remove this individual from our employ.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, common-sense Conservatives will axe the tax. We will build the homes. We will fix the budget. We will stop the crime.

After eight years, the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister is not worth the cost, crime or corruption. Yesterday we learned that yet another company received eight million tax dollars for the arrive scam. However, it gets better: This one was owned by a national defence bureaucrat. The rot continues. Yesterday, Parliament passed our motion to force the government to release all documents and to repay taxpayers.

Will the government end the cover-up and release the documents, yes or no?

• (1510)

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite began his question by talking about all the things the Conservatives propose to do at some point in the future. However, let us remember what they did when they were in government. They cut defence spending, for example, to less than 1% of GDP. They cut the resources of the police, our national security and intelligence advisers, and all the people whose job it is to protect us and to maintain the integrity of our institutions. They cut them.

We have been rebuilding the government to get the work done, and we are prepared to take the action necessary—

The Speaker: I will ask the hon. member for South Shore—St. Margarets to please wait his turn.

The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan.

* * *

[Translation]

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Quebec is blessed with tourist attractions that appeal to Quebecers, Canadians and the rest of the world. Quebec's tourism sector accounts for more than 3% of jobs and 2% of the GDP.

Can the minister tell us how our government will ensure that Quebec's tourism sector achieves its full growth potential, be it for sustainable tourism, agri-tourism, outdoor experiences, indigenous tourism or rural tourism?

Hon. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He can tell everyone in Alfred-Pellan and the rest of Quebec that, as of today, the tourism growth program for Quebec is ready to receive project submissions from SMEs, not-for-profit organizations and indigenous communities.

Our delivery partners, the Société des attractions touristiques du Québec and Indigenous Tourism Quebec, will select projects to enhance and diversify visitor experiences.

The Conservatives do not believe in tourism. They want to make cuts everywhere from Saguenay to Gaspé. Here on this side of the House, we will support all of Quebec's tourism projects.

* * *

[English]

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last summer's wildfires devastated communities across Canada. The Minister of Emergency Preparedness has admitted that the upcoming wildfire season will be even worse.

Canadians want their government to take decisive action. According to last week's Abacus poll, 74% of them want to see this done through a new national wildfire fighting force, but the Liber-

Oral Questions

als are taking a go-slow approach. The wildfire season is already starting.

When will the government act to create a national wildfire fighting force?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (President of the King's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Emergency Preparedness and Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact, actually, we are taking immediate action, taking lessons learned not only from last year but also from previous years.

First and foremost, we need to make sure that all the resources that have been put in place go directly to fighting wildfires, that is, to the local levels. We have already trained approximately 500 firefighters, putting in place more personnel to support the recovery.

Yes, we are reviewing the overall national system as well.

For any support that we provide, we are going to make sure that it actually has the maximum impact.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, we are learning that Palestinians in Gaza have been shot and killed while waiting for aid, at a time when the UN reports that at least a quarter of those in Gaza are one step from famine.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International reports that Israel has failed to comply with the ICJ ruling requiring it to take immediate steps to prevent genocide, including allowing humanitarian aid in.

In light of this, when will the government reinstate UNRWA funding, which millions of Palestinians rely on for food, and call on Israel to follow the ICJ ruling?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the stories coming out of Gaza are extremely preoccupying. This is catastrophic. I would call it a nightmare scenario.

At all times, international humanitarian law must be respected; both parties must respect the ICJ ruling. We need to do more to make sure that humanitarian aid is going into Gaza. At all times, civilians must be protected.

Government Orders

• (1515)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is time for the weekly Thursday question. I just want to let my colleague, the government House leader, know that the Conservatives are ready to quickly pass any legislation that will axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget or stop the crime. They need not use extended sittings to do that, if they come forward with common-sense, practical plans, not like the inflationary deficits and soft-on-crime approach that have unleashed so much crime and chaos in our community.

Can the government House leader inform the House whether any of that will be coming the week we come back? If not, what will the government actually be calling for debate.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have good news today. We have announced a whole bunch more homes being built in Canada. We have reduced taxes on the middle class and increased them on the one per cent, and those guys voted against it. The budget is the best in the G7, and we have a great record on reducing poverty. All these things are well in hand without the bad track record of the previous government.

[Translation]

Later today, we will have the final vote on the motion regarding the Senate amendment to Bill C-35, an act respecting early learning and child care in Canada. Tomorrow will be an allotted day.

[English]

When we return following the constituency weeks, we will resume second reading debate of Bill C-59, the fall economic statement implementation act, 2023. On Wednesday of the same week, we will continue debate on the motion relating to the Senate amendments to Bill C-29, an act to provide for the establishment of a national council for reconciliation. Tuesday, March 19, and Thursday, March 21, shall be allotted days.

* * *

[Translation]

FALL ECONOMIC STATEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2023**BILL C-59—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION**

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): I would like to advise that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-59, an act to implement certain provisions of the fall economic statement tabled in Parliament on November 21, 2023 and certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 28, 2023.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

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. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak to such an important piece of legislation.

It is interesting to note the mechanisms that were used in order to prevent debate on this piece of legislation. It is fairly well established that, as a government, we have been very aggressive on the issue of trying to provide child care to Canadians. We have had a number of ministers work with different provincial entities and other stakeholders across the country in order to develop a plan that would be well received by Canadians.

Having achieved that plan, the work was then to start by working with provinces and getting agreements put into place. Many provinces actually have \$10-a-day child care because of the government's proactive approach to providing good-quality child care. Manitoba is one of those provinces. In fact, it was not that long ago that we had the Prime Minister come to Winnipeg North and visit Stanley Knowles School, where he got to witness first-hand some of the benefactors of quality child care. That was in just one school in the riding of Winnipeg North. We saw children, parents and administrators of good-quality child care.

When we look at the dialogue that had taken place, see the individual efforts by the child care providers, and see the smiles on the faces of children and their parents and guardians who bring them to that facility, we get a better appreciation as to why child care is so very important.

Here is the issue I have. Virtually every member of the Conservative Party who speaks nowadays has been programmed to talk about their four priorities. The one I want to focus a little attention on is the priority they classify as “fixing the budget”. It is important that people really understand what Conservatives mean when they say, “fixing the budget”. From my perspective, those are code words about a Conservative hidden agenda in terms of what a Conservative government would actually do. We need to be aware of that. The Conservatives need to start sharing what their true feelings, thoughts and policies are on very important public policy positions.

Earlier today, in the debate on this, one of the Conservatives stood up and was very critical of Bill C-35. I posed a question, asking if the member could be very clear, because the Conservative Party has not been clear on the child care issue and on Bill C-35. If we look at what Conservatives were saying during the election, the position they took was that at the end of the day, they were going to rip up the child care proposals that the Liberal government was talking about just prior to the election. That is what they were telling Canadians.

Government Orders

Shortly after the election, Conservatives started to waffle a little, as the government started to actually get provinces to sign on to it. Whether it was provinces like my home province of Manitoba or provinces like Ontario, what we witnessed is that from all regions of the country, provinces and territories were buying into the national program. That caused a few issues to the Conservative Party members, as they started to feel a little uncomfortable with what they were seeing during the last federal election.

● (1520)

Let us fast-forward to what is happening today and what we are hearing from the Conservative caucus. I asked a member who spoke on it specifically what the Conservative Party's position is on \$10-a-day child care. It was pretty straightforward, but the answer was far from straightforward. It did not provide any clarity whatsoever.

That is why I say people need to be aware of the “fix the budget” bumper sticker or theme that the Conservative Party is telling Canadians. What it really means is that programs we are talking about today, programs that have the support of New Democrats, members of the Bloc and Green Party members will be on the chopping block. The Conservatives do not support them. They might say something at different points in time, but they do not support the initiative that has been taken by this government.

The contrast between the Conservatives and the government is very compelling when it comes to social programming. We have seen that from day one. When we think of how this government has been there to support Canadians, providing programs that have seen disposable incomes go up for seniors and families with children, we have witnessed the Conservative Party vote against those measures time and time again, right from the beginning.

We told families we would give the middle class a break and brought in a tax reduction for Canada's middle class, and the Conservatives voted against that. When we brought in reforms to the Canada child benefit, the Conservative Party voted against them too. We brought in measures that ultimately prevented millionaires from receiving money and gave more money to those with lower incomes, and the Conservatives voted against them. We brought in enhancements to the guaranteed income supplement, and the Conservative Party voted against them.

Let us put that in perspective when the Conservatives tell us to fix the budget. Fixing the budget, to them, means balancing the budget. In order to balance the budget and axe the tax, they are really talking about cutting programs, cutting investments we have made to support Canadians.

We had another program announced earlier today. The Minister of Health put forward yet another comprehensive program to help Canadians. Just like the child care program is going to help with affordability, we now have a national pharmacare program, a program I have been advocating for many years. I have introduced many petitions over the last number of years on that issue, asking parliamentarians to recognize the importance of pharmacare. I am absolutely delighted to see the legislation before us today, but I am concerned. Much like what we are witnessing on Bill C-35, with the Conservatives being critical of it and having opposed child care in the past, I am concerned that other social programs, like pharma-

care, are going to be on the chopping block when it comes to “fixing the budget”, their priority issue.

● (1525)

That is something I know the constituents of Winnipeg North, and I would argue Canadians as a whole, see, understand and appreciate the true value of. These are the types of programs that I think the Conservatives need to better understand, so that when they start talking about fixing the budget they can be a bit clearer as to the types of programs they are looking at cutting.

When I listen to what they are saying on child care today and what I heard them say during the last federal election, I am concerned about child care and the future of child care. I believe that is easily justified. My colleague, the parliamentary secretary for foreign affairs, talked about how when Ken Dryden travelled the country and brought forward to Parliament back then, a number of years ago, a national child care program, it ultimately was defeated at that time by the coalition of the NDP and the Stephen Harper Conservatives, which brought down the Liberal government. As a direct result, Stephen Harper killed the child care program back then. When he was elected to the chair of the Prime Minister's Office, it did not survive.

Therefore, I think it is important that we question whether, under the current Conservative leadership, which is even further to the right than Stephen Harper, we really believe the child care program is going to survive, and why it is absolutely critical that we have this legislation pass, because at the very least it would make that more difficult as the program becomes more established.

Why is this legislation so important? I would suggest that all we need to do is to look at one of the treasures of being Canadian, which is the Canada Health Act. It ensured that Conservative governments in the future would be prevented from getting rid of it. The longer that act was in place, the more difficult it was for future governments to not support a national health care program.

I would argue that the same principle applies here, to Bill C-35. The longer Bill C-35 is part of Canadian law, and today Canadians already understand and appreciate the importance of a national child care program, the better I believe it will stand the test of time, so that future generations will in fact have affordable child care opportunities. That is why I believe Bill C-35 is such an important piece of legislation.

Government Orders

I am concerned about the short term, because it is the short-term thinking of the narrow-minded individuals who make up the Conservative Party today, which is further to the right than we have ever seen it, that I believe is a great threat to a national child care program, not to mention other programs that we have already put in place. The dental program that was rolled out last year for children is being rolled out this year for seniors and people with disabilities. These are good programs that are making a difference. These are the types of programs that I am genuinely concerned about with respect to what would happen if there was a change in government. That is why I believe it is important for us in government not just to talk about these types of initiatives, but also to bring in the legislation, because in the long term I believe these types of national programs are part of the reason we are building a Canadian identity we can all be very proud of. The best example of that is our health care system.

• (1530)

When we think of child care itself, all we need to do is to take a look at the province of Quebec, which has had affordable child care for many years now. As a direct result of that, there is a higher percentage of workforce participation by women, which I believe is attributed to the child care policies of the Province of Quebec. It is more than just a social program; not only do children benefit because of a high-quality child care program, but so do the economy and the family unit.

I do not know how factual this next statement is, but I believe it is fairly accurate because it has been cited in the past that in the province of Quebec, women's participation in the workforce is the highest in North America. I do not know whether that is still the case today, but it amplifies the fact that providing affordable child care has a very real, tangible impact. Why would people not support that?

I hear the criticism coming from the other side, saying, "Well, what about the number of spaces and what about this and that other aspect?" However, we have to recognize that, much as in health care, there is a provincial jurisdictional issue, so there are some limitations to what Ottawa can do. We have been very careful in the way in which child care has been rolled out throughout the country, which is why there has been a great deal of discussion and negotiation with all of the provinces and territories and the many different stakeholders. It is absolutely critical that we get it right.

We expect to see, and members will see in the agreements with other jurisdictions, the current stock of \$10-a-day child care spots not only being maintained but also being increased. I can say, in good part because of the funding that is coming from Ottawa, that we are going to see an increase in the actual number of spots in the province of Manitoba, where we have already achieved \$10-a-day care well before the targeted dates that were established. Manitoba is benefiting from the national program today.

I can tell members opposite from the Conservative Party that the agreement that was signed in Manitoba was actually signed by Heather Stefanson's government, a Progressive Conservative government. It is the same sort of Progressive Conservative government under Doug Ford here in Ontario that actually signed an agreement. Therefore the program is coming not only from Ottawa

and the literally hundreds of stakeholders and thousands of parents, but also from provinces of all political stripes that understand and appreciate the true value of a national child care program that is there to support parents.

Members opposite like to talk about quotes from some parents. However, I would suggest that they talk to those who are actually in the system today receiving this, and we are talking about tens of thousands throughout the country, in all regions, who are benefiting today because of a sound, progressive policy that is universally being accepted by different political parties in different levels of government.

• (1535)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, the speech from the member was sort of all over the place. I just want to ask him a very simple question: Is he aware of the closure of so many day cares in Alberta because of the \$10-a-day program?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, what the member needs to do, along with others who have raised that particular issue, is start to get serious with the jurisdiction of the Province of Alberta. He tries to imply that the millions of dollars Ottawa is providing to Alberta is causing closures in day cares. I suggest it has a lot more to do with the ways in which it is being administered in working with the child care providers.

It is somewhat concerning in the sense that this is not just about the status quo of overall numbers. It is important that the number of spaces actually increases, and I believe that is what Bill C-35 is all about, good-quality child care and increasing the availability of spots.

Working with certain provinces, in particular the province of Alberta, and seeing what they are doing is something that is worthwhile. Maybe the standing committee can look at that—

• (1540)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We need to allow the same amount of time for answers as for questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I really appreciated my colleague's comments. Quebec has been using the early childhood centre model for 25 years.

We are well aware that the role of the official opposition is to oppose, which is what it is doing. However, we know this program's value and its economic benefits. We know how much it contributes economically, and we also know its preventive benefits from a health perspective.

