



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

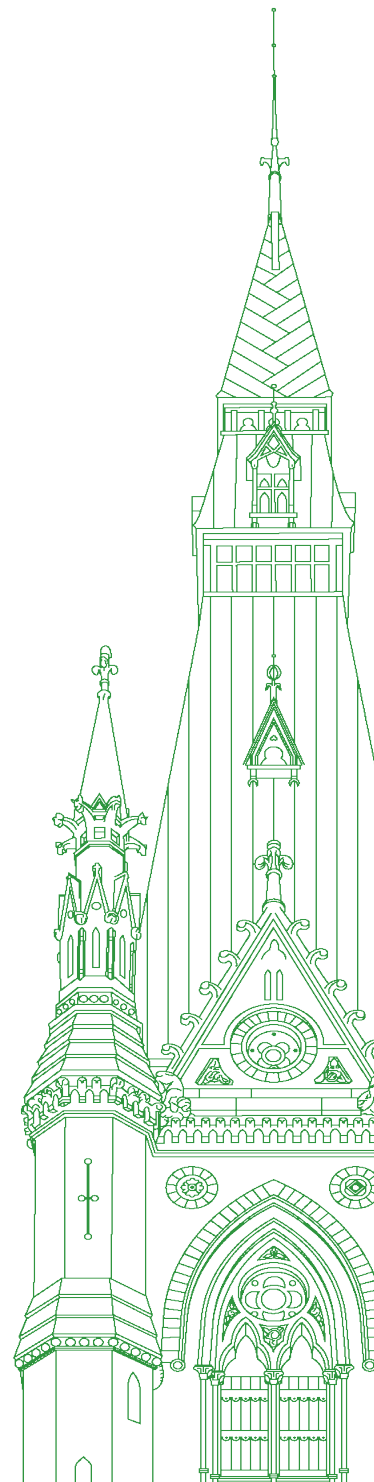
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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 5, 2023

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1010)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as this is the first time I am standing up since on your election to the chair as the Speaker of the House of Commons, I want to extend my personal congratulations to you.

Having said that, 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.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 49th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of the committees of the House.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 49th report later this day.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate you in that chair. As it is Thanksgiving weekend, I would like to wish all members, their loved ones and their constituents a happy Thanksgiving. Because we have had a couple of tough weeks, I would like to recognize all the people who help make this place function. I give thanks to them and for them, including the PPS; their work is not easy, and it is appreciated.

With that, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 49th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

[*Translation*]

The 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)

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

EXPRESSION OF POLITICAL OPINION

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition on behalf of Canadians who are drawing the attention of the House to Bill C-257, which would add protections against political discrimination to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The petitioners have two points they want to raise with the House of Commons.

First, they want the House to expeditiously support Bill C-257, which bans discrimination on the basis of political belief or activity.

Second, they want the defence of the rights of Canadians to peacefully express their political opinions to be made a first priority of the House of Commons.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and privilege to present a petition today on behalf of constituents in my riding. The petitioners cite that, in 2018, the national anthem was amended with gender-neutral language to ensure equity and inclusion, but Canada's most notable symbols, the Canadian flag and the national anthem, fail to represent indigenous people.

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The first contact between indigenous and non-indigenous people was amicable. Indigenous people showed newcomers how to survive. They agreed to share but not surrender their land, expecting settlers to share resources and only take what they needed. Their relationship to the land differs from those who claim it today, as the nature of this tie is not one of ownership but stewardship. The land is a sacred gift from the creator, which indigenous people vow to protect.

The petitioners cite many things. I will highlight the following. Indigenous people's relationship to the land is constitutionally recognized. Accordingly, the citizens and residents of the petition call on Canada to refute the doctrine of discovery and terra nullius by amending the national anthem's lyrics from "Our home and native land" to "Our home on native land". Canada would therefore honour its moral responsibility and fulfill part of its commitment to the 45th call to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, moving toward reparation by recognizing that indigenous people occupied, cultivated and thrived on these lands before Europeans arrived.

NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this is the first time I have had the opportunity to address you, allow me to congratulate you on your election as Speaker.

I present a petition on behalf of Canadians across the country who are very concerned with the loss of the freedom of choice in health care, and who are becoming increasingly alarmed by the legislation and statutory changes that were embedded, and buried, quite frankly, in Bill C-47, the Budget Implementation Act, 2023, No. 1.

Canadians are competent and able to make their own health decisions without state interference. Therefore, the petitioners are calling upon this Parliament to guarantee the right of every Canadian to health freedom by enacting the charter of health freedom, which was drafted for the Natural Health Products Protection Association on September 4, 2008.

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of 4,000 Canadians who are frustrated with the state of air passenger protection in this country.

This petition comes on the heels of several seasons of air travel chaos. The petitioners note that Canada's air passenger protection regime falls well short of the examples set in other jurisdictions, including the European Union.

The petitioners note that the backlog of complaints before the Canadian Transportation Agency, as of March 20, 2023, stood at 42,000 complaints. I would add that it is now well over 50,000.

Finally, the petitioners call on the government to table a bill that would reflect the contents of Bill C-327, which was drafted in close collaboration with air passenger rights advocates, and to do so at the soonest opportunity in order to protect the rights of air passengers right across this country.

• (1015)

OCEAN ECOSYSTEM

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise this morning virtually to present a petition on a quite astonishingly dreadful proposal for new commercial activities threatening marine ecosystems, but particularly the general group of species known as cephalopods, or octopus and squid.

Octopus and squid are obviously wild animals. They are solitary animals. There are now proposals all around the world for commercial, industrial-scale operations to raise cephalopods in captivity and then to slaughter them for commercial use.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to act quickly on this threat, to ban the importation of farmed cephalopod products into Canada and to ban any effort to take up this operation of the commercial, industrial-scale raising of cephalopods. The threats are to human health and to wild ecosystems. This is a carnivorous animal, so there would also be a threat to the wild fish population's sustainability.

At every level, the petitioners are concerned, and they ask the Liberal government to act.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to stand in this place and present a petition.

The petitioners are concerned that, as part of federal defence department training exercises, over 1,800 piglets have been killed after being stabbed, mutilated and exposed to radiation and chemical nerve agents.

The petitioners also point out that 77% of NATO nations no longer use animals for military medical training. The petitioners call on the Government of Canada and the Minister of National Defence to end the use of animals in military medical training.

BASIC INCOME GUARANTEE PROGRAM

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Region of Waterloo consists of five federal ridings, and constituents from the Region of Waterloo have come together in support of Prince Edward Island's negotiations with the Government of Canada to advance a basic income guarantee program that would last at least five years.

The petitioners raise concerns that, within the province of Ontario, we had a basic income pilot to see how we could lift communities and people up, but unfortunately, the current Conservative provincial government chose to kibosh that and to get rid of it right away.

As we approach Thanksgiving weekend, we know a lot of people are hurting. The petitioners feel this type of program might be an idea that could see more Canadians lifted up, especially during these challenging times.

I would hope Conservative members opposite would stop yelling at me, because we should be more concerned about the people who are hurting.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that whoever has the floor deserves the respect of this House. Members also need to make sure that the content they are reading is what is actually in the petition. I am not sure if that was all in the petition, about the Ontario government. I just want to make sure that hon. members are providing the content of their petitions as is.

FREEDOM OF POLITICAL EXPRESSION

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present a number of petitions to the House today.

The first petition is in support of an excellent private member's bill, Bill C-257. This bill seeks to protect Canadians from discrimination on the basis of political views or activity. It would add political belief and activity as prohibited grounds of discrimination within the Canadian Human Rights Act. The bill recognizes, fundamentally, according to petitioners, that political discrimination is wrong, as well as that it is in the interests of our democracy to have a dynamic in which people can express their political opinions freely without fear of employment-related or other kinds of personal repercussions for taking political positions that reflect their sincerely held convictions.

Petitioners are asking the House to support Bill C-257, and in other areas, to defend the right of Canadians to peacefully express their political opinions.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the next petition I would like to present is regarding the ongoing persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China. The petitioners note that Falun Gong is a traditional Chinese spiritual discipline that consists of meditation, exercises and moral teachings based on the principles of truthfulness, tolerance and compassion. The petitioners reflect on the horrific campaign of persecution of Falun Gong practitioners, which goes back a number of decades, as well as the work done by David Matas and David Kilgour in uncovering forced organ harvesting.

Petitioners want to see Canada do more to combat these acts of violence and to stand up for Falun Gong practitioners and other victims, including Uyghurs, Christians, democracy activists and other victims of violence perpetrated by the CCP regime.

• (1020)

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the third petition I am presenting deals with proposals for the politicization of charitable status determinations. The petitioners note a past Liberal Party platform commitment aimed at politicizing charitable status and denying charitable

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status to organizations that happen to reflect a set of values that is different from that of the Liberal Party.

The petitioners note that this could jeopardize the charitable status and the ability to fundraise of organizations such as hospitals, houses of worship, schools, homeless shelters and other charitable organizations that are simply trying to serve the communities in which they find themselves but would not want to pass a Liberal values test.

If the member is suggesting that—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I know the member has a number of petitions. I find that, as I am listening to them, at times, the member will make his petitions fairly political. It is supposed to be a relatively brief comment on the content and not necessarily a reading or a politicization of the petition.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I was having a side conversation about another matter; I could not hear exactly what the hon. member was saying. However, I do want to remind members that it is a summary of what is in the petition and not the MP's view or an elaboration of what may or may not be in it. I am not aware of what is actually in the petitions themselves, but I want to remind all members to ensure that they summarize what is in the petition.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I appreciate that the member for Winnipeg North is concerned about the politicization of the House of Commons. We certainly would not want to see that happening.

The petitioners say:

The government has previously used a "values test" to discriminate against worthy applicants to the Canada Summer Jobs Program, denying funding to any organization which was not willing to check a box endorsing political positions of the governing party;

Charities and other non-profit organizations should not be discriminated against on the basis of their political views or religious values and should not be subject to a politicized "values test"; and

All Canadians have a right under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to freedom of expression without discrimination.

I am happy to reflect those concerns of petitioners without, in any way, commenting on my personal views on the matter, in order to satisfy the member for Winnipeg North.

Petitioners call on all members to protect and preserve the application of charitable status on a politically and ideologically neutral basis, without discrimination, and to affirm the right of all Canadians to freedom of expression. That is the view of some very wise petitioners.

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MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the fourth and final petition I will table for today is from petitioners who are deeply concerned about proposals to legalize the killing of children under the rubric of so-called medical assistance in dying. The petitioners find these proposals deeply disturbing, and they call on the Government of Canada to block any attempt to allow the killing of children in Canada.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1025)

[Translation]

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND GROCERIES ACT

The House resumed from October 3 consideration of the motion that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-56. It is a government bill that would amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act.

Like my colleagues, I see this as an attempt by the federal government to respond to spiralling housing and grocery prices. It is true that rising interest rates are hurting many families, who are seeing mortgage payments take up more and more of their family budget. We need only imagine the situation of single-parent families, young people, students and immigrant families. I will spare the House the full list.

However, I am sure my colleagues will understand why I have doubts about the effectiveness of certain measures in Bill C-56. When we look at the specifics of the measures put forward by this government, we see realities that are very often based on gender. Women often bear the brunt. What troubles me is the situation of the people who are paying the price for these increases. Thousands of families in each of our ridings are in that boat. Even more outrageous is the fact that seniors are once again left out in the cold, as are the most disadvantaged members of our society.

To find solutions to address this housing crisis, we must listen more to the organizations working on the ground. I want to acknowledge the contribution of my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, who has travelled all over Quebec. During his tour, he took part in an activity in my riding of Abitibi—Témiscamingue. The activity drew over 25 people, which is a large number, and a lot of solutions were put forward. We must listen to orga-

nizations on the ground, such as the Association des groupes de ressources techniques du Québec, or AGRTQ, the Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes, and other non-profit organizations, as well as co-operatives, which are too often forgotten. The government needs to get projects off the ground and renew funding for initiatives that are working.

The YWCA, an organization that also works in Quebec with women in need of transitional housing, reminded us on Tuesday that it is important to shift public policy toward gender equality. In this crisis that affects our constituents, it is important to remember what organizations expect of us, namely better alignment and more flexibility and agility.

The housing shortage is dire. The government has to encourage the construction of rental and residential housing. It also has to renew the social housing construction program to provide more transitional housing and more affordable permanent housing.

Bill C-56 includes provisions relating to competition that will make a difference in the longer term. What a shame the government did not act sooner. It is kind of late in the game. In 1996, there were 13 grocery chains; now there are only three.

Let us look at the three main measures in Bill C-56.

First, it gives the commissioner of competition real investigative powers. Once Bill C-56 is law, the commissioner will be able to compel a person to testify or produce documents. That has not been possible up to now. I was at a summit organized by the Competition Bureau this morning. I could see that people are taking action on this. They are ready and willing. There were over 700 people online. The room was full. Clearly this issue matters to people. Waiting this long for competition reform may well cost us, though. I will have more to say about that later.

The second measure prohibits agreements with non-competitors aimed at reducing competition. For example, when a grocery store signed a lease with a shopping centre, it was common practice to include clauses prohibiting the shopping centre from renting space to another grocery store. That type of practice will now be prohibited, and that is a good thing.

The final measure, which we are very pleased with, responds to requests from my colleague, the member for Terrebonne, who has been calling for an end to the efficiencies defence for mergers and acquisitions. This measure may come too late, as the five major players' powerful position in the food industry clearly shows.

I want to stress the fact that one major challenge remains. We must continue trying to find a way to enhance competition in the food industry or this bill will not meet its real objective. Once a company is in a dominant position, there is no incentive or requirement for it to make room for more competitors. Introducing new competitors is the only way to prevent pricing arrangements and to permanently entrench the concept of affordability, meaning affordably priced goods and services.

My colleagues must be accustomed to hearing me talk about the reality in Abitibi—Témiscamingue, because the government needs to understand that it often acts too late for our communities.

● (1030)

I want to talk about this because Abitibi—Témiscamingue has been affected by the loss of competition in the food industry. To know where we are going, we must know where we are coming from. In conversation with locals in Abitibi—Témiscamingue, and particularly in Rouyn-Noranda, the topic of the Montemurro grocery store is bound to come up. Montemurro was the pride of the region. The business continued expanding until 1966, when it purchased the wholesaler ADL.

ADL used to buy up half the fresh vegetables grown in the region. At one point, it was supplying 25 independent markets from northern Ontario and Abitibi—Témiscamingue all the way to Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. Its sales totalled \$270 million. Its distribution centre and administrative headquarters were based in Rouyn-Noranda. My colleagues can imagine how much development leverage our regional agriculture sector had through that company.

In 2006, Sobeys arrived on the scene. What was the result for people in my region? From 2006 to 2013, ADL pared back its distribution activities, becoming a mere transfer centre. Our local products and our local agricultural production gave us significant business opportunities and the ability to supply fresh local produce, but local production was greatly affected by this change.

Prior to the merger of Sobeys and ADL, vegetables from all over our region were sent to Rouyn-Noranda. Since the merger, they have to travel further before ending up on our shelves. Unfortunately, items like tomatoes from Guyenne have to go all the way to Montreal before ending up back in La Sarre, the next town over.

Unfortunately, for reasons of efficiency, these acquisitions were approved as a formality. The government did not oppose these mergers and acquisitions. Today, Sobeys, Loblaws, Metro, Costco and Walmart control 80% of the food market. That is the situation I am referring to when I say that the measure set out in Bill C-56 will close a loophole, but it comes much too late for food markets. ADL was the last major wholesaler in Quebec, and maybe even in Canada.

A few people in Quebec still managed to make their mark in the market. The people in Amos are very lucky because they can still count on a wholesaler, Ben Deshaies, who is based in Amos. This business model of buying local is incredibly important to us. The Deshaies family deserve a lot of credit for being able to succeed, thanks to the entrepreneurial qualities passed down from generation to generation, despite a near total lack of competition in this sector.

It is time to act on the many demands that the Bloc Québécois has put forward in the House and at the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology. Thanks to the lack of competition and the encouragement of oligopolies, the major players are taking advantage of their market share to raise prices.

In my opinion, it is essential that the minister avoid making cuts to processors and farmers. Quebec's food processing companies are

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economic drivers that help support many families and create jobs across Quebec. They have already made their contribution and are facing considerable pressure, particularly in communities close to those resources.

It is striking to see that farmers and processors are no longer making money but that consumers are paying twice as much. Between the two, someone is making a profit. That is the trouble. That is where the problem lies. It is often the same company concentrating resources and distributing them.

It has also been striking to see the headlines in the news over the last two weeks about the federal government pressuring the major supermarket chains to take significant steps to stabilize or even lower food costs. I recently read one farmer's opinion in *La Tribune*. He noted the importance of short supply chains for our food security. That is what the member for Berthier—Maskinongé always says, and he can never say it enough.

That same point has been raised by many farmers in Témiscamingue. The public markets in our regions now offer a variety of high-quality products. It is time to support them by buying our produce there, but it is also time to encourage permanent, year-round measures. I would also encourage my colleagues to pursue our discussions in greater depth. It is essential for us to delve deeper to find solutions. Although Competition Bureau studies are useful, we need to react thoughtfully to red flags.

The proposed amendments to the Competition Act in Bill C-56 can help prevent the situation from getting worse in the future by tightening up the rules governing business mergers and acquisitions. However, they will not fix the existing problems. The damage has already been done, and Bill C-56 does not present any forward-looking solutions for fixing it.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one thing the government has done is support Canadians through difficult times. We understand and appreciate the whole issue of the cost of living. That is one of the reasons we came up with the grocery rebate, in essence supporting somewhere in the neighbourhood of 11 million Canadians.

The legislation we have before us today is in recognition of the fact that we need to see more competition. The minister has met with the big five grocers, if I can put it that way. We want to see lower prices. We want to see more stabilization.

What would the member do, in addition to the many things we have already done, to assist Canadians on this very important issue?

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• (1035)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Speaker, the current situation is that Canada has let oligopolies take over. That is true in the food industry, and it is also true in the banking sector. Taking action to fix that may require more courage, but it will have an impact on people's wallets. This situation also exists in the gas industry. It would take more courage for the House to address these issues. It is also true in telecommunications.

As with the reform of the Competition Act, I applaud the progress that has been made by the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry. I was there for his presentation this morning at Canada's competition summit. There is now a willingness to act that I believe was needed. For several years, I have also been urging the Standing Committee on Industry Technology to take action on competition reform, which is an important solution.

However, at this time, no action is being taken about the oligopolies. I look forward to seeing what splashy measures the government proposes when Parliament returns.

Will they have any impact? How can the government take a coercive approach with the large chains without raising prices and passing the cost on to consumers? I am very worried, so I look forward to getting some answers.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to share a story. There are four grocery stores just a block away from where I live. One of them is a major chain store, like the oligopolies my colleague is talking about. Another one is a small independent grocery store owned by a Portuguese family. All their children work there. Strangely enough, the prices at the small independent store are sometimes half of what the chain store charges. Inflation, however, supposedly affects everyone equally. There has to be something wrong with the logic of the major grocery chains.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks when the Liberals, half-heartedly and almost on bended knee, beg these huge oligopolies to stabilize prices. What is the use of stabilizing prices when prices are already too high and people are going without food?

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Speaker, my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie is in no position to lecture anyone about going down on bended knee and demanding things from the government, but that is another debate.

However, the question remains. Where are the profits going? They are certainly not going to our farmers, who are on the verge of bankruptcy. Things are really tough right now. My region has had a drought, and that is on top of rising input and fuel costs. The challenges are enormous. It is important to strengthen local distribution channels and ensure direct access to farmers. The growing number of intermediaries means that, if everyone takes a share, consumers end up paying more.

Right now consumers have very little direct access to farmers. The major players who control the distribution market are taking so much money that processors are no longer making any money and consumers are paying twice as much.

Local distribution channels must be strengthened. We need to invest in our regions and create public markets and permanent structures that will encourage consumers to visit. That way, we can improve our agricultural industry and our economy.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, when it comes to local distribution and slaughtering capacity, we know the situation could substantially improve. There are only a few abattoirs throughout the regions, in Quebec and across Canada. There is an over-concentration.

Does the federal government have a role to play here?

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Speaker, there are no abattoirs in Abitibi—Témiscamingue. It is a serious problem for our agriculture. Our farmers have to get their beef slaughtered more than 500 kilometres away. How is it that are we able to get programs to compensate the transportation of livestock, but we cannot get programs that should be fully funded by the governments? Obviously, it is hard to make abattoirs profitable. Having programs, however, would help us create economic diversity.

There is a cost to the quality of meat, the transportation, the environment and others. We need to invest in regional abattoirs.

• (1040)

[English]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-56, the affordable housing and groceries act.

The entire world is experiencing a global inflation crisis. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine and supply chain and climate change challenges, inflation is a worldwide issue. Compared to other G7 countries, Canada has fared very well, but that does not mean our country is immune to the factors driving up high prices around the world.

COVID-19 was an unforeseen global crisis. The world essentially ground to a halt. Canada has performed relatively well through the pandemic recovery thanks to the resiliency of the Canadian economy and in part to the programs the government introduced to support Canadians and business owners. However, just because Canada is doing better than many other G7 nations, that does not mean Canadians are not experiencing difficulties.

This past summer, I spoke to many constituents in Surrey—Newton who had concerns about the price of housing and the price of groceries. Therefore, I am very pleased Bill C-56 was the first piece of legislation the government introduced this fall session. Due to global inflation, the government understands that many Canadians are struggling to make ends meet. Although we have been introducing measures that have helped Canadians, we must continue to do more to provide targeted support. Bill C-56 addresses what we would do to help build more rental housing and to try to curb the rise in prices we have seen in grocery stores throughout the country.

Making housing more affordable is something we must tackle, including where the federal government can influence the activities within the marketplace so all Canadians have the opportunity of owning a home. Bill C-56 puts forward legislation to encourage the construction of much-needed purpose-built rental housing. We are proposing to eliminate the GST on the construction of new apartment buildings, student housing and seniors residences across Canada. Working on housing supply is an important part of what the federal government is doing to help Canadians. For a rental unit valued at \$500,000, the GST rental rebate would deliver \$25,000 in tax relief to developers and builders. This tool would help create the necessary conditions to build the types of housing that we need and that families want to live in.

This legislation would also remove a restriction on the existing GST rules to ensure that public service bodies, such as universities, public colleges, hospitals, charities and certain not-for-profit organizations, could build or purchase purpose-built rental housing and be permitted to claim 100% of the enhanced GST rental rebate.

We are also calling on provinces that currently apply PST or the provincial part of the HST to rental housing to join us by matching the federal rebate for new rental housing. It is very encouraging to see that certain provinces would be participating in this program. We are also requesting that local governments put an end to exclusionary zoning, and we are encouraging them to build apartments near public transit in order to have housing accelerator fund applications approved.

● (1045)

Launched earlier this year, the housing accelerator fund is a \$4-billion initiative designed to help cities unlock new housing supply, targeting approximately 100,000 units across the country. I look at lead times for projects, particularly in the Lower Mainland and more particularly in Surrey, and they are up to two years. To bring that down, this \$4-billion bill would help cities hire more planners, inspectors and plan checkers so the process can be passed and there would be more inventory in the market. It would also support the development of complete low-carbon and climate-resilient communities that are diverse, affordable, inclusive and equitable. Every community across this country needs to build more homes faster so we can reduce the cost of housing for all Canadians.

Through the one-time grocery rebate issued in July, we delivered targeted inflation relief to 11 million low- and modest-income Canadians and the families that needed it the most. This support was welcomed by Canadians, but we know that more needs to be done to address the rising cost of groceries. This is why we are taking immediate steps to enhance competition across the economy, with a focus on the grocery sector, to help stabilize costs for Canadians.

With Bill C-56, we would also be helping Canadians by stabilizing the price of groceries. We are introducing a set of legislative amendments to the Competition Act that would ensure more effective and modern competition law to promote affordability for Canadians and help our economic growth. This bill would empower the Competition Bureau to take action against collaborations that restrain competition and consumer choice, in particular in situations where the larger grocery store chains prevent smaller competitors

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from establishing operations nearby. The government is taking concrete steps to help stabilize food prices and improve competition in Canada. Canadians can be assured that the government will continue to work day in and day out to bring them much-needed relief.

Bill C-56 builds on other measures that the government has introduced to make life more affordable for Canadians. We are supporting 3.5 million families annually through the tax-free Canada child benefit, including over 28,000 children in Surrey—Newton, with families this year receiving up to \$7,400 per child under the age of six and \$6,300 per child for children aged six to 17. We have increased old age security, have enhanced the Canada workers benefit and have also reduced fees for regulated child care by an average of 50%, moving toward \$10-per-day day care by 2026. Six provinces and territories have already reached that goal. In my own province of British Columbia, the capacity has doubled on this \$10-a-day day care system.

We have strengthened the social safety net that millions of Canadians depend on, and we are working on helping Canadians put food on their table, pay their rent and be successful within their respective communities. We want to ensure that Canada remains the best place in the world to live, work, go to school and raise a family. Making life more affordable is a key part of that. I urge all members of the House to support this legislation to help Canadian families.

● (1050)

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Madam Speaker, like other Liberals, this member just lists off in his speech a long list of new Liberal spending. It is record spending, of course, as everybody knows, not many times more than previous governments but many billions of dollars more than previous governments.

Many of them have talked about the fact that they are subsidizing, through a grocery rebate, 11 million Canadians. Does the hon. member recognize that the fact that the government needs to subsidize groceries for over a quarter of our population is a sign of an absolutely devastatingly bad Liberal economic policy?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Speaker, I am very proud of the fiscal prudence our government brought to Canada. Our government absolutely understands that our job is to balance fiscal responsibility and compassion, and we have done that.

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If we review our record, Canada has the lowest deficit in the G7 nations. Canada also has the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. Canada's AAA credit rating was reaffirmed just two weeks ago. Canadians can afford to be compassionate to the most vulnerable among us, and we will be. That is why we gave this grocery rebate. Now we know that we need to work on the Competition Act, as well as bringing in more housing so people can have an affordable lifestyle.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, we passed a bill in the House that allocates \$4 billion to a housing accelerator fund for municipalities. The federal government cannot talk to Quebec municipalities; it has to come to an agreement with the Quebec government. Negotiations are under way, and the share due to Quebec comes to \$900 million. I would like to remind everyone that housing is a provincial jurisdiction.

According to what we learned this morning, the federal government is nitpicking and dawdling. It is having a hard time choosing a colour for the tiles and the carpet. Then it questions whether a given apartment should have 8 or 14 lights. What a waste of time. Again, this is a provincial jurisdiction. There are currently 10,000 people in Quebec who do not have a roof over their heads.

What will it take to get Ottawa to send that \$900-million cheque?

We need it now.

[English]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Speaker, I totally understand how important this \$4-billion accelerator fund is to the municipalities, particularly in Surrey—Newton. As I said earlier, the wait-list for the plans and projects is too long. We have to bring it down. We need to have those efforts with Quebec. Similarly, all those efforts are not only needed in Surrey, but they are needed across the country, including in Quebec.

The housing minister recently met with Minister Duranceau to pursue the work the hon. member is talking about. We hope that, in the coming months, municipalities, Quebec and the Canadian government will work together, hand in hand, to help municipalities have more housing supply for Quebeckers.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member's speech typifies what we are hearing from the Liberals. There is a recognition of the crisis of high food prices, and they talk about stabilizing them. That would be stabilizing them at the highest level ever with some of the highest margins ever. They have called in the CEOs, who were previously found guilty of price-fixing with bread. Studies have shown that margins have gone up during the pandemic.

What is the member expecting these CEOs to do with these voluntary measures?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Speaker, we are also looking to give more powers to the Competition Bureau to conduct marketing studies and compel information from companies so a decision can be made to bring the prices down.

• (1055)

Mr. Arpan Khanna (Oxford, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is such an honour to rise for my first debate on such an important issue that not only the residents in Oxford are facing, but also Canadians across the country.

Before I begin and dive deep into Bill C-56, I would like to take a few moments—

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

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Speaker, the interpreters are signalling that there is feedback. I am not sure whether it is from an electronic source close to the microphones, but the interpreters are hearing a thud.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members to keep their phones and earpieces away from the microphones and not on their desk because it creates problems for the interpreters.

I would ask the member speaking to make sure his interpretation earpiece is off and that there is no phone beside the mike.

Mr. Branden Leslie: Madam Speaker, as this is the member's maiden speech, would it be acceptable for him to restart his speech from the beginning given the challenges we have had technically?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will do that, but I want to remind all members of the House to make sure that they are prepared, and that includes having phones and earpieces away from the mikes.

The hon. member for Oxford.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Madam Speaker, I rise today for my first debate on such an important issue facing not only Oxford residents but also Canadians across our country.

Before I dive into Bill C-56, I would like to take a few minutes to quickly recognize all those who made my journey to this chamber possible. First there is my great campaign team and the hundreds of volunteers who showed up and knocked on doors. There is also a strong riding association, my family and friends, and my great Conservative caucus colleagues, who came out, knocked on doors, put up signs and helped me to take my seat in this chamber today.

I am truly blessed to be representing the great riding, one of the best ridings, of Oxford. We are a great community with so much potential. We are the best dairy farmers in Canada. We are the best agriculture sector in Canada. We have the 401 and 403 intersecting in my riding, making it a great transportation logistical hub for Canada. We have the leaders in the auto sector and two massive plants in my riding, with Toyota in Woodstock and CAMI in Ingersoll. We are leaders in hospitality in the food industry. Many members may have heard of Shaw's Ice Cream or Jakeman's Maple Farm, and both are in Oxford.

We are a great community with so much potential. Why? It is because of our people. We have hard-working, dedicated, committed folks who want to roll up their sleeves and get things done, which is the story of my family.

Like many Canadians, I do not come from privilege. I am a proud son of immigrants. My mom came to Canada from India from a dairy farming family back in India and dad was working class. They came to Canada with \$10 in their pocket and a dream for a better life, not just for themselves but also for the next generation, and they worked hard. Growing up, I saw them both work in factories with 16-hour shifts. They picked up the odd shift on weekends whenever they could to make ends meet. Growing up, we picked strawberries to put food on our table. That is the story of other hard-working Canadians as well. We all worked. Nothing was given to us. We knew that if we worked hard and played by the rules, we could earn an honest living and get ahead in this country.

This is why it is an honour of a lifetime to be standing here in this chamber because only in Canada can a proud son of immigrants, a son of factory workers, take a seat in this chamber and be a public servant to Canadians, which is why I do not take this role lightly. I will be one of the hardest-working members of Parliament in this chamber. I will give it everything I have. I will serve with humility because I know that in public service I am serving, and Canadians are my boss. I work for them. I will always stand up for what is right, not what is easy. I will always be a strong voice for the voiceless.

The stakes are high in our country. After eight years of this Liberal-NDP government, Canadians are struggling. The Canadian dream that my parents came to this country for is sadly starting to fade away.

To address the issue at hand today, Bill C-56 is the Liberal's response to addressing an affordability crisis that they themselves created with failed leadership, weak policies and simply incompetence, which is why they are looking around for ideas, and they are looking at the Conservative caucus for ideas. I do not mind that at all. I understand that they like to steal ideas, which is not a bad thing because Conservatives have common sense ideas that will get our country back on track. We will bring affordability to coast to coast for Canadians.

However, it does break my heart to see half of Canadians living paycheque to paycheque. Seven million Canadians are now struggling to put food on their table. There are 1.5 million Canadians who are now visiting a food bank. These are our friends, our neighbours, our relatives, and one in five are now skipping meals.

In my riding, we have great organizations that have stepped up to support the most vulnerable. One of them is in Tillsonburg, which is called the Tillsonburg Helping Hand Food Bank. It has great volunteers who are working hard to make sure they support our community. I met with Dianne and the team, and they told me that food bank usage is up 60% just from last year.

• (1100)

Another shining light in my riding is Operation Sharing. It does great work with the homeless community. When I spoke to Shawn

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Shapton, he told me the exact same thing, that we are at a crisis point that has never been seen before.

I remember speaking to a single mom when I was knocking on doors in Woodstock during my campaign. We had a conversation, and there were tears coming down her face. She was concerned for her family. She was worried that she would not be able to feed her children and provide for the newborn son she had just had.

When I was in Tavistock, I met a senior who worked all his life, did everything right and saved money, but now he is on a fixed income and is looking for a handout from his daughter. That is not the Canadian dream my parents had.

What really bothers me is when veterans, who served our country, and working-class Canadians, who are now struggling, are being pushed to potentially end their lives with the MAID program. That is not the Canadian dream.

When the government finally wakes up and talks about affordability, what is the first thing it does? It gets the cameras out, stages a photo op and calls grocery CEOs. Canadians do not need more photo ops. They need more food on their tables.

The Liberal-NDP policies, such as the carbon tax, do nothing for the environment, but they do punish Canadians. They make everything more expensive, including heating their homes, putting food on their tables and putting gas in their cars. It punishes our farmers in Oxford, who have seen their input costs skyrocket. When they are heating their barns, drying their grain and running their operations, they are paying tens of thousands of dollars for that.

However, members do not need to take my word for it. The government's own Parliamentary Budget Officer said the carbon tax is going to cost farmers a billion dollars in the next few years. It punishes our truckers, who ship our food, and it ultimately punishes Canadians who buy the food. Our common sense Conservative team, led by our great leader, will axe this failed tax and put more money back into hard-working Canadians.

It does not end there. Liberals have created a mess in housing as well. Way back when, we could go to work, earn an honest living and buy our dream home. Now that dream of home ownership is starting to fade away. Housing, rent and mortgage payments have doubled. Nine in 10 young Canadians feel they will never be able to buy a home.

I met with a young couple in Norwich last week. We had coffee and were talking about their future. They told me that they did everything right. They went to school, got decent jobs and saved their money, but it is still not enough for a down payment. They are still living with their parents, and it is a barrier to them starting their own family.

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For years the Prime Minister and the government have been telling Canadians that they have an affordable plan. I watched the minister stand to say they have a plan and now, all of a sudden, he has switched and is saying that housing is not a federal responsibility. Real leaders do not hide and make excuses. They find ways to get things done.

That is why the Conservative leader and our strong team have put forward a plan. We are going to remove government gatekeepers who are blocking construction. We are going to incentivize our local townships and municipalities to build more homes. We are going to make sure we have affordable homes for Canadians.

The Liberals gave us a long list of challenges after they broke Canada, but I believe deep in my heart that, with the right leadership, we will get our country back on track. With the Conservative leader as prime minister, we can restore the Canadian promise that Liberals have broken. We are going to bring home affordable homes, and we are going to bring home affordable groceries. We are going to bring it home.

• (1105)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to welcome my hon. colleague to the House, and congratulate him.

I am really positive about Bill C-56 and how it would strengthen the Competition Act. I wonder if the member could comment on this approach and on whether he thinks it would have positive impacts in lowering grocery prices across the country.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the best wishes coming from the other side of the chamber.

What I do know for a fact is that staging photo ops with grocery CEOs will not solve this problem. They are trying to take our plan, which is a great plan, and I commend them for that. We need to use common sense thoughtful policies, which I do applaud the Liberals for taking them from our leader and caucus. However, photo ops will not fix the problem. We need real, concrete solutions. They have been at the helm for eight years. This is not a new problem.

For us, it is about getting practical solutions that will give Canadians relief, solutions like scrapping the failed carbon tax. That will provide relief to hard-working families right away.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, first, I want to congratulate my colleague on his election.

One thing I did not hear in his speech was about corporate profits when it came to grocery prices. We know that corporate profits are contributing over 25 times the impact than the carbon tax, according to the Governor of the Bank of Canada. He cites that the carbon tax is 0.15% in terms of its contributions to the overall impact of inflation.

I would like to hear whether my colleague believes there should be an excess profit tax on the big grocery stores like Sobeys, Metro and Loblaws, which had a \$3.6-billion profit just last year alone. We saw grocery prices skyrocket. I hope my colleague can talk about the corporate greed and the impact that is having on inflation.

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's wishes, but I am also concerned, because those members

have been part of the government for the last eight years. It is the NDP-Liberal government that has caused the problems we see today. They should be pushing this legislation through their colleagues on the other side.

The carbon tax is driving up the cost of our groceries. We would scrap that tax. For them, it is about CEO photo ops; for us, it is about bringing home real solutions for Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his election and his first speech in the House. I think that he spoke with remarkable aplomb. I congratulate him.

He talked about Conservative solutions to the housing crisis. The Conservatives want to talk to cities. That does not work. That entire strategy does not work at all. In Quebec, the federal government cannot talk directly to cities. That is done through Quebec. Housing is a provincial jurisdiction. Moreover, the crisis is not quite as serious in Quebec as it is in the rest of Canada—for example, in Toronto and Vancouver—because Quebec stepped in when the federal government withdrew from housing for 30 years. For 30 years, Quebec created programs that actually provided for social housing while nothing was happening in Ottawa.

Does my colleague not agree that, if the federal government wants to develop strategies, it must talk directly to the Government of Quebec and send in the money?

The federal government has fiscal capacities that Quebec and the municipalities do not have. It must reach an agreement with Quebec to ensure that the money to build housing will be released as soon as possible.

• (1110)

[English]

Mr. Arpan Khanna: Madam Speaker, last year, we built the same number of homes that we built in 1972, but our population has gone up significantly.

When the member says that there is no solutions and asks how we will work with the government, we have federal funds that will go toward infrastructure. We will ensure that before we give a dollar to municipalities, it will be tied to success, to building more homes. If municipalities build more homes, they will get a bonus. They will get more rewards.

Our plan is to work with our local mayors and give them support. We will work with our provinces and build more affordable housing.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to rise today to speak to Bill C-56, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act.

We know that the bill calls for two important aspects: to remove the GST from construction costs on new rental units and to enable the Competition Bureau to conduct better investigations, while also removing efficiency exemptions during mergers to improve competition.

With respect to the removal of the GST, the New Democrats have been calling for this, but it will not meaningfully reduce rent payments or create social and co-operative housing effectively, and we absolutely need that. However, the bill would be part of a bigger comprehensive approach that we want to move forward to address the affordable housing crisis.

With respect to the Competition Act, the bill is a start at reining in and regulating monopolies, but it would not go far enough to support Canadians on their desire to control these monopolies and the impacts they have on our economy.

We know that in the eight years the Liberal government has been in power, it has been the New Democrats who have been bringing forward solutions to get help for people, like this GST removal on housing, although it would not go far enough or have enough restrictions to deal with competition.

I am going to speak about a couple of things. We know the bill is a little too late with respect to the housing crisis, but I will speak to that first.

Let us look at the impact of housing. I am the critic for the NDP for mental health and substance use. We know that the cost of housing is escalating. There is a lack of affordable housing and the available occupancy rates are at historic lows. This is having a huge impact on people's mental health and stress levels, and this is a long-standing issue.

When there was a minority government in 1972, the NDP worked with the Liberals to create the national housing strategy, which developed 18,000 to 25,000 units a year until 1992. In fact, I am one of the many Canadians who grew up in co-op housing, so I am a beneficiary of that housing. I lived first-hand the experience of having safe and secure housing for my family and my parents. I saw what that could do. In fact, I can go back to that co-op today and see many of the people with whom I grew up. Their kids and their grandkids are living there as well.

However, since the Liberals pulled out of the national housing strategy in the early 1990s, both the Conservative and Liberal governments consecutively failed to dive back in. As a result, we have lost between 18,000 and 25,000 units a year for over 30 years. Now our non-market housing availability is at 3.5%, and we do not have to look far to see what 3.5% looks like.

If we go outside the doors of the House of Commons, we will see homeless people. I can go to Port Alberni, a medium-sized city in my riding, or a small city in my riding, and I will see homelessness. We can go to any big city and we will see homeless people everywhere. However, we can go to Europe, where places like the Netherlands is at 35% non-market housing and Vienna it is at 60%, and we will not see the scale of homelessness that we see in our country.

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We know it is so much more expensive to not provide people housing. There is the cost to hospitals, a cost to all our systems. It could eventually impact our prison system, as we know.

Ben Perrin, the former public safety adviser for the Stephen Harper Conservatives, hosted an event the other night. He has a new book called *Indictment*, about the reform of Canada's justice system. He talked about how the lowest cost approach was to put people in proper housing. That would cost a fraction of what it would cost if we did not, in terms of the prison system, hospital system and health care system. We need to get back into affordable housing.

We keep hearing this from the Conservative Party. We heard the leader of the Conservative Party talk about divesting, selling off 6,000 government buildings and the divesting of 15% of public lands. What would that look like? We just saw what happened in Ontario with the Conservatives under Doug Ford. It looks like profiteering, profits for developers. In fact, a handful of developers would have made \$8.3 billion almost overnight, donors of the Doug Ford government. This is what it looks like when Conservatives divest public lands. Public lands belong in public hands, not in the pockets of developers.

• (1115)

The B.C. Liberals, who have now rebranded themselves as B.C. United, did the same thing. They sold off \$493 million worth of public lands to the private sector, to donors of their party. That was worth \$860 million just a couple of years later.

The Conservative ideas of selling off public lands ends up in the pockets of developers. We need to fix this. I am bringing forward a plan to do that. We know we need 3.5 million homes just to meet the demand by 2030. This is going to take a wartime-like effort to do that. We have to work together in the House if we are to achieve that. We have to remove barriers, and we need to provide guidelines and regulations so we do not have another Greenbelt or the scam like we saw in British Columbia, when the Conservative and the right wing get into government.

We need to ensure a regime is put in place. I put forward a motion at the government operations and estimates committee to do just that, to look at selling or leasing. We should not ever sell public lands. That should never, ever happen. We should only lease public lands. Public lands belong in public hands. I cannot say that enough.

If we do lease or use government buildings, it should be done with free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples whose lands we live, work and reside on. Also, they are the most impacted when it comes to homelessness, overcrowded housing and housing needs. They have to be part of the conversation; they cannot be left out.

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I urge all of us to work together to provide regulations so that we never see a Greenbelt-style divestment of housing or government lands. That is not going to create affordable housing. That is not going to solve our housing crisis.

We heard from Leilani Farha, former special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, regarding this bill, which lacks a lot. She said, "I thought we were worried about affordability for tenants not developers! Average rents in Canada are now more than 2,000/mos. If the GST waiver is going to make a difference it must be conditional on building affordable units. Public value for public dollars. "I want to thank her for that comment.

When I talk about how 3.5% of our housing is in non-market housing right now, over 30% this year is in corporate interests in REITs. We have seen corporations buy up a large amount of our residential housing stock. That needs to stop. We need to get to the opposite. It should be 30% non-market housing and 3.5% corporate housing. That is the problem. It has to get flipped on its head.

I will speak quickly, because I only have a couple of minutes left, about the Competition Act. Loblaws, Sobeys and Metro had \$3.6 billion in profits, and that went in the pockets of the owners. The co-op in my hometown of Tofino had \$12 million in sales in groceries, \$16 million at the gas bar, \$28 million in overall sales, and they gave back a 5% dividend to their members. They kept 0.5% for capital costs and improved services.

We need to ensure we have an excess profit tax on these excess profits for grocery store owners, and use some of that profit to support models like the co-op model. We know that that 5% went back into the hands of the people in my community. With the private sector, that money went into the pockets of people like Galen Weston. That needs to be discouraged. We need to find a better way forward.

We hear the Conservatives talk about the impact of the carbon tax. It is 0.15% of inflation, according to the Government of Canada. Eight in 10 families get it back. What they do not want to talk about is that they are fighting for the two in 10. It is a diversion tactic. The Conservatives do not want to talk about who they are really fighting for. If we do not do anything and put a price on carbon, then it is shouldered by the eight in 10 of all Canadians. If we do nothing, then there will be a carbon adjustment at the border, but the Conservatives do not want to talk about that. That would cripple industry in our country.

The truth is that grocery store prices have had a 56 times increase than the carbon tax impact on food and services, and 26 times in terms of the corporate greed and profit when it comes to grocery stores. I want to put things in perspective.

● (1120)

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do not agree with my friend and colleague's comments in terms of demonizing the private sector. The private sector is going to be an important partner to get us out of this housing crisis. However, I also do not agree with the Leader of the Opposition when it comes to demonizing municipalities.

My friend and colleague talked about working with municipalities to build the non-market housing supply. Unlike the Leader of

the Opposition, who has demonized small-town mayors and municipal councils, we have worked with municipalities; our housing accelerator fund is one example of that.

Why is it important to work with municipalities rather than making them out to be the demons, as part of our housing crisis that we have today?

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, let us face it: the Liberals' and Conservatives' free-market developer-style model has not worked. I sat in local government and if they actually put money on the table for non-market housing, that would get gobbled up in a heartbeat. Municipalities want to be partners, but they do not have the resources. They have been downloaded on and downloaded on since 1992 by Conservatives and Liberals consecutively. They need resources for non-market housing. They will deliver it. The municipalities will work with the private sector. There is an opportunity to work together, but it does not mean giving up public lands. It means that we can work together in leasing out projects and working with the development community in that way.

The current method of Liberal and Conservative policy when it comes to the developer-driven model is not going to work. It has never worked anywhere around the world that an affordable housing crisis has been solved by the private sector and a free-market approach.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's raising grocery costs. Let us put some things on the record here: The day after the photo op with the five retailers, the retailers decreed to their suppliers, starting with the largest one and the second ones following suit, that they would accept no price increases from their suppliers for the next 12 months. The PBO's analysis of the carbon tax is not specific around food inflation. It is a general analysis. Food production is energy intensive.

If this hon. colleague were to convince his government partners to put a profits tax that would take the entire retail profit into the form of a tax into government coffers, that would lower the cost of groceries from a \$25 set to \$24, which is 4%.

With carbon tax being applied to the farmer, to the trucker and to every step of the process, with retailers saying they will not absorb it and there are no price increases, who should pay that carbon tax? Is it the farmer, the supplier to the farmer, the trucker or the distributor?

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Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, the Governor of the Bank of Canada said the impact of the carbon tax is 0.15% of inflation. However, we look at oil and gas companies, which are having record profits; these big grocery stores are having record profits; and the big banks are having record profits. We can look at other countries, like Britain, where the Conservatives are in government, by the way; they have an excess profits tax on oil and gas. We cannot even get Liberals in Canada to do that; never mind Conservatives. We do not need lobbyists for oil and gas here on the Hill because the Conservatives are the lobbyists for oil and gas and that is the truth. It is a diversion.

The reality is that we need an excess profits tax on these industries that are runaway, causing inflation and really harming Canadians every day with the costs that are being downloaded on them. We really need to have an honest conversation and not this diversion method of deterrence.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's speech and his plea for off-market housing. I think that is the direction we need to take.

I would like to ask him a question that is a bit more specific. We have a structural problem. Quebec alone needs 1.1 million housing units by 2030. If we mobilized all of the resources in Quebec, the maximum number of units that construction workers could build per year is 80,000, and that is if all home builders participate. We would need to build 200,000 units in Quebec alone. I do not have the numbers for Canada, but I am sure they must be similar.

I agree with my NDP friends that we need an acquisition fund so that we can acquire existing housing, but we also need to find other solutions.

Does my colleague have any other solutions to suggest?

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Speaker, I really appreciate the comment and we are on the same page: that we need a wartime-like effort. We need to use every tool in the tool box to deal with this. Right now, the government does not have a plan. It has no plan on how it is going to build 3.5 million homes, and this is what we need to do in this chamber. We need to have that conversation and bring forward ideas. Like I said, let us use some public land, but let us keep it in public hands, leasing and working with the private sector to ensure that we can build affordable non-market housing.

This free-market approach will not work. It has not worked anywhere in the world to solve an affordable housing crisis and it is not going to start working now. I want to work with my colleague because we need a plan and right now the current government is a rudderless ship. Removing the GST on rental housing is low-hanging fruit.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to join the debate today virtually to continue the discussion of Bill C-56, which aims to and claims to address the dual affordability crises of the affordability of housing and of food and groceries.

There is no question on any side of this House that we are seeing very difficult conditions for most Canadians, and particularly for anyone who is not in the billionaire class. We are seeing very difficult conditions in affordability, particularly for those who are not in the housing market yet and need to find ways to meet increasingly challenging costs of rent, and, for those who are in the housing market, the increasingly high costs of maintaining their mortgages as interest rates rise.

It is with some irony I remember that during the early days of the COVID crisis, and I would say probably it was in 2020, we had at the Standing Committee on Finance the then Governor of the Bank of Canada, Stephen Poloz, appear. Some of the members said to him that we were spending this money and asked him what would happen afterward. They asked if we would suffer inflation. I remember the former Governor of the Bank of Canada said, on inflation, "That's a problem I'd love to have." They were so certain at that point inflation was not the threat and deflation was the threat.

What happened? It was not that his analysis was wrong; it is that conditions changed dramatically. Why are we seeing rising food prices? Let us look at food for a minute and then look at housing. Bill C-56, while well intentioned, would not make a big difference for Canadians in the cost of housing or food. That is not because the Liberal government is malevolent, but it is because it has taken the wrong approach, as have the Conservatives. We really need to look at this and ask if we can really fight what we are seeing in rising costs or if we should make sure we top up government revenues, sources, such that we can provide the sources of income and revenue to Canadians so they can survive what is coming at them economically.

Let us step back and look at this. Certainly, the fact we went from a fear of deflation to inflation was an unexpected event. Putin's attack on Ukraine had the effect of driving up oil prices all around the world. The attack on Ukraine also had an impact on food prices, because, as we all know, Ukraine is part of the breadbasket of the world and provides grain in massive exports, which have been significantly challenged by blockading Russian ports.

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Occasionally we have grain deals that let grain go through, but there is no question the biggest impacts on driving up prices in Canada in our grocery carts have been Putin's attack on Ukraine, the rising costs of fossil fuels as a result, and the supply chain disruptions in growing food and shipping out grains. This is combined with climate crisis events, which have created droughts, which affect access to food, and which have created extreme weather events. As an example, there are the extreme weather events that affect the island of Mauritius where most of the vanilla is grown. There are massive typhoons that keep hitting because of climate change, which drives up, by the time it goes through the supply chains, the cost of ice cream in Canada because vanilla costs more.

We are looking at a complex web of pressures that have driven up prices. If we look for guidance on what we are now experiencing, there was a 2005 book called *The Long Emergency: Surviving the End of Oil, Climate Change, and Other Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-First Century* by James Howard Kunstler. He accurately predicted what we are experiencing: war, climate crisis and instability in fossil fuel production as we hit peak oil. That is what he was looking at in 2005 when the book came out.

We need to look at this and ask if we are able, with Bill C-56, to confidently say to Canadians that this will bring prices in their grocery carts down. I do not think we can, and I do not think anyone wants to say that or hold out this false hope to Canadians. We actually need to look at what we are facing. The climate crisis will drive up the price of certain foods. As long as the war in Ukraine persists, we are looking at cost impacts throughout our economy. In fossil fuel production, where Russia has hit Ukraine, it has also had an impact on fossil fuel production and on excess profits to the fossil fuel sector.