My question is simple. I would like my colleague to tell me, is there is any hidden reason that would explain why we should not move forward and why the Conservatives are still against it?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it is very concerning. That is why I highlighted in my comments the wording the Conservatives use all the time when they say they are going to “fix the budget”, because fixing the budget means cuts. That is why I drew the analogy with the Canada Health Act. It was the Province of Saskatchewan that initiated the idea, which the national government jumped all over. We got a national health care program, we brought in the health care act, and now, through time, it has become very sacred to all Canadians.

At the end of the day, let us recognize that Quebec did a wonderful thing, which has really contributed. It liberated a lot of people and is having such a positive impact. We need to try to take advantage of the Quebec idea, nationalize it, bring in the legislation and enable more people across Canada to be liberated to do the things they want to do, as a direct result of having affordable child care. That is something the Conservatives should be supporting, but I am genuinely concerned that part of “fix the budget” means getting rid of child care, and Canadians need to be told.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, again I put on the record the Green Party's strong support for early learning, enriched child care accessible to all across Canada. I note that in Bill C-35 there would be a number of improvements, but one of the pieces is that while funding would be required, there is no particular funding mechanism mentioned.

I want to reference that I was honoured to know the amazing Canadian social justice activist and journalist June Callwood. June always argued that what we needed was a baby investment tax. She would have put it on corporations, and every corporation would be asked whether it had done its bit. Are we investing in our toddlers, our children? It is the strongest investment we could make.

Is the Government of Canada considering mechanisms to ensure strong, sustainable funding directed to early childhood education?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, this is the second major investment the government has put into the children of Canada. The first one was the Canada child benefit, which lifted hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty by making substantial reforms. Today it is making child care more affordable.

I must admit this is the first time I heard the idea the leader of the Green Party put on the table, and I look forward to no doubt having more discussion on that particular issue. I do not know too much about it.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, obviously, as Quebecers, we have known for quite some time now how important it is to have accessible public child care.

Not only is this a feminist and forward-thinking policy, but it is also good economic policy because it gives women in particular the opportunity to return to the labour market.

Economist Pierre Fortin estimated that, in the first few years of Quebec's child care program, 70,000 women were able to return to

Government Orders

the labour market, since they no longer had to stay home because child care costs were far too high.

I would like my colleague to tell us more about how this is a feminist, social and economic program.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member is so correct. We often talk about the social benefits. I must not underestimate the impact it has on the economy itself. When we free up opportunities for wider participation in the workforce, that contributes immensely to the Canadian economy, thereby raising the standard of living for all of us. Not only, as I say, is there a social benefit to it; there is also a very healthy and strong economic benefit to it. That is why it has proven to be so successful in the province of Quebec and ultimately would be equally successful nationwide as a direct result.

● (1545)

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the last question was much the same, but I would like to hear more of an explanation. In Kitchener—Conestoga, I have talked to many parents to whom the affordability and accessibility of child care are very important.

At the same time, there is a labour shortage right now. I was hoping the member could expand on how early learning and child care that is affordable and accessible is not only a good social program to have but would also help get more people back to work and not have to make the decision of staying home or getting back into the workplace.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, let me give a bit of a generalized, hypothetical situation: There are many women who would go into post-secondary education at a technical vocational facility or a university shortly after having a child. Child care can be a challenge in terms of affordability. Making it more affordable enables an individual to practise what they have studied or to get into the workforce. There are so many jobs that could be filled. That is why I say it creates opportunities in many different ways, and that is just one very small example of the type of impact it could have in a real, tangible way.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am hearing a misrepresentation of what the members are hearing from this side of the House and that I know Canadians are hearing clearly: it is the people who are low-income, single moms and individuals who truly need day care, who are not able to afford it who need the \$10-a-day child care supply first.

What has happened with the route the government has gone is that the \$10-a-day child care is going to people who already have their children in day care. All the other people are having to wait for spaces to be developed and for new people to be prepared to teach and care for children, so this is not a good business plan. Why did the government not choose to put the funding into those who need it most? Those who can afford it could wait until the program develops further.

Government Orders

At the moment, day cares are having to shut down because \$10-a-day care is not providing the finances that the care providers need. Therefore there are children who need care. There are parents who are poor, who cannot get the care, and there are not enough spaces. What we are saying on this side of the floor, to which the member is welcome to respond, is that the model is not being provided in the most beneficial way to Canadians and in the most efficient way for the tax dollars that are going into the program.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I completely disagree with the member. What this tells me is that the Conservative Party does not understand what is actually taking place in the agreements between Ottawa and the different jurisdictions. The agreements that are in place not only help facilitate the spaces that currently exist but also provide additional incentive to expand the overall number of spaces. The Conservative Party is all over the map on this. Pre-election, the Conservatives were going to rip up the bill. Who knows what they are really going to do?

Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Surrey Centre.

I appreciate, as always, the opportunity to rise in the House on behalf of my constituents in Winnipeg South Centre. It is timely that I have the opportunity to talk about this bill because just last week, during our constituency week, I visited Splash Early Learning Centre in my riding. It was a wonderful opportunity for me to get a tour of the facility. I noted that there were some really interesting and innovative things they were doing, and I will come back to that later on in my remarks.

As my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North has mentioned on a number of occasions today in the chamber, our home province of Manitoba has realized \$10-a-day day care, and this is part of the \$30-billion investment over a five-year period that is going to help benefit families, kids and ultimately educators throughout our public education and private systems across the country as a result of this investment.

A system that helps to ensure families across Canada can access high-quality, affordable and inclusive early learning and child care is critical no matter where they live. As has been said many times in this chamber, child care is not a luxury. It is a necessity. Parents should have the opportunity to build both a family and a career, and children deserve the best possible start in life. As members know, I spent a good chunk of my career as a teacher and as a principal, and there is no doubt, in my experiences working with young people and families, that when they had access to early child care and early learning opportunities, we saw the benefits of that later on in their educational journeys.

Bill C-35, which we are debating at the moment, would reinforce the Government of Canada's long-term commitment to early learning and child care. It would do so by articulating the federal goal, vision and principles for a Canada-wide system. Bill C-35 would also enshrine our commitment to sustained and ongoing funding to provinces, territories and indigenous peoples. In addition, Bill C-35 would enhance accountability through regular reporting to Parliament on the progress towards an early learning and child care system. Finally, Bill C-35 would establish in law the national advisory council on early learning and child care.

I will say that I think one of the most important and critical components of this bill is those last pieces I referenced. In particular, they are the necessity that Parliament report back on the progress that has been made in the agreements across the country and the national advisory council. I think it is critical that the input of experts from across Canada is taken into consideration.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Early learning and child care are essential needs. The early learning and child care system will drive economic growth, increase mothers' participation in the workforce, and guarantee that no parent will ever have to choose between returning to work or staying at home to take care of children.

To achieve these goals, we need to put in place mechanisms that will ensure that the early learning and child care system runs smoothly. One of those mechanisms is without a doubt the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care.

The National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care will play an important role in providing third-party expert advice and thereby complement federal expertise for designing the system. The council will serve as a consultative forum on the issues and challenges that the early learning and child care system might face. The council will represent the early learning and child care sector. Its members will reflect Canada's geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity.

I am pleased that my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois and my colleagues from Quebec in the other parties are here. I think that the Quebec model is outstanding.

As my colleague from Winnipeg North mentioned a few minutes ago, there are many lessons we can learn from the Quebec model, which has had many success stories in recent decades.

[English]

I recognize there are ongoing challenges, just as there are at the beginning of any program. Of course, \$10-a-day day care is a critical component. The cost is essential to ensuring that families can access this much-needed service. However, at the same time, we do need to continue to focus, and I acknowledge that, on some of the other challenges that face our system.

This would include making sure that we have enough early childhood educators, they are well paid and there are incentives, such as benefit packages, that come along with the work so that these educators do not get scooped up into the system to go on to be, for example, educational assistants.

This also means working with our colleges and universities. I am really pleased to know that, when I speak with early childhood educators and those post-secondary institutions and families on the ground in my riding of Winnipeg South Centre in Manitoba, I am seeing that this is starting to take place, but there is no doubt that there is room to grow.

One of the really interesting opportunities that are presented is the partnerships that can arise through early childhood learning centres and other community infrastructure, and this was displayed to me last week. As I mentioned, I went to Splash Early Learning Centre. What was really interesting, and I think it is perhaps something we should be talking about across party lines and across the country, is that, in this particular instance, there was a church in my riding, and the church was starting to see that the congregation was diminishing over time for a variety of different reasons.

The church decided that it was going to invest upfront and renovate a substantial portion of the space that it occupied and then, in turn, after the renovation was made, it was going to rent this out to the early childhood education centre. That is exactly what happened. This has provided the faith-based community, as this particular example is a church in my riding, with the ability to generate more revenue, which it was losing through other means, while, at the same time, making sure we can contribute to the well-being of young people in our riding by creating the spaces they need to experience quality child care.

I am not sure if I completely understand some of the arguments I have heard from colleagues of mine across the way. I come from a profession, as I have mentioned before, in education. This included working for a number of years in the northwest part of Winnipeg. This is a part of the city with large numbers of newcomers to Canada, large indigenous populations, large numbers of members of our community who are typically disenfranchised and who suffer as a result of a variety of barriers and obstacles, both historical and current, and challenges in accessing systems.

I think this is truly inspirational. I think this is truly beneficial. I think that, when we look back in the future at the investments the Government of Canada made and the laws we passed in relation to early childhood education in the country, they will be looked upon as some of the most important and most beneficial we have made in our history.

As I mentioned, when we see students by the time they get to middle school and high school, where I spent most of my time as an educator, the benefits of having access to early childhood education are very obvious. It is not only the benefits to the children that are of the utmost importance in the context of this conversation, but also what it does to the workforce.

We know that there has been a historic increase in the number of women who are participating in the workforce by virtue of the fact that they now have access in greater ways, with more opportunity, and more affordable opportunities, than they have had in the past. That has allowed for us to have more economic drivers, greater economic participation and more equity and equality across this country.

Government Orders

In conclusion to my remarks on this important and historic piece of legislation today, I want to note that one piece of criticism that seems to be coming from certain colleagues across the way is on the challenge of there being people who can afford child care, and this seems to be their preoccupation while, at the same time, we hear, day after day, criticisms about an affordability crisis in Canada. We are addressing that affordability crisis, of course, in a variety of different ways. One of the marquee ways in which we are addressing it is through ensuring that there is access to low-cost, quality child care in this country.

• (1555)

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am going to make a comment and extend a question on the member's last statement about making access available. That is the whole issue here. The spaces that already existed, that are now \$10 a day, were already filled, and individuals who truly need care for their children are not able to get it because the spaces are not available yet. The access is available for people who can afford the care because they are already in the system. There are people who truly need that space, and we want those people to be involved in the workforce because they are people who probably have a single income.

Why would we not work toward creating more access, as the priority, so that people are not being bumped? Institutions and day care centres can no longer afford to run their facilities because they are not getting the funding they need. The government, I know, has pushed a lot of it down to the provinces, but it is flipped backward—

• (1600)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We need to give the hon. member the opportunity to answer.

Mr. Ben Carr: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague across the way. I will answer it in two parts. The first is that we are. Part of the money that is being invested into the provincial deals we have signed is to make sure that we have an increase in the number of spaces, that we subsidize wages, and that we look at partnerships with colleges and universities so there are more spaces.

To the second part of the question, I do not quite understand what my colleague means when she says those “who truly need” it, as though those who do not currently have access do not truly need it. There are lots of people in our community that do not have the access. Of course, I cannot speak to the context in the province she comes from, but I know that \$10-a-day day care is a critical component of supporting the needs that people in my riding of Winnipeg South Centre and my home province of Manitoba require.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, we know that the federal government has signed a five-year agreement with the Quebec government. Regarding this announcement between the two governments, the Prime Minister suggested that the federal government would continue to help Quebec while respecting Quebec's jurisdictions.

Will the government keep its word and continue with the agreement after five years?

Government Orders

Mr. Ben Carr: Madam Speaker, that would probably be a question for the minister.

As I mentioned a few minutes ago, Quebec has an outstanding model. We have learned a lot of positive lessons about creating a national system based on what Quebec has put in place.

Unfortunately, that is not a question I can answer on behalf of the government. It would probably be better to ask the minister.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, child care is vitally important. We have seen the Quebec model. British Columbia has also done an amazing job. The B.C. NDP government has provided and worked on building a child care network across British Columbia.

What perturbs me about the discussion on this bill is that the Conservatives are blocking the bill, refusing to let it go through. The Conservatives are very clear about what they want to do. They have a four-point program: axe the services, build up the billionaires, fix elections and stop democracy. That is what Conservatives are all about. I do not understand, when they say they are concerned about cost-of-living issues, why they would block a bill that would help so many families. Child care is essential for raising families. Why does the member think the Conservatives are refusing to let this bill go through?

Mr. Ben Carr: Madam Speaker, sometimes when we hear the same song over and over again, it is nice to hear a remake of it. I really appreciate that my colleague from the NDP provided some new lyrics to the song we have been hearing frequently here in the House of Commons. It has got a nice ring to it.

In terms of why the Conservatives are choosing to vote against this legislation, I think it is probably because they do not believe that investments in young people and in families are going to be beneficial in the long run for this country. I think that, along with my colleagues in the Bloc, the NDP and the Green Party, over here on the government's side, we absolutely disagree with that perspective.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to participate in the debate on this historic legislation. Bill C-35, if passed, would indeed make history.

People may be asking why we are doing this now. Why is the Government of Canada embarking on this ambitious plan to build a Canada-wide child care system? There is no doubt that there are many other important issues to take on, and let me say that we will be better able to handle them if we make sure that women can fully participate in the workforce. Indeed, the United Nations sustainable development goal no. 5 states:

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

We cannot have gender equality if women are prevented from participating in the workforce. Let me share the story of a woman, a mother to a seven-year-old and a nine-year-old. She thanked us for the child care agreement. She said it was not going to impact her because her children were too old, but that she hopes that other

women will not have to make the same choices she did. She was a spouse in a lower-income household. Putting her children into child care would have cost more than her take-home pay after taxes at the end of each month.

She stayed at home with the kids, and has been out of the workforce for over a decade. She said it was okay, but also said that she imagines what could have been, had she not had to make that decision. For her, it really was not a choice. It was something she had to do for her family's finances. That is why we are doing this. As that woman's story illustrates, affordable child care means mothers can enter, return or remain in the labour market, if they wish to do so. They could also go further in education or open up businesses.