• (1130)

Let us step back and examine it. The approach of this bill is to create more supply for rental housing, which is good as far as it goes. I do not think any of us on any side of the House object to the idea that we should take the GST off the construction costs of building more affordable rental housing. Will that solve our housing crisis? Not when we allow short-term vacation rentals, such as the Airbnb sector, to continue to suck up what we have as available homes, making them inaccessible to people who want to live there. We must provide a very different model for how we use buildings that should be homes because they have become investment properties. The more we can take speculation and investment interests out of housing, the better off we will be, which is why the Greens have been calling for ages to get rid of real estate investment trusts, which operate to make money off housing in a way that was never intended.

I completely agree with the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni, who mentioned in his speech the importance of co-op housing. We need to return to that.

It is a complex question on two key issues. Looking at this, we can approach rising prices by saying that we are going to do what we see in Bill C-56, and I am certainly going to vote for Bill C-56, which is trying to get a Competition Act extension to look at the lack of competition in the grocery food sector. This is good as far as it goes, as the big five control too much, but that does not go to our

immediate problem, neither does getting rid of the GST on building rental housing. We need to make some rather large structural changes, like not having our GDP growth depend so much on rising home prices. Breaking our cultural addiction to rising residential home prices would make a big difference.

What do we do in the short term? We need to turn to excess profits taxes on the oil and gas sector and grocery chains. We did this with the Canada Revenue dividend during the COVID crisis. We should return to it and extend it so it applies to excess profits in the oil and gas sector and grocery chains. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that if we extend the Canada dividend to just oil and gas excess profits, we would have \$4.4 billion more.

We need to make sure Canadians have the money in their pockets to be able to keep a roof over their head and have nutritious food for families. That really means bringing in a guaranteed livable income. How do we afford a guaranteed livable income? We essentially did it with COVID benefits, which rolled out quite quickly and did not require needs testing. A guaranteed livable income would protect the most vulnerable in our society from increased energy prices, housing prices and grocery prices. How can we afford it? We bring in an excess profits tax on the oil and gas sector and grocery chains, as well as continuing it on banks and insurance companies. The key to this is in Motion No. 92, introduced recently by the hon. member for Kitchener Centre. We need other MPs to support an excess profits tax, so I would ask members to sign on as seconders to the motion.

We have to stand back and say that we cannot guarantee people that the climate crisis is not going to affect food prices, because it is. Until we have an end to Putin's attack on Ukraine, what we are really seeing in the oil and gas sector is war profiteering. We must not allow these multi-billion dollar multinational corporations to rake in billions in profits, which is really impacting people who can barely afford to make it to the end of the month.

With my remaining 40 seconds I will say this. Let us step back and use a different lens. Let us tax where we need to tax excess profits and get that money into the hands of Canadians who need it.

Government Orders

• (1135)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to make reference to the member's statement with respect to Airbnbs. It amplifies the need for the government to recognize the roles we all play. One way to meet the needs of Canadians for housing is for all levels of government to work together, federal, provincial and municipal. Airbnb is more of a local municipality issue, so it is best for the municipalities to deal with that. From a national perspective, it is important that we demonstrate leadership on a number of fronts, which I believe we have demonstrated.

Could I get the member's thoughts on how important it is that all levels of government work together to meet this situation?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more with my hon. friend, the parliamentary secretary. We should get Canada to work together, to think like a country, and get all of our orders of government to work together just as well as the European Union does, with 27 separate sovereign nation states and 30 official languages. Canada operates like a group of separate fiefdoms, each going in their own direction and not wanting to co-operate with each other. I do not understand why, but that is the nub of many issues, from the climate crisis to the affordability crisis.

Just to make a quick point about Airbnb, yes, it is municipal. The City of New York has been brave and put in a rule that short-term vacation rentals cannot be for less than 30 days, because they were seeing too much available housing being sucked up into the market for Airbnbs.

We do need to act. Municipalities need to act, but they are going to need supports, provincially and federally, to take on what is essentially a multinational giant.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, a recent study by C.D. Howe Institute determined that in Vancouver, the gap between the construction costs and market price of a new home is almost \$1.3 million. The hon. member is from the province and from the Vancouver area. Can she tell us why this is happening and what the solution is for such a thing?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, as a resident of Vancouver Island who cannot afford a home here, we rent and our rent has gone up. I am not going to say for one minute that I am one of the Canadians having a hard time of it. We all know what we make as MPs. However, what happened to the Vancouver housing market started with converting homes into investment properties.

I am not trying to blame everything on the previous Conservative government, so forgive me, but this did start under the Harper government with a \$1-million investment fast track for getting residency in Canada. What we have is a lot of offshore money coming in to buy up million-dollar properties and leave them vacant. That began distorting our housing market in a big way, and we have seen rising home values, as we know.

People will say that is all right, because if they own their own home, that is what they cash in for their savings and retirement. A lot of people in my community who own their own home want to downsize and move somewhere else, but if they sell their home, they cannot find a place to live that is affordable in their retirement

once they have divested their property. It is a complicated mess that all started when we stopped treating homes as homes and started treating them as investment properties.

• (1140)

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands spoke about the structural issues that led to the housing crisis we are in, issues that have persisted for decades as investment in housing has dropped off. For example, in 2022, the rapid housing initiative, a one-time fund, was not renewed.

Could the member speak about what she has seen over the last 10 years in her time as a parliamentarian with these one-time investments without ongoing, sustained support to address the housing crisis that we are now in?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I offer a big thanks to the member for Kitchener Centre for Motion No. 92. I am hoping we get it through.

The housing crisis is exacerbated, no question, by an increase in the number of Canadians here. I favour more immigration, absolutely, but we need to be planning for that so we have homes for the people who are moving here

We absolutely have to act on real estate investment trusts. We have to break the cycle of expecting rising housing prices to drive our economy and recognize that we need to invest in building sustainable housing with sustainable funding, not flash-in-the-pan, one-time-only housing, as my hon. colleague referenced.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, today I will be speaking to Bill C-56, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act. This bill is divided into two parts to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act. I will be sharing a few points in respect of why the bill is being tabled at this moment and how it relates to small businesses.

I have one point before I begin. On a per-person basis, real GDP growth has declined for four consecutive quarters. Controlling for population growth, per capita GDP declined by 3.5% at an annualized rate, according to RBC.

In many respects, I would sum this bill up as too little, too late. After eight years of the NDP-Liberal government taxing, spending and putting up red tape, the bill before us is just not enough. Inflation, rising interest rates, unaffordable housing and a sense that everything feels broken have left Canadians wondering if their government truly has their best interests at heart.

Government Orders

Indeed, with tanking poll numbers, the Liberal-NDP government veered from its legislative agenda to table this bill before us today after the summer recess. A recent study by Dalhousie University's Agri-Food Analytics Lab found that over half of Canadians are employing more cost-saving measures at the grocery store than they did a year ago, and more than 86% consider themselves more price conscious thanks to rising grocery prices. However, no one has to ask me. All anyone has to do is go to the Superstore, Save-On-Foods or Costco on the weekend and look at the faces of people when they see prices.

Food Banks Canada recently reported that one in seven of their clients is currently employed. Canadians are going to work and earning a paycheque, but it does not go far enough anymore. This summer when I was door knocking, I met a young mom with three kids at home. Her husband works in the construction industry and also part time as a mechanic, but despite having a pretty good income, at the end of the month it does not add up, and they are using St. Joseph's Food Bank in Mission. It is a sad state of affairs right now.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that it is Small Business Month. For every dollar that is spent at a Canadian small business, 60¢ is returned to the local economy. For big corporations, that figure is just 11¢. Small businesses employ two-thirds of Canadians. They are truly the backbone of our economy. Unfortunately, the government has long held a disdain for small businesses and the people behind them.

In 2015, the Prime Minister said, "a large percentage of small businesses are actually just ways for wealthier Canadians to save on their taxes". Just recently, the Prime Minister once again showed his disdain for small business owners with his half-baked promise of a CEBA loan repayment extension. The CBC proudly touted that businesses would have an additional year to pay off their outstanding CEBA loans and still receive partial forgiveness. Small businesses were thrilled to hear that they would be given more time to weather the economic storm and repay their loans.

Unfortunately, that is not the case. The fact is that businesses will only have an additional 18 days to repay their loans or miss out on the forgivable portion. That is shameful. I wonder if the Minister of Small Business will stand in this House, correct the record and clearly state that the actual extension date for small businesses to receive the forgivable portion of their loans is only 18 days and not a year, as communicated.

After the last election, the Prime Minister said in this House on numerous occasions that the Conservatives' plan on housing was "to give tax breaks to wealthy landlords". He typecast all landlords as wealthy crooks while ignoring key barriers to building new affordable rental units, namely excessive taxes as one contributing factor. When the government was elected in 2015, it did indeed promise to scrap the GST on new purpose-built rental housing. Was its definition of a landlord a little different back then?

Members on that side of the House love to misquote me about getting the federal government out of the housing industry. What I have said is that the federal government needs to get out of industry's way so that it can build. Funnily enough, they are finally tak-

ing that step today, and I am supportive of the measure on reducing the GST on purpose-built rentals.

● (1145)

I will now turn to another portion of the bill, the Competition Act. The bill would repeal the efficiencies defence in that piece of legislation. Canada, I will note, is the only country in the G7 that allows this type of defence. It permits anti-competitive mergers to go ahead so long as the cost savings outweigh the negative impacts on competition. Cost savings are almost always found through job cuts. Just recently, Canadians watched as the government did nothing to stop the anti-competitive merger of Rogers and Shaw. I am glad this defence will not be able to be used in the future.

Interestingly, this is another idea that was brought forward by a Conservative in recent months. This past June, the member for Bay of Quinte tabled Bill C-339, an act to amend the Competition Act regarding the efficiencies defence. Bill C-339 and Bill C-56 make identical amendments to the Competition Act.

The problem here is that while this is a good idea to promote competitiveness in the broader economy, it would not do anything to stop rising prices at grocery stores or the anxiety Canadians are feeling when trying to feed their families and, in this particular week, planning for a Thanksgiving dinner. The cost of lettuce is up 94% across Canada. Carrots are up 74%. Oranges are up more than 77%.

I will note that part of the reason those prices are up so much is that carbon taxes have been rising. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the carbon tax will cost the average Canadian family between \$402 and \$847 this year. By 2030, the carbon tax will add an additional 50¢ per litre to the price of gas.

Further exacerbating this is the issue of shrinkflation. I remember a time not too long ago when I could buy two pork roasts from Costco for \$18. Now, for the same price, we just get one. When Canadians see the title of this bill, it gives the impression that the government is doing something about grocery prices right now. That is false.

While this is an agreeable change to the Competition Act, it would do nothing to address the immediate needs of Canadians struggling with higher grocery costs and the anxiety that comes with that. As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, it is too little, too late.

It goes without saying that when we tax the farmer who produces the food and tax the trucker who delivers the food, those costs are going to be passed on to the consumer. If the NDP-Liberal government really wanted to address the affordability crisis right now, it would axe the tax.

While I will be joining my Conservatives colleagues in voting to move this bill forward to committee, it simply does not go far enough to provide Canadians relief from sky-rocketing prices. While it does contain good policies, it would do nothing to fix the real-time and very challenging struggles faced by Canadians in respect of finding an affordable place to live and paying an affordable price for the food they need to feed their families.

• (1150)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad the Conservatives are going to be voting in favour of the legislation.

The member makes reference to groceries and the need for competition. Is he aware that the last major buy-up that reduced competition was under Stephen Harper when Loblaw's purchased Shoppers? It had a very profound impact on the size of one company. I think the purchase was over \$12 billion.

The legislation the member says he is going to vote in will help deal with issues like that. Does he see that as positive? Does he support that particular aspect of the legislation?

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, my colleague from Winnipeg North raises an important point about the Competition Act. The efficiencies clause, which was likely used, but I cannot confirm that, in the context of the merger he referenced, was the same one used in the Rogers-Shaw merger. I am not disputing that this is a positive change. In fact, my colleague from Bay of Quinte tabled very similar legislation in this Parliament. However, we need to do more with respect to the Competition Act to allow for competition to flourish. That relates to the number of grocery stores and the number of businesses offering those services to Canada.

The principal point I am trying to make today is that a change to the Competition Act right now would not impact the prices people are paying at grocery stores. Despite the title of this bill, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act, and the short title, the affordable housing and groceries act, it does nothing to reduce the cost of groceries in the immediate term.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague on his speech.

It is always a bit disconcerting to hear the Conservatives talking about the cost of living. I would like to remind the House that, a few weeks ago, in September, the Conservatives held a convention in Quebec, and it cost \$1,700 to attend.

Let me take out my common sense calculator. If we exclude taxes—because if anyone is familiar with taxes it is the Conservatives—it would take a person who earns \$15.25 an hour, which is the minimum wage in Quebec, five weeks of work to be able to participate in a three-day convention. That is their common sense. That is the Conservative Party.

In 1986, there were 13 grocery chains. Now there are only three. The Conservative Party was in power for 17 years, often with a majority government.

Government Orders

I want my colleague to name one thing that his party did to amend the Competition Act since 1986.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, in Quebec, voting Bloc means voting to raise taxes. The Bloc Québécois is costing Quebecers more. Quebecers will consider voting Conservative because we will lower taxes. We will support families and lower the cost of living.

The Bloc Québécois wants to raise the cost of living for Quebecers. We will put a stop to that. It is just common sense.

[English]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's speech. What I did not hear was any discussion of co-operative housing. I know that the member has co-ops in his riding, and they have made a great contribution to providing affordable housing for families. Does the member support a reinvestment in and reinvigoration of the co-operative housing movement in this country?

• (1155)

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Speaker, I am in no way opposed to further increases in co-operative housing across Canada. It has played an important role in providing a safe and affordable place for many of my constituents to live.

However, in order to reduce the overall cost of housing in Canada, we not only need to be taking the measure in this bill of reducing GST payments on purpose-built rental construction. We also need to have a whole-of-system approach to make sure we can produce all types of housing so Canadians have a safe and affordable place to live. It is not lost on members of the chamber that we had more houses, in real terms, built in 1972 than we did last year. We have to do more. What we are doing right now is not enough.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, since this my first opportunity to give a speech since Parliament resumed, I would like to take the opportunity to say hello to all the people in my riding of Thérèse-De Blainville and to once again tell them that they can count on me. I reiterate my commitment to be a strong voice for them in Ottawa.

When Parliament resumed, I told my constituents that we still do not know what the Liberal government's agenda is, but, for us, it is clear that the very top priority must be the housing crisis and the financial situation of seniors. In the current socio-economic context, our choices and actions must be guided by social solidarity.

The bill before us basically deals with two things: the excise tax, as it pertains to housing, and the Competition Act. This is the government's response to a crisis that has been going on for months and, in some cases, even years. It is nothing new. I am talking about a public finance crisis, a cost of living that is far too high for our constituents and an ongoing housing crisis that is only getting worse.

Government Orders

I am still a little naive, and glad of it. When the government announced its big cabinet shuffle last summer, I figured it would gain some momentum and change course. A big cabinet shakeup was announced to send a message, but instead the news was full of examples of how expensive and difficult life was getting for people. Nothing came out of it. After three days we heard the word “housing”, but that was it.

I can say right now that the Bloc Québécois supports the principle of Bill C-56. The bill is a rushed response to show that the government is doing something about housing and the cost of living.

I am a little less naive than before, but not by much. Let me say that this bill does not go far enough and is not ambitious enough. It does not address the situation and falls far short of addressing the current situation.

As far as housing is concerned, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, reported in its January 2023 rental market report that renter households are dealing with a significant increase in costs. In 2022, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment increased by 5.6%, or double the average recorded increase from 1999 to 2022. For new renters it is even worse. The increase is nearly 20%.

If we continue to view housing as an asset then we will never get out of this mess. Housing is a right. Food and housing are basic needs. These are rights. Our response to the housing crisis, for our constituents, needs to be bold.

I think there is a sense of urgency because we are facing a housing crisis that cannot be ignored. The current government has acknowledged this crisis, but the proposed measures, especially this bill that abolishes the GST on new rental housing construction, is a drop in an ocean of needs.

• (1200)

It has been estimated that Quebec will need 1.1 million additional units by 2030. That is six years from now. That is tomorrow. It is an alarming situation that calls for bold, ambitious and powerful measures.

According to CMHC, costs will rise faster in Quebec than anywhere else in Canada. There are several reasons for that, including interprovincial migration and immigration. Quebec will be hit much harder by the housing shortage than other regions. CMHC estimates that housing prices in Quebec will double by 2030 compared to 2019. Who is going to tell Quebecers that their rent will be nearly double in six years? That 102% increase will be the highest in Canada by 2030, even topping Ontario. Granting a reprieve from the GST may seem like a positive measure at first glance but, in reality, it is inadequate. It is high time we adopted far more structural and ambitious solutions.

The government appointed a federal housing advocate in 2022. She wrote a report that I encourage everyone to read. She herself has repeatedly emphasized that the private sector alone cannot solve the housing crisis. Large-scale construction of social and affordable housing is the only real solution. Unfortunately, this bill offers nothing at all for social housing and does nothing to make housing more affordable. Eliminating the GST on rental housing

raises questions. How many rental units will it create? How many affordable units will it create? We do not have answers to those questions. Maybe regulations will provide answers.

The answer from an economic perspective is usually supply and demand. If supply increases, demand will be met and prices will go down. There is no guarantee that prices will go down, though. There is no guarantee that this will make more truly sustainable affordable housing available. Everyone in the sector, including non-profits, co-ops and municipalities, has solutions to these problems. They understand the situation. They are on the ground. They know what is needed.

The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, of which I am a member, has conducted several studies on housing, the national housing strategy and the CMHC, among others. Some strong recommendations have been made, none of which are about demonizing the private sector. Instead, they suggest that it is time to look at building housing and renovating existing units. It is important to invest in what we already have, which is entirely possible.

The new Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities appeared before our committee. There are currently 4,000 housing units just waiting to be renovated pursuant to the old agreements with the federal government. However, the federal government is not letting any money flow. As my colleague from Longueuil—Saint-Hubert said, we could have housing for these people by July, but the government is dragging its feet.

Approximately \$82 billion in taxpayers' money was allocated to the national housing strategy, which is now five years old. Because of bureaucracy and red tape, no energetic action has been taken to meet the public's urgent needs. Nothing has been accomplished.

Five years have passed since the national housing strategy was launched, and there are still five more years to go. The government needs to do a 180° turn.

• (1205)

When a strategy is not meeting the needs, then it can be changed. That is particularly true when the government is creating programs and funds in which it is prepared to invest \$900 million, but then it is waiting and failing to take action.

Given the current crisis, citizens deserve answers from their elected officials. It is time to act. This bill deserves—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

[English]

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I very much enjoyed the speech from the member opposite. I have worked long and hard with her at the HUMA committee on many housing studies, as she just referenced.

I always put the province of Quebec on a pedestal when it comes to supporting non-market housing for residents who are in need of affordable housing. I am in the unenviable position of being in the province of Ontario, which has a Conservative government whose approach to affordable housing is to make people rich in the private sector.

My question, and the member emphasized this in her speech, is this: Why is it important that all three levels of government address the national housing crisis we have? In certain provinces it is happening, and they are making inroads. The province of Quebec is a great example, and I would put the province of British Columbia in that category as well. However, here in Ontario it is not working, because we have a provincial government that has no affordable housing programs to match municipal contributions as well as federal. Again, my question to the member is this: Why is it important that all three levels of government work together?

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I want to commend my colleague. It is a pleasure to work with him on such important issues. I thank him for drawing attention to Quebec's initiatives.

There are many people in Quebec who also want to do more, but I think there are important programs in place. Why? It is a matter of political will. Long ago now, Quebec made a social choice to address the issue of housing. Of the three levels of government, Quebec and the municipalities are the ones that have the expertise in this area.

When the federal government decides to use its spending power and do its part to support what is being done, it must do so in only one way. We do not expect the federal government to give a slap on the wrist to the municipalities and governments that are not doing their job. We expect the federal government to support them by giving them—

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

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a question and I am going to look to my colleague because I know she has a lot of experience in the labour movement.

If Quebec's major labour unions could step up and give people in the building trades a little more flexibility, would that help increase the number of affordable and social housing units? Costs are the problem. Builders in Quebec no longer want to build social housing because it costs too much. Could we tackle the issue that way?

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, the member is talking about big labour organizations.

At the beginning of my speech, I talked about social solidarity. Our communities are better off because of the social and public programs we choose for ourselves. Unions are major contributors to that. I was on the board of the FTQ's Fonds de solidarité des travailleurs for seven years, so I know that those are the kinds of actions such funds take to support the construction of affordable rental housing.

I do want to clarify something, though. Let us consider what is happening right now. Sometimes incentives are made available, but

private sector builders are not interested. They would rather miss out on those potential benefits because they do not want to be obligated to provide affordable housing. They want to keep building housing for profit.

● (1210)

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

I agree that eliminating the GST on rental housing construction is a small measure, too small to fix the current crisis. However, it is an NDP proposal, so I do want to defend it. The thing that has us concerned is that the Liberals went only halfway. They are eliminating the GST on housing construction, but with no guarantee that this will have an impact on the price of rent. There is a risk that this 5% rebate will end up in the pockets of the developer building the housing.

Does my colleague share that concern?

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Speaker, I do share my colleague's concern.

That is why I was wondering if getting rid of the GST on rental housing construction was the only proposed solution. We do not know how many housing units will be built. We are not getting these answers.

As far as affordability is concerned, we understand that the government cannot guarantee that, because the builder is the one who will get the GST exemption. Is the builder going to reduce the cost of the housing because it got a GST exemption out of the gate? I think that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

[English]

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, according to the 13th edition of "Canada's Food Price Report", published in 2023, by September last year, families across Canada were paying in excess of 10% more for their groceries. This year, Canadians' grocery bills have increased by another 8% to 9% or more. Vegetables are seeing the biggest price increases, and as a result, Canadian families are cutting back on their purchases of vegetables and other healthy food choices for their children. About 20% of Canadians report skipping a meal each day, and food banks across the country are seeing record visits by Canadian families.

Government Orders

On this side of the House for the last few years, I have been calling attention to the practices of Canada's big grocery retailers and their lack of competition in the grocery market. For a couple of years now, I have also been asking the Competition Bureau to investigate the grocery chains and their abuse of dominance. For the past three years, I have called attention to the market concentration in the hands of big grocery retailers and to the resulting lack of competition and the consequences for producers, suppliers and Canadian consumers. Producers and suppliers are gouged by what the big grocery retailers demand of them. Canadian consumers are gouged by the prices the big grocery retailers demand at the check-out.

Now, suddenly, the Prime Minister seems to have awakened from sleeping at the wheel to what Canadian families have known as a reality every time they have bought food. Where has the Prime Minister been? Only now has he called in the grocery retailers and introduced this bill? When was the last time the Prime Minister went to a grocery store? When was the last time the Prime Minister had to buy a Thanksgiving turkey dinner with all the trimmings? Families that can afford it will be paying a minimum of \$60 to \$80 this year for their turkey, let alone all the trimmings. Many families that cannot afford it will just go without. My guess is that the last time the Prime Minister visited a grocery store was some time in the previous decade, maybe.

Canadians cannot afford more of what they have suffered under eight years of the Prime Minister and his irresponsible Liberal-NDP government. Canadians cannot afford this costly coalition. The reason for food inflation is not just too little competition among grocery retailers. Beginning in 2018, the Prime Minister has been gouging Canadian families with a regressive, unfair carbon tax, which we will call “carbon tax 1”, and has been inflating it year over year.

As of April Fool's Day 2023, the Prime Minister inflated carbon tax 1 to \$65 a tonne, and by April Fool's Day 2030, the Prime Minister wants to inflate carbon tax 1 to \$170 a tonne. However, the Prime Minister has not stopped there. He decided that one carbon tax is not enough, so as of Canada Day, the Prime Minister has added another carbon tax. Therefore, now the Prime Minister is asking Canadians to pay not one but two carbon taxes. Even worse, when the carbon tax is added at the pumps or on their home heating bill, Canadians are charged sales tax on top of the carbon tax.

There is no other way to put this: The Prime Minister and his costly coalition are charging Canadian families tax on tax. However, they do not stop there, with carbon tax 1 and carbon tax 2. Between these two carbon taxes, by April Fool's Day 2030, the Prime Minister wants to charge Canadian farmers and truckers 69¢ for every litre of diesel they put in their trucks. It is not rocket science; it is basic math that the NDP-Liberal government just does not seem to get. If it costs a farmer more to grow the food and costs the trucker more to ship the food, it is going to cost Canadian families more to buy the food.

The Bank of Canada governor, Tiff Macklem, says that the carbon tax announcements that have it going up increase inflation each year. The leader of “Canada's Food Price Report 2023”, Doctor Sylvain Charlebois, has pointed out that the carbon tax has made business expenses go up. He points to a “compounding effect” up

and down the food chain as the supply chain is exposed to increased costs from the carbon tax. I will illustrate. Thanks to the Prime Minister's carbon tax 1 and carbon tax 2, even with agricultural exemptions, farmers are paying carbon taxes on various parts of their production chain not covered by those exemptions. There are the carbon tax costs of heating barns with natural gas or propane when there are animals being raised. Getting produce, meat, poultry and eggs to the processors with diesel-powered trucks costs more with carbon tax. There is more; there is carbon tax paid on moving that food, with more diesel-powered trucks, from the processors' warehouses to the grocery stores.