Why now? In September 1970, more than 50 years ago, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women recommended early learning and child care legislation, saying:

We recommend that the federal government immediately take steps to enter into agreement with the provinces leading to the adoption of a national Day-Care Act under which federal funds would be made available on a cost-sharing basis for the building and running of day-care centres meeting specified minimum standards.....make similar arrangements for the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

So why now, at long last? The pandemic moved things along, so to speak. As the Deputy Prime Minister said in her April 2021 budget speech, COVID brutally exposed something women have long known: without child care, parents, usually mothers, cannot work.

The closing of our schools and day cares during the height of the pandemic drove women's participation in the labour force down to its lowest level in more than two decades. This is part of the disproportionate impact that COVID-19 has had on women. The crisis has been described as a “she-cession”. The Government of Canada does not want the legacy of the pandemic to be one of rolling back the clock on women's participation in the workforce, nor one of backtracking on the social and political gains women and allies have fought so hard to secure.

There is broad consensus from all parts of society that the time is now. Private sector, social sector and labour leaders agree that child care is a vital part of our social infrastructure and one that was weakened by the pandemic. That is why we committed to this program in the 2020 Speech from the Throne. That is why, in budget 2021, the Deputy Prime Minister spoke of this smart feminist economic policy and pledged up to \$30 billion over five years to build this child care system across Canada.

That is why we have Bill C-35 before us today. The bill echoes the recommendations made over 50 years ago in the royal commission's report. It sets out our vision for a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. It sets out our commitment to maintaining long-term funding. Finally, it creates the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care.

We have a bold goal. By March 2026, parents across the country should have access to high-quality early learning and child care for an average of \$10 a day. This is because Canada is a country that believes in investing in its future. We are standing on the shoulders of the commissioners who penned the 1970 report. We are standing on the shoulders of the visionary leaders in Quebec who enacted legislation in 1997 that created a day care system similar to what we are rolling out country-wide.

• (1605)

At the time, women's labour force participation with young children in Quebec was more than two percentage points lower than in the rest of Canada. In 2022, it was five points higher than the rest of Canada. Women in Quebec have some of the highest labour market participation rates in the world.

In most countries around the world, the debate is no longer whether gender equality is an important objective or not, but how best to achieve it. I think that Bill C-35 is part of the "how". It is part of the solution that will lead us to greater gender equality by supporting mothers in reaching their full economic potential. Furthermore, Canada's job gains, compared to when COVID-19 first hit, have outperformed almost all of our G7 peers, supported by an expanding workforce. The government's investment in early learning and child care is helping more women fully participate in the workforce.

The labour force participation rate for women aged 25 to 54 years has reached a record high of nearly 86%, compared to just 77% in the U.S. At the same time, a record high of 80% of Canadians, aged 15 to 64 years, are now participating in the workforce, reflecting broad-based gains in employment opportunities across demographic groups.

Making full use of the skills and talents of Canadians is a key driver of a stronger economy. It helps to address labour market shortages and increases the rate at which the economy can grow, without generating inflationary pressures. These are encouraging signs. Now we just need to pass this proposed bill so that a Canada-wide early learning and child care system can become entrenched in Canadian law and a part of our social safety net, something to make us all proud.

• (1610)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is absolutely no doubt that access to child care is the number one issue in supporting mothers getting back to work or choosing to work outside of the home.

There are a couple of things I want to correct on the record. This bill is already in effect. It is already happening. These agreements have already been signed. What we are arguing and debating today in the House are two amendments that were put through the Senate

Government Orders

that Conservatives supported but the Liberals did not, and now we are here.

My question to the member opposite is this. If one cannot access child care, then what is it? What we do know is what has come out of Stats Canada. Under this \$10-a-day child care, 77% of high-income parents are accessing it under this Liberal program, versus 41% of low-income families. Does he support that?

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, let me remind members that this program is just being implemented. We are also spending money on training early childhood educators. We are having municipalities develop spaces. These are sometimes spaces that require specific zoning and specific safety standards. That is why we are working in collaboration with the provinces to ensure that we have enough early childhood educators and enough spots for them.

I have been speaking to a school board in Surrey and the school board is now reinventing all new schools. Every new school that will be designed, elementary school or high school, will have a child care facility on the same campus so that when people drop off their elementary or high school students, they can also drop off their young child in the same place to make it easier.

Those are the types of investments we are making. We are working with the provinces. We are working with school boards. Unlike some of the other members who wish to vote against this, we will make this happen and we will have early childhood child care for every child in Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his speech. I would like to come back to what my colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou said about Quebec's specificity and respect for jurisdictions.

She said that, although the bill does not recognize Quebec's specificity, respect its knowledge or require the government to give Quebec the right to opt out with full compensation, there is a five-year agreement between the two governments.

Given that the right to opt out with full compensation is not specifically included in the bill, I do not see that as a permanent thing. To me, that sends the same message that, in five years, the government could decide to start imposing conditions.

Does my colleague agree that the government's failure to include in the bill the right to opt out with full compensation basically sends the message that, as soon as the five-year agreement is up, the government will want to interfere in an area that is under Quebec's exclusive jurisdiction?

Government Orders

• (1615)

[English]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, if anything, this bill would protect francophones across this country so there would be accessible child care in culturally and linguistically appropriate measures. However, at the end of the five years, we hope Canadians will choose a government that wants to keep child care in this country and in every single province. We trust that Canadians will make that decision and it will not have to get to that point.

These agreements are intergovernmental and we will have to work with both governments at the time.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his work.

To us in the NDP, what was really important in Bill C-35 was that it prioritizes a public, not-for-profit, co-operative or community child care model. My colleague from Winnipeg Centre has done a lot of work on this and I congratulate her on that.

How important is it to my colleague that the private sector not be the one effectively prioritized in order to keep the prices reasonable and affordable for the families that really need it? That way we would be contributing to helping people return to work because their children could go to a co-operative or public affordable child care centre.

[English]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, it is going to be imperative that it be region to region, where they are able to have public child care. Like I mentioned, if school boards wanted to administer it, fund it and support it themselves, that would be ideal and probably foremost, but where they cannot, that is where the private sector would step up and give that service.

We would not want to impede availability to Canadians. The best system should prevail in every jurisdiction.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to open my speech this afternoon by clarifying a few things, especially for the member for Winnipeg South Centre and the member for Winnipeg North. They seem to be confused about how Conservatives voted on Bill C-35. The bill was voted on at all stages and received unanimous consent from every member in this House.

I will make it crystal clear to everybody now that I support the amendment, which is what we are debating. That is where I stand. I hope I do not have to answer that question later.

Today, I appreciate the opportunity to bring up and focus on the concerns I am hearing from day cares and parents right across my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. I am going to back this up with data. In fact, I want to highlight that we actually need more data, specifically around the impact this program is having on before- and after-school programs across the country. This is mainly due to a lack of early childhood educators. I would encourage the government to listen and go out and seek that data, unlike what has maybe happened so far.

I have had this conversation with some of my colleagues from Quebec, which has a program that, I would argue, has been quite successful in la belle province. However, the reason it has worked is that it was implemented over time; they did not just jam it down people's throats and basically hold a gun, or a bag of money, to the provinces and territories to implement something without actually thinking out all the consequences.

The following is a quote from a speech made in the House:

Again, we see the Liberals promising what they cannot deliver. Ten dollars-a-day day care does not address the labour shortage and the lack of spaces. I will guarantee today that, if and when this strategy fails and has not delivered affordable child care for all those in need across Canada in all jurisdictions, the Liberal government will blame the provinces and territories for that failure.

Who said that? It was me. I said that during my speech last spring, when we were first debating this bill. I still hold that this is what we are hearing today, right now, from day cares and providers across the country.

Let us talk about some data and news coverage that we have been hearing within the last few weeks. It was reported earlier this month that 77% of high-income parents access child care versus only 41% of low-income families. The government talks about the child care benefit, which makes sense, is something I support and is means tested. I am struggling to understand how the government has implemented a program that is actually taking away from lower-income Canadians because of the demand from people who are making \$1 million a year. It does not make sense to me, personally, and I just do not understand why the government would bring something like that in.

According to StatsCan, 46.4% of parents reported difficulty finding child care in 2023; this is up from 36.4% in 2019. Also, in 2023, 26% of parents of children aged zero to five years who were not using child care reported their child was on a wait-list, which is up from 19% in 2022.

A CBC News article reads, "Sharon Gregson with the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of B.C. says while there are about 130,000 licensed child-care spaces in the province, 75 per cent of children age 0-12 aren't able to access them."

I am not going to use my words now, but I am going to read from emails I received today. I found out I had the opportunity to speak to this today, so I reached out to the day care and child care providers across my riding and, in hours, received pages of feedback addressing the concerns they have around this program. Some commented that they would have provided me with a lot more, but they did not have time.

One nursery school wrote, “Although we believe in the concept, the current model is not sustainable. Our school is not receiving the funding needed. It does not take into consideration inflation. Inflation funding through the Canada-wide early learning and child care is significantly lower than the actual increased costs of operation. [The] 2023 inflation funding was only 2.75%, which is a decrease from earlier at 2.1%. Non-registered early childhood educators, which fill 45% of the workforce, are completely neglected in wage funding calculations.”

● (1620)

It went on to state, “We have a wait-list of over 100 families. Most of the children on the wait-list will age out before they get a spot at our school.”

Another nursery school stated, “The private independent centres are not the only centres raising deep concerns over this program.” It also stated some concerns from member private centres in the Ontario Association of Independent Childcare Centres, which are currently looking to opt out of the program if they have not opted out already. In fact, 70% of these centres, which are all volunteer-led, are looking to opt out when the cost-based funding comes out.

Another comment made was that there has been a huge increase in order to meet the demands of this program and the administrative time needed. This has pulled administrators away from other classroom activities they used to be able to do. They “do not feel they can stay in the program and deliver the programming and quality of care for which the centre stands.” In one case here, and again in Ontario, where I reside, this means their day care fees will go up from \$525 to over \$1,000 a month, or over \$12,000 a year.

According to the school, “incremental funding adjustments have not kept pace with rising operational costs”. This is “far from sufficient to cover increased expenses over the last two years”, and it is looking for more “detailed guidance and clarity on implementation.” It said that this uncertainty is just creating challenges “for providers to plan and ensure the continued delivery of high-quality care.” It continued, “Without adequate support and flexibility in funding, providers are now considering opting out of the program.”

It provided some recommendations. This is the important part. It urges “all levels of government to work together to do the following: re-evaluate the funding model to ensure it accurately reflects the rising costs of providing high-quality child care, including considering direct funding to families or continued revenue replacement for providers.”

Another recommendation is to “engage in meaningful consultation with child care providers and parents to understand the challenges and adjust the Canada-wide early learning child care program to better meet the needs of all stakeholders.”

The last of its recommendations is to “follow the Quebec lead, where families that cannot access centres in the program can claim costs separately for the child care they choose. This allows parents to choose the child care that is right for their family and ensure it is affordable. Some may want Montessori, some academic, some forest schools or childminding in their homes. Parents should have the choice.”

Government Orders

The YMCA is urging the additional recruitment of newcomers into the early childhood education system “by prioritizing early childhood education as an in-demand profession in Ontario and recognizing home country credentials. Ontario should increase investments in accelerated early childhood educator assistant training programs, in addition to increasing compensation levels of assistants working in the sector.”

I recognize that part of this would be implemented at the provincial level, but the feedback we are getting from the provinces and territories is that the government has not funded them appropriately. Specifically, the YMCA in my riding is short 10 full-time child care educators for its toddler and preschool programs to achieve capacity. This translates into the potential to have another 59 new children from its substantial wait-list. I am going to get into the wait-list data here shortly. It can only increase its capacity for the school-age programs if it has the necessary educators. I will get into that later.

Another child care and family education centre stated, “The increases we are experiencing in utilities, food, rents and supplies have been staggering. The funding we receive does not cover our costs.” It also stated, “It is not hard to see why our educators are leaving the sector. This program is surviving on the backs of low-paid, hard-working educators. The additional paperwork, reporting, reconciling, is adding so much work to our administrative team, who are already struggling with so many other requirements. We cannot and will not be able to meet the demand for child care. Parents are struggling to find a space to benefit from the Canada-wide early learning child care reduced rates.”

● (1625)

The one program currently operates with over 527 licensed child care spaces across their locations. This includes for toddlers, preschoolers and school-aged children. Their wait-list was sitting at 790 for their program as of February 15, and they guarantee this number would actually be higher if they counted the wait-list today.

Not one day goes by that they are not faced with challenges with the current program. This system should be funded appropriately and equitably if it is to succeed. Parents are faced with the reality that, without child care, they cannot go to work. Parents are angry and frustrated with this system that they did not have a proper say about.

This is from Grey County, one of my counties. Both counties provided some good feedback on some statistics. The average monthly number of children aged zero to six years receiving the reduction is 1,231. That is some good news. There are 1,231 kids who are getting some benefit in my one county. However, as of December 31 of this past year, 1,835 children are reported to be on the wait-list.

Government Orders

Child care operators again continue to report ongoing issues in recruiting and retaining qualified staff, limiting the ability of some of these programs to operate at full licensed capacity. Again, there are concerns over the wage floor and the delay in the implementation of the funding model.

Specifically, I had asked for follow-up about the impact the program is having on before- and after-school programs. I hinted at this earlier in my speech. They are basically operating at a lower number than their licensed capacity. In Grey County alone there are 730 licensed spaces for children six to 12 in the before- and after-school programs. However, as of December 31, there were over 166 children reported to be on the wait-lists, and the main reason the operators report that they are only operating at 60% to 75% of their capacity is that they had to move staff to the full-day program for children aged zero to six. As well, they have a problem recruiting staff because of the shift requirements around the before- and after-school programs.

They are continuing to work with the operators of the child care centres on recruitment and retention strategies in an effort to fix this, so they are trying to do their best at their level.

I want to share the impact on somebody I know personally, a single parent. Since this program was signed, they have now lost their before- and after-school program. They have to drop their child off at 10 to 9 in the morning and pick the child up every day at 3:40. How does a single parent do that? Who works a six-hour day? It is very unmanageable.

If not for the flexibility of relying on friends and other family members, they are basically left with a program where we are taking lucky or single parents who were able to go back into the workforce under this program. Again, we are still missing the necessary staff and enough early childhood educators. However, in two years, or whenever a child has aged out and their parent is now trying to look for that before- and after-school program, they have to quit work, because they can no longer keep their job. This has an even larger impact on the gig economy and shift workers who do not have the flexibility to show up from 9 to 5. There are so many workers in this country, especially lower-income workers, who depend upon that flexibility of the before- and after-school programs that were available but have been negatively impacted by this current program.

I have the pleasure of representing most of Grey County, or all but one very important part, the municipality of Blue Mountains, which my colleague from Simcoe—Grey represents. I also represent the top half of Bruce County. What Bruce County has talked about, and some of it is positive, is affordable child care. I fully agree. I think everybody in this whole House is fully agreed, because we made these statements a number of times here in the chamber.

Affordable child care is a critical component to addressing inflationary cost of living concerns, economic growth, workforce participation and declining economic conditions that have disproportionately impacted women.

• (1630)

However, child care providers have expressed concern about the financial viability. Additional operational funding is also required to maintain these spaces and ensure that child care operators have sustained, predictable and adequate support to continue in the program. Full funding is required. Workforce challenges remain a barrier to expanding early years in child care access. To ensure the success of the early childhood program, workforce challenges must be resolved quickly, with increased compensation and benefits to reflect the education, skill sets and value of these early childhood educators.

This is specific data out of Bruce County. The expansion in order to meet the demand of just the access and inclusion framework of 645 new child care spaces requires another 100 to 130 additional ECEs in the sector to accommodate the child-to-staff ratios. There are currently 1,243 children on the Bruce County centralized wait-list who require licensed day care.

There is some good news here: Bruce County is co-leading a Bruce Grey registered early childhood educator recruitment and retention working group, which includes membership and support from local colleges, boards of education, workplace engagement services and corporate communications to develop and implement local ECE recruitment and retention strategies. To support the need for this, Bruce County has actually partnered with Fanshawe College to offer a part-time early childhood education program, which is being offered locally in our region. In this school year alone, 32 students are participating in that program. Let us do the math. Thirty-two new early childhood educators frees up somewhere between 150 and 250 of the child care spaces that are still needed once we get these early childhood educators into the workforce, but over 1,250 spaces are needed, so it is only a drop in the bucket, and we need to do more. There is of course no guarantee that all of the ECEs will stay in the program and choose to get into this work.

As I come near to the end of my speech, I just want to highlight a few of the points I had flagged before, when we had the privilege of debating this.

Regarding access, this program is difficult to work, especially in rural Canada, if the spaces and staff do not exist. This is something that needs to be done, because otherwise parents and families out there cannot access these subsidized rates.

Respecting labour shortages, this is something that has not changed. I highlighted the data very clearly. This is great, but these lower costs do not exist if parents cannot actually get access to the programs themselves.

With respect to the rising operating costs, and I highlighted this, we knew it was coming even last year. The funding that is currently set out through the federal government to the provinces and territories does not cover the expenses of many of the organizations that are being asked to deliver this.

In conclusion, affordable quality child care is critical, but if people cannot access it, it does not exist. Again, this bill specifically would actually do nothing to address the accessibility challenge. All Canadian families should have access to affordable and quality child care and be able to choose the child care providers who best suit their family's needs. Bill C-35 would be good for families who already have a child care space, but it would not help the thousands of families on the child care wait-lists or the operators who do not have the staff or infrastructure to offer more spaces. Again, we see the Liberals promising what they cannot deliver.

Conservatives would support all forms of child care, including traditional day care centres; centres with extended, part-time or overnight care; nurseries; flexible and drop-in care; before- and after-school care; preschools and co-op child care; faith-based care; unique programming to support children with disabilities; home-based child care; nannies and shared nannies; stay-at-home parents and guardians who raise their own children; and family members, friends or neighbours who provide care. It would be care for all.

● (1635)

Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, since we are talking about young people and the important investments the governments have made, I was quite pleased to hear the member reference that he thought that an income-tested CCB program is having a positive impact on young people and their families in this country. I will note that it was of course Prime Minister Harper's government over a number of years that did not income-test that program. Does the member believe and agree that this government's CCB is having a more profound impact, by virtue of the income-testing component that he said he agrees with, relative to the one from the Harper government?

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, I was elected only in 2019, and I know the member was elected more recently, so I cannot really compare. I have not done sufficient data analysis. I am just saying that I support income testing for the program.

I know plenty of people would use it, myself included, though I likely would not meet the requirement anyway because I have the privilege of being compensated well as a member of Parliament. If I did meet it, I would never even apply for the program, because I do not think it is the government's job to support the raising of my children. That is Alex Ruff's personal opinion. I am not speaking for everybody; I am just saying I do not personally feel I need the government to help me—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I know the hon. member referred to himself, but we still do not use names in the House.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound on his speech.

Quebec is a distinct society by virtue of not only its identity, but also its choices. It was over 25 years ago now that Quebec chose to set up early childhood centres. This child care system already exists

Government Orders

in Quebec. I really feel that we are wasting Quebecers' time when we have to debate a bill to bring in a system that has already existed in Quebec for more than 25 years.

This morning, we also heard about a new pharmacare program, something that has existed in Quebec for nearly 50 years now.

I would like my colleague from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound to tell me loud and clear if he respects Quebec's choices and if, for these types of programs, Quebec can have a right to opt out with full financial compensation, no strings attached.

[English]

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, I cannot answer a question on a bill that has yet to be fully debated or analyzed, on pharmacare. I did speak to Bill C-35 and the child care program in Quebec, and I complimented Quebec because it was able to implement something. The majority of this does fall within provincial jurisdiction.

I made the comment when I spoke to this last year that I do not even understand why legislation is being brought in on this. The agreements have been signed. There are many other things we could be addressing versus debating something that has already been signed with the provinces and territories.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague, it seems, does not have to rely on social programs to send his children to day care. Maybe he has the means to pay \$60 or \$80 a day for those services. However, not everyone has that kind of money. Not everyone has grandparents or neighbours who can look after their children. That keeps some people, especially women, out of the workforce.

How can my colleague consider Quebec's social programs and policies such a great success, but refuse to offer the same thing to the people he represents in the rest of Canada?

● (1640)

[English]

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, I never said that. I said me personally. I was talking about a question that I received from the Liberal member about the child care benefit, not about the early learning and child care program. I am just saying that it is something that I would not personally partake in. It is the way I was raised, that we take care of things ourselves, but I have 100% indicated the importance of the program and why it is so critical to support those in need.

Government Orders

I believe the government should be focused on those who need the help, not everybody in general. I believe in less government, not more government.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I understand exactly what the member is saying. I heard something incredible that the entire House needs to hear, which represents what Conservatives think.

Would you repeat the list at the end of your speech of all the different ways that we would support—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): No, I will not repeat anything.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: I apologize, Madam Speaker.

I would ask the member to repeat the amazing list of all the ways Conservatives would support parents in the way they choose to raise their children, including what is being offered in the House today, but done better.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, Conservatives would support all forms of child care, including traditional day care centres; centres with extended, part-time or overnight care; nurseries; flexible and drop-in care; before- and after-school care; preschools and co-op child care; faith-based care; unique programming to support children with disabilities; home-based child care; nannies and shared nannies; stay-at-home parents and guardians who raise their own children; and family members, friends and neighbours who provide that care.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is clear that the member did not understand the question from the member for Winnipeg South Centre; nor did he understand the follow-up question from the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. He said he would not take the CCB. What he is not understanding is that he is not eligible for it, because it is means-tested. He would not have the option to take it even if he wanted it.

What we were trying to do is point out how that is hypocritical with respect to Stephen Harper's plan. The universal child care benefit gave cheques in the same amount to everyone. Millionaires got cheques. What we find very ironic now is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I will interrupt the hon. member. We have been having quite a nice debate, so can we respect members who are asking and answering questions?

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, what we find very ironic now is that Conservatives are suddenly saying 77% of people do not need this. They are asking why we are providing it. Our point is that is what the difference between the Canada child benefit and the former Stephen Harper universal child care benefit is all about. It is about means-testing.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, I understood the question perfectly. I said that even if I could qualify for it, I would not apply for it. Again, we are talking about something that has nothing to do with the debate today.

My question back to the member is, why is there not an income means-testing on this program? Right now, the Liberal government is basically cutting cheques to millionaires.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, someone I hold in high regard, for his speech.

Like my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, I would like him to discuss the issue of opting out with full compensation, but from another angle.

Based on what he said at the start of his speech, the key to Quebec's success is that no other government told the province how to set up its early childhood education program. Quebec had enough time to implement it properly. We agree with that.

We do not want another government telling us what to do in the future. I would like the member to tell us why the Conservatives voted against the Bloc Québécois amendments presented in committee in order to include in Bill C-35 a right allowing Quebec to opt out with full compensation.

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, I wish I could answer. I really take pride in trying to answer all questions. I have no idea of the logic or the rationale. It is not something I am familiar with. I will follow up with the member to try to get an answer by talking to my colleagues who are part of that committee, but I was not aware.

The bottom line is, to highlight what I did bring up in my speech, it was not even just about the fact that another level of government was telling Quebec what to do. Quebec actually took its time to implement it properly. It did not force it down anybody's throat. It took the time necessary to consider the impact, build the labour force for it and do everything needed to actually implement a successful program.

● (1645)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his intervention today. I really loved what he did in his speech today: He provided honest, real feedback from both operators and families from his riding, and their recommendations. One was meaningful consultation, which the Liberal-NDP government has failed to do. We have seen that repeatedly today in the House. It is giving preference only to public and not-for-profit child care centres.

I would love to hear from him again on the feedback and recommendations that people on the ground and frontline families and operators are asking for.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Madam Speaker, it is hard for me to answer a question from somebody who knows even more about this than I do.

My point is that Canada is a large, diverse country. Part of the reason I got into politics was that I was tired of seeing decisions coming out of Ottawa that work great for major urban centres but do not work for every part of this great country, like at the provincial level, but mainly between the rural and urban divide.

I think consultation needs to occur at all levels, with parents and everybody, to come up with meaningful programs that work for everybody, not just for certain demographics—

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

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I just want to circle back on my intervention with the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. I still do not think that he quite gets it, because, in truth, he said even if he could, he would not apply for it. The point is that people do not apply for it. When they fill out their income tax, one of the spouses or one of the parents is going to declare the dependence of children. Then, based on the income, a certain amount will be given based on that means-testing.

It is not a program that a person can opt in to or opt out of. It is a program that is about making sure that those who need it get it, and those who do not need it do not get it. What we were trying to say in our exchanges earlier from this side was that this was—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. What is the relevance? We are talking about Bill C-35, and the member opposite is talking about—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member is trying to conclude on a point that was raised before, and he has some leeway in what he says in the time for his speech.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, it certainly is relevant when I am referencing back to actual debate that took place in the House less than 10 minutes ago.

My point is that the Canada child benefit is means-tested, and people only get it when they meet certain thresholds. The program that the former Stephen Harper government had, which was basically to give everybody the exact same amount of money regardless of one's income just based on whether they had a child, was not means-tested. In fact, it was a program geared toward giving cheques to millionaires, which was exactly what happened.

I am happy to talk about this particular legislation today.

First, I just want to briefly say that it is with extreme sorrow that I learned today of the passing of Grace Eves. Grace was an incredible member of my community in Kingston and the Islands. She was extremely supportive of me throughout the years. Even in my early days of running for city council, Grace was my treasurer and helped with my campaigns. It was really hard for me to learn today, even

Government Orders

though I had visited her in palliative care last week, that she had passed away. My deepest condolences go out to her husband, William, and to her family.

Bill C-35, and there has been criticism I have heard from Conservatives, is about entrenching this framework. I think it is important to entrench this into law because I feel that if a future government, whenever that may be, might make the decision to change course with respect to a policy like this, it is going to have to go through a legislative process in order to undo it. I think that is really important, and we have been talking about in this country for decades, talking about bringing in child care that could be a benefit to Canadians as a whole. I think those benefits are extremely important.

This is not just about investing in children, although it is extremely important to have early education and early learning opportunities for children. It is not just about empowering more people and, in particular, more women to get into the workforce, those who want to but are being held back because they are making conscious decisions about the cost of child care versus the additional income. This is also about growing our economy.

We know that a successful economy is one that is continually growing. We know that we have problems, like a lot of developed countries do, with labour shortages. This would provide an opportunity to empower people who want to get into the workforce to be able to do that, because they would not be burdened by the significant offset of child care. It would also grow our economy, and we would see economic growth through participation in the labour force, in particular, by filling those spots that quite often need to be filled.

It was brought up by a parliamentary secretary earlier that all one has to do, without even getting into the historical context of Quebec and the success it has seen, is to look at the United States, where 77% of women participate in the labour market. In Canada, that number is 86%. The parliamentary secretary said that earlier today. I think that this is already showing the results and the positive impacts of this program.

One of the concerns that have come up within the last several minutes here that I am hearing from my Conservative colleagues and, indeed a Bloc member was saying this too, is why this is important. Why do we need to do this? We already have signed deals.

We need to make this law and make this legislative, in terms of entrenching it into the laws in our country, to ensure that this is formalized. Why is that important? I think the general public should know, especially those enjoying the benefits of the child care agreements out there, that every Conservative MP who ran in the last election and, in fact, every Conservative candidate who ran in the last election, ran on getting rid of this program.

● (1650)

Erin O'Toole made it very clear that if he was elected, he would scrap those agreements that were made with the provinces. The current leader of the Conservatives, in the past, bragged about the fact that Conservatives got rid of child care programs that the Liberals brought forward.

Government Orders

It happened nearly 20 years ago, and we talked about this earlier. Ken Dryden was literally at the door with the agreements and was ready to work with provinces, but due to the unfortunate scenario where the NDP sided with the Conservatives to take down the Liberal government at the time, which resulted in a Conservative government being elected, Stephen Harper did exactly that. He got rid of those programs. This is something that the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Carleton, has bragged about.

I think that Canadians are right to be concerned about the intentions of the Conservative Party, which is why entrenching this into legislation, by making this law, is so critically important. It would ensure that these agreements, this relationship and the collaboration between the federal government and the provincial governments, are sustained. If a future government decides it would like to do away with it, it would have to go through a lengthy process to do that, which would include debates in the House, votes and so on.

I do not think we have to worry about that. I do not think that the Conservatives are against it, despite their rhetoric, and they will point this out, as the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound pointed out earlier. That is good to hear. However, it is unfortunate that every time they stand up to talk about it, it as though it is one of the worst pieces of legislation that could have ever existed. This is the scenario that the Conservatives routinely find themselves in, whether it on this legislation or whether it is on scab-worker legislation. Routinely, they will speak out against something, talk very negatively about it, challenge all the work that has been done it and when it comes time to vote, they vote in favour of it.