• (1215)

The grocery retailers have to heat their stores, many with natural gas, propane or, in some cases, heating oil, so they are paying even more carbon tax. Consumers are travelling to and from the grocery store and are paying carbon tax on the fuel they put in their vehicles. Again, if it costs a farmer more to grow the food and it costs the trucker more to ship the food, it is going to cost Canadian families more to buy the food.

How do we solve this problem of rising food prices and the Prime Minister's costly coalition? First things first, we have to axe the carbon tax. The Leader of the Opposition and members on this side of the House want to give Canadian families relief from unfair competition. We want to offer Canadian families relief from the unsustainable burden of carbon tax 1 and carbon tax 2. I have one word: enough.

As for the bill, let me make a few observations with respect to grocery retail competition. Sadly, this bill seems to be a lot of fluff and not much substance. The Prime Minister has had eight years to look into this issue and to provide legislation that would put a stop to consolidation over concentration of market share in the grocery chains. This level of coordination of grocery stores into bigger grocery retail chains is reducing competition for consumer dollars. With less competition in grocery retail, Canadian consumers will always pay more. Let me give one example. I have two grocery store flyers, one from Toronto and one from Vancouver, from the same store and with the same items. Vancouver is about 2,000 kilometres, or 1,200 miles, from Central Valley, California, where most of our produce comes from, especially during the winter months. Toronto is about 4,000 kilometres, or 2,500 miles from California's Central Valley.

However, as I compared the two prices given for the same products, the prices for produce were higher in the Vancouver flyer than in the Toronto flyer, for the exact same items, even though Vancouver is about 1,000 miles closer to the producers than Toronto is. Why is this? It is because there is more competition in the Toronto area, with many more grocery stores available for folks. There are many small, independent grocery stores.

The bill makes much of the role of the commissioner of competition, but I have to point out that Canada already has a competition commissioner. Further, Canada already has a competition tribunal. However, Canadians still face high food prices because Canada's competition watchdogs have no teeth. It is not enough to have an official whose title is Competition Commissioner. If the competition commissioner is to uphold competitive pricing in the interests of Canadian consumers, this office has to have real teeth. The competition commissioner should have real power to call into question the excessive concentration of market control.

To sum up, Canadian families are seeing unaffordable price increases year over year in the foods they buy to feed their families. Almost daily, my constituency office is hearing from Canadians, young and old, who are having difficulty getting by. Many do not have enough money to buy groceries after rent and mortgage payments are made. More and more people are visiting food banks. Too many are breaking down in tears in my office because of their inability to pay for the basic necessities of life. Hundreds of my constituents are having trouble making ends meet because of runaway inflation that the Liberal government has caused. Canadian consumers face inflation on food at 8% to 9% year over year. Again, 20% of Canadians report skipping a meal a day just to save money on groceries.

Meanwhile, the government taxes to the max with carbon tax 1 and now carbon tax 2, plus the HST piled on top. It is tax on tax. Enough is enough. Canadians deserve better than a Prime Minister and a government that just seem to go through the motions. The Prime Minister can deny it all he wants, but Canadians know that inflation is real. The bill does not go far enough to address the lack of competition among grocery retailers.

Sadly, the Prime Minister is propped up by NDP supporters and Liberals who sit in the House, and they have not seen a regulation they would not support nor a carbon tax they would not impose to burden and weigh down Canadian families that are just trying to make ends meet by stretching their hard-earned dollars. Canadian families are paying at the fuel pumps and they are paying in their heating bills, and having enough money left over to get their grocery checkout line is sometimes a burden.

It is time for a real change from the inflationary, all-too-costly coalition of the NDP-Liberal government.

• (1220)

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, inflation is real. I do not think anyone is denying that.

She mentioned rising rents. We provided assistance, through the national housing strategy. Program after program that has been presented to this House has been opposed by the opposition.

Government Orders

We provided assistance through the rapid housing initiative, the innovation fund and the national coinvestment fund. We provided more support for co-ops, which a lot of members in this House have talked about, as well as the need to drive investments through municipalities and non-profits.

Every time the government has tried to assist Canadians, those in need, some of our most vulnerable population, the member opposite and her leader have chosen to vote against it. Why have they done so?

Ms. Lianne Rood: Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is that a one-time payment is not going to do anything to help people in the long term.

One of my constituents, Paula in Wallaceburg, writes, “Lianne, renters need apartments that working people can afford. I make \$27 per hour and I have no benefits, and my rent, for a 400-square-foot one-bedroom unit, is currently \$1,400 a month, plus electricity, and I have to pay for laundry. Rent needs to come down or I will have no retirement savings left.”

Jolene from Dover Centre writes, “Average, hard-working Canadians like my husband and I, we have been forgotten”—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I need to give time for other questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am going to do a little fact-checking here.

The member talked about the Governor of the Bank of Canada, Tiff Macklem. He said that the carbon tax, all of it combined, is contributing 0.15% to inflation. That is 15¢ on 100 dollars' worth of groceries.

What she did not talk about is corporate greed, which is costing \$3.90 on 100 dollars' worth of groceries. We know why. It is because Conservatives are gatekeepers for the big grocery stores, for the Galen Westons.

They also do not want to talk about the fact that eight out of 10 Canadian families get a rebate. Why do they not want to talk about that? It is because the truth is they are really fighting for two out of 10 Canadian families, and they know it.

Will my colleague tell the truth that the Conservatives are really fighting for the two out of 10 families that are not getting a carbon tax rebate back and that they are actually just trying to distract from reality?

Ms. Lianne Rood: Madam Speaker, I take offence to that, because I am telling the truth.

Government Orders

What the member is referring to is actually only on food. We can ask the farmers how their bills have gone up with the carbon tax. We can ask how much inputs have gone up. We can ask how much packaging has gone up for products. We can ask retailers why packaging has gone up. It is because the carbon tax is paid on fuel that delivers every single thing along the supply chain, and when the fuel prices go up, everything along the supply chain goes up. Unless we axe the tax, we are not going to see a reprieve. We need to axe the carbon tax and give families back more money in their pockets, not some one-time rebate that was masked as a grocery rebate when it is actually an HST rebate.

• (1225)

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was listening to my colleague's speech, after hearing other speeches given earlier by the Conservatives or the coalition. Members advised taking action specifically on the supply side of the housing issue. I think that everyone agrees on the need to address the housing supply. I also think that the government has a critical role to play in this regard, and that it is not doing enough.

However, there are two sides to every situation. The reason a housing shortage happens is because of demand, because people want housing. I never hear anyone talk about that in the House, even though it is being discussed everywhere in the media. Why is there a record number of newcomers, particularly temporary foreign workers, yet no one wants to talk about it in the House? It is something under the federal government's control, after all.

[English]

Ms. Lianne Rood: Madam Speaker, part of the reason we cannot get houses built is because we cannot even get workers to work. A mom of a young adult told me that her son completed college and has a full-time job. He does training, travels as requested and has duties, but he cannot afford to live or rent near work. He lives at home; he drives over an hour each way, paying too much in gas to save for a mortgage or first and last on a rental. He looked into an electric vehicle and put down a deposit to purchase, but he cannot afford the higher insurance, not to mention the higher payments. He could not find any government rebates or incentives. His work, which he absolutely loves, as a very skilled and specialized—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We have to resume debate.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, everyone knows that times are really tough right now. Canadians are suffering; housing and grocery prices are higher than ever, and they continue to go up. There is a real need for the government to intervene and adopt public policies to try to circumvent these circumstances that Canadians find themselves in.

Bill C-56 is a good step toward accomplishing some things, and certainly there are some things in this bill that, for years, New Democrats have called for. However, I have to say that this bill is a very small step. There are so many things that people need from the government to help with affordability.

The bill introduced by the leader of the NDP actually even goes further with regard to the Competition Bureau, which is a part of Bill C-56. His bill, Bill C-352, would impose harsher penalties on companies that fix prices and would better rein in and regulate monopolies in the industry. Currently, the onus to prove that mergers or monopolies are harmful to Canadians is placed upon the Competition Bureau, and that needs to change. We think that the burden of proof should fall to the companies; they should have to prove that their activities are in the interests of Canadians. Bill C-352 would do this. It would better protect Canadian consumers.

Not a day goes by that I do not hear from constituents who are struggling to pay for their groceries, rent or mortgage. I meet with community groups, food banks and shelters that are trying to stretch their services and programs so that they can help and cover more and more people. The people in London—Fanshawe are incredibly generous. When a neighbour needs help, there are many who will do what they can and give what they can, but the government needs to learn from them. It seems to be concerned only with these incremental supports. It is really quite disappointing.

We have had federal governments in power, time after time in this country, that have no real interest in actually ending poverty. They only perpetuate it. In fact, it would cost us less to eliminate homelessness and poverty entirely. We have had both Liberals and Conservatives in government that are only truly concerned with ensuring that those who hold the majority of power, keep it.

We need to deal with the core problem here: For years, there has been a growing divide between the richest and the poorest among us. The truth of the matter is that this country was built by everyone, by all citizens, but not all citizens are getting an equal return on that investment.

I am extremely disappointed with the Liberals' approach of calling in the grocery CEOs for a meeting, wagging their fingers at them and asking them to please do better. It is a government made of people, and it needs to govern for all people. All people have to pay their fair share. We have a responsibility to draft laws to ensure that equality.

The Conservatives would have us believe that the carbon tax is the only thing driving up grocery prices, but if that were the case, then the CEOs' profits would not be growing in the way we have seen them grow. If they were just passing along the increased costs from inflation or from the carbon tax, Loblaws, Sobeys and Metro would not have made \$3.6 billion in combined profits in 2022. Those profits are growing by far more than the increase in input costs. Any government or any party that wants to form a government with some common sense and with a seriousness about addressing the challenges that Canadians have been facing at the grocery store has to recognize the role of corporate greed in the equation. Nothing will change for people until we do that.

Long before the pandemic, before these incredible increases in inflation, New Democrats were recommending a windfall profit tax. Other governments around the world are doing this. We can use our legislative powers to stop price gouging, price-fixing and greedflation. We need to address the extreme profits these companies enjoy at the expense of people in my riding and in all our ridings.

I also want to talk about the other piece of this bill concerning the removal of the GST from construction costs on rental units. Again, this is a good first step, but it is a small one. It is one that New Democrats have long been calling for. When it comes to housing, we have seen Liberal and Conservative governments ensure that housing is entirely a financial issue.

I believe that housing is a human right. We cannot rely solely on a market-based solution when it is about a human right. If we truly want to resolve the housing crisis that has been growing for over 30 years in Canada, we need a wide range of solutions.

• (1230)

New Democrats have made several proposals. One I would like to talk about right now is the inclusion of an acquisition fund for non-profit organizations. This would give them an opportunity to buy affordable social housing when organizations or companies decide to sell them. This non-profit acquisition fund could help alleviate the housing crisis.

We have seen a lot of real estate investment trusts or big corporate landlords swoop in and buy buildings. They have fast access to capital, and they have a lot of money in reserve that they can use to buy these places.

Again, in my riding, there are residents who live in the Webster Street Apartments, and they are being renovicted. I have raised this issue in the House a number of times, asking for the government to help them. Sadly, my calls have fallen on deaf ears.

Ultimately, a Toronto-based corporation purchased rental units in my riding that were formally reasonably priced. They made small renovations, sometimes painting or removing partial walls, and then they told the existing residents that they would be charged an additional \$1,000 a month in rent. These residents are seniors, people living on ODSP, single moms and people on fixed incomes. They cannot afford that significant increase in their rent.

They are now having to leave their homes. Some of them have lived there for decades. They have created a community. They feel

truly a part of the building with their neighbours; they know who their neighbours are. However, they are being forced to leave that home.

The creation of a non-profit acquisition fund could have helped stop that kind of renoviction and helped the people in my constituency who live on Webster Street.

The government must also adopt policies that will help address the critical shortage of social and affordable housing. There is no mention of that in Bill C-56. We know that there are opportunities to work with the government and other parties to ensure that Canada can take strategic approaches, including non-market solutions.

There is no doubt in my mind that a public policy intervention is required in order to get a handle on this situation. We have reached this moment of crisis because, for 30 years now, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have largely said that they will leave housing up to the market. However, the market has not produced solutions around affordability.

The market has an important role to play in the building of housing or the delivery of groceries, for that matter. However, the government has to create a balance. There is currently no balance. We cannot leave it solely to the market. A lot of housing needs in Canada will never be met by the market; meeting these needs would not be profitable enough.

That is why we need a strategy that pushes private actors into making affordable suites available as part of their holdings. It is why we need governments to take responsibility, as they did in the 40s all the way up to the 90s.

Unless we get governments back to the table and take responsibility for the creation of social housing, we are not going to see an adequate resolution to this crisis. That is one of the things that has changed significantly in Canada since the 1990s, where the government said that it actually did have a responsibility and an obligation to invest in social housing. Sadly, we had a Liberal government that stopped that. In Ontario, we had a Conservative government that stopped that in the 90s.

We need to get back to that level of investment and commitment. We cannot continue to see current governments, such as Doug Ford's provincial Conservative government in Ontario, being in the back pockets of wealthy developers. Again, this is about balance.

We need a meaningful engagement of not-for-profit and co-operative sectors to build social housing. I need to see that in Bill C-56. I would love to see that in the bill.

Government Orders

There are so many things I want to talk about in terms of affordability and housing, but I will conclude with this: Food and housing are not just commodities. These are not things people can do without. They need them to live. They cannot solely be the subject of profit-driven markets, with no checks or balances or regulations on that greed.

My constituents, and all people in Canada, have the right to live a dignified and healthy existence; we have an obligation here in this place to give that to them. New Democrats will always fight for that equality and fairness.

• (1235)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I remember very clearly, going right back to 1993, that I was advocating that the federal government play a role in housing, but every political party inside the House of Commons opposed such involvement. A lot has changed under the current Prime Minister.

The current Prime Minister is the first prime minister since the early 90s who has made a clear statement that we have to invest in housing. He has brought forward a national strategy of housing, from virtually day one to the legislation we have today, where we are, again, saying that the federal government needs to play a role.

Yes, it is important, and it is nice to see that we have a national government that wants to play that federal role, but all the stakeholders need to come together in order to deal with this housing situation properly. This includes non-profit organizations, other levels of government and, of course, the federal government. Would the hon. member not agree with that?

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, yes, this needs a whole-of-government approach, and all partners need to work together. This has become a crisis that governments have watched happen, which they have created over the last 30 years. However, there have also been a lot of gaffes in the federal government's provisions of some of the solutions New Democrats have been calling for. There have been a lot of delays. Knowing that they have created this crisis over the last 30 years, now we have to have a huge response to it.

I would tell the hon. member to put his money where his mouth is, stand up, stop making just announcements and do what is needed.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member from the NDP has been part of the government for the last year and a half, and now the government is blaming the government for the crisis we are going through. How can she explain that?

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, that is an absolutely ridiculous statement. New Democrats are not members of the government. We are trying to use some of the power we have to deliver on the commitments we made to people on the doorsteps. We have not seen anything from the Conservative Party because all they do is criticize rather than propose solutions and work with the government in providing some help for constituents.

I am proud of my track record. I am proud that I am able to provide dental care to the people who need it and, hopefully, pharmaceutical, if the government will play ball with us on that. What has your party done to actually provide—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would remind the hon. member that I cannot answer that question.

We will continue with questions and comments. The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I cited earlier the impact of corporate greed in our country. It is about \$3.90 on a \$100 bag of groceries. The carbon tax, which the Conservatives try to spin as the major contributor, is 15¢ on a \$100 bag of groceries.

We know corporate profits are going into the pockets of Galen Weston. In places like Tofino, Hornby Island and Ucluelet, there are co-op grocery stores that give the profits back to their members. Does my colleague agree that we should charge an excess profit tax on corporate greed to fund co-op models when it comes to the grocery business?

• (1240)

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, I could not agree with my hon. colleague more.

I really liked what he said earlier in this debate when he referred to the Conservative Party's focus on the carbon tax as a diversion tactic. They are ultimately trying to cover up for and be these huge lobbyists for the oil and gas companies that receive those extreme profits, which we need to put excess taxes on.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Madam Speaker, following up on that point, as the member for London—Fanshawe likely knows, the carbon tax, in the last year, added two cents a litre to the cost of gas. Excess profits of the oil and gas industry added 18¢. That is why I put forward a motion that calls for a windfall profit tax on oil and gas companies, specifically looking to work with members of all parties to do something extremely reasonable and responsible to get at the corporate greed that she is speaking about.

Could the member speak to her support for doing so?

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, New Democrats have been calling for that for a long time. My entire speech was to get at the point that there is no balance. The government's responsibility is to provide a balance, and that is out of play right now. We need to ensure that people pay their fair share, and those are the kinds of ideas that need to get to them.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise today to speak about Bill C-56, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act, or the so-called affordable housing and groceries act. I call it a sham, a desperate attempt by this desperate government to make Canadians think it is tackling these problems by using a name that falsely labels the purpose of the act. It is pure propaganda.

Government Orders

Let us talk about groceries. People watching might be surprised to learn that the bill has literally nothing to do with groceries. Once it is passed, grocery prices would not suddenly drop because of anything in the bill. The bill is, in fact, about something else entirely. It would make amendments to the Competition Act.

First, it would remove the efficiencies defence, an idea Conservatives first proposed, but we never said that it was a solution to high grocery prices because that simply would not be true. However, what its removal would do is make it more difficult for major corporations to merge using economies of scale and savings as an argument. The bill would also introduce new market study powers and give the Minister of Innovation the power to order expensive market studies, which many argue would politicize the process and is financially onerous for industry. Ironically, the bill would drive up the cost for industry, making food even more expensive.

This does not sound at all like inflation-busting measures to me because they simply are not. Members need not take it just from me. They can take it from the Business Council of Canada, which released a statement saying, “As the Competition Act amendments included in today’s bill will in no way address the inflationary environment now facing Canadians – and could, conversely, worsen inflation by introducing uncertainty and instability in the free market”. This is not a ringing endorsement.

Its president, Goldy Hyder, had more to say. He said that it would “stifle” business through “bad regulation” and called it a “trojan horse”. He went on to say, “Ottawa wants Canadians to think the bill will improve affordability for families by giving consumers more choice...but that’s not its actual purpose nor what it will achieve.” He also said that the government “is acting in bad faith” and that the “amendments came as an ambush” and without proper consultation. As well, he said, “If the government is truly serious about lowering prices...lower import tariffs on certain goods...or eliminate...interprovincial trade barriers”.

However, he is not the only critic. Michael Osborne, the chair of Cozen O'Connor's Canadian competition law practice says of the bill, “Some of the amendments are good, more are bad, but most are useless.”

It is not high praise. It is useless because competition law is simply not designed to solve macro economic problems such as inflation. He pointed out what we have been saying for two years, which is that inflation is caused by expanding the money supply too quickly by loose monetary and fiscal policy.

He went on to say, “By design, competition law cannot limit increases in the money supply; that's the job of central banks...If a lack of competition is responsible for rising grocery prices, then competition law might be able to help. But the evidence doesn't support this.” He also indicated that the bill vests too much power to order market studies with the minister, reducing the bureau's independence and increasing the risk of politicizing competition law enforcement.

It is becoming a disturbing trend with this government to hand power directly to politicians at the expense of other departmental officials. This will lessen the independence of the Competition Bureau and politicize the way that we deal with competition law.

Even if there were more room for competition in the grocery industry, Mr. Osborne opines that removing the efficiencies defence would have little effect on lowering prices given how small margins are on grocery sales. These are damning opinions from industry regarding the efficacy and forthrightness of Bill C-56.

If the Liberals really wanted to make groceries more affordable, they would drop their inflationary carbon tax to stop taxing the farmer who produces the food, the trucker who transports the food and the grocer who sells the food. It is the height of Liberal hypocrisy to claim to be lowering food prices while they are taxing food production and transportation every step of the way.

The bill before us also claims to be the affordable housing act, which is another sham. Although it would reduce the cost of a new build by the 5% GST it would eliminate, it would do nothing to bring down the price of existing housing in the near term.

• (1245)

After eight years of the Prime Minister, housing costs have more than doubled. Toronto now ranks as the worst housing bubble in the world. Vancouver is now the third most overpriced housing market in the world when we compare average income to housing price. It is worse than New York, London and Singapore, a tiny island with 2,000 times more people per square kilometre. All these places have more money, more people and less land, yet somehow, miraculously, their housing is more affordable.

Canada has the fewest homes per capita of any G7 country, even though we have the most land to build on. That is because we are the second lowest in being the slowest with building permits out of all 40 OECD countries. It used to take 25 years to pay off a mortgage. Now it takes 25 years just to save up for a down payment. Only in Canada has housing become so unaffordable so quickly. This is happening because the Prime Minister subsidizes government gatekeepers and the red tape that prevent builders from getting shovels in the ground and our people into homes they can afford.

In Vancouver, nearly \$1.3 million of the cost of an average home is due to government gatekeepers adding unnecessary red tape. That means that over 60% of the price of a home in Vancouver is due to delays, fees, regulations, taxes and high-priced consultants. In Toronto, the added cost is \$350,000.

Government Orders

Housing prices have doubled; mortgage payments have doubled. According to the IMF, Canada is the G7 country most at risk of a mortgage default crisis. We have the most at-risk housing market among developed economies. As low-interest mortgages come up for renewal, defaults are sure to rise.

Conservatives have a real plan to get housing built. Our leader and party's act, the building homes not bureaucracy act, would incentivize cities to speed up the rate at which they build more homes every year to meet our housing targets. Cities would have to increase the number of houses built by 15% each year and then 15% on top of the previous target every year. If targets were missed, cities would have to catch up in the following years and build even more homes, or a percentage of their federal funding, equivalent to the percentage they miss their targets by, would be withheld. Cities that exceed that target would get bonus funding; cities that miss it would have their funding reduced. Federal transit funding would be provided to certain cities only when those stations are surrounded by high-density residential buildings.

We would empower Canadians to file complaints about Nimbysism with the federal infrastructure department. When complaints are legitimate, we would withhold infrastructure and transit dollars until municipalities allow homes to be built. It would ensure that CMHC executives cannot receive bonuses unless housing targets are met and applications for new construction are approved within 60 days.

In addition, there will be a 100% GST rebate on new residential rental properties for which the average rent payable is below market rate to ensure that low-income housing gets built in this country.

This bill would also require the housing minister to report on the inventory of federal buildings and land to identify land suitable for housing construction, and to propose a plan to sell at least 15% of any federal buildings and land that would be appropriate for housing construction.

The sad reality is that, under the Prime Minister, housing costs 50% more in Canada than it does in the United States. To bring market equilibrium, we need to build 3.5 million homes by 2030. This act will not get the job done.

I find it troubling that the government that caused this affordability crisis because of its inflationary spending and taxes has now brought legislation that blames food producers and grocers. Deflecting blame from itself and using the power of the state to impose a solution on industry is a bullying tactic unbecoming of a responsible and ethical government.

It is time for the Liberals to get out of the way and let Conservatives fix what they broke. This bill is a sham, and the Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

• (1250)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am sure it will come as no surprise that I totally disagree with what the member is saying. He is making it very clear that he is in opposition to this legislation. For clarification purposes, does the member intend to vote against this legislation?

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Speaker, I first want to congratulate the member. I know his daughter was elected to the Manitoba legislature this week as the only Liberal in a legislature of 57 seats. Nevertheless, I congratulate his daughter.

What I am against is a government bringing legislation to make Canadians believe it is doing something when it is not. This bill is called the affordable housing and groceries act, but it has nothing to do with making groceries and housing more affordable as—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We will continue with questions and comments.

The hon. member for Drummond.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I always find it interesting to listen to my Conservative colleagues bash the Liberal government—rightly so most of the time, and I am not suggesting that they are not good at it. However, rarely do we hear anything in the Conservatives' speeches other than criticism of the government's inaction or misdeeds. Rarely do we hear them come up with concrete solutions. There is \$900 million of housing money sitting in Ottawa's coffers. It is earmarked for Quebec City to address the housing shortage.

Does my Conservative colleague agree that the federal government should hurry up and release this money unconditionally so that we can find housing for people who do not have a roof over their head and build housing to alleviate the crisis that is currently raging in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada?

[English]

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague that tangible and effective action needs to take place now more than ever to get housing built. This bill would not do that. An amendment to the Competition Act would not get houses built. While a 5% reduction on the GST is something that I could get my head around supporting, the reality is that it is not going to solve the housing crisis and get the millions of houses built that we need by 2030.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for bringing up the Manitoba election. It gives me a chance to congratulate Wab Kinew as the new premier of Manitoba. He is the first indigenous premier in our country.

My colleague talked about a sham and sheer propaganda. Let us talk about that when it comes to housing. He did not talk about the 30% corporatization of the housing market that is driving up market forces. He did not talk about the profiteering that is taking place and that the free-market approach has not worked. In fact, he did not talk about the Greenbelt scandal in Ontario.

What are the federal Conservatives going to do differently than the Doug Ford Conservatives to ensure we do not have another Greenbelt scandal? They talk about selling off public lands and public buildings. What are they going to do to ensure that it does not end up in the pockets of developers? Public lands belong in public hands.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Speaker, if that member had his way, every single house and apartment building in Canada would be owned by the government. We know that government across the country is the worst landlord of them all.