I do not even think that Conservatives, because I think they know where the majority of Canadians are on this and how they feel about it, would ever consider touching this. Nonetheless, I would certainly feel much more confident, as I am sure my colleagues would and Canadians would, to know that this would be entrenched in legislation. That is why this measure is important.

When the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound asks the question, or when the member from the Bloc asks why we are even talking about this when we have these agreements in place, that is the reason. We need to do this to ensure that there is longevity to this and that, in order to dismantle this program, it would require a number of steps in the future.

If we want to look at the success of this program, and I have said this many times here, all we need to do is to look to the Quebec model, which happened several decades ago. I have stood up in the House many times as a proud Ontario member of Parliament, whether it is on this issue, on the environment or on other socially progressive issues, Quebec certainly led the way. We can learn from what Quebec did a number of decades ago with child care. We can see the results. We see that, in Quebec, more women are in the workforce. We knew we would be successful in encouraging more people to get into the workforce if we brought forward these agreements and worked with provinces in this manner. We can learn a lot, and indeed we did learn a lot.

It is important to recognize that there are always growing pains with new programs. I listened to the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound speak about how Quebec got it right. I am curious to know, if he went back and looked at its implementation several

decades ago, if it was as squeaky clean and worked as effectively from day one as he suggests. I think that maybe it was not that great when it was rolled out because there are growing pains to these learning processes.

● (1655)

I understand if the Conservative angle right now is to try to highlight these growing pains as the challenges that would end the entire program. However, I have a lot more faith in our ability to deliver on this and a lot more faith in Canadians' abilities to ensure that this program lasts in perpetuity because of what we have seen in Quebec and because we have seen the success in Quebec, notwithstanding the fact that it may have had growing pains as well in the beginning. I find that so critical to look at the success of Quebec and other jurisdictions throughout the world that have taken on similar challenges.

I go back to a point I made earlier, specifically with respect to \$10-a-day child care and the issue of whether child care should be means tested, as was suggested by Conservatives. We have a program in place to means-test, in terms of helping families to raise their children, and that is the Canada child benefit. That is a payment program to families with children, which is based on income. I do not receive it, and the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound does not receive it, as he indicated, nor would we if we tried to apply. It is something that we would just not get, given our level of income.

However, it is important that rather than the Conservative plan of the universal child care benefit, which just gave the same amount to every single family based on the number of children, this is a program that means-tests. The lower the income, the more a family would get from society, through the government, to help raise their children. As a Liberal, we see a value in that and in society playing a role in helping to raise children. We see a benefit to collectively coming together to make that happen and, in particular, to support those who need it the most. That is where the means testing part comes in, with respect to the Canada child benefit.

This particular program and \$10-a-day child care is about making a universal standard across the entire country that absolutely everybody could benefit from. I started in my speech and will perhaps conclude with this, it is not just about providing child care for children and not just about making things cheaper. This is about providing opportunities. As has been demonstrated through Quebec, and as we can see already in Canada when compared to the United States, this is about empowering more women to get into the workforce, which is exactly what we are seeing as a result of this.

Most importantly, from my perspective, it is about growing our economy and helping to fill some gaps that exist within the labour force and the shortage of labour that we might have in this country. I am really excited to see that this has finally come to fruition. I accept the amendment that has been put forward by the Senate. I think we should pass this. This is a bill that would do great things for Canadians, just like the pharmacare bill that was introduced today.

I want to take the opportunity, as I have done before, to thank my colleagues in the NDP for working collectively and constructively on behalf of Canadians to provide programs that would genuinely impact and change the lives of Canadians. It is so incredibly important.

• (1700)

I would be the first to say that, because of the NDP, we have really been pushed forward in terms of our social and progressive agendas. Its members should take a lot of the credit for this, as I know they like to do and are doing. They deserve credit for being among the adults working in this room on behalf of Canadians.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Madam Speaker, to the member opposite, the member for Kingston and the Islands, I will say that I think one of the key pieces of this discussion, in solving the problems that exist, is listening to constituents.

Today a constituent of his was here in Ottawa. Kerri Kehoe was a victim. She was viciously sexually assaulted as a child. Her attacker is in minimum security. He had a parole hearing last year. He was recommended for escorted day passes, but the parole board declined him. A victim advocate determined that Kerri's rights were violated. She sought help from her MP, the member for Kingston and the Islands, and he refused to meet with her.

Why would we believe anything that he has to say, that he would even listen to the constituents who have genuine concerns about this program, when he refuses to meet with people about something as serious as this?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, Kerri Kehoe is an individual whom I know very well. My wife is very close to her. As a matter of fact, my wife was at that parole board hearing. Kerri will always receive support from me and my family.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: That's untrue, and she wrote this. She wrote this, and you know it.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member will stop. The hon. member knows she cannot use that language in the House.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague from Kingston and the Islands on his speech. I think that we just witnessed something historic. I have never heard my colleague say the word “Quebec” so many times before.

This is hypocritical. My colleague is saying that the government is following Quebec's example because it is a leader in the area of child care, but when it comes time to negotiate other programs that fall under Quebec's jurisdiction, Quebec is suddenly no longer a leader. I am thinking, for example, of the dental insurance and pharmacare programs that the member just bragged about implementing. The government is telling Quebec what to do and imposing conditions on us. It wants Quebec to grovel for the money. However, the reality is that the more freedom Quebec has, the better it

Government Orders

does. Quebec did not wait for the federal government to implement its child care system.

I would like my colleague to answer a simple question. What can a Canadian do that a Quebecer cannot?

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I have said many times in my speeches, especially when it relates to progressive issues or the environment, that I am not here to say that Ottawa knows best. As a matter of fact, putting the program together required the minister to go out and have discussions with each jurisdiction, with each province. This is why I got a kick out of hearing the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound talking about it being one system imposed by the federal government. On the contrary, there are a number of systems across the country that have been negotiated with and are being delivered by provinces. I know that the member knows that.

I take great pride in learning from the success of Quebec and seeing how we can put that into the rest of the country. If he ever has opportunity to share with me what we should be doing better in Ontario when it comes to issues like this or the environment, I will happily sit down with him and listen, because we have a lot to learn from what Quebec has done over the years.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government's approach to programs like this one has been to offer federal funding in exchange for the provinces' committing to certain standards as part of agreements. There has been a lot of discussion about the early childhood education workforce and how poorly paid it is. Could not one of the conditions of the child care agreements be around the compensation of the professionals who are instructing and caring for our children at the most important point in their development?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, absolutely. I appreciate the suggestion by my colleague. I am always open to listening to what the other options are. At the end of the day, it is important to remember, as I indicated in my last answer, that we work with provinces. The provinces are the ultimate delivery vehicle for this program. They are going to roll it out in ways that work within their provinces and, presumably, across different ways within the jurisdiction that they represent.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to present some details on the universal child care benefit that was brought in during the Harper years. I was not here in the House, but I did go door to door later on and learned a significant amount about it. I think the means test issue here is backwards, because the reason the funding went out to everyone in Canada was that it was the most efficient way to do it. When I went door to door, there were people who would say that they did not get to keep the funding and that this was not fair. I asked them whether they owned their home and how many cars they had. I would say, “If you take that money and pop it in a savings account, you are going to have to give it back in taxes.”

Government Orders

However, here was the kicker: If all of a sudden someone shut down the oil field, jobs were lost and all of a sudden someone had to somehow make up that money, it was already there for that family. Now, however, with the way it is done, people have to wait a whole tax cycle to find out whether they will qualify. When the means test needs to be presented is when there are people who are low-income and need those spaces, and they are not prioritized. That is what should be happening here. One of the things we are saying could better the program is to make a means test the entry into it.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, is the member saying that Conservatives would want to change that back? If I understood her correctly, she is saying that if a family got the money, they were basically taxed on it, so they might need to give it back. In that case, would she not apply the exact same logic to the price on pollution and the carbon rebate? That is not means-tested. That is giving the exact same amount to everybody, so if her logic is correct about the universal child care benefit, she has to apply the same logic to the carbon rebate.

• (1710)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am wondering whether the deputy House leader would be able to give his perspective on where the Conservative Party is on the child care issue. I know in the last federal election, there were members who were saying they would rip up the agreements we were putting into place, and then they kind of waffled. They were really critical inside the chamber. I think at one point they might even have voted in favour. I have no idea where they actually are on the issue of Bill C-35.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, if he does not know, it is because he is probably confused by the fact that the Conservatives are always doing that on so many issues. They did it on scab legislation. They were extremely critical of that, but then when it came time to vote for it, just quietly they all stood up in favour. We were actually really surprised.

It is the exact same thing with this particular piece of legislation. We hear the member for Peterborough—Kawartha, who keeps standing up and criticizing the government, routinely hammering away at the fact that this is a horrible program. Every Conservative who gets up does the exact same thing, but then when it comes time to vote, they vote in favour of it.

I will just recap that. They ran on a platform to get rid of the child care program. The Conservative leader has bragged about the fact that they have killed child care agreements in the past, and then the Conservatives get in here and are extremely critical about it, which would all lead to suggest they are against it. Then at the last moment, they vote in favour of it.

I think Canadians can reflect on that and understand and appreciate what the Conservatives would actually do if they were in government.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, just to clarify, if people have been listening to the debates, they will know that Conservatives have consistently said that we support child care, and our leader is on the record as saying he is going to

honour the agreements with provinces and territories, so I do not appreciate the efforts of the members opposite to spread misinformation and disinformation.

My question for the member is this: One out of 10 people is actually being served by the \$10-a-day day care program that exists now, and there is a huge need, so does the government recognize that this is the tip of the iceberg and that so much more is needed if we are really going to solve the problem of affordable day care in Canada?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, it is not misinformation and disinformation. The Conservatives ran on getting rid of the child care program. The Leader of the Opposition has bragged about the fact that they got rid of these programs in the past, but why should Canadians not be skeptical of it, when the Conservatives also ran on a price on pollution and now are suddenly against it?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak once more to Bill C-35, an act respecting early learning and child care in Canada, with respect to the amendments that were provided by the Senate.

First, let me reiterate the Conservative Party's support for child care and for supporting women entering or re-entering the workforce as they balance their family lives. We want to see Canadians have equal access to child care in the forms that fit their families. This goes far beyond the Liberals' \$10-a-day day care spots to include traditional day care centres; centres with extended, part-time or overnight care; nurseries; flexible and drop-in care; before- and after-school care; pre-schools and co-op child care; faith-based care; unique programming to support children with disabilities; home-based care; nannies and shared nannies; au pairs; stay-at-home parents; guardians who raise their own children; and family members, friends or neighbours who provide care. This is what it means to make up and support community, and our children and our grandchildren are some of the most vulnerable members in our communities. They all deserve high-quality care in the chosen style of their caretakers.

However, my Liberal colleagues have been clear that they do not want to amend the bill overall to include choice for parents. This is unhelpful for a variety of reasons. So many Canadian parents are not in a position to send their children to traditional day care during conventional work hours. First responders, medical personnel, military members, truck drivers and a whole host of others must work through the nights, weekends and holidays, when many traditional day care centres are closed, and they thus require specialized care. Do they not deserve flexible options that suit their needs, especially when so many of their jobs are community focused? Anyone working unconventional shifts to provide for themselves and their families is just as deserving of high-quality affordable child care as those who work Monday to Friday, nine to five.

I have personal experience in this realm. I raised my two daughters while travelling extensively for work as a chemical engineer. I have previously in the House discussed the challenges of securing child care for them while working around my busy travel schedule, especially when factoring in the realities of travel, which include delays, changed timelines and flights cancelled altogether. Families absolutely need options that work for their individual needs. When Conservatives form government, we would honour the provincial and territorial agreements and ensure parents have the choice and flexibility they deserve to remove the Liberal ideological shackles, if they so desire.

With regard to the Senate amendment of Bill C-35, the bill already contained references to the official language minority communities, or OLMCs, when it was sent to the Senate. However, the bill did not originally include any reference to them until the Conservative amendments were made during the clause-by-clause review done at HUMA and we introduced these safeguards. The references to the OLMCs in the bill now include a provision that federal investments related to programs and services for the education and care of young children should be guided by the commitments outlined in the Official Languages Act, and the inclusion of OLMCs and indigenous peoples in the composition of the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care.

We are grateful to the hon. senator from Acadia who proposed an amendment to include a reference in clause 8 to eliminate any ambiguity before the courts, and we continue to support his amendment today. The amendment would add the words “official language minority communities” to the first sentence of clause 8, after “including early learning and child care programs and services for Indigenous peoples”, and would divide clause 8 into two paragraphs. The first paragraph would then outline the government's financial commitment, while the second would specify the mechanisms through which the federal government would provide funding. To allay any remaining hesitancy, under no circumstances is it the intention to create a new direct-negotiation mechanism between the federal government and the OLMCs. The amendment text is very clear on this matter. Furthermore, adding a mention of OLMCs after the word “including” would not in any way diminish the rights of any other minority or indigenous peoples.

Clause 3 of the bill explicitly states that it would not infringe upon the rights of indigenous peoples as “recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982”. The amendment is sim-

ply to clarify the intent to ensure the consideration of OLMCs as stipulated in clauses 7 and 11.

● (1715)

There has been much study done on early childhood as a critical period for language development and the identity development of children. Access to French language early childhood services is often a necessary condition for the transmission of language and culture in French communities. These services help young children acquire the language skills they need to prepare for education, especially for children who will enter French language or immersion schools across the country. This is all upholding the right to education enshrined in section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Critically, and to assuage fears from across the aisle, this amendment does not introduce any new funding mechanism and merely aims to clarify financial commitments. Especially with Sarnia—Lambton recently receiving the official Francophone designation and with French language use in danger throughout the country, it is more critical than ever to establish and protect these services for our official language minority communities.

This amendment was adopted by a large majority of senators, who clearly understand and appreciate both the need to increase child care spaces and access to them and the need to deliver services across the board in both of our official Canadian languages. It is clear now more than ever just how important and critical child care is, in terms of both obtaining an early child care space and maintaining it if one is lucky enough to have one, for recruiting and retaining women in the workforce.

The employment rate for young women has been on a strong downward trend since last February, with a cumulative decline of 4.2% over that period. This is the lowest since May 2020, excluding the pandemic. More than 46% of parents reported difficulty finding child care in 2023, which is up from 36.4% in 2019, so more parents are having trouble finding child care now, in the era of the Liberals' \$10-a-day child care, than before.

A column in the Financial Post last week alleges that the Liberals' national child care plan is proving to be “an expensive shambles, creating widespread shortages and destroying private child care businesses”. This problem spans the country, with issues from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia.

Government Orders

Government Orders

This week there has been a slate of news reports across the country, with headlines despairing over the lack of access to child care, including the Liberals' \$10-a-day program. Day care operators, including the owner of Little Heroes Daycare Centre here in Ottawa, say they cannot turn a profit and are not even breaking even since opting in to the \$10-a-day program, which they did out of their desire to assist their families, to their own detriment.

To further illustrate, as part of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women's current study of women's economic empowerment, the executive director of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario, which represents independent licensed child care centres, said, "[W]e have a sector of the economy that was largely created by women. It's essential to women's equality in the workforce. It's one of the only economic sectors in the country where women are fairly represented as owners and managers, and it's being not only undervalued by government but targeted for replacement by a government-run system."

The Liberals are undercutting their own economy once again and pushing costs onto taxpayers while denying Canadians the freedom to choose what works best for their families. What is more is that one of the main goals of the \$10-a-day plan was to enable women to join the workforce in greater numbers, but a recent Fraser Institute report looking at that issue indicates there is "little evidence" whether the Liberal program is reaching its stated goals. It reads, "There is also little evidence that the federal government is achieving [the second] goal of boosting the labour force participation of women with children."

As the StatsCan data I quoted earlier shows, the employment rate for young women is on a downward trend. It is another example of the problem of the Prime Minister's fake feminism.

I will be generous and allow that the pandemic exacerbated the issues of child care, and many well-meaning parents changed their plans and their lives to accommodate for a more precarious world, either changing work hours to watch children, changing jobs or leaving the workforce altogether. However, the Liberals owe Canadian parents and families that much more for letting them down in the first place.

Conservatives, when we form government, will put Canadians first and prioritize freedom of choice and family life, empowering parents to make the decisions that best serve their child care needs and not just what the government prescribes.

• (1720)

If I look over the history of my own journey with child care, I will say that it is very difficult when only one in 10 families are covered by the existing program. That is nine out of 10 families that are not. I have people calling my office asking if I can help them find child care. It is almost impossible.

I had some very wonderful child care providers and some not-so-wonderful child care providers. Ms. Betty was a school teacher who was off with her own kids. She was probably a better mother than I will ever be, so that was great. She was flexible, because I could drop the kids off at 5:30 in the morning if I had to catch a flight at six o'clock. If a flight was cancelled, late, or the kids had to stay

late, she had flexibility. That is really important for a lot of workers today.

Similarly, I had Joanne, who was wonderful. She was a stay-at-home mom with her kids. Once again, she was flexible and gave excellent care. However, she moved and I was left in a cycle of trying to find child care. It started with Sarah, who was a mom at the preschool that my kids went to, but once my kids were eating cat food on her stairs, I had to find another one. Then there was the student who was smoking weed and hanging out with her boyfriend. That one went away. Then there was Karen. I should have known maybe just by the name, but she was watching soaps when I came home and found out she has let my kids go swimming with a male neighbour some place up the road. That was not so great. There was a happy occasion with Generations Day Care in Petrolia, which was a wonderful experience. It was certainly expensive, but worth it. The pinnacle was Andrea, an ECE worker who became my nanny. She was able to stay overnight if I needed, make meals if I was travelling, and do anything that was needed. When my kids got older and went to high school, she opened her own day care and they ended up working there, so that was fantastic.

There is a lot of need. We need more care and in order to get more care we have to build on the \$10-a-day child care and we have to allow parents to have choices. We have to figure out how we are going to help with those, because I think that is fair.

We also need to consider that, with the inflation we are seeing, the cost of food and heating is going up, and the interest rates are going up. All of these pressures are really affecting the cost of providing child care. I know when we studied this issue at the status of women committee we looked at the Quebec model. At the time, Quebec was charging less than \$10 a day for day care and the actual cost was more like \$47 or \$48, which would have hugely increased now. However, the comment was that there were still long wait-lists. Therefore, I do not think it is good to have \$10-a-day day care if there are no spaces. We need to provide more spaces. We need to be creative in figuring out how we help people get child care and broaden their freedom of choice so that people who work weird hours can get coverage, and people who have special needs children can get the care they need. All of these things I think will be important.

I know all of the provincial and territorial agreements have been signed. I always hear the Liberals whining about Conservatives wasting the time of the House on concurrence motions, but here we are debating something where the agreements have already been signed. Why do we have everyone state on the public record that we support this program when that is the case? We should move on.

Finally, I want to reiterate some of the things that have been implied. The members opposite have implied that Conservatives do not support this program. That is not true. We do support child care. Anyone can go to openparliament.ca and see that we all voted yes on Bill C-35.

• (1725)

I think there is more work to be done in this area. I certainly would like to see the government come forward with something that would not only address an increase in spaces but also help those who are less fortunate. We see that 71% of people who are taking advantage of the \$10-a-day day care are higher-income people, whereas only 41% are lower-income ones. That does not seem right to me. I think there needs to be a means test. There needs to be something that favours those who need the help the most, because obviously we do not have enough spaces, so we have to prioritize.

If we could work with the provinces and territories to create some flexibility, I think that would help the private day cares. We need more spaces. We cannot afford to lose the ones we have, and that is what is happening. I am hearing from day care providers that are not eligible for this program that they are struggling, and many of them are even going out of business. I have heard from the ones that are in the program that they are having issues with cash flow because of the way the remuneration works.

I think there is more work to be done on this, but certainly we need to move in this direction. We want to see more women in the workforce. I certainly experienced the highs and the lows of child care, and would rather head in the direction of highs.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[English]

CONSUMER-LED BANKING ACT

The House resumed from February 1 consideration of the motion that Bill C-365, An Act respecting the implementation of a consumer-led banking system for Canadians, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member for Bay of Quinte for his private member's bill, in particular, on the topic of open banking. We know that open banking is becoming more and more commonplace, or at least the demand for it is, given the changes that are occurring in the banking sector.

It is clear that Canadians deserve a secure and stable financial sector that is globally competitive, promotes consumer choice and contributes to economic growth. As the financial sector becomes increasingly digitized, standards must be used to modernize, ensuring that Canada continues to enjoy a strong, stable and innovative financial sector. At the same time, Canadians must continue to have the confidence that the financial sector operates with the highest regard for privacy and security.

Private Members' Business

I will be honest. Before the bill was introduced, I did not really understand the details of open banking, how it would work or exactly what the benefit would be to consumers and clients of banking institutions. For those who do not know, and I would appreciate being corrected if my layman's understanding of it is incorrect, open banking pretty much gives the authority to a bank to share information with a third party in the event that somebody wants to share that information for one reason or another.

For example, as was explained to me, open banking might be utilized when somebody applies for a mortgage and wants to prove some of the data in their banking information, such as paying rent. Having the bank share that data with a mortgage lender that someone is applying to would obviously be of benefit in being able to provide credibility and information. It also relates to stability in terms of their ability to pay. The concept is very good, and I see it as being important. The way our banking system is going, and the manner in which it is being digitized, is something that all parliamentarians should be seized with in terms of properly empowering banks to do this.

What I understand from reading the private member's bill that has been tabled by the member for Bay of Quinte is that it would ask the minister to develop a plan within six months to stipulate exactly how open banking would work and ensure that it takes place. However, at the same time, during debate on the fall economic statement in the latter part of 2023, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance had signalled that the framework for open banking specifically is coming forward.

One problem with the private member's bill is that it specifically stipulates a six-month period for the minister to table this. I hope we will see that happen faster as a result of the fact that the finance minister had already indicated she is working on this and that it comes at an expedited pace because we need to have those securities in place for Canadians who are sharing that information.

Most importantly, the one thing that seems to be lacking in the bill is any detail. Details are important in terms of making sure the proper measures are put in place to protect data and Canadians' information, and that is what I am expecting to see in the legislation that will come as a result of what was indicated during debate on the fall economic statement. The government has been working on this since around 2019. This has been on its radar. It is something that the government is seized with. Whether it comes through this private member's bill or government legislation, at the end of the day, I think there will be unanimous support from all members in terms of ensuring that open banking becomes trusted and secure and that Canadians can use it with confidence.

Private Members' Business

• (1735)

The specific framework that the government will be putting forward would enable consumers to securely and confidently access their financial data and, in turn, safely use services that can help them improve their financial outcomes. However, the private member's bill before us is a plan that would see the government move slower on open banking than our current timeline is projecting, and the bill puts forward, as I indicated, no or very little detail on the implementation of a consumer-driven banking regime. We plan to continue to engage with Canadians, industry leaders and stakeholders on this and to establish this consumer-driven banking framework in a manner that respects the collaborative process.

I certainly want to congratulate the member on the introduction of the bill. It is a timely issue and a subject that is certainly something the government has been working on. It is something that we plan to bring forward, and due to the fact that the bill before us lacks detail on how the implementation would occur and how those safeguards would look, I think it would be more prudent for the House to wait until that legislation comes forward, which would have the proper scrutiny in the House rather than just two hours of debate. It would go to committee, have the proper scrutiny there, come back here and once again have the level of discussion and discourse that is required for something as important as this.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Bay of Quinte for introducing Bill C-365. As surprising as it may be, this is the first time we have had the opportunity to debate open finance in the House. Even the Standing Committee on Finance has never addressed this issue. So far, the discussion has been largely left to the experts and industry representatives. All the fine people at the Department of Finance, the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions and the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada are currently examining the issue. The Autorité des marchés financiers, or AMF, and Quebec's ministry of finance are also looking into it. It is important to remember that the technology companies that would interface with customers in an open financial system are not banks. They do not necessarily fall under federal jurisdiction, just as not all financial institutions fall under federal jurisdiction.

I have been closely following the work of the Advisory Committee on Open Banking, which is referenced extensively in the preamble of the bill. This work is very enlightening. The committee heard from a wide range of stakeholders, including banks, credit unions, insurance companies, trusts, brokers and technology companies. However, no consumer advocacy groups, privacy advocates or provincial regulators were consulted. It is past time to broaden the conversation. For that reason alone, the member is making a huge contribution and I sincerely thank him for it.

Implementing an open financial system would be a huge change with many implications. In the long term, we can envisage a system in which financial institutions would essentially manufacture financial products. Customer relations would be handled by technology companies that would not offer the financial products themselves but would act as intermediaries and data aggregators. That is quite a change. The bill's preamble lists the benefits of such an open financial system. I will not repeat them here, as the sponsor did a fine

job outlining them. I support them. They are real. I would even say that moving toward an open system is probably inevitable.

Since this is the first time we are discussing this subject, I will use my time today to broaden the debate a bit. It is our job as legislators to talk about the benefits, but also the challenges and risks, since we are working toward the common good.

Our financial system's greatest asset is its stability and the confidence that comes with that stability. It is stable because it is subject to strict legal obligations. Ultimately, if something goes wrong, for example if there is fraud, data theft, failure to report a suspicious transaction that would assist in tracking money laundering or terrorist financing, then the financial institution is the one that is legally and financially responsible. Financial institutions are subject to strict prudential obligations so as to ensure they have the means of dealing with the risks in question. Since the financial institutions are ultimately responsible, they guard their members' and customers' personal and financial information very jealously. However, this is where the system's greatest asset, its stability, also becomes a weakness, because it can lead to compartmentalization and a lack of flexibility.

The world has changed. The development of information technologies has given rise to the data economy, which can only grow if data circulates freely. It is unclear whether our financial architecture is adapted to this new environment. A financial institution cannot be expected to take responsibility for the use of data it no longer has custody of. Prudential standards and regulations will have to be adapted. It is far from certain that a technology company has the wherewithal to take on those financial risks. A financial start-up can be born and die in no time at all. If that happens, there will be no one left to shoulder the consequences of fraud, data leakage, incorrect information or poor financial choices. We need to be cautious.

Does that mean we should do nothing? Far from it. People want the flexibility of an open financial system. They want aggregators that put all their information in one place, facilitate transactions and give individuals an accurate picture of their financial situation. That is invaluable when money is tight at the end of the month. People also have a hard time understanding why they are not being allowed to do this. After all, our personal information belongs to us.

• (1740)

That is why fintech companies have already started coming on line despite the legal limbo. They are responding to an obvious demand. At this point, however, because they are not officially part of a cohesive financial system, they exist in a grey area and find alternative ways to evolve. Users currently provide their personal information themselves, and when the app gets into an account, it extracts data from the screen and stores it.

Financial institutions' secure networks get regular visits from actors outside the financial sector, and that makes them vulnerable. The more advanced these strategies get, the greater the risk. As I was saying, the status quo is not sustainable. It would be pointless for legislators to bury their heads in the sand. There is no going back to 1990.

In some cases, the risks are minimal. An aggregator that scans public data to show us mortgage rates at all financial institutions in one click is convenient and low-risk. When it collects our personal data to give us a detailed picture of our financial situation, that is also convenient, but carries more risk. Financial information is very sensitive, so it is vital to protect it. If the app can be used to perform transactions, which implies that it places orders, that opens up a whole new level of risk, the risk of fraud.

What about the principle of needing to know the customer? That principle is the foundation of our anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing laws. How can a financial institution apply this principle when it is communicating via an app? Lastly, an important part of risk is the financial capacity to take on risk. Without that, the consumer could lose everything. Fintechs currently operate in a grey area, which is a problem. What we need is a clear framework with clear obligations and responsibilities, as well as oversight mechanisms and institutions to enforce compliance.

The Advisory Committee on Open Banking recognized all of these difficulties, but it felt that it was important to move quickly so that Canada would not be lagging behind and so as not to hamper the sector's development. Companies continue to operate in a grey area, which is not serving anyone well. That is why the advisory committee recommended giving clear direction but introduce minimal regulations so that things can move faster. Then, industry stakeholders can determine for themselves how to operationalize that and resolve technical issues. In short, the committee is recommending a sort of self-regulation.

The committee recognized that the financial soundness of technology companies is an issue, but it did not propose any institutional mechanism for dealing with it. There would not be any equivalent for deposit insurance, at least not in the beginning. At best, the committee mentions getting their own insurance. The committee also recognized the constitutional issue, but it proposed circumventing it. It proposes integrating the federal financial institutions. As for the others, they can join if they want to, but as second-class institutions.