I believe in the private sector building houses. That is the way it has been done throughout our history. In the 1970s, the federal government brought in, for example, the MURB program that incentivized hundreds of thousands of homes to be built. We are not going to do it the socialist way. We are going to leverage the free market to get homes built in our country.

• (1255)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I was prompted to put my hand up to ask a question when the member said that the current Liberal government was responsible for inflation. I hope the hon. member will take this question in the spirit in which it is intended, which is non-partisan.

I am plenty angry with the Liberal government and the Prime Minister for many things, but I do not think it is reasonable to say that the Prime Minister is responsible for Putin invading Ukraine, for climate crises around the world that have impacted accessibility and the cost of various food stuffs, for supply chain disruptions all around the world or for the post-pandemic impacts on food production. There are multiple reasons why we are facing rising prices and they are not exclusively within Canada.

I would like the member to reconsider—

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

The hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Madam Speaker, a simple Google search by her about economists and quantitative easing increasing the money supply will confirm to her what economists have been saying for a long time, which is that increasing the money supply by \$600 billion has diluted the value of our currency and that is primarily driving inflation in Canada.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today with respect to Bill C-56, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act, and I will get into those two components.

It has been an interesting debate in the House, hearing various land barons talk about affordable living for other people who have to rent from them. However, the mixture of our market right now has brought us to this situation. That mixture of the market was abandoned by then Paul Martin, when we lost our housing initiatives. Since then, the recovery process has been brutal and that lack of stock has led to the problems we have right now in a free-market system.

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On top of that, in communities like Windsor, Tecumseh and Essex around my riding, a lot of building has taken place, but they have been more affluent homes, more on the higher end of the market for the profit margins to be higher. That has been one of the problems. We have lost co-operative and other types of housing units that really should have been built during that time frame. Therefore, even when we have had an increase in housing stock, it has not led to the things we want.

Today, at least we are trying to do something with respect to it. It is not a great bill, but it is something coming forward on which we have some unanimity in the House of Commons. The GST is something that even the Conservatives think they could agree with, which is ironic, because the Conservatives, going back in history, brought in the GST under Brian Mulroney and brought in the HST under Stephen Harper. In fact, we are still paying for that. When the HST was brought in, the government had to grease a couple of provinces to come on board and we had to borrow billions of dollars, on which we are still paying interest.

I have an updated Parliamentary Budget Office paper and also a House of Commons Library of Parliament paper, which is updated every year to show how much interest we are paying from Harper bringing in the HST, and borrowing billions of dollars. We borrowed billions of dollars to bring in a new tax on Canadians.

Therefore, when the Conservatives talk about taxation, they need to keep their history in check. It is good that they are owning up to the GST issue and these regressive taxes that have been put on Canadians. We even had an election at one point in time when the Liberals and Conservatives talked about getting rid of the GST. We can see it still has not happened in the fullness of time, but at least in this instance we are going to support the waiving of the GST tax for new builds. There is a problem, though, that we have to monitor. Are those savings going to be passed on to consumers who are renters and to other people in the market purchasing those homes.

There need to be real incentives to build those homes. To this day, many people enjoy what is called “wartime housing”. After the Second World War, smaller units, with two to three bedrooms, were built and these were affordable for veterans. Those units now have had additional components built on to them or they have stayed the same. They are still very much part of a good market for many people, including in my riding where we have had a lot of veterans, some who served most recently in Afghanistan and other theatres. Windsor, Ontario has always done its part, going back to the War of 1812. We even contributed support for all kinds of different wars and conflicts, and for peace. We still have housing stock from World War II that has never been followed up on, which is a real issue with regard to our veterans, but thank goodness those housing units are there.

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I would point out the new residential rebate, which is important. It is probably going to have to get through the Senate, so we are looking at more delays. When we are looking at an opportunity to get something done, we are probably looking at the new year for this. We have a housing crisis right now, so the response of this chamber is at least a modest improvement. However, not everybody in this chamber is willing to support this bill and get it done as quickly as possible. Therefore, we are going to continue to inflate the problem because the bill is going to take some time to get through.

The other component in the bill is the amendment to the Competition Act, which is really important. As I mentioned in a previous debate, the Competition Act needs massive updating. I am really pleased that my leader, the member for Burnaby South, has tabled legislation to fix the Competition Act in some respects.

This bill is going to have a few components too. It would “establish a framework for the Minister of Industry to direct the Commissioner of Competition to conduct an inquiry into the state of competition in a market”, which is important; “permit the Competition Tribunal to make certain orders...to an agreement or arrangement...to prevent or lessen competition; and repeal the exception in section 96 of the Act involving efficiency gains brought about by mergers.” The last one is a bit more technical, but basically the “efficiency gains” argument is really outdated in Canada.

We can prove that it would be less competition if there were a merger, and the Competition Bureau can prove that as well, but at the same time the merger can go ahead at the expense of people just because there would be a better profit margin. Therefore, we need to get rid of that altogether.

• (1300)

One thing that is really interesting about the situation we have right now is that both Conservative and Liberal governments have constantly allowed mergers to take place, resulting in the loss of Canadian jobs. We had the Lowe's takeover of Rona. We have seen where that has backfired. Some of the Rona stores are now being reopened.

Target took over Zellers, and then Target closed all its stores. By the way, at the time of the takeover, Zellers was the only department store making money and had benefits for its workers. The workers were paid about 12% more than other department stores. It was a Canadian-owned operation. The Liberal government allowed the takeover to take place. We lost all those stores. Target closed in Canada and moved back, south of the border. It was a complete and utter disaster.

There have been others. We watched Future Shop be taken over by Best Buy. Now there is a lack of competition now in the electronics sector. Future Shop was a Canadian icon store, gone. Now we have the Best Buy option and Amazon online, and very little competition.

I could go on and on about some of the different things that have been allowed to be taken over, basically leading to a lack of competition.

I want to highlight a couple of things with regard to the grocery store retail industry, which is another part of what are fighting for. This is going to help in that situation as well.

The CEOs of the grocery stores came before the industry committee and we questioned them. Unbelievably, on the same day, all three of the major chains cut their hero pay, which was paid during the pandemic, on the very same day. There are still issues out there.

Right now in the retail sector, several different things are taking place. In fact, we can look at some of the media stories coming out. Global and Mike Drolet did a good piece on theft in the retail market, how it was changing, how some stores were closing, not only in the United States but in other places, also potentially here, and the way that stores looked at and handled some things.

I bring this up because it is not a victimless crime. It raises the price of all groceries, with respect to theft and the types of behaviour taking place. Also, the same workers, who were the heroes during the pandemic, have to face increased and complicated situations at the workplace, either defending the products, feeling that they are compromised or having confrontations with customers. What is taking place is very important; it is a culture change.

We can look at the obvious things these grocery store chains have done in the past, such as fixing the price of bread, an important staple for children going to school and for families to survive. They colluded, like the robber barons of the past, to fix the price of bread. There was not only a lack of competition, but there was a coordinated approach on one of the basic human staples, increasing prices for Canadians. What happened? The grocery store chains got a slap on the wrist because of current competition issues.

The government responded by saying that it brought the CEOs in and asked them to at least hold the prices, to hold the line. What a garbage stance that is from the government.

Let us go back in history and look at some of the things that have taken place. Even the Liberal government had issues with its own in calling for corporate tax cut reductions until recently. In fact, some of the former Liberal leadership said that it did not cut taxes fast enough. That was their competition.

These grocery store icons, which enjoy monopolies in Canada, had a reduction of corporate tax at that time. At the same time, these CEOs with big pays were fixing the price of bread. There are other types of malfeasance going on with regard to their operations. They have also been known, as I mentioned, to actually push their workers the hardest and, frankly, in some of the most despicable ways possible.

All three of the grocery store chains cancelled hero pay at the same time. Not only does that stink to high heaven, it tells us the disdain they have for their workers. They had no shame in this whatsoever. There was no shame whatsoever when they were in front of the committee, saying that this was just the way they did business, that it was okay.

This bill is a modest improvement. As members in the House, we have the control to get something done on the GST with regard to housing, as well as on increased competition in Canada. Between the grocery retailers, the telcos and others, we need competition and we need it now.

• (1305)

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I really appreciate the comments and advocacy for additional affordable housing resources. I served for several decades as a municipal councillor and looked to higher levels of government for increased spending. It did not come from the province for two decades, it certainly did not come from the federal government for the 26 years that I was a member of city council. It was not until this government arrived and created a national housing strategy that we have seen record investment.

While I take the criticism that we can always do more, it is important to emphasize that we have made investments in municipalities across the country. We have invested a lot in Windsor-Essex through the co-investment fund. That was a \$90-million investment. The rapid housing initiative was a \$20-million investment.

Everyone gets up and bemoans the fact that we need to do more for housing. I completely get it, but there needs to be some recognition of what the government has done with regard to making historic investments, investments we have not seen since the 1980s. I want to make sure that member is aware of the investments that we have made in Windsor-Essex and other mid- to large-sized municipalities, including rural areas across the country.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, absolutely. This is my eighth Parliament and every government has done some good work on different things. There is no doubt about it. I could run off a list, whether they have been Conservative majority or minority governments or Liberal majority or minority governments. Good things have taken place in every budget, so there are some good things happening.

I appreciate the member's work on city council. I served for one and a half terms on city council. What we have to recognize, though, right now, is that the Paul Martin administration at the time basically broke down the process where we had regular, routine funding for the not-for-profit and housing markets. That has led to systemic problems. That is what New Democrats are going for.

I do appreciate that there things happening, and that is why we support this legislation.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I share with my neighbour and friend concern about the impact of the cost of groceries on Canadians.

Rather than an excess profit tax on retailers, if we were to wipe out the profit entirely of the retailers for the moment, it would take the price of a bag of groceries from \$25 down to \$24. Is that suffi-

ciently low for Canadian consumers if that is the only solution being proposed or, if that is not low enough for Canadians, what other solutions would he acknowledge? Higher interest rates are impacting the food value chain and the carbon tax is impacting the food chain. What other solutions would he have?

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's work on a lot of initiatives, including helping me with my private member's bill on Ojibway national urban park.

His riding also has a lot of greenhouses, does a lot of production for Canada and there is a lot of shipping. It is not enough to lower it that way. I believe there needs to be more work done.

The United States has antitrust legislation, where it can break up the monopolization. There has to be more work done on that in Canada because some of the grocery retail chains have also bought up many of the pharmacies. We have vertical integration in the industry, so we have even less competition than we saw in the past because other grocery retailers at the smaller levels are also getting absorbed into the vertical integration of basically three conglomerates.

• (1310)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like my colleague to further explain how exempting rental housing developers from paying GST will address the crying need for affordability. How is this going to lower housing prices to help the middle class and the poorest get by?

Given that this was an NDP idea, from what I understand, can my colleague explain how this will address those needs?

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, something I have some concern about, too, is whether the GST removed from new rental builds will help lower the cost of building the units at that time, but the key component to this would be the follow-up to make sure the savings are passed on to the people buying or renting those units in the future, not only in the short term but in the long term. Sadly, on some that were built, the savings did not get passed on.

For example, in the oil and gas industry, there has been a fight to remove or reduce the GST on some of the costs, but they are never passed onto the consumer, so it is an extra cash grab for corporate conglomerates.

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Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always an honour and a pleasure to speak in this place and to add my voice to debate. Today we are talking about Bill C-56, which if passed would amend the Excise Tax Act and implement a temporary 100% rebate on the GST portion for new purpose-built rental housing and amend the Competition Act to get rid of the efficiencies defence, which has been a handy loophole that has been used to let almost any corporate merger go ahead, no matter what it would do to consumer choice.

I want to talk mostly about the housing portion of this.

We are in a housing crisis. Too many Canadians cannot afford to live in their own country. For a long time, people thought of this as just a Vancouver and Toronto problem, but over the past eight years the affordability crisis has reached into every community in Canada. Even in my city, where the economy was devastated in 2015 and where real estate prices actually fell due to the government's implementation of an immediate attack on the energy industry, I am receiving emails from my constituents, who are demanding action on housing. I got an email from Kathy, who talked about her rent going very quickly from \$1,600 to \$1,800 to \$2,200 per month, and that is more than half of her income. I know that every MP in this House is getting these kinds of emails. Rent has doubled, under the watch of the current government, across Canada.

I also get emails from people who believe they will never become homeowners. If someone is a young person today who did everything their thoughtful and nurturing parents told them to do, like studied hard and earnestly, worked hard, got a good education and entered the workforce in a profession or a skilled trade, they would now be earning a good income, which is probably higher than an average income for Canadians. This ambitious young person who might be a nurse, a welder, a lawyer, a teacher or an engineer should have the world at their feet. The promise of Canada for decades was that this young person could now go out and rent a place, save their money for a few years and buy a home before maybe settling down and starting a family, but this is no longer the reality.

How much money can a young person be expected to save in this current environment? What do they do when half their income is going to pay rent? What do they do about the food prices that constantly go up or the prices of gasoline and home heating that go up? The cost of everything due to the government's inflationary deficits and wasteful spending leaves a worker without the ability to save. It would take the typical worker most of their working life to save up for a down payment to buy a typical house, but that would be in vain anyway, because they would not qualify for the mortgage that they would then need to actually go ahead and purchase a typical home.

What are young people today coming out of school to do? Under the government, the country is becoming a place with two kinds of families: families that already own a home and families that may never. The only hope that young Canadians have of becoming homeowners now in most of Canada's large cities is, with help from their parents, if their parents happen to already own a home, the hope that their parents will have the ability and enough money that they can contribute to that large down payment and co-sign the

loan. For everybody else, there is just an ever-increasing cycle of rents that rise with shrinking space and quality of accommodation.

The reason for this is quite simple. For years, the supply of houses has failed to keep up with demand. For eight years the government has ignored the failure of supply to keep up with demand. The government has piled on costs and taxes at the federal level to push up construction inputs and it has enabled municipal political allies, who never fail to be the voices of Nimbyism.

● (1315)

Eight years after making a promise on page 7 of their election platform in 2015, Liberals have now figured out there is a problem with access to housing in Canada and are rushing a bill in at the beginning of this fall session to bring about this campaign commitment they made on the elimination of GST on purpose-built rentals.

We see this time and time again. The government creates a problem, and in this case eight years of high taxes, deficits, increased bureaucracy and wasteful spending, leading to inflation, which has led to high interest rates, compounding the shortage of housing supply by making it more expensive, or impossible, for builders to build. Now it wants Parliament to rush through a bill that contains something it promised in the 2015 election and which it has just now gotten around to tabling in Parliament.

Something else happened. The opposition leader tabled the proposed building homes, not bureaucracy act, which also promises to cut the GST on purpose-built rental for construction of below-market rent. The Leader of the Opposition's bill also deals directly with the bureaucratic hurdles to home construction and municipalities that do not want to build new homes.

The Conservative plan is elegant in its simplicity. A Conservative government would make federal infrastructure money contingent on housing outcomes, not housing announcements but actual keys in doors. The Conservative plan would do so not by telling municipalities what to do, but simply by insisting they meet this national policy objective of ensuring that Canadians have a home to live in.

A Conservative government would not bully local councils, like the housing minister recently did in his letter to city council threatening to withhold federal money if city council did not take a particular position on a particular vote. That is not how the Conservative plan would work.

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The Conservative plan takes no position on what municipalities do. We would leave that to elected officials, who are elected in their communities to decide how they achieve the objective of increased housing supply. Let us make no mistake, the Conservative government would tie and hold back infrastructure funding if municipalities failed to get keys in doors by increasing the amount of housing stock that is built in their communities. We are saying to municipalities to let the builders build, get on with making sure we have approvals and stand up to the powerful, vested interests that can always come up with a reason that a housing project or a neighbourhood development cannot be approved.

The bill we are debating today seems like it was forced on to the floor by the Liberals trying to catch up to the Conservatives, who already had a plan tabled.

The other part of the bill is actually also stolen directly from the member for Bay of Quinte, who had tabled a private member's bill to abolish the efficiencies defence. I do not have time to get into the efficiencies defence, but I certainly support abolishing it. I have supported it before. I supported my colleague, the member for Bay of Quinte. Also, the previous NDP speaker supports this, and he has talked about competition. I agree with him as well. It is long overdue.

The Rogers-Shaw merger debacle should have been enough to immediately table such legislation, but if a Conservative initiative like that private member's bill is enough to spur the government to action, so be it. That is fine. That is actually Parliament doing what it should, which is debating ideas. If the government sees an idea in two Conservative PMBs, and maybe even an NDP PMB, and wants to copy these ideas and table them as government legislation, great. Let us get it done.

Canadians do not care who tabled what. They just want it done. However, it is a lesson to those who maybe have cozied up and are in this unhealthy coalition with the government. They can be in opposition and still get things done, like tabling good legislation. Let us get good ideas on the table and let us get better policy for Canadians.

• (1320)

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that was a bit hard to listen to.

I was a municipal councillor in the 2008-09 recession, and municipalities individually begged the previous government for assistance on the affordable housing front. We witnessed our affordable housing wait-lists almost double, and so in Hamilton it went from 3,600 families and individuals to almost 6,200 or 6,400, if memory serves me right.

We also collectively asked, through FCM, for the previous government to assist municipalities. Guess who was part of the government? The Leader of the Opposition. This is not a case of playing catch-up, this is a case of making up for lost time. All the years the Conservatives were in government, they had no housing plan.

Now our government has come forward with a national housing strategy that responds to the concerns and requests from municipalities from across the country. Is the member aware of that?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, I am aware of a few things, including that the government has been in office for eight years and is only now being spurred on, kicking and screaming, by the opposition's plan, which has been tabled in this place, to implement something it promised to do in 2015. I know that in 2008, it did not cost \$2,200 a month to rent a portion of a house in my riding. I know that in 2008, the mortgage payment on a typical home in Canada was not \$3,600 a month. I spent 22 years in that industry. I know a bit about affordability and what people could qualify for then and now.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for calling out and asking for good ideas. We saw the Conservatives in Ontario try a land giveaway of the Greenbelt that was going to put \$8.3 billion into the pockets of developers. We hear the Conservatives talking about selling public lands and public buildings.

I want to know if he thinks that what happened in Ontario was a good idea. What would the Conservatives do to make sure that does not happen again when it comes to federal lands? Public lands belong in public hands and not in developers' pockets.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, I am not going to debate Queen's Park politics here. I am not even sure if that part of the question is in order.

As to the member's point about freeing up public lands for development, he raises an important point. It has to be done right. However, it was actually promised by the government in 2015, another broken, ignored promise from eight years ago, that it would examine ways that surplus buildings and lands of the federal government could be made available for residential housing development to meet the overwhelming need for residential property in Canada.

• (1325)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague made an important distinction in the Conservative approach to housing: We are not going to dictate municipal decisions around zoning and around the mechanics of where housing goes, but we are going to set targets and clear expectations. I think this is consistent with both the urgency of the housing crisis we see and the important principle of subsidiarity, which is that decisions should be worked out at the local level with precise details.

We can see across the board right now that not enough is being built. We can use the federal spending power to require that when federal dollars are going in for major infrastructure projects, there is an alignment with targets to grow the supply of housing in this country.

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I wonder if the member can share further about how the Conservative principles operating here can really harness growth in the housing supply both by setting national targets in our national interest and by allowing local decision-making to continue.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Madam Speaker, the member is exactly right. That is the Conservative approach. There is national government level funding for municipal infrastructure, and that must be tied to national policy objectives like increasing the housing supply. However, it would be up to local governments, responsible to the local voters who elect them, to decide how to meet those objectives, and they would lose their money if they do not meet those objectives.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, we certainly do not have to look very hard or listen very hard to know that Canadians are suffering and that the government's out-of-control inflationary spending is causing tremendous damage to households from coast to coast. I think any member in this place who is taking the time to meet with constituents and hear the concerns they have is hearing exactly this.

Here we are in the House of Commons debating the issue of affordability, and of course the government has come to the table with one thing it believes is the solution. We as the opposition believe that perhaps there are other things that need to be considered, so I will be talking about those here today.

I recently had a phone call with a 65-year-old woman in my riding who is on CPP, OAS and GIS. Combined, she makes just over \$1,700 a month. She was calling me because she is incredibly concerned because she cannot afford her rent, her food, her prescription, her car and her cellphone bill.

These, of course, are just essential things; they are part of making life work. There is nothing lavish here. She is not asking to go on a fancy vacation. She is not asking to enrol in any fancy art classes or any extracurricular. She simply wants to live, but the money she makes each month, this set amount, is not enough to do that. This is because the amount she brings in has remained fixed but the cost of everything she has to purchase has, of course, skyrocketed. The reason for that is the government's inflationary spending.

I recently spoke to a couple in my riding who could not afford their rent anymore so they unfortunately had to let their unit go. As a result, they moved into a motor home, where they now reside with their little dog. They move around from one Walmart parking lot to another just trying to get by.

I was speaking to a senior on the phone who was living in a home that was condemned. He was not able to move. He did not want to move, even though he received repeated notices saying that he had to because the home was structurally no longer able to exist and his health and safety were at risk. He refused.

Eventually, authorities had to come and remove him from the home, this elderly man who is in his eighties. He did not have the ability to afford any other available rental in our community. The authorities determined that they did not want to take him to the shelter because that seemed cruel. Instead, he landed in the hospital. He was cared for in the hospital for over a month before he was finally put into an affordable housing unit.

These are the types of situations that are taking place not just in my community but across the entire country. There are people who are struggling to make ends meet. It does not stop with the household and the impact there; it expands beyond that.

I was speaking with people at a local charity. They put together backpacks for kids who would not otherwise have new school supplies. They needed to put together a total of 1,300. They said that in previous years, the number has been closer to 500 or 600. That is shocking enough. That tells us that families are struggling.

Here is the other thing. Our community is incredibly generous, incredibly gracious and incredibly kind and wants to answer the need. Normally they would donate with no problem. These backpacks would be created and it would be fantastic. However, this year, because families are struggling, it was more difficult to find donations.

I was speaking with the director of the local food bank and she was telling me that the clientele has changed. The demographic that is using the food bank increasingly more than any other is single men who are working. They have a job. Those individuals, who are working really hard and wanting to afford life and contribute to society, are having the most difficult time making ends meet.

We know that across this country, a record number of people have unfortunately had to resort to the use of a food bank, not because they wanted to but because they were forced to, because the government decided to spend out of control and tax to the nines. Unfortunately, Canadians have had to pay the incredible cost that comes with that.

● (1330)

The chief responsibility of the federal government is to serve the flourishing of its citizens. Flourishing is something most Canadians probably have a hard time wrapping their heads around. I think right now most of them are just focused on surviving.

When the government is focused on the flourishing of Canadians, it hones in on six things. It hones in on the unity of the country. It hones in on keeping Canadians safe and secure. It hones in on building major infrastructure. It hones in on facilitating economic prosperity, not just for some by pitting one sector against another but for all. A government that is interested in the flourishing of its citizens is also focused on a robust justice system and making sure the rule of law is equally applied, and focused on its place on the world stage and making sure it represents itself well.

I would ask Canadians if the government is interested in their flourishing. I think the answer that would come back to me is no, because Canadians are not better off under the government. They are not feeling cared for by the government. They do not have the ability to flourish under the government.

There are many issues that I could get into, but today we are focused on the economic issues. We are focused specifically on affordability. It is with this issue that I will spend the majority of my time.

After eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, we are watching as the cost of housing, the cost of food, the cost of fuel and the cost of home heating skyrocket. We are watching as Canadians are struggling to make ends meet. We are listening to young people who are feeling desperate. They want hope that perhaps one day in the future they can afford a home.

I recently sat down with a group of young people in my riding and asked how many of them dream of owning a home. The stats say that nine out of 10 have given up on that dream. In my community, all of them raised their hands. They still have that dream. They still have it because they believe that they can work hard and earn it. At the same time, they look at the policies of the government and look at the reality being created for them, and they are struggling to believe that their hope can be fulfilled. However, they still hope.

Why do they hope? They hope because they are confident in themselves. They are confident in their ability to better themselves through education, to land a great job, to work really hard and prosper. However, they need a government that is willing to partner with them, a government that also believes in their potential. They need a government that would also unleash them as young Canadians who are able to bring about great prosperity. That is not the Liberal government.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister's incompetence has led us to a place of darkness where Canadians are finding it difficult to dream from one day to the next. A common-sense Conservative government would free hard-working people to earn powerful paycheques to pay for affordable homes and affordable food and to put fuel in their vehicles. A Conservative government would take away the bridles of red tape and allow people to step into their gifts, talents and abilities and thrive. Canadians are the problem-solvers, the solution-makers and the wealth-generators this nation needs in order to propel forward. Conservatives believe in them.

The hon. member across the way rolls his eyes because he does not believe in the Canadian people, but Conservatives do. Conservatives believe in each and every one of them and their ability to succeed.

Canadians only need a government that is willing to partner with them, a government that is willing to rein in its spending, a government that is willing to axe silly taxes like the carbon tax and a government that is willing to take away the extra red tape and regulation that is put in place to hinder Canadians rather than facilitate their prosperity. After eight years of struggling under the current government and its strict regime, Canadians deserve a government that will free them, that will allow them to step into their abilities, talents and gifts and prosper. That is a Conservative government.

• (1335)

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I probably should have waited to have lunch until after that speech.

For me, the common-sense legislation that we keep hearing about sounds a lot like the common-sense revolution adopted by the Mike Harris government in the 1990s. That political playbook made municipalities the bad guys. It is oddly similar to the narrative that has been picked up by the Leader of the Opposition, who

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is blaming others for the fact that his government had nothing on the affordable housing file for almost a decade.