I am a Quebecker whose main financial institution is a co-operative, not a bank. Understandably, a two-tier financial system leaves much to be desired. Barring a constitutional amendment, the federal government cannot regulate them. Also, in order for the financial system to be truly open, governments will have to coordinate. I really like the first clause of Bill C-365. It requires the government to present directions and an action plan in a timely manner so that the public can take ownership of it and we can debate it. That is good. I am not so sure about the second clause. Setting a deadline for introducing legislation without ensuring that we are ready and that any potential problems have been resolved seems a bit rash to me.

As we consider the implementation of open banking, let us heed the Emperor Augustus and make haste slowly. That is essentially

Private Members' Business

the message I am getting from the Speaker, who wants me to wrap up. Let us get to work right away because the status quo is no longer tenable, but let us take the time to do things right, because the stakes are high.

● (1745)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would like to thank the hon. member for sharing yet another wonderful expression.

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MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing the House that the Senate has passed the following bill: Bill C-62, an act to amend an act to amend the Criminal Code, medical assistance in dying, no. 2.

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[English]

CONSUMER-LED BANKING ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-365, An Act respecting the implementation of a consumer-led banking system for Canadians, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the capacity crowd that is here tonight on this riveting PMB. This is indeed a very important moment in Canadian history.

This is a full-circle moment for me, because it allows me the opportunity to revisit the first time my words ever entered into Hansard, which would have been September 27, 2016. Also, when I was a city councillor, I provided testimony to OGGO, which had a special committee on postal banking. The reason I bring that up is because the hon. member for Bay of Quinte, whom I rather enjoy, does a phenomenal job of talking about all of the certitudes of capitalism, all the symptoms, ills and all the ways in which regulatory capture in cartels and monopolies shape our Canadian economy, and yet sometimes, well most of the time, in fact, all of the time, Conservatives just really seem to miss the target. While it is true we will likely be supporting this, I do not think that it actually speaks to the issue of the way in which the cartel banking system has captured the Canadian economy, and I will tell members why.

Private Members' Business

I come to my politics through observation. Back in 2014 when I was running to be a city councillor in Hamilton, my campaign office was right across the street from a payday loan company. At the end of every month, about a week to go in a month, I watched people start to enter payday loan centres. It was at that time I got to understand that most of the people who were entering those predatory, economically violent and, dare I say, extortionary businesses were already on a fixed income, many were already on social assistance, and many were hard-working people who just did not have enough money due to their legislated poverty to make it to the end of the month, and so they would visit these predatory loan companies.

In the process of trying to better understand the fullness of this economic violence on people, I came to understand that the Canadian Union of Postal Workers had presented what I thought was a very sound and fair banking policy: postal banking. The reason I bring this up on this PMB debate is because, yes, it is obvious that every consumer should have the right to have data sovereignty over their own information and that it should not be held hostage or be under some kind of extortionary measure by a cartel bank preventing them from transitioning seamlessly to another. That is a basic tenet of a fair economy and one that I think everybody should support, but it does not speak to the heart of the matter. If we are going to talk about open banking, what we need to talk about is decommodified banking for the most vulnerable among us. For example, a person receiving a social assistance cheque or ODSP who does not have the ability to actually have a bank account would then see that meagre \$720 or \$1,200, in Ontario, have fees added onto it.

When we talk about predatory violence, I look to the work of ACORN, which does incredible work on this and on fair banking. It has identified, quite rightly, the way easyfinancial, Money Mart and Cash Money charge interest on loans. For example, on a loan of less than \$1,500 that is supposed to be paid back in two weeks, and we know that if a person on a fixed income does not have the money at the end of the month then that person would probably not have it in the months to come, the annual interest rates actually compound to somewhere between 400% and 600%. However, federally, we legislate extortion or loan sharking at 60% plus interest and other charges. So, when we see loans in this predatory sector go up 300% between 2016 and 2020, ACORN did the right thing and launched a campaign on this.

I am proud to say that another full-circle moment for me in this conversation was as a city councillor when I was responsible for moving a motion that actually created the first municipality in Ontario to regulate payday loans in our municipalities.

• (1750)

I am a proud Hamiltonian from Hamilton Centre, which is the birthplace of Tim Hortons. At its peak, there were more payday lenders in Hamilton Centre than there were Tim Hortons. Do members know who the president of the Payday Loan Association was at that time? Many members on the government's side will know this person well. It was Stan Keyes, a former Liberal member of Parliament who was basically shilling for the predatory and extortionary payday loan sector. What happened? By the time we were done with him, we had run him out of Hamilton. They had to change the name of that association.

Why do I bring it back to that? It is because the most vulnerable Canadians among us do not have to worry about whether or not they can move their information from bank to bank. They cannot even get into a bank. How can we enter into a conversation about open banking when not every Canadian has access to a bank?

I want to go back to the Canadian Union of Postal Workers. The Conservatives did the cut and gut on it and tried to privatize Canada Post. Then the Liberals, of course, followed suit shortly thereafter. They looked at ending door-to-door service and all the other things Canadians rely on. We took them to task, and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers came forward with a beautiful program called Delivering Community Power. Part of that plan was postal banking.

Members may or may not know this, but within the charter of Canada Post is the ability to offer postal banking. We cannot have a conversation about open banking unless we are providing banking for everybody in this digital economy. At a time when everybody relies on the ability to transfer monies to and from, it is not just about their information, but also about the freedom to have a decommodified banking sector.

When I say decommodified, I am referring to the cartels that we have allowed to be created in this country. This is where I will give credit to the member for Bay of Quinte because he understands the point, as I have heard him talk about it. The cartel here has created a scenario in an economy where we pay the highest interest rates on credit cards. We pay the highest amounts on service fees.

When I was a small business owner, I went in to do a cash deposit. I saw a \$5 fee that said "CD Fee". I asked them, "What the heck is this?" It was a cash deposit fee. A bank was charging me a \$5-a-month fee to simply deposit cash into a bank account. That is preposterous. We need to rein this in, which is why this is a positive first step. However, any step, absent taking control of our banking sector from the regulatory capture of the five major bank cartels in this country, falls short.

We have an opportunity within the charter of Canada Post. We have infrastructure. I referred to Tim Hortons and how ubiquitous that is in Canada. Guess what? Across the country, dotting the country, there are small postal offices ready to deliver postal banking. For example, they are in the north, near indigenous, first nations, Métis and Inuit communities. They are already there, and all we have to do is give them the opportunity. We just have to give them the opportunity to provide basic banking services to people.

This is so that, if someone is on a fixed income and receiving their monthly social assistance, whether it is Ontario Works or ODSP, rather than being extorted by the payday loan sector, they could go into their local post office, take that money out and try to keep up in an economy that is leaving far too many behind.

It is laudable what my friend from Bay of Quinte is doing, who I consider to be a learned member of Parliament and somebody who understands the harms caused by capitalism. I would challenge him to go further than just tinker around the edges of an open banking system and let us go all the way. Let us go all the way and open up banking for Canadians from coast to coast to coast, regardless of how much money they have and regardless of where they live.

• (1755)

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will start my speech with a couple of important messages.

Recently, we saw the passing of Daryl Kramp, who was an amazing member of Parliament and a personal mentor to myself. I give my best to his family going forward. He was a legend of a man who really contributed to his family, to his community and to this place as well.

I would also like to give a shout-out to the member for Elmwood—Transcona. He has announced his resignation from this place. He was a treat and a treasure to work with at the finance committee. He was always well prepared and always dedicated to the people of his riding.

With that, I will start my talk on open banking. Open banking is an area where Canada should be focused. As I have stated numerous times, Canada has a productivity crisis. We are said to be one of the lowest productivity countries in the world. In fact, we are on a trajectory, if this continues on this path, where we will not even be considered an advanced economy anymore. We have such low levels of productivity relative to the United States and other countries. Open banking is low-hanging fruit. It is a relatively easy fix for the government to lift up our productivity. I will unpack what I mean by that.

First, I want to talk specifically about the member for Bay of Quinte's private member's bill, which would force the government to do a couple of things. The first would be, within six months, to implement open banking, and the second would be to make public a report that was produced for the finance department. These are absolutely critical steps to pushing this along.

What is open banking, or consumer-led banking? Let us start there. It is the ability for clients to own their own data and to move their own data to the financial institutions that they choose. Currently, we have a system for transferring data within financial institutions that is not much above an abacus. It actually involves the transfer of paper, physically bringing documents and transferring one's data to other financial institutions.

This creates barriers for people to transfer their financial data from one institution to another. Like most Canadians, I have a number of payees on my online banking, and I have information saved on there. It would literally take me hours to rebuild that data and to move that data to another financial institution. That creates a barrier

Private Members' Business

so that Canadians do not shop for the best rates. I would disagree with my colleague who spoke prior to me, although I respect him. We have different perspectives, but we want to get to the same place.

It is my heartfelt belief, as I believe it is for most Conservatives, that competition is the way to bring fairness to the banking system. Ultimately, it is about having a level playing field where we have small, big and medium-sized players all competing for Canadians' business and where we will have success. Open banking structures that playing field. While I would disagree with the member that we do not need direct government intervention, what we do need is government to set in place the legislative framework for institutions to be able to compete fairly.

In the failing of doing that, what we actually have is a cumbersome system where Canadians cannot transfer their financial data. This means that if people get a bill from whatever major bank, see that their fees were \$50 and think it is unfair, then in an open banking system we would be able, with a couple of clicks of the mouse, to make those banks work for our business, as opposed to people working for them.

Everywhere open banking has been tried, it has been tremendously successful on a number of fronts, and one is affordability. As I said, competition is the magic elixir, the magic pill that would fix many ails in the economy. It makes businesses compete for people's business. It lowers costs and improves services to deliver better value. In an open banking system, everywhere it has been tried, it has driven down the costs for consumers.

• (1800)

Canadians pay billions and billions of dollars every year to financial institutions. For that, they are, relative to their competitors across the world, not, in my opinion, getting the best value. In order to increase that value, to get that better value, we need to enable competition, but right now, as I said, the cumbersome system of data transfer is preventing that competition from occurring.

I actually believe it could be great for our banks and great for our financial institutions, because it would make them stronger. It would make them compete.

Ultimately, we want Canadian businesses, large, medium and small, to succeed, not only here in Canada but across the world. If they are put in an arena here in our country where they become stronger and better able to compete globally by having strong domestic competition, they are then strengthened and able to bring some of that great Canadian know-how, some of that great Canadian entrepreneurship, across the world.

The other area where it will help our economy is with respect to entrepreneurship. Right now, in Canada, as I said, we are unfortunately one of the lower-productivity countries in the OECD and forecast to be one of the lowest for the foreseeable future.

Private Members' Business

Just to give an idea, we measure it by GDP per hour, per worker. That is the general stat, the metric by which it is measured. Canada is down around \$50 per worker. The U.S. would be at \$75. Countries like Switzerland are up at over \$100 per hour, per worker, so we have a substantial problem.

One of the issues that we have is, of course, competition, which I have talked about, but also growing our new and small businesses, our innovators, to take that next level.

The challenge is that they often, in the Canadian finance ecosystem, find it challenging to obtain proper financing, to grow from that small business, that idea, into a big business. What happens is that many of those small businesses actually have to leave our country to attract the financing they need.

They go all over, around the world, of course, most notably to Silicon Valley down in the United States, but also all over the world, to where they can attract more capital.

What open banking does is to allow greater transparency at the request of the business or the individual, which gives the bank or the financial institution or the lender of any sort greater confidence in lending that money out to these institutions, and gets it to them more quickly.

Often, especially in the tech space, technologies like artificial intelligence are not changing by the year or even by the month or even by the week. It is a daily thing. One needs to get that financing, that cash, to those businesses as quickly as possible. Currently, in the financial ecosystem, we hear story after story that innovators are not getting that capital quickly enough.

Just to give a quick story, a friend of mine is an individual who came over here to Canada as a refugee from abroad. He actually went and got his Ph.D. and was in an IT field and desperately wanted to give back to the country that had given so much to him. It broke his heart that he ended up having to move to the United States because there just was not the financing here for his idea.

He was the number seven employee in a company that went on to be worth billions of dollars. That could have been done right here, right in Canada.

I think this is a fantastic bill. I think the member for Bay of Quinte has done a great service for his community and for Canada. I believe we should give it unanimous support to get this bill through as quickly as possible, so that we can increase the competitiveness of the Canadian economy and improve affordability in the Canadian financial sector. We owe it to Canadians to get this done and to get it done quickly.

• (1805)

[Translation]

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to participate in the debate on Bill C-365, an act respecting the implementation of a consumer-led banking system for Canadians. This is a private member's bill.

[English]

Bill C-365 would require the Minister of Finance to table in each House of Parliament, within 30 days of the bill's passage, a plan to implement an open banking system in Canada and a bill to implement an open banking system in Canada within six months. I could stop there, because that is a plan that would see the government move more slowly on open banking than it already is. The Minister of Finance has already announced that budget 2024 will include legislation for the implementation of consumer-driven banking.

Instead, I will take a moment to underline the importance of this file and why we should reject a private member's bill that would impose a lax deadline and no details on the implementation of a consumer-driven banking regime. Consumer-driven banking, also known as open banking or consumer-driven finance, refers to systems that allow people and businesses to securely transfer their financial data to different financial services providers, such as apps that use data to provide automated budgeting and savings advice. Individuals can access services that allow them to build their credit by proving they have paid rent on time, for example.

It is expected that consumer-driven banking would empower Canadians to securely access and share their financial data, ensure that Canadians are not subject to fees when accessing and sharing their data, protect Canadians and the financial system from risky practices like screen scraping, ensure that parties at fault are liable for any damages or data breaches, and allow Canadians to safely access innovative products and services that can help them improve their financial outcomes.

The issue now is that without consumer-driven banking, Canadians, by default, currently share their banking credentials with entities other than their bank in order to access data-driven financial services, while there are no rules around the practice. This can be worrisome for many Canadians. Personally, it makes me feel uneasy. Like many other Canadians, I am concerned that the non-secure, unregulated practice called screen scraping leaves us open to security, privacy and liability risks in the event of data breaches or losses. That is why giving Canadians control over their own financial data is so important.

[Translation]

That is exactly what our government wants to do. Indeed, we support the implementation of consumer-driven banking. We have already made a lot of progress in this direction. However, such a system needs to be defined by clear rules to protect consumers.

Last fall, the Minister of Finance indicated in the 2023 fall economic statement that the government intends to introduce framework legislation for implementing consumer-driven banking in the 2024 budget. This framework legislation will propose a phased-in approach to scope, oversight of the technical standard, and a timeline for phasing out screen scraping.