It was hard to listen to that speech. It is classic conservatism to create a bogeyman and find someone to blame instead of providing solutions. Our government has provided solutions through the national housing strategy. Every time our government has provided something in an effort to assist some of our most vulnerable Canadians, the member opposite and her party have voted against it. Why?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Speaker, the member across the way said that he should have had lunch before listening to my speech. It is interesting, because I think he missed the point. Sadly, one-fifth of all Canadians actually will not have lunch today. They cannot afford to have lunch today because of this member and his government. Again, he rolls his eyes as if to say that those Canadians who are going without a meal today do not matter. He shakes his head as if to say that these Canadians are not his concern. Shame on that member, because each and every one of us in this place is elected to represent every single Canadian from coast to coast, regardless of their income, their challenges or their abilities. Shame on that member for not advancing—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Jonquière.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, if we want to help the less fortunate, the people struggling to pay for their groceries or housing, our first diagnosis has to be the right diagnosis. Who in society is currently benefiting from the government's largesse and spending—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I am going to interrupt the hon. member because I do not believe that the member being asked the question is listening. I will therefore ask the hon. member to repeat his question.

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, that is incredibly kind of you. However, I am not expecting an answer that is very long on details.

If we want to help the less fortunate, the people struggling to pay for their groceries and housing, I was saying that we need to make the right diagnosis. To reach a diagnosis, we need to identify the money that we are collectively injecting and that is going to the wrong people. If I were to say that the oil companies managed to rake in \$200 billion last year while getting \$82 billion in tax credits, people would probably call it an outrage. However, this seems to be what the member is presenting today by talking mostly about the carbon tax and saying that she thinks it is still not enough.

I wonder if she can justify that to her constituents.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Speaker, the hon. member asked who is benefiting from the government's spending. Is it the already wealthy and the big corporations? At the end of the day, I am not here representing them. I am here representing everyday, hard-working Canadians. I fly under the Conservative banner, not the Liberal banner, so I cannot help but be on the side of the everyday person, the person who works hard, gets up in the morning and thinks about their day ahead and hopes they are going to be able to make it through. I am on the side of the person who drops their kids off at school and then rushes off to work; maybe leaves during lunch hour in order to pick up a couple of things and do a few errands; runs back to work and finishes up their full day; runs to day care to grab their kids; runs home; makes a meal; puts the kids in bed; plops on the couch for half an hour and then heads to bed to wake up the next morning and do the same thing all over again. That is—

• (1340)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know that when it comes to the Conservatives in Ontario, it is the developers who are benefiting when it comes to housing, which is the conversation of today.

We have heard the federal Conservatives talk about selling off government land and government buildings. As New Democrats, we would see benefits in leasing those lands and working with the developers and non-market housing groups to develop housing. My question to the member is this: Is the Conservatives' model more like a Queen's Park, Ontario Conservative, Doug Ford greenbelt model, or would their model actually have safeguards to protect the public from developers and their friends?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Speaker, I would rule that question out of order. It was a provincially based question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would ask the hon. member to not tell me how to do my job.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Vancouver East.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to enter into this debate.

With respect to housing in Canada, as we all know, we are faced with an intense chronic housing crisis. In fact, I would argue that the Conservatives, when they were in government, were the ones who cancelled the co-op program, which is a proven model in Canada that provides safe, secure, affordable housing to community members. More than that, co-op housing provides a community within a community through that model. What did the Conservatives do in 1992? They cancelled the national co-op housing program.

Now, based on the discussion and the leader of the Conservatives, one would think they are going to be the saviour in addressing the housing crisis, but let us be clear: They Conservatives were the people who helped cause the housing crisis we are faced with today in this country. Of course, after the Conservatives cut funding

for housing programs and eliminated the co-op program altogether, we had the Liberals come into office. What did they do? They cancelled the national affordable housing program in 1993, further escalating the housing crisis. The truth is that successive Liberal and Conservative governments failed Canadians. They failed to ensure that there was social housing built, and they failed to ensure that there was co-op housing built, to the point of where we are today.

I still remember, when I was in the community in 1993 working as a community legal advocate, the shock that went through my system and through our whole community when we heard that the government had cancelled the program. Part of my job was to try to assist people, including seniors, people with disabilities, indigenous people and women. There were women fleeing violence and women who needed housing because they were in a domestic violence situation. They needed housing for themselves and their children, and they were losing their children because they could not secure safe, affordable housing. It was not because they were bad parents, but because successive Liberal and Conservative federal governments walked away from them and did not provide the housing that was critically needed then.

Fast-forward to today, and where are we at? We have a situation where, just today, a report came out that in my community in Vancouver East and in the greater Vancouver area, it was found in the most recent study that the homelessness count had increased by 30% from the last count. The truth is that, in many ways, I do not need a report to tell me so, although having that data is really important, because I see it in the community with the encampments that have surfaced. It is everywhere. It has proliferated everywhere. In my riding of Vancouver East, we have a permanent encampment. What is wrong with this picture? We have to ask this question.

Why is it that successive Liberal and Conservative governments have allowed this to happen? It is unjustifiable. Housing is for people to live in; it is not a commodity for investors to use to turn a bigger and bigger profit. That is what has happened over the years since the Liberals and Conservatives walked away from co-op and social housing. They allow the market to flourish and then to benefit from it at the expense of people who need homes. Not only are people unhoused; renters are also getting renovicted. Seniors on fixed income, long-time tenants in a building, are being displaced and renovicted, and they will no longer have access to a home. They cannot afford a home. They will no longer be able to live in the place where they have lived for many years. This was allowed under both Liberals and Conservatives and was escalated, I would say, by their bad housing policy and by their walking away from the people in our communities that are in need.

Government Orders

● (1345)

We will hear the Liberals say that in 2017, they entered back into the housing environment with the national housing strategy. If anybody has taken the time to read it, and I urge all Liberal members to pick it up, the report from the Auditor General indicated they do not even know who is benefiting from the government's programs. In fact, they do not even know whether those who are in need, those who are most vulnerable, are accessing the supports they need. "Incompetence" would be one way of describing it, but it is not justifiable with where things are at today.

Now, the Conservatives have a leader who goes around acting as though he were the saviour. Let us be clear: When he was part of the Harper administration as a cabinet minister, under that administration, Canadians lost 800,000 units of affordable housing. That is close to a million units. A million families or individuals could have had access to housing that they do not have now. What is their solution today? It is more market-driven solutions. Let us be clear: It is the market-driven solutions that the government had relied on that got us here today. Nowhere do the Conservatives in their plans talk about building social housing or co-op housing.

The Liberal program does not talk about affordability. How strange is it? What planet do we live on that we operate in this way? It is no wonder we have a housing crisis. The bill that the government has tabled on the GST piece is to facilitate more housing being built. I want to be clear that we need more housing, but we also need to make sure that the housing that is built is accessible to people, meaning that it is truly affordable for people. It is strange to me that the government decided in some weird, altered universe, in this bill, that it would exclude co-ops from accessing the GST exemption. Why on earth would one do that? It makes no sense whatsoever.

The co-op program, as indicated, is a proven model in the delivery of housing in our communities. Co-ops create communities within communities. One can see it when walking into a co-op housing project. One can see the love within the community and the supports that are there for each other. People take care of each other and they build community with each other. To not support co-ops makes no sense. The NDP will absolutely be moving amendments to address that issue.

The other piece the NDP will doing is calling on the government to amend the bill to allow for existing non-profit housing projects to access this exemption. This would allow for some projects to become viable and, in other instances, for projects to create better affordability for the communities in need. That is what we need to do, to work towards, in that direction. We also need to actually set up some level of eligibility criteria in terms of affordability, to make sure the private developers are not just going to get a benefit but that there is also a further return to the community, and that is on the affordability criteria.

We have to think about housing in a holistic way. The NDP is putting forward these ideas. Above all else, we need the government to build social housing and co-op housing like we used to. Housing is for people to live in and not just to make a profit from.

● (1350)

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments, but I want to ask her a question.

I represent, through my portfolio, the territories. One thing I will be speaking about in the House is the lack of housing in Nunavut specifically. Per-unit costs have risen to \$1.1 million because of inflation and carbon taxes. That is why no units were built this year, because it is simply too expensive, as the local government has said.

If it is so bad with the current Liberal government, why does the NDP keep supporting it in the House?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, where the NDP is at is this: Unlike the Conservatives, New Democrats are here to fight for the people and to get more for the people. We are not just here to talk about how great we are and then deliver nothing, having been part of a previous administration that cut housing programs for the people in need. We are creating affordability through different means, and that is why we fought tooth and nail to get the dental care plan.

Yes, the leader of the Conservatives has had access to dental care services all his life through the public service, but most Canadians do not. We will fight tooth and nail on affordability on all fronts.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have heard Conservatives talk about selling 6,000 buildings and 15% of public lands. We only need to look at Ontario, where the Doug Ford Conservatives did a deal for the greenbelt; they sold public lands and put \$8.3 billion into the pockets of developers. In my home province of British Columbia, the B.C. Liberals sold private lands to benefit their friends, who were donors to the B.C. Liberal Party.

What policies and framework would the member like to see put in place to protect Canadians from Conservatives, their friends and their donors?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, for the federal government to make available federal lands for the development of housing, first and foremost, we need to ensure there is a public return to the community. The Conservatives do not want to put any requirements in place, because they only want to line the pockets of their pals, the investors and developers. For the NDP, there has to be a return to the community.

In the spirit of reconciliation, we have to make land available by returning land back to indigenous people, first and foremost. Second, for buildings that are made available for development, to turn it into social housing, it has to be social or co-op housing. The rents have to be reduced to below market, so that people can access it and it is truly affordable for the community.

Statements by Members

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I am originally from Nova Scotia, and I look at a history lesson that I think we can all learn from. The private sector does not build housing when we really need it and does not build it in a hurry. The first public housing ever built in Canada was in the wake of the Halifax explosion in 1917, when thousands lost their homes, and governments, including as far away as the U.K., created a fund. The government moved in and built, to this day, some of the nicest and most sought-after housing in Halifax, in the Hydrostone district. It was the first public housing effort ever in Canada.

Within months of the Halifax explosion, the governments had created apartments, temporary but serviceable, for 832 people. They had a roof over their heads. It was done quickly and affordably. We are lacking the sense of emergency, particularly for those who are acutely homeless, living rough or living in tents.

Does my hon. colleague from Vancouver East think we should adopt a strategically different approach to the emergency for people who are homeless?

• (1355)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, there is no question that the urgency is real. This housing crisis is a chronic crisis. It has been more than 30 years since the government walked away from building social and co-op housing.

To speak to the member's point, it can be done. We just need the political will to do so and for government to say that it will build social and co-op housing, with the models it used to use. When veterans returned from the war, we built victory homes; Canada, at that time, said it would not allow—

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

The hon. member for Kenora.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is great to rise today and join the debate on this very important topic. I just want to start by saying that, in Bill C-56, I am pleased to see that the Liberals finally seem to be admitting that Canadians are struggling. Over the last number of years, they have been telling us everything is fine and that the government has a great credit rating with all the agencies. However, we have been raising concerns about the housing costs, the cost of groceries and the cost of living for quite some time now, and I think that the bill being brought forward shows that the government is finally admitting that there is a housing crisis and that its inflationary policies are driving up the cost of groceries for Canadians.

It is also clear to me that it is a tired government that is out of ideas. Within the bill, of course, it is looking to remove the GST from purpose-built rentals, but that is something that has been brought forward by our current common-sense Conservative leader, the leader of the official opposition.

As well, the bill aims to help address grocery costs by removing the efficiencies defence, which currently allows anti-competitive mergers to survive challenges if corporate efficiencies offset the harm to competition, even when Canadian consumers would pay higher prices and have fewer choices. This is another Conservative idea. It was brought forward by my friend, colleague and seatmate,

the member for Bay of Quinte. I want to thank him for bringing that forward. He is a very smart guy and a decent hockey player, but he brought forward this idea, and it is another one that the Liberals have now adopted.

I want to be clear that I am happy that the government is trying to take some of our Conservative ideas. I will highlight a few other ideas that I would like to offer the government to bring forward, if it is serious about addressing the housing crisis and the cost of groceries.

As we know, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, housing prices have doubled. Nine in 10 youth say they will never afford a home, and many families cannot even pay the interest on their mortgages. Now the government's solution is to bring forward more photo ops and, as I mentioned, plagiarize Conservative messaging. The bill takes the Leader of the Opposition's idea from his building homes not bureaucracy act: to remove the GST on purpose-built rentals. It is a good idea, of course, but it is missing a key piece.

Our leader's bill would incentivize more affordable homes, because in order to qualify for the removal of GST, the rental price must be below market value, meaning that more homes would get built and prices would come down. As new homes were built, they would continually bring those prices down in order to qualify. The Liberals' version would not do that. It would allow prices to continue to skyrocket.

I look forward to sharing some more ideas on this after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

RED DRESS ALERT

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, yesterday was the National Day of Action for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit People. In the spring, the NDP led the call to have the House declare the continued loss of indigenous women, girls, two-spirit and gender-diverse people as a Canada-wide emergency and to commit to providing immediate and substantial investment. This included the red dress alert.

Families and organizations such as Sisters in Spirit and the Native Women's Association are calling on the federal government to invest in this alert system to save lives. This is a matter of life and death. There is no more time to wait.

The NDP calls on the Liberal government to take this emergency seriously and immediately act on the call for a red dress alert.

* * *

MT SPACE

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, almost 20 years ago, shortly after immigrating from Lebanon, Majdi Bou-Matar founded MT Space, an incredible arts organization in the Waterloo region that centres racialized and marginalized artists and stories in our community. His goal was to establish an international theatre festival within 10 years. Sadly, Majdi passed away suddenly last June, and our community continues to grieve his loss.

MT Space has shifted what we consider mainstream theatre in our community, and the festival that he envisioned years ago continues to grow. This year marked MT Space's full return to live and in-person theatre, with IMPACT 23. Over the course of six days, they pretty much took over downtown Kitchener, bringing together artists from eight different countries to stage 20 productions indoors and outdoors.

My thanks go to Pam and the entire MT Space team and board for their leadership, for challenging our preconceptions of theatre and for their tireless work—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

* * *

THANKSGIVING

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to extend my warmest wishes to my constituents in Markham—Unionville on this special occasion of Thanksgiving. Across this great country, Canadians are bound together by our shared values of gratitude, unity and compassion.

This Thanksgiving, let us reflect on the blessings we enjoy, the moments we cherish with loved ones and the prosperity that our great nation provides. In Markham—Unionville, we are fortunate to celebrate our cultural diversity, where traditions from around the world enrich our lives and bring us closer together.

This Thanksgiving, I encourage all of us to embrace this spirit of inclusivity and share the abundance of our community with those in need. May this Thanksgiving be a time of joy, reflection and generosity as we come together, support one another and remember that we are stronger when we stand united.

From my family to your family, I say happy Thanksgiving.

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THOMAS MCBRIDE

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I announce the passing of Thomas McBride. Tom was a beloved employee of mine and a fixture on Parliament Hill since 2006. His sudden departure has left a deep void in my office, one that will not be easily filled. Tom proudly received his B.A. in political science and moved to Ottawa to fulfill his aspiration of working on Parliament Hill, where many will remember him for the roles he fulfilled and the assistance he provided to members and their staff.

Statements by Members

We remember his love of sports and his passionate support of Canada. Perhaps that is how Tom developed his sense of fairness and fair play. Sadly, life is not always fair. All Tom's friends across party lines who respected, appreciated and loved him will miss his presence on the Hill.

We wish to extend our deepest condolences to his mother, Barbara, his sister, Julie, and the rest of his family and friends. May the Creator accept our prayers on his behalf.

My thanks go to Tom for his friendship and service.

The Speaker: I hope that hon. members will permit me to extend my sympathies for his loss.

The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

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MAPLE SYRUP PRODUCERS

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the maple syrup industry has deep roots in Kitchener—Conestoga. It is more than just a tradition; it is a symbol of our strong agricultural heritage. Maple syrup producers craft one of Canada's most iconic commodities. It is about not only the delicious sweetness that graces our pancakes and waffles but also protecting the environment and embracing sustainable practices.

I was reminded that maple syrup producers are stewards of the forests when I visited Snyder Heritage Farm in Breslau, a fifth-generation farm. I met with Kevin Snyder, president of the Waterloo-Wellington chapter of maple syrup producers. One thing we discussed was our government's announcement of the maple production improvement initiative. This program will support purchasing equipment that increases productivity and efficiency. It will provide funding to cover woodlot management activities, helping maple syrup producers, such as the Snyder family, strengthen their businesses and continue to sweeten our lives.

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● (1405)

[Translation]

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 57TH SAINTE-JULIE SCOUT GROUP

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to acknowledge the 50th anniversary of the 57th Sainte-Julie Scout Group, which was celebrated on September 9.

For half a century, the 57th group has been teaching young people in Sainte-Julie the positive values of the movement, namely respect, trust, justice and achievement, but also practical knowledge that they can use for the rest of their lives. What about the lasting friendships that are developed there? Half a century in the history of a people who have been around for 400 years is simply remarkable and deserves to be properly celebrated.

Statements by Members

I thank the visionaries that founded this group 50 years ago and all the facilitators who have come and gone throughout the years. Congratulations and long live the 57th Sainte-Julie Scout Group.

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RIDING OF ORLÉANS

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of myself and my constituents in Orléans, I would like to congratulate you on your election as Speaker of the House.

I would also like to thank the Société franco-ontarienne du patrimoine et de l'histoire d'Orléans for its leadership in organizing the third edition of the art and crafts market at the Shenkman Arts Centre in Orléans. It was a wonderful opportunity to discover and appreciate new arts and crafts creations from the people of Orléans.

As part of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, I had the honour of attending the unveiling of the children's sacred forest at Beechwood Cemetery. The children's sacred forest and its commemorative stone will serve as a focal point for reconciliation and for the long journey that lies ahead in memory of the thousands of children who never made it home.

I would like to close by wishing my colleagues, all House of Commons staff and especially the people of Orléans a happy Thanksgiving.

* * *

[English]

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, Nunavut residents cannot trust the Prime Minister on housing. At a campaign stop in Iqaluit in the last election he promised, “We’re going to try and maximize what we can do in the next construction season.”

The sad reality is that housing projects last year were cancelled or delayed due to the rising costs from the Prime Minister’s rising inflation and carbon taxes. All the bids came in well over budget, at around \$1.1 million per unit. It is unbelievable.

The Nunavut minister said, “They were just all way too expensive. The housing corporation just doesn’t have that type of money.”

In 2019, the Prime Minister said that he made housing a priority. In 2021, he reconfirmed that the federal government has a role to play in housing. However, after presiding over creating housing hell across Canada, with housing costs doubling under his watch, he stated, “I’ll be blunt as well — housing isn’t a primary federal responsibility.”

After eight years, northerners are learning the hard way that the Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

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VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the unfortunate and deeply embarrassing events in this House a couple of weeks ago have provided us an important reminder of the need for Holocaust education.

For those of us from metro Vancouver, the work of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre in my riding of Vancouver Granville seeks to do exactly this. Through education and remembrance it engages students, educators and the broader public with respect to the history of the Holocaust, the Shoah, and its ongoing relevance.

As a teaching museum that stewards programs and collections initiated by Holocaust survivors, the VHEC honours and supports those who survived and remembers those who perished. Every year, the centre’s Holocaust education programs reach British Columbia classrooms, teachers and more than 25,000 students. Its efforts will help build a world free of anti-Semitism, discrimination and genocide.

I encourage everyone to visit the centre as we each embark on our own journeys of remembrance and education.

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● (1410)

SELWYN ROMILLY

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to mourn the passing of the Honourable Selwyn Romilly. He was the first Black student to graduate law at UBC, the first Black provincial court judge and the first Black justice on the B.C. Supreme Court.

Indeed, he had many firsts. Three years ago, at 81, he was the first Black retired justice to be handcuffed in public by the Vancouver Police who had mistaken him for a 40-year-old Black felon. True to form, Selwyn did not use that humiliation for bitter retaliation, but worked with police to change handcuffing procedures.

Justice Romilly was recognized by his peers as a wise and eminent jurist, and a trailblazer and advocate for civil rights and justice in his judgments. He was a role model to young Black lawyers. He was a Trini like me, a year ahead of me in high school. He was a friend, teacher and mentor to many.

We will miss him.

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CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everything feels broken in Canada. The costly coalition of the NDP-Liberals has shattered the Canadian dream. Unaffordable, unsafe, divided: everything feels broken after eight long years because, increasingly, everything is broken.

Statements by Members

We can put the pieces back together. Imagine a government that lives within its means, leaves more money in one's pockets, lets one get ahead, protects our streets and unites people. It can happen and it will happen. This Prime Minister is not worth the cost, but soon enough he will be replaced. Common-sense Conservatives will fix what he has broken in the Canada that we and know and love.

One's home, my home, our home: let us bring it home.

* * *

CANADIAN BEER DAY

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the fifth annual Canadian Beer Day. This year's theme was "Passion and Pride: The People Behind Canadian Beer". It celebrates those who brew our beloved beer, sell it, deliver it, serve it or simply enjoy it.

Canadian brewers play a pivotal role in all of our communities across the country, employing 21,000 Canadians directly and supporting 149,000 hard-working families. Canadians are rightly proud of our brewing heritage and continue to choose locally brewed beer on 88% of all consumption occasions, among the highest domestic content of any Canadian agri-food sector.

From the smaller craft brewers to the largest beer makers, behind every pint of Canadian beer we savour there is a story of perseverance, creativity and the pursuit of excellence. May we continue to celebrate everyone involved in our beloved beer all year round. Cheers to Canadian brewers.

Sláinte.

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CARBON TAX

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, Canadians continue to feel the impact of the NDP-Liberal government's inflationary taxes on heat, gas and groceries. A resident from my community recently shared his home gas bill. The carbon tax was higher than the cost of gas.

Minimum carbon tax amounts are set by the federal government and it has now imposed two carbon taxes. The Liberals have not hit one single climate target with their tax plan.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer says that this tax will shrink the economy and that carbon tax 2 will cost the average household an extra \$573 per year without any rebates, with families in some provinces having to pay at least \$1,100. Combined, carbon taxes 1 and 2 will cost families up to \$4,000 each year.

Most seniors, young adults and families simply cannot afford this. This is on top of inflationary food costs and mortgage interest costs.

The Prime Minister is just not worth the cost.

[Translation]

CARBON TAX

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the leader of the Bloc Québécois is off gallivanting abroad, there is work to do here in Canada.

After eight years under this Liberal government, Canadians, including Quebecers, are suffering. Since I am from Quebec, I try to defend the interests of Quebecers every day. I find it alarming that the number of people going to food banks is rising and that people in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier cannot afford to buy as many groceries. When Quebecers are getting poorer, it is important to intervene. When Ottawa is taking more money out of Quebecers' pockets, I call that a tax. The second carbon tax applies in Quebec.

Who voted in favour of that legislation on June 5? The Bloc Québécois. What is worse, yesterday, members of the Bloc had the opportunity to fix their mistake, but they did not. It is costly to vote for the Bloc Québécois. It will be drastically more expensive to vote for this separatist party.

The only party that is here to defend Quebec's interests is the Conservative Party of Canada.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me first to offer my most heartfelt congratulations on your election as Chair.

I rise today because last week a fire broke out at a house under construction in my riding of Willowdale. While working to suppress the blaze, one of our courageous firefighters was injured. Fortunately, the firefighter was quickly rushed to Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and, I am told, is in a good and stable condition.

The incident serves as a powerful reminder of the grave risks that our firefighters and, indeed, all first responders face in their daily lives. This summer, every Canadian marvelled at the sheer heroism of our firefighters, as they fought back forest fires across our beautiful country, fires that broke records, both in number and in intensity.

I speak on behalf of all residents of Willowdale when I express our sincere gratitude to our injured firefighter and to all first responders.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FOOD SECURITY IN SCHOOLS

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign, the Liberals promised to establish a national school nutritious meal program. They promised \$1 billion in funding over five years for a school food program throughout Canada, which is the only G7 country that does not already have one. Since then, we have heard nothing.

Meanwhile, the cost of living continues to rise, making this measure even more urgent. I have personally written to the Minister of Finance to remind her of this promise on behalf of all the organizations that are now compelled to demand it. Organizations such as the Breakfast Club are no longer able to manage the task of ensuring food security for our children in schools.

We know that direct services to citizens are one of the federal government's weaknesses, but this money was promised. It is time to transfer that money to Quebec and the provinces so that programs can get under way. Our children have been waiting more than two years for their lunch.

* * *

[English]

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is World Teachers' Day. Teachers are at the front lines of creating safe and inclusive spaces for kids. Today I am sending a shout-out to all of the amazing teachers and educators in Coquitlam School District No. 43, who do just that and make a real difference in students' lives.

Port Moody—Coquitlam has benefited from teachers like Megan Leslie, who empowered her students to advocate for equity in our community. Under her care and leadership, the students of Dr. Charles Best high school have achieved free menstrual products in city facilities, the raising of the pride flag at city hall and an impactful annual red dress awareness day that has meant so much.

To all teachers and educators, I thank them. I see them and I see the amazing work they do. They deserve to be celebrated today and every day.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about shrinkage.

This Thanksgiving, prices up 30%. Let us talk about corn, turkey, gravy, stuffing and all of the fixings Canadians have. Under the Liberal-NDP government, we are also seeing decreases in products. We are seeing all of these items decreased. We are seeing less corn, less turkey and less chicken, even though we are paying more.

Not only do we have shrinkage, the government is starting to apply more hidden taxes at the grocery store. HST and GST are being added to everyday items and often hidden at the bottom of the grocery receipt. I encourage Canadians listening at home to pull their grocery receipts out this Thanksgiving and look at the hidden GST

and HST taxes on the bottom. Groceries are supposed to be tax-free, but this Thanksgiving we are seeing turkey, corn, potatoes and other foods being taxed.

This Thanksgiving, Canadians are paying more and paying a hidden tax on shrinking grocery items. The Prime Minister and the NDP-Liberal government are simply not worth the cost.

* * *

● (1420)

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just last week, we learned of 15 potential gravesites at the Choutla Residential School grounds in Carcross, Yukon, echoing the stories and whispers of children who never came home.

Last Friday, I attended a potlatch to honour Kaska missing and murdered women. The people of Liard First Nation and Watson Lake gathered in a ceremony that included an achingly beautiful fashion show of young women in red dresses, evoking the unspeakable loss of women and girls, daughters, aunties and moms to many of the people gathered.

Saturday, I walked in Whitehorse with survivors and families and those who simply came to commemorate the lost children and lasting trauma that residential schools have left.

I am proud to be part of a government that has put reconciliation into action, including the creation of this national day of remembrance and reflection. Reconciliation is a long road marked by mileposts, where we can, over time, witness the healing of generations. In this time of truth and reconciliation, let us continue to commit to the work that indeed every child matters.

The Speaker: Colleagues, before we proceed, being the new Speaker, I sometimes do not know where everybody sits in the House. For Statements by Members, I would like to remind all members to please be in their seat to make their declaration.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of this Prime Minister, he is not worth the cost.

For example, after a big photo op a month ago, he promised he would bring down the cost of Thanksgiving dinner, but today we see nothing but another photo op. Canadians cannot eat photos. They need turkey or other food to eat. Costs have risen by nearly 70% since his government took office.

Will he be able to reverse these increases in the next four days before Thanksgiving?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question.

Canadians know not to take advice from the Leader of the Opposition when it comes to the economy. The last time he advised Canadians, he told them to buy cryptocurrency. Now he is suggesting that Canadians buy \$120 turkeys. I have news for him. I found a Butterball turkey for \$30, and I think I can deliver it to his official residence.

If the Conservatives want to do something for Canadians, they should vote in favour of Bill C-56 to help Canadians now and bring down prices in Canada.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly, the minister is the turkey here.

I check the flyers. In the last year of Conservative government, a turkey cost \$1.49 a pound. Now it is \$2.49 a pound. That is a 67% increase. After eight years under this Prime Minister, his carbon taxes are driving up costs for the farmers who produce food and for the truck drivers who transport it. Everyone who buys food ends up paying more.

Will the Prime Minister bring down these exorbitant costs before Thanksgiving, yes or no?

• (1425)

The Speaker: Before I let the minister answer, I would like to remind all members that, in order to maintain order in the House, it is important not to compare a member to something.

The hon. Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for your intervention. I would also like to congratulate you on your new role. This was my first opportunity to say so.

This is not a joke. I hope that the Canadians watching today, and there are many, see that this is not a joke. What we have presented is a five-point plan. First, we have asked the big grocery chains in the country to work together to help Canadians. Second, we created an office specifically to help Canadians on issues of skimpflation, also known as shrinkflation. These are issues that affect Canadians every Thursday.

The third thing we told people is that the grocery code of conduct needs to be signed. The fourth thing is that we are going to gather more data from people to better negotiate between the small and large manufacturers. Fifth, we are going to advance—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost of food. For example, the price of a turkey is up at Loblaws by 67% after eight years of the Prime Minister's carbon taxes. All the Liberals have offered since they promised to bring prices down by Thanksgiving is a code of conduct, an office and a photo op. We cannot eat any of those three things. They will not be on the Thanksgiving dinner table.

What will the Liberals do in the next four days to reverse the 67% increase in the cost of a turkey at Loblaws, just like they promised they would?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take no lessons from this Conservative. The last time the Conservative leader advised Canadians, it was about buying crypto. Now he is suggesting to Canadians to buy a turkey at \$120. I found a Butterball for him for \$30 and—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We have the first scratch. I would like to remind all members that props are not acceptable in the House of Commons; it is about the debate.

The hon. minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I was shopping for the Leader of the Opposition to help him.

If the Conservatives want to do something for Canadians, not just ask questions but do something, they should vote for Bill C-56. It is going to help Canadians. It is going to stabilize prices in Canada. It is going to bring competition to this country. What we need is for them to act.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, prices have risen so fast that Canadians did not want champagne for Thanksgiving; they just want some food. I did a little price shopping on that for him.

In the last days of the Conservative government, the price for a pound of turkey was \$1.49. The flyers today show it is \$2.49, a 70% increase. I might add that the picture of the turkey during the Conservative years was a big plump beautiful bird, whereas right now it is a skimpy, shrimpy little thing that looks like it has been taxed to death.

Why will the Liberals not get off the back of the turkey so we can have a nice dinner for Thanksgiving?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition can have as much as he wants, but one thing I can say is that Canadians have no fun these days because they know—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Settle down. Order.

Oral Questions

The hon. minister.

• (1430)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I hope they have this much energy to support our bill to make a difference in the lives of Canadians, because this is not a joke.

Canadians expect action. That is what we took this morning with a five-item action plan to help stabilize prices in Canada. If the Conservatives want to keep laughing and making jokes, they should tell them to Canadians, who expect them to approve Bill C-56, reform competition, lower prices in Canada and make sure that Canadians can have what they deserve in this situation.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister accidentally told the truth there for a second. He said Canadians are not having any fun. He has that right, because after eight years the Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

The minister says we should energetically support his bills. He and his Prime Minister have been forcing Canadians to support Liberal bills for eight years. The bill is way too high. Food prices are up more than 20% in two years, with the fastest increase in interest rates in monetary history.

Why will the Liberals not stop sending Canadians the bill and let Canadians afford to eat and heat and house themselves this Thanksgiving?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition. He is coming to his senses. He realizes that the best way to help Canadians is to support the government.

This is a time when all parliamentarians need to come together. That is why we presented a plan that is going to help stabilize prices in Canada, that is going to increase competition in this country and that is going to take measures to help Canadians.

If the Leader of the Opposition wants to give a gift to Canadians for Thanksgiving, why does he not support Bill C-56 and show Canadians that he can do something for them?

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is strange how defending the French language in Quebec is always difficult for the Liberals.

Let us take, for example, the Minister of Immigration. Yesterday in committee, he was once again unable to acknowledge a simple fact proven by all indicators: French is declining in Quebec. He was like James Bond under torture, but refusing to cough up the goods.

Oddly enough, it reminded us of the debates on Bill C-13 regarding the official languages reform. The minister was one of the West Island Liberals who fought tooth and nail against stronger protection for the French language.

Is it a coincidence?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we must be cautious about the figures the member is referring to. If we consider the number of people who speak French, there are more of us than ever: 94% of the people in Quebec can speak French.

If we consider the language spoken at home, when I was young, I spoke only Spanish. That does not mean that I am not a francophone. I am also a francophone. I spoke Spanish at home, but at school, at work, when playing hockey and everywhere on the street, I spoke French. This proves that Bill 101 is working. The Bloc Québécois can shout and get angry all it wants, but the fact is that more people are speaking French.

The government will always ensure that their number keeps growing day by day.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, even so, we are talking about the immigration minister.

This year, the federal government increased the number of temporary immigrants to Quebec by 150,000. Quebec is concerned about its reception capacity. The Quebec immigration minister said that she discussed this with the federal minister and that he had not even considered the notion of reception capacity. That is very worrisome. The minister, who is having a terrible time admitting that French is threatened, does not realize that reception capacity must be part of his immigration reform.

Do we really need to explain that to him?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the statistic that the member keeps repeating has to do with one's mother tongue. That excludes me and my family, the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Tourism. What does it take to be a Quebecker in Quebec?

I am a proud Quebecker. I am proud to be a Quebecker and to say that I am a Quebecker, but the statistic that the member keeps quoting refers to one's mother tongue. The fact remains that 94% of people in Quebec can speak French, and we should be proud of that. The member is shaming the people who drafted the Charter of the French Language with the statistic he is quoting. He should be ashamed of himself. I am proud.

With regard to immigration in Canada, we will ensure that French speakers come to Quebec.

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been 21 months since food prices have outpaced general inflation, and the Prime Minister was not willing to do anything until he started falling behind in the polls. That is two years that Canadians have been struggling because the government is unwilling to take on the real problem, which is corporate greed. Will the government admit that its plan to scramble to try to do something is to save itself and not Canadians?

• (1435)

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ. We have been putting in place programs to support Canadians with bill after bill and law after law. We supported 11 million Canadians with the grocery rebate, 4.2 million Canadians with the workers benefit and six million Canadians in increasing old age security. Why is that? It is because our government believes in investing in Canadians time after time, and we will continue to do that to build a stronger Canada.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government does not have the courage to take on corporate greed when it comes to the price of groceries or it when it comes to the privatization of our health care system.

Shoppers Drug Mart, owned by Galen Weston, is rapidly expanding American-style for-profit health care delivery in our country, and the government is nowhere to be seen. In the last election, the Prime Minister said he would defend public universal health care and now he calls privatization “innovation”.

Therefore, what is the plan? Is it to wait another two years and then nicely ask Galen Weston to stop?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, together we have made huge progress in reducing drug costs for Canadians. By working together on bulk purchasing, \$3.5 billion less is now spent by Canadians by reducing those costs. We need to and must do much more. That is why we are continuing to work, not only with the party opposite, the New Democrats, but also with all parties, with a strategy on rare diseases and with the introduction of legislation on pharmacare. Together, we can make sure that Canadians are not faced with the impossible choice of essentials or the medicine they need.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, even Thanksgiving dinner has become unaffordable. Food banks across the country are overwhelmed. With Thanksgiving approaching, some food banks have made the tough decision of cutting back on distributing food because they just do not have enough to go around.

The Liberals' carbon taxes have driven up the cost of Thanksgiving staples, such as potatoes, by 77%. Will the Prime Minister re-

Oral Questions

verse the 77% hike on Thanksgiving food before Thanksgiving, as he promised, yes or no?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservative member wants to see grocery prices lowered, I hope that she asks her leader why it is that the Conservatives continue to delay the legislation that is before the House.

Just this morning, I was so pleased to see the member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon say that he supports Bill C-56. I wonder if other Conservatives can convince their leader to support this bill because Canadians are counting on all of us in the House to help stabilize grocery prices.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are counting on immediate relief before Thanksgiving. People are rationing food across the country. According to Food Banks Canada, people are making impossible choices between paying their rent or putting food on the table for their families. The Liberal-NDP government continues its inflationary spending, which has caused grocery prices to increase by 94%, as is the case with lettuce.

Canadians are realizing that the Prime Minister is just not worth the cost. Will the Prime Minister keep his promise and reverse his punishing food price hikes by Thanksgiving?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are important measures that can be immediately implemented to help Canadians, but the problem is that, we hear from Conservatives very sincere concerns in question period, but when it comes time to vote and debate legislation, we see procedural delay tactics and Conservatives voting against the interests of Canadians.

I would urge everybody in the House to act to support Canadians, stabilize prices and get more homes built in this country.

• (1440)

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this will not be a happy Thanksgiving for many Canadian families because food prices are absolutely out of control, and the NDP leader just said that food inflation has outpaced inflation over the last 20 months, which is coincidentally the length of the Liberal-NDP coalition. What could be happening? The sad fact is this: Canadian families are having to make a hard choice between feeding their families and paying their rents.

Will the Prime Minister finally recognize the damage he has done to Canada and keep his promise so people can have an affordable Thanksgiving dinner?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying earlier, we have presented tangible measures in the House. I do not understand how the Conservatives can claim to be sincere in their concern for Canadians while using procedural tactics to prevent us from helping Canadians. I just cannot understand it.

If the Conservatives want to be there, then they should pull up their socks, take action and help us help Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, only a party whose leader said that he admires the basic dictatorship of China would say that legitimate debate about a government piece of legislation is so inconvenient and an obstruction. That is a disgraceful comment and opinion, but it is not a surprise coming from the Liberals, whose leader admires a basic dictatorship. Everything they have done has done nothing to improve food affordability. After eight long years of the Liberal government, Canadians cannot pay for food.

Will the Prime Minister keep his promise so Canadians can have an affordable Thanksgiving dinner?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Conservatives can explain in debate what it is about cutting GST on the construction of new homes that they disagree with. What is it about strengthening competition laws to stabilize grocery prices here in Canada that they disagree with?

I ask because I have not heard a single argument in debate that has convinced any Canadian in this country that we should not proceed with those measures, and if the Conservatives want to help Canadians, they should be sincere in their actions. They should vote in the interests of Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Liberals were sincere, they would have voted for our motion to cancel the carbon taxes, which would have had an immediate effect on every Canadian's wallet.

A month ago, they put on a big media show to say that this year's Thanksgiving dinner would be more affordable for everyone. In the meantime, the price of peas has increased by 22%. Since 2015, the price of turkey has increased by 70%, and the price of potatoes has gone up by 74%. The government has four days left to lower the cost of Thanksgiving dinner.

After eight years of empty promises, will the Liberals finally manage to keep a promise for once?

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives like to cherry-pick the facts they want to cling to, even when their facts are not facts.

Something they never talk about is the fact that climate change is also increasing the cost of groceries. This year saw the worst harvests in almost every region of Quebec and Canada. More than any-

one, our farmers across the country know how important it is to keep putting a price on pollution and fighting climate change.

If the Conservatives really want to help farmers and Canadians, they should support our efforts to fight climate change.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the people of Chambly do not know how they are going to pay for their Thanksgiving turkey. Meanwhile, the Bloc leader of the Bloc-Liberal coalition is playing diplomat. He is spending thousands of dollars on travel and emitting greenhouse gases to attend fancy cocktail parties, but to talk about what? Did he go there to talk about the cost of living, the housing shortage or repealing the carbon taxes? No, he went there to talk about independence. Voting for the Bloc Québécois is costly.

Will the Prime Minister recall his separatist Bloc ambassador and deal with his promise to lower prices in time for Thanksgiving?

• (1445)

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think today's debate calls for a little more gravitas from the Conservatives.

We are talking about the challenges facing Quebecers and Canadians. The cost of living has been rising. Today, we presented measures to help Canadians, stabilize grocery costs and fight climate change at the same time. The Conservatives are still voting against these measures.

If they really want to help Canadians, they should vote in favour of Bill C-56 so that we can move forward and stabilize the cost of groceries.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have good news: Quebec will match the federal government's \$900-million investment in housing. Woo-hoo! There is just one small problem: The money cannot flow because the federal government is still trying to impose conditions on Quebec instead of reaching an agreement.

This morning, the Premier of Quebec reiterated that this is urgent. He needs an agreement by next Friday so he can include the \$900 million in his November 7 economic update. Will the government stop quibbling and immediately announce that it is giving Quebec its \$900-million share? This is urgent.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Yikes, Mr. Speaker.

We do not actually need the Bloc Québécois's threats and theatrics. I am going to use a word he does not like very much: whining. Bloc members are here to whine and pick fights. Here are the facts. Negotiations are progressing. Quebec will get \$900 million. Quebec will match that figure. Negotiations are going well. Why? Because people on this side are standing up for Quebec.

Oral Questions

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are not the only ones whining. There are 10,000 homeless people in Quebec who are whining to the federal government right now.

The Quebec finance minister met with the Deputy Prime Minister on Monday. Here is what he said this morning: “I reiterated how urgent it is that an agreement be reached...Ottawa is imposing conditions, and that is unacceptable to us”. The announcement that Quebec will match the funding is supposed to be good news. As long as Ottawa continues to quibble, it means that we are no longer talking about \$900 million, but \$1.8 billion that is just sitting around waiting for Ottawa to get moving.

Will the government announce that it is letting the money flow to Quebec so that we can finally get to work?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member is well aware, I am in discussion with Minister Duranceau. I am working with the Province of Quebec to reach an agreement to ensure that federal funds are used to build housing. We agree with the Province of Quebec that this is a priority, and I will continue my work.

[English]

It is important that, when we are entrusted with the responsibility of investing hundreds of millions of dollars, we do it sincerely, working alongside our provincial partners, and ensure that Canadians receive the results of that funding.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, can anyone guess why Quebec is the only province that is matching the \$900 million from Ottawa for housing? It is because Quebec is the only province in Canada that invests in housing. Quebecers made the progressive choice to take care of housing themselves. Instead of holding Quebec up as an example, the federal government is withholding the \$900 million Quebec is entitled to, in a classic dispute in which the federal government holds all the cards. Enough is enough.

The Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain, or FRAPRU, is in Ottawa today. The government has an opportunity to announce that the housing dispute is over. When will the government stop messing around and send us our \$900 million?

Hon. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if there is one thing we can agree on with our colleague and with Quebec, it is that addressing the housing issue is a matter of urgency. That is exactly what we are doing. Since 2015, we have agreed on many things with Quebec, and we will reach an agreement for Quebec.

The thing that is bothering the Bloc is that it is not at the negotiating table and never will be. On the other side, there are the Conservatives who want to take money away from the municipalities and who do not believe in the provinces.

On this side of the House, we will work on reaching an agreement on housing for Quebecers.

• (1450)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the Prime Minister, it is clear that he is not worth the cost. He promised Canadians an affordable Thanksgiving, but all they are seeing are longer lines at the food bank. The NDP-Liberal government is throwing off more crumbs than a stale loaf of bread. This half-baked loaf of higher deficits and carbon taxes is making it harder for Canadians to afford Thanksgiving.

Will the Prime Minister deliver lower grocery prices or admit he made a turkey of a promise, one that is empty on the inside?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we can cast our mind back to eight years ago, when 2.4 million more Canadians were in poverty, and we can ask what the government of Stephen Harper and the official opposition leader did at that point in time. They did not do anything.

Right now, there is a global challenge. Yes, Canada has one of the lowest rates of food inflation in the world, but it is hitting us hard. The Conservatives' solution is to stop taking action on climate change, which is the very thing driving that problem. The reality is that the Conservatives would cancel the rebates people get, and yes, they would attack, as an example, 3.5 million seniors who are going to get dental care. They want to take that away. That is what they are really about.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am hoping we can get the minister back to the conversation.

Thanksgiving is normally a joyous celebration for families. However, this year, seven million Canadians are struggling to put food on their table. After eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, across Canada, food bank visits are skyrocketing. They are at the highest level in Canadian history, according to the CEO of Food Banks Canada. The Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

Will the Prime Minister lower prices, or will he break his promise to all Canadians?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is focused on lowering grocery prices, and we have legislation on the table that would do that.

However, what are the Conservatives focused on? In Alberta, they are trying to pull out of the Canada pension plan. Canadians who have contributed for their whole lives to the CPP, seniors who have contributed for their whole lives to their pensions, are having the rug pulled out from under them. Will the Conservative leader stand up in the House and tell his colleagues to keep their hands off Canadians' pensions?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***CARBON PRICING**

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of this Liberal government, after eight long years of disastrous management, the government is introducing carbon tax 2.0, and the Bloc is on board. The Bloc wants to radically increase that carbon tax and has voted with the government twice. Voting for the Bloc is costly. Groceries are costly. Filling the tank is costly. Housing is costly.

Why does the Liberal government not axe its second carbon tax, which applies to Quebec and received the Bloc's support twice?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, there is no federal carbon tax in Quebec because the Province of Quebec is a leader in the fight against climate change.

Second, Canadians are worried about the cost of living, but they are also worried about climate change and the impact of natural disasters on our health and our economy. We put a price on pollution to address those two concerns.

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HOUSING

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are experiencing an unprecedented housing crisis caused by the Liberals and the Conservatives. It is unconscionable. Outside, tents are popping up faster than truly affordable housing. People are poorly housed, living with mould, but are unable to move because they have nowhere to go. People are suffering. The solutions, however, are no mystery.

Will the Liberals buy land to build housing that meets people's needs? Will they use public land for public housing? Will they build social housing, housing co-operatives and community housing?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree entirely with the need my hon. colleague has flagged, which is to build more affordable housing. I agree that we should be using federally owned land to achieve that outcome. I agree that we should continue to make the investments under the national housing strategy, which is now responsible for the construction or repair of nearly half a million homes across this country.

I will be the first to acknowledge that over the course of the past number of decades, governments of both Liberal and Conservative persuasions did not do what was necessary to get the job done. We changed that in 2017. We will continue to make the investments necessary to ensure that everyone in Canada has a place to call home.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians, particularly Jewish, Polish and Roma Canadians whose family members were murdered by Nazis, demand answers. Meanwhile, the Liberals sit on a secret report on Nazi war criminals who were welcomed into Canada after World War II. We cannot learn from the lessons of the past and heal if the Liberal government is intent on keeping those secrets safe.

Will the Liberal government release the Deschênes report so Canadians can finally know who these Nazi war criminals were who were welcomed into Canada?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what happened over the past 10 days in the House of Commons was completely unacceptable and embarrassing for all of us. The former Speaker of the House accepted full responsibility and resigned, which was the honourable thing to do. The Prime Minister apologized in the House.

Our country has a dark history with respect to Nazis in this country, which is particularly hurtful to all Holocaust survivors and particularly to the Jewish community in this country. Senior officials and civil servants are looking carefully at the Deschênes commission report and will be making recommendations soon on the options that are available.

An hon. member: Options? Release them.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that Canadians are feeling the high cost of inflation. No family should have difficulty making ends meet and putting food on the table. Since 2015, the government has made significant investments to support Canadians and make life more affordable.

Can the President of the Treasury Board share what the government is doing to ensure that Canadians are getting the support they need, while supporting a strong economy?

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has always been there to support Canadians. Whether it is through the CEBA loan, the grocery rebate, the Canada child benefit or the Canada dental benefit, the fact of the matter is that we will continue to invest in Canadians while prudently managing the fiscal purse.

We will also make sure that we are creating jobs and building a strong economy for this country. That is our goal, and we will continue to work hard for Canadians.

*Oral Questions***CARBON PRICING**

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, the price of everything is skyrocketing. “Canada's Food Price Report 2023” states that 64% of Canadians are altering their food-buying habits, moving to dollar stores for groceries and buying less nutritious food. Three per cent of people are eating less. The report blames energy and input costs for this food crisis. The Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

Will the Prime Minister lower food prices by Thanksgiving, or will he break his promise to Canadians?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of measures that we have put on the table that will stabilize grocery prices and that will build more homes in this country. Consistently, what we have seen from the Conservatives are delay tactics.

Thankfully, this morning, we had a Conservative member stand up in the House and say that he was supportive of the government's legislation and that he would be voting for it. I wonder if there are other Conservatives on their bench who are also of that view. Perhaps they could get together and speak to the Conservative leader, because I believe it is actually the Conservative leader who wants to delay help to Canadians.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a yes or no to my question, so I will try again.

Food Banks Canada stated that at this time of the year, the number of people turning to food banks is growing. What happens is that people are forced to make impossible choices, choices like paying rent or buying food. NDP-Liberal food inflation is driving food bank usage to its highest levels since Pierre Trudeau, 42 years ago. After eight years, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

Will the Prime Minister lower food prices by Thanksgiving, or will he break his promise to Canadians again?

• (1500)

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it curious that my hon. colleague is standing up only now to defend the interests of low-income families that might need the services that food banks provide, when his party, over the course of my time in the chamber, has consistently voted against the measures that would make life more affordable for them.

I look back to when we first formed government. We raised taxes on the wealthiest 1% and cut them for the middle class, and the Conservatives voted against it. When we changed the Canada child benefit and stopped sending cheques to millionaires so we could put more money into the pockets of nine out of 10 Canadian families, the member voted against it. Every step of the way, including support for food banks during the pandemic, the Conservatives could not get behind it.

Will the member now vote for the measures that could have a direct impact on the price of groceries, and support Bill C-56?

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, food bank usage in Newfoundland and Labrador is at a 42-year high. It is no wonder. According to the PBO, carbon taxes 1 and 2 are going to cost households in my home province an extra \$2,166 per year. After yesterday's vote, where 23 Atlantic Liberal MPs voted to support this suffering, folks back home are saying that the Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

Will the NDP-Liberal government finally be the servant, not the master, and axe the tax?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the agri-food sector has endured more extreme weather events, particularly in the province of the member, such as increasingly severe and frequent storms, soil erosion, erratic and unpredicted rainfall, and higher-than-ever temperatures, including here in Ottawa in the last three days. That all results from climate change.

As farmers always do, they have persevered. They have developed and implemented more environmentally friendly on-farm practices and have reduced their emissions. The government is supporting them every step of the way through that process, and we will make sure that we continue to be there for farmers and consumers when it comes to lowering food prices.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, the member for Milton should be able to do a better job than that when answering a question. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians want answers.

According to a CTV news report, many will not be able to afford a turkey dinner this Thanksgiving. With vegetables and turkey up around 70% in just eight years, the NDP-Liberal carbon tax is now taking food off tables.

Will the costly coalition listen to the Liberal premier of Newfoundland and Labrador and axe the tax?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame will not say is that next week, climate action incentive payments will be arriving in the bank accounts of his constituents. He should make sure they know those are coming.

If the member really believes in affordability, then he ought to vote for Bill C-56 and the Atlantic accord, which he is standing against.

Oral Questions

This is not the Conservative Party of our parents. The Progressive Conservatives stood up against things like acid rain, and they created solutions. The present Conservative leader, the member for Carleton, does not believe in climate change. He has spun his heels. The Conservatives have ditched progressive values and do not care about fighting climate change or fighting for lower grocery prices.