• (1810)

[English]

In line with international best practices, the aim of our legislation will be to codify key elements including scope, common rules for addressing liability, privacy, security, accreditation and management of technical standards; mandate a government-led governance entity responsible for monitoring and supervising the system, enforcing common rules, accrediting and updating mandated technical standards; and address liability among industry participants.

Our work will be framed by three major policy objectives. First, we are aiming to ensure the continued safety and soundness of the financial sector by addressing the security risks arising from existing data sharing practices such as screen scraping, and by establishing oversight of financial data sharing activities. Second, we want to ensure that Canadians can securely and confidently access and use their financial data to improve their financial outcomes. Third, we want to establish a cohesive framework with a clear, fair and transparent approach to accreditation, to support the continued security and stability of the Canadian financial sector, including existing financial institutions.

[Translation]

It is important for our government to ensure Canadians benefit from effective oversight of financial data sharing. That is why our framework will mandate a government-led entity to supervise and enforce the framework.

To facilitate oversight of provincial entities while respecting their jurisdiction, a model that permits provincial entities to opt in to governance, supervision and participation will be developed.

Naturally, governance design is key to ensuring the framework achieves the public policy objectives, which in this case are safety, stability, innovation and utility for all Canadians.

With a strong governance framework, we will be able to ensure participants abide by common rules by outlining clear roles and responsibilities for participants and government, and what actions will be taken when non-compliance occurs.

[English]

I am glad to see that, after significant consultation and review, there is now broad alignment among stakeholders with the government's proposed approach. The day after the fall economic statement, the Canadian Bankers Association was quoted as saying that it welcomes "the clarity provided in the Fall Economic Statement" and that it will "continue to work collaboratively with the government on implementing a consumer-driven banking regime in Canada."

Furthermore, Canadian fintechs were also reported to be supportive of the government's plan, as outlined in the fall economic state-

Private Members' Business

ment and policy statement. The framework proposed by our government aligns with those of our largest trading partners, including the United States.

As members can see, consumer-driven banking is something that we support and are acting on. This framework is necessary to establish a system that enables secure financial data sharing. The Minister of Finance has already announced that budget 2024 will include legislation for the implementation of consumer-driven banking.

[Translation]

In order to do that, we continue to work closely with industry, federal regulators, provincial and territorial governments and other stakeholders.

It is clear that, with all the progress we are making on creating a consumer-driven banking system, Bill C-365 is not necessary. It will be obsolete before it is even voted on.

[English]

That is why I will vote against Bill C-365, and I invite my hon. colleagues to do the same.

The Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. member for Bay of Quinte for his right of reply.

• (1815)

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a pleasure to hear the debate and to present my first private member's bill when it comes to open banking here in Canada.

This bill was to do two things. It was to ensure that we provide the opportunity for businesses to participate in Canadian banking, in fintechs, and it was also to ensure the government did what it promised.

Before I start that, I just want to make a quick comment. The Right Honourable Prime Minister Mulroney has passed away, and to his family, to Caroline, to Ben and others, I give our sincere condolences. A favourite quote of mine from Brian Mulroney was, "Canada must strive to be a beacon of hope, a model of prosperity, and a nation that works for all its citizens." Rest in peace, to Brian Mulroney.

I am encouraged by the speeches tonight by the members for Hamilton Centre and Jonquière, who talk about the need for open banking. We brought this bill forward because it has taken six years to get legislation promised to Canadian fintechs and to Canadians themselves to get competition in Canada. Canada has a monopoly problem. We have a major problem, where we have major regulations that ensure we have oligopolies and monopolies in the grocery sector, and we are paying some of the highest prices in the world in the airlines, in telecommunications and in banking.

Government Orders

The solution to banking is open, or consumer-led, banking. This bill would do two things. It would ensure there is legislation presented within six months, and it would make the government table a report that has been on the minister's desk since May 2023. For six years, we have been waiting.

Canadians and fintechs are saying one thing, and one thing very clearly, to me; they cannot wait anymore. They do not believe the Liberal government will present this legislation in the March budget, even though it has been in the fall economic statement. They do not believe that it may even be in the next fall economic statement. By passing this bill, parliamentarians can ensure that open banking comes before discussion in the House of Commons and also in the other House. In doing so, we would help the fintechs that are desperately asking us to ensure we get open banking implemented in Canada.

Those fintechs are providing good wages at a time when start-ups in Canada are low, and we need more businesses with more powerful paycheques. More importantly, Canadians need better options for banking. I heard my colleague, earlier, talk about different options for all types of Canadians for banking. There is a company called Borrowell that actually has a fintech app, through open banking, which actually builds credit scores by tracking one's payment of rent. That is a great example of what a fintech business and what open banking would do for all Canadians.

More importantly, this bill would ensure that we could fix the problem in banking. One-third of Canadians are upset with their banking institution, 70% of Canadians have had the same bank account for 11 years, and 80% of Canadians have never switched bank accounts. We have a major oligopoly problem in Canada, with five Canadian banks now controlling 90% of mortgages and with HSBC being bought by RBC.

This bill would create competition, and when there is competition in Canada, that gives benefits through freedom of choice to Canadians and that gives them savings. In the U.K., with the bank accounts for people living in the U.K., they pay zero dollars for transactional fees, zero dollars for overdraft fees and zero dollars for monthly fees. Canadians would save \$400 a year if this is implemented.

I am happy to see the discussion. I am hoping to see that we get the vote through Parliament so that we can talk about open banking in this place and in the Senate. We can help fintechs, but more importantly, help Canadians. Let us bring open banking and consumer-led banking, and let us bring it home.

The Deputy Speaker: 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.

• (1820)

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Williams: Mr. Speaker, we request a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 20, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

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. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is obviously with great regret that this House has learned of the passing of Canada's 18th prime minister, the Right Honourable Martin Brian Mulroney.

Obviously, all members join us in wishing the Mulroney family our deepest sympathy at this time as they deal with the loss of this great statesman, who has done so much for our country. I join all Canadians in offering our condolences. Out of respect, I would like to seek unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House:

(a) the motion respecting Senate amendments to Bill C-35, An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada, be deemed adopted; and

(b) this House do now adjourn.

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

It is agreed.

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

(Motion agreed to, amendments read the second time and concurred in)

The Deputy Speaker: My condolences to the family of the Right Honourable Brian Mulroney.

It being 6:23 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:23 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, February 29, 2024

Privilege

Alleged Insufficiency and Inaccuracy of Responses to Order Paper Questions—Speaker's Ruling	
The Speaker	21455

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Commissioner of Lobbying

The Speaker	21456
-------------------	-------

Main Estimates, 2024-25

Ms. Anand	21456
-----------------	-------

Certificates of Nomination

Mr. Lamoureux	21456
---------------------	-------

Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner

Mr. Lamoureux	21456
Motion	21456
(Motion agreed to)	21456

Government Response to Petitions

Mr. Lamoureux	21456
---------------------	-------

Departmental Plans, 2024-25

Ms. Anand	21456
-----------------	-------

Federal Tax Expenditures

Ms. Anand	21456
-----------------	-------

Pharmacare Act

Mr. Holland	21456
Bill C-64. Introduction and first reading	21456
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	21456

Committees of the House

Status of Women

Mrs. Vecchio	21457
Mrs. Roberts	21457
Ms. Larouche	21457

Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Mr. Schmale	21457
Motion for concurrence	21457
Mr. Lamoureux	21459
Ms. Larouche	21459
Ms. Gazan	21459
Mr. Melillo	21460
Mr. Battiste	21461
Mrs. Gill	21461
Ms. Idlout	21461
Mr. Lamoureux	21462
Motion	21463
Motion agreed to	21464

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act

Motion That Debate Be Not Further Adjourned	
Mr. MacKinnon	21464
Motion	21464
Ms. Ferreri	21464
Ms. Sudds	21464
Ms. McPherson	21465
Ms. Bérubé	21465
Mr. Arya	21465
Mrs. Gray	21465
Ms. Larouche	21466
Ms. Idlout	21466
Mr. Patzer	21466
Ms. Gazan	21467
Mr. Arya	21467
Motion agreed to	21469

Second reading and concurrence in Senate amendments

Bill C-35. Second reading and concurrence in Senate amendments	21470
Mr. Lawrence	21470
Mr. Lamoureux	21471
Ms. Idlout	21471
Mr. Albas	21471
Ms. Ferreri	21472
Mrs. Desbiens	21472

Standing Committee on Science and Research

(On the Order: Orders of the Day:)	21472
Mr. Lamoureux	21472
Motion	21472
(Motion agreed to)	21473

Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act

Bill C-35. Second reading and concurrence in Senate amendments	21473
Ms. Idlout	21473
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	21474
Mr. Lamoureux	21474
Ms. Ferreri	21475
Ms. McPherson	21475
Mr. Oliphant	21476
Ms. Larouche	21476
Ms. Ferreri	21477
Ms. Gazan	21477

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Black History Month

Mr. Chen	21477
----------------	-------

Rare Disease Day	
Mr. Kmiec	21478
Child Poverty	
Mrs. Atwin	21478
25th Anniversary of a Rivière-des-Mille-Îles Business	
Mr. Desilets	21478
Parole Board of Canada	
Mr. Caputo	21478
58th Quebec Games	
Mrs. Brière	21479
Women and Gender Equality	
Mr. Ehsassi	21479
National Association of Women and the Law	
Ms. Damoff	21479
Carbon Tax	
Mrs. Wagantall	21479
Key to the City of Brampton	
Mr. Ali	21479
ArriveCAN App	
Mr. Khanna	21480
Public Safety	
Mr. Seeback	21480
Alan Redway and John Godfrey	
Mr. Oliphant	21480
Member for Elmwood—Transcona	
Mr. Green	21480
Pierre Fournelle	
Ms. Gaudreau	21480
Public Safety	
Mr. Strahl	21481
Black History Month	
Mr. Chiang	21481

ORAL QUESTIONS

Public Safety	
Mr. Chong	21481
Mr. Holland	21481
Mr. Chong	21481
Mr. Holland	21481
Mr. Chong	21482
Mr. Holland	21482
Mr. Ellis	21482
Mr. Holland	21482
Mr. Ellis	21482
Mr. Holland	21482
Justice	
Ms. Normandin	21482
Mr. Virani	21482

Ms. Normandin	21482
Mr. Virani	21483
Public Services and Procurement	
Mr. Singh	21483
Mr. Blair	21483
Housing	
Mr. Singh	21483
Ms. Martinez Ferrada	21483
Public Safety	
Mr. Bezan	21483
Mr. Holland	21483
Mr. Bezan	21483
Mr. Holland	21484
Mr. Bezan	21484
Mr. Holland	21484
Mr. Paul-Hus	21484
Mr. Holland	21484
Mr. Paul-Hus	21484
Mr. Champagne	21484
Mr. Paul-Hus	21485
Mr. Champagne	21485
Justice	
Mr. Champoux	21485
Mr. Virani	21485
Mr. Champoux	21485
Mr. Virani	21485
Mr. Fortin	21485
Mr. Virani	21485
Public Safety	
Mr. Cooper	21485
Mr. Holland	21486
Mr. Cooper	21486
Mr. Holland	21486
Mrs. Kramp-Neuman	21486
Mr. Holland	21486
Housing	
Ms. Barron	21486
Mr. Fragiskatos	21486
Pharmacare	
Ms. McPherson	21487
Mr. Holland	21487
News Media Industry	
Mrs. Chatel	21487
Mrs. St-Onge	21487
Public Safety	
Mr. Scheer	21487
Mr. Champagne	21487
Mr. Scheer	21487
Mr. Holland	21488
Mr. Berthold	21488
Mr. Champagne	21488
Mr. Berthold	21488
Mr. Champagne	21488

Health	
Mr. Thériault	21488
Mr. Holland	21488
Pharmacare	
Mr. Thériault	21489
Mr. Holland	21489
Carbon Pricing	
Ms. Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	21489
Mr. Fragiskatos	21489
Ms. Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	21489
Mr. MacKinnon	21489
Mrs. Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	21489
Mr. MacKinnon	21489
Health	
Ms. Fry	21490
Ms. Saks	21490
Public Services and Procurement	
Mr. Barrett	21490
Mr. Blair	21490
Mr. Barrett	21490
Mr. Blair	21490
Mr. Brock	21490
Mr. Blair	21491
Tourism Industry	
Mr. Iacono	21491
Ms. Martinez Ferrada	21491
Emergency Preparedness	
Mr. Cannings	21491
Mr. Sajjan	21491
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Morrice	21491
Ms. Joly	21491
Business of the House	
Mr. Scheer	21492
Mr. MacKinnon	21492
Fall Economic Statement Implementation Act, 2023	
Bill C-59—Notice of Time Allocation Motion	
Mr. MacKinnon	21492

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act	
Bill C-35. Second reading and concurrence in Senate amendments	21492
Mr. Lamoureux	21492
Mr. Aboultaif	21494
Ms. Gaudreau	21494
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	21495
Mr. Boulерice	21495

Mr. Louis	21495
Mrs. Wagantall	21495
Mr. Carr	21496
Mrs. Wagantall	21497
Ms. Bérubé	21497
Mr. Julian	21498
Mr. Sarai	21498
Ms. Ferreri	21499
Ms. Normandin	21499
Mr. Boulерice	21500
Mr. Ruff	21500
Mr. Carr	21503
Mr. Blanchette-Joncas	21503
Mr. Boulерice	21503
Mrs. Wagantall	21504
Mr. Gerretsen	21504
Ms. Normandin	21504
Ms. Ferreri	21504
Mr. Gerretsen	21505
Ms. Ferreri	21507
Mr. Blanchette-Joncas	21507
Mr. Bachrach	21507
Mrs. Wagantall	21507
Mr. Lamoureux	21508
Ms. Gladu	21508
Ms. Gladu	21508

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Consumer-led Banking Act	
Bill C-365. Second reading	21511
Mr. Gerretsen	21511
Mr. Ste-Marie	21512
Message from the Senate	
The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès)	21513
Consumer-led Banking Act	
Bill C-365. Second reading	21513
Mr. Green	21513
Mr. Lawrence	21515
Ms. Koutrakis	21516
Mr. Williams	21517
Division on motion deferred	21518

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act	
Bill C-35. Second reading and concurrence in Senate amendments	21518
Mr. Nater	21518
Motion	21518
(Motion agreed to, amendments read the second time and concurred in)	21518

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
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