* * *

[Translation]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, September 2023 is the hottest September on record. The temperature of the water in the Gulf of St. Lawrence has hit record highs, with unprecedented marine heatwaves.

The trees planted in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean to reduce our carbon footprint burned in this summer's wildfires. Meanwhile, we learned from a report that the federal government will increase oil production to record levels within the next two years. Its Trans Mountain pipeline will be wide open and fully operational as of January. That is really discouraging.

How is it that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change does not understand this?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. It is very important to consider our impact on the environment. That is why our government put a cap on greenhouse gas emissions from the oil and gas sector. That is one of the key measures in our emissions reduction plan.

Oil and gas companies have shown many times that they are able to innovate and develop other new and competitive technologies.

• (1505)

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is October and it is 30°C. Clearly, there is something unusual about this.

More and more experts believe that the 1.5°C increase we wanted to avoid before the end of the century will be exceeded by 2030. However, Canada is an oil-producing country, as the Minister of Environment and Climate Change likes to say. It is an oil-producing country that will increase production, rather than slow it down, to the point where it is poised to break all production records within 10 years. Canada is throwing fuel on the fire.

Is this what the former environmental activist turned Minister of the Environment wants his legacy to be?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take the fight against climate change very seriously. In fact, it is our government that will ensure that we are net zero by 2050.

If the Bloc Québécois is so interested in the oil issue, I would like to know why the leader of the Bloc Québécois, when he was Quebec's environment minister, said without hesitation that the

Government of Quebec planned to go ahead with the development of the oil industry in Quebec. I would like an answer.

* * *

INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of Liberal governance, it is clear that mismanagement is their hallmark, to say the least. Unfortunately, it is rubbing off.

Radio-Canada journalist Daniel Leblanc informed us a few days ago that Sustainable Development Technology Canada's green fund has spent nearly \$40 million without scrutiny. Unfortunately, it is not surprising. Why not? Because the example comes from the top. When the government mismanages everything, it is perfectly normal for other organizations to mismanage everything as well.

When will the government finally manage its files properly, with common sense?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent for his question. It is important to remind Canadians who are watching us today of the facts. As soon as the allegations were made, we commissioned an independent expert report. On that basis, we took action and demanded that a plan be put in place to ensure that we have the highest level of governance at that foundation. When it comes to public funds, we expect the highest level of governance at every institution.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the minister said is very interesting. I thank him for that. The problem is that the story never changes. Whenever the government is caught red-handed, it starts taking action. However, it was slow to act when alarm bells went off a long time ago. Now, the government says that it will have to demand accountability and ensure sound management.

Does the government have confidence in this organization's current management, which is responsible for the current financial problems?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not about anyone being caught red-handed. It is about the serious allegations that were raised.

The government requested the report precisely to ensure that it could investigate the allegations and then implement a system with the highest level of governance, because that is what Canadians and the government expect from all agencies that receive federal funding. We are going to ensure that taxpayers' money is managed properly.

*Oral Questions**[English]***CANADIAN HERITAGE**

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, it has made it absolutely clear that it intends to censor what Canadians can see, hear and post online. It is hell-bent to make sure that this is the case.

My colleagues and I brought forward a very common sense motion today in committee, asking that the minister come and answer questions with regard to her new podcast registry. This podcast registry is moving forward under the government's current censorship legislation. The response was this: The NDP, the Liberals and their Bloc allies all voted down our motion. They do not want to hear. They do not want to ask questions. They do not want to understand. They do not want to give Canadians a voice. In fact, one may refer to them as the censorship coalition.

Why is the government so hell-bent on censoring Canadians?

● (1510)

Hon. Pascale St-Onge (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us hear what an expert has to say.

Professor Pierre Trudel calls the Conservative argument “a complete disconnect with reality”. He says that it is clear it was not intended to control what users see or post online. He calls the CRTC process a “mere formality”. He said, “As a teacher, if a student writes this” in an exam, “I put a big zero” on his exam. He said, “You really don’t have to know how to read to say something as pathetic as that.”

* * *

*[Translation]***AIR TRANSPORTATION**

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after years of inaction under the Conservative government, our government became the first to adopt a regime to protect passenger rights, establishing a common set of obligations that all airlines must respect. To strengthen this regime, additional measures were introduced in Bill C-47, creating even stricter regulations for airlines and ensuring that passengers are always protected.

Can the minister provide an update on this work?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and friend for her question.

Canadians work hard, save up and put money aside for their vacations or to visit their loved ones and families. That is why our government was the first to protect workers' rights. We strengthened our passenger rights regime by making compensation mandatory for most disruptions, putting the onus on airlines, not passengers, and guaranteeing standard or improved service levels in the event of a disruption.

In fact, we were the first to be there for Canadian travellers, and we will continue to be.

*[English]***PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT**

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, Liberal insiders have never had it so good and Canadians are paying the price.

We have learned that the RCMP is investigating allegations of misconduct involving three companies that worked on the Arrive-CAN app. They paint a picture of cozy relationships between the government and questionable contractors, sweetheart deals for the Liberal insiders, while Canadians struggle to make ends meet. The Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

When will the Liberal government come clean on its unethical behaviour and quit lining the pockets of Liberal insiders?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first day rising in the chamber with you in the chair, I want to congratulate you sincerely on your appointment.

Misconduct of any kind in procurement processes is never acceptable. We are aware of the RCMP's ongoing investigation into these serious allegations. To protect the integrity of the investigation, we will not be providing any further comment at this time.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years, the NDP-Liberal government is not worth the cost.

Statistics Canada reports that the number of businesses closing shop in Canada is greater than the number of businesses opening. In August, there was a 37% increase in business insolvencies year over year. This is the highest it has been in recent history. Canadians are losing confidence at an alarming rate in their ability to do business in our country.

Why has the government turned a blind eye to the looming crisis of declining entrepreneurship in our country?

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Small Business, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want the small business owners of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon to know that their Conservative member of Parliament has voted against cutting taxes for growing small businesses, voted against lowering credit card transaction fees by up to a quarter, voted against supports for diverse and under-represented entrepreneurs. Common sense does not mean voting against supports for small businesses.

Oral Questions

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal minister knows as well as I do that many of the problems facing small businesses in our country are a direct result of that party's governance and negligence: higher inflation, higher payroll taxes, higher carbon taxes, higher commercial rents, a labour crisis, more red tape and a botched CEBA repayment plan that confused thousands of entrepreneurs across our country. All of these factors hurt our job creators and business confidence in our country.

When will the government begin taking these problems seriously?

• (1515)

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Small Business, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition called the supports we provided small businesses “big fat government” supports. He is literally mocking the idea that we stood up for small businesses in a time of their need.

In the middle of the pandemic, small businesses were worried about keeping their doors open, keeping the lights on and keeping their teams employed. Our government stepped in during their darkest hour and delivered supports like the Canada emergency rent and wage subsidy for the hardest hit business, the tourism and hospitality recovery program and the CEBA loans.

I am proud of the fact that we are there for them. While the Leader of the Opposition mocks the support we provided small businesses, we will continue to have their backs.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every week Canadians are having to spend more and more on groceries just to feed their families. They are having to put off savings and even other essentials in order to keep putting food on the table. We recognize the global supply chain challenges and global inflation, but we need to acknowledge Canadian families are having a hard time right now.

Could the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry tell us about his meeting with the grocery executives and what we are doing to address affordability at the grocery stores?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my voice was used to express the frustration of millions of Canadians when I met the CEOs of the grocery stores.

The good news is that today we presented a five-point action plan. First of all, we have a commitment from the grocery stores. We are going to create an office of consumer affairs to help consumers. We are going to make sure the grocery code of conduct is going forward. We are going to collect more data on food prices in Canada. We are also going to fight for more competition.

Every day is a good day to fight for Canadians. The Conservatives should join us to make sure we bring stabilization to prices in Canada for the benefit of all.

HEALTH

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this summer, 11 emergency rooms in Alberta closed due to the shortage of health care workers, and today we learned that some Canadians are being forced to leave overcrowded emergency rooms without treatment due to no staff.

The Liberals and the Conservatives have failed to protect Canadians from Conservative leaders like Danielle Smith and Scott Moe, who want U.S.-style health care that will poach nurses and doctors from our public system. When will the federal government stand up for Canada's public health care and ensure that our hospitals have the staff they need to care for Canadians?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, standing up for public health care is what we have done over the last eight years. It is certainly what we are going to do going forward.

We made an investment of \$200 billion in our health system, and we are making sure not only that this money flows but that there are indicators so Canadians can see how health outcomes are improving for them in every corner of this country. We are going to make sure these dollars reduce wait times, increase doctors and increase nurses, and we will make sure that, overall, Canadians get better health.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, on the 112th National Day of the Republic of China, Taiwan, I reflected on a few facts. Taiwan has never held two of our citizens as hostages for 1,019 days. It has not intimidated Chinese Canadians, interfered in our elections or tried to buy off MPs or political parties. Taiwan is a democracy. It does not have a president for life who will not hesitate to destabilize world peace or threaten Canada's bilateral trade as a cowered Liberal government looks on.

Can the government enlighten this House about whether there has been any new “credible” evidence for it to stand up for Canadians and combat foreign interference by the Chinese Community Party, or is its new strategy to engage in a diversionary war with India?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reassure all members in this House of the importance for us to counter any form of foreign interference. That is why the Minister of Public Safety and I have been working on this over the past months. Of course, we all know that Justice Hogue has been appointed to be in charge of the inquiry. That being said, we will continue to work within our Indo-Pacific strategy, and we have a China framework as part of it.

* * *

● (1520)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period today, the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells used his public social media platform to compare questions from this side of the House, from Conservatives, to one of the most prolific Nazis in the history of the world, one of the most virulent anti-Semites in the history of the world.

I am happy to provide you, Mr. Speaker, with screenshots of all of that. I think the least the member could do, after the week we have had in this House and the pain that has been caused to Canadians of every community right across the country, is stand up right now in this House and apologize.

The Speaker: I recognize the hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did go elbows up on Twitter and I apologize for that. I did attempt to raise the issue the other day of the frequent misrepresentation coming from the Conservative side, but elbows up was a little too much in this case and I apologize.

The Speaker: I am going to ask the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells to please provide a clear apology to the House.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I apologize to the House.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells for unreservedly apologizing to the House.

[Translation]

The member for La Prairie on a point of order.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when you became Speaker, you insisted that we must all respect one another. We agree on that.

The member for Hamilton Centre asked the Minister of Justice a question earlier. Following the Minister of Justice's response, many of us heard the member say a few words.

Bloc members rarely speak English, so listen carefully.

Here is what he said:

[English]

“The options? Just release it, fascist.”

Tributes

[Translation]

That is what he said, and I think he should apologize.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, history will tell us quite clearly that the Nazis were indeed fascists. That is why when I referenced Nazis, I referenced them as fascists. I think you will find the comment stands.

The Speaker: This issue is sounding closer to debate.

[Translation]

I will take that into consideration and come back to the House with a ruling.

* * *

● (1525)

[English]

MICHEL PATRICE

The Speaker: Colleagues, before we move to the vote, I would like to recognize a special situation. Today, after over 30 years of service to the House of Commons, we have the retirement of one of our table officers, Michel Patrice.

[Translation]

This week, Michel Patrice, deputy clerk of the administration, is retiring after 30 years of service to the Parliament of Canada.

[English]

Michel was appointed deputy clerk of administration in August 2017.

[Translation]

As deputy clerk of the administration, he played a crucial role in ensuring excellent service to members, including at the Board of Internal Economy, where he provided valuable advice to the Speaker and board members.

[English]

Thanks to his leadership in this position, members of Parliament have benefited from smooth and efficient operations and services from the House of Commons. I understand that he managed meetings exceptionally well, being that I am new here, and made sure they never ran over time. I am sure that this had nothing to do with him wanting to stretch his long legs and enjoy the great outdoors of Sparks Street while lighting up a smoke.

[Translation]

He skilfully oversaw the start of Centre Block renovations and the successful relocation of MPs to temporary quarters in the West Block.

[English]

In his long career on Parliament Hill, Michel served both Houses: the House of Commons and of course the other place. He served them with diligence, intelligence, professionalism, calm and his trademark smile.

Tributes

Many members will remember how quickly this House was able to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that Parliament was able to work on behalf of Canadians in a time of crisis. The accomplishments of this place under Michel's leadership were many and they were significant.

[Translation]

With his training as a lawyer, everyone here, as well as in the other place, has benefited from his legal experience and his excellent understanding of complex procedural and administrative issues.

[English]

These are qualities that made him an invaluable, trusted resource for countless parliamentarians over his career.

[Translation]

Michel, on behalf of the members and employees of the House of Commons administration, I would like to thank you most sincerely for your long and valuable contribution to the service of our institution.

[English]

As a colleague and leader, you have always acted with dignity, humanity and an inspiring sense of duty, and no one will forget your great sense of humour, a vital asset for any workplace.

[Translation]

I wish you health and happiness. As you embark on this new chapter of your life, I wish you a happy retirement. Thank you for everything.

[English]

Michel, please know that you leave this place better for your service, and you take with you the deepest thanks of all members and the entire Parliament Hill family.

[Translation]

I wish you all the best.

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today by following your lead. First of all, I want to congratulate you on your election to the chair. You make the Outaouais region very proud.

I rise to pay tribute to another guy from the Outaouais, a man who served this Parliament. Thirty years of service is worthy of recognition. During those 30 years, he served parliamentarians and Canadians with honour and distinction.

Everyone here is very familiar with this man. Michel Patrice, deputy clerk of administration for the House of Commons, is a person we can all count on for his undeniable expertise, his sage advice and his consistency at work. I often had the opportunity to benefit from his experience, his judgment and his analytical skills. I can say that he never let me down. He is at the heart of everything that happens in the parliamentary precinct.

As the deputy clerk of administration for the House of Commons, he must ensure that everything goes smoothly for MPs, for the thousands of people who work here and for the tens of thou-

sands of visitors who come here every year. Many people would be intimidated by such a monumental task, but not Michel.

Michel always manages to accomplish the work he is given. He is a man of action. Recently, he told us that he intended to retire this fall. His retirement will be the culmination of a remarkable career on Parliament Hill that spans over 30 years.

From 1994 to 2017, Michel served parliamentarians in the Senate as a law clerk and parliamentary counsel. Since he was appointed to the House in August 2017, Michel has worked hard to get the various directorates within the House of Commons to focus on the same objectives. That was no easy task. I think we are humble enough to recognize that we do not always agree here. Michel is above all that. He aligned the activities of parliamentary precinct operations, digital services and real property, human resources services, finance services and the office of the Sergeant-at-Arms and corporate security.

Much has happened in all those areas. Michel was always a master when it came to managing all those interconnected services across the parliamentary precinct at a time when change was necessary and relatively constant. As I said, Michel got the job done. He spared no effort; he was determined. He achieved his goal.

Since coming here, Michel has led initiatives of importance to all members, including the long-term vision and plan for renovating the parliamentary precinct and, in particular, the successful move from Centre Block to West Block. A move like that had never been done and could have hit a lot of snags, but Michel made sure everything went smoothly. It was a success.

He also oversaw the enhancement of security programs for members on and off the Hill. He helped improve the financial disclosure and reporting process for members of Parliament, which really needed an upgrade.

During his years of service to the House, he worked tirelessly to modernize and improve the administrative support provided to members. Under his watch, the House administration improved significantly.

During his tenure as deputy clerk, Michel had to deal with one of the biggest challenges of our time, the COVID-19 pandemic. He worked with his House administration colleagues to ensure, first, that safety measures were put in place to protect everyone on the Hill, and second, that the House of Commons could continue its important democratic work with minimal disruption during a time of crisis. He collaborated with his colleagues to facilitate the creation of hybrid sittings in the House. As a result, democracy emerged from the crisis all the stronger. Democracy was maintained and debates continued.

• (1530)

All members and all Canadians have benefited from his hard work. Everyone knows that, on Parliament Hill, we always manage to do the work entrusted to us to help the country.

I would personally like to thank Michel for his enormous contribution to the House of Commons. On a personal note, I want to thank him for helping a young chief government whip by providing him with loads of advice. I thank him for his clear commitment to making Parliament a better place to work and a better symbol for all of Canada.

I wish him the best of luck in this new chapter of his life. He has provided outstanding service to his country. He should be very proud of the work he has done in the House. He helped make Parliament better.

Thank you, Michel.

• (1535)

[English]

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure and an honour for me to rise in the House today and say a few words to highlight the amazing career of our much appreciated colleague Michel Patrice, the deputy clerk for administration who is retiring in just a few days.

Humbly let me say that I am very impressed by the breadth and diversity of Michel's career, which includes more than 30 years of hard work on Parliament Hill. I am convinced that colleagues will share my admiration.

[Translation]

Michel held a number of positions during his distinguished career. He served as a committee clerk, law clerk and parliamentary counsel, and chief law officer on the Senate side, before offering his services on the House of Commons side with his appointment in 2017 as deputy clerk of the House administration.

[English]

Going from the Senate to the House of Commons is a little backward in a lot of cases, but I am sure he learned a lot about the importance of one chamber versus the other. Let us not forget that we are 70%. They are only 30%.

[Translation]

Although I only met Michel in 2019, I feel like I have known him forever. I am sure that many of my colleagues in the House feel the same way.

In addition to his incredible professionalism, Michel has always been a compassionate person who always made himself available despite his busy schedule, which makes a bigger difference than words can describe.

[English]

When I was elected as member of Parliament in 2019, my first exchanges with him were warm, courteous and very reassuring.

In 2021, when I assumed my duties as Deputy Speaker, which led me to chair the long-term vision working group on the rehabili-

Tributes

tation of Centre Block, Michel ensured that I could pick up where my predecessor left off so that the important work of our committee could continue and that I would be on the same page as my committee colleagues.

[Translation]

I have often called upon his services and, even though he was sometimes not the person responsible for dealing with what I was asking, he helped me on his own initiative. I cannot count the number of times his actions and advice were appreciated and reassuring.

His altruism toward his colleagues, members of Parliament, staffers and employees of all directorates on the Hill knew no bounds. He left nothing to chance and always ensured that we had all the tools we needed to do our jobs.

[English]

The mutual respect he and I had for each other was also valuable. In our political arena, no matter the colour of our team's jersey, Michel was a part of it, and he always had our good at heart as parliamentarians and as individuals. I am sure that many of my colleagues are like me and consider Michel a friend.

His commitment, his attachment and his respect for our institution is not only remarkable, but is also an example for all of us.

Thanks to the work of people like him as clerk, we have become better parliamentarians. I thank him for that.

[Translation]

In the 30 years he spent here, Michel lived through different eras, different governments, different challenges and different crises, all of which gave him experience, which served us well in both good times and bad. I thank him for guiding us when we needed his wisdom.

On behalf of myself and all my Conservative caucus colleagues, I want to sincerely thank Michel for his loyal service and wish him all the best in his retirement. We will really miss him.

[English]

May the next years be relaxing and filled with beautiful projects that Michel may not have had the time to start yet because this place never really stops.

We wish Michel good luck, and we wish him all the best with his family and loved ones.

Merci, Michel, et bonne retraite.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I admit that I was saddened to learn of the departure of Michel Patrice, the deputy clerk of administration, because he is so amazing. Life is short. All kinds of professional and personal adventures come our way and lead us to make decisions. To leave at the height of a career, however, is a big decision.

Tributes

Michel Patrice has had a very long career in both the Senate and the House of Commons. My colleagues in the House have demonstrated this and described his many accomplishments, and I will not repeat them here. It would take a 20-minute speech at least. I want to focus on something very specific.

Michel has had a remarkable career. Since 2017—and I believe he is quite proud of this achievement—he has overseen the largest organizational change in the parliamentary life of our MPs. This change has had a very concrete and major impact on our teams and on the members as a whole. He decided to put all of his skills and qualities to use in leading this organizational change because he truly believes that members of Parliament deserve the utmost respect. Members of Parliament, parliamentarians and their teams are at the heart of his professional commitment. That is why, over the past five years, he has wholeheartedly invested a great deal of time and energy. He has mobilized his teams. He has inspired his teams to think, excel, create, innovate, all with the aim of offering the best support to MPs and their teams.

It takes an exceptional leader to inspire a great team, one of the greatest teams in Parliament, a team oriented towards the same goal: supporting MPs in their work, in their parliamentary duties so that they feel good, supporting them with a strong administration, and supporting their teams. We know that good MPs are good MPs because they are well supported. People who are hard-working, highly trained and well supported perform well. Michel Patrice deserves credit for his tenacity, sometimes against all odds. Changes of this magnitude do not come without challenges; it is not easy. He is tenacious and persistent, and he succeeded.

For the past few years, MPs have benefited from an administration with a clearer understanding that constant support tailored to their needs strengthens Parliament as an institution because its members feel better supported. It is a very personalized approach. That is one of Michel's qualities. He listens, he observes, he is one of the first to grasp what is going on and he comes up with solutions and ways of doing things that make our work easier. We all know his list of achievements is long. He and his teams were crucial to setting up the hybrid Parliament. A good leader always has good people helping him. He surrounded himself with the best. He played a very important role in setting up the hybrid Parliament. He made sure it worked during a time that was not easy for anyone.

I have a brief anecdote to share. It is always nice to spice up our speeches a bit. I have been on the Board of Internal Economy since I became whip in 2019. I worked with the deputy clerk of administration a number of times to prepare for our meetings at the Board of Internal Economy. Perhaps better than most, he understood my desire, my insistence and the importance I placed on members having access to robust and competent interpretation services in both languages. He also understood my tenacity and my insistence on having this service at every meeting of the Board of Internal Economy. With a smile on his face and his legendary listening skills, he supported me in my efforts to shed light on the situation with the interpreters. I would therefore like to thank him for his infinite patience, and especially for listening to and supporting us.

● (1540)

As I said, Michel Patrice is an exceptional leader, an exceptional senior public servant, and I would even go so far as to say an exceptional person. It is extremely rare to find a senior manager who has so many professional skills but who is still down-to-earth, compassionate, approachable and, most of all, a good listener. One of his greatest strengths is that he focuses on finding solutions. I never saw Mr. Patrice get flustered by a problem, because to him, there is no such thing as a problem. To him, there are only solutions that are tailored to the needs that are expressed. To Michel, there are no problems, only solutions.

The best gift we can give him is to carry on and build his legacy. It is a legacy that is greatly appreciated by MPs and their teams. I feel truly privileged to have crossed paths with him. He is a good person, a generous person, who has devoted his entire career to the public service. Honestly, I have no doubt that life will be good to him.

I wish Michel the best for what comes next, and I thank him again for everything.

● (1545)

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are blessed in the House with an incredibly dedicated team that provides support for our democracy. We see some of them in the gallery. We know every day that it is because of them, because of their work and their dedication, that we are able to have the sometimes intense debates that we have in this place. We are able to pass legislation. Hopefully working together, we are able to build a better Canada, where nobody is left behind. Among those very dedicated servants of Parliament, servants of democracy, one of the greatest and most dedicated is Michel Patrice.

[Translation]

Today, we just heard all the parties express their deep gratitude for and pay tribute to this exceptional man, the deputy clerk of administration, who gave so much to Parliament and our democracy over the past 30 years. As the supervisor of parliamentary precinct operations, Michel Patrice played a major role when the House of Commons moved from Centre Block to West Block.

Under his inspired leadership and that of his extremely dedicated team, this complex process went off without a hitch. His commitment to operational excellence ensured a smooth transition so that MPs were able to continue their important work in serving the public. The way he maintained the continuity of Parliament's operations shows Mr. Patrice's dedication to serving democracy and its representatives.

*Tributes**[English]*

It was seamless, as members will remember, when we moved. One day we were in the Centre Block, and the next day we were here in West Block in this magnificent bastion of democracy. It was simple for members of Parliament, but the complexity of the millions of decisions that were needed to renovate this space, to build in this courtyard and then to provide everything that members of Parliament were served with shows not only the immense dedication but also the incredible skill of Michel Patrice.

[Translation]

It is also important to mention the key role Mr. Patrice played during the COVID-19 pandemic. Faced once again with an unprecedented challenge, he deftly coordinated the implementation of a hybrid Parliament, which allowed our democratic process to continue despite the extraordinary circumstances, the likes of which had not been seen in a century. His vision made it possible to implement innovative solutions so that parliamentarians could continue to participate in House proceedings while protecting everyone's health and safety. Michel was very adaptable and showed outstanding leadership at times when institutional stability was more vital than ever.

● (1550)

[English]

The hybrid Parliament remains an important legacy. We are in the world's largest democracy. Tonight I will be flying home 5,000 kilometres to go back to my riding, which is nowhere near as far away as the places many of the members of this Parliament reside. For all of us, when there is a crucial issue with respect to health, a family emergency or even the passing of a loved one, moving forward, we will still always be able to serve our constituents. That is an important legacy of Michel Patrice.

[Translation]

We also benefited from his resilience and leadership during the occupation of downtown Ottawa in February 2022. Under difficult circumstances, his unwavering commitment to maintaining parliamentary operations despite the challenges is a testament to his steadfast determination.

[English]

During this period, Michel Patrice worked literally 24-7. Other whips, House leaders and I can testify to that, as we would sometimes receive calls at 4:00 or 4:30 in the morning. Michel Patrice was still at work as we sought to find solutions to this crisis.

[Translation]

We congratulate Mr. Patrice on a well-earned retirement. We owe him a debt of gratitude for his vigilant stewardship of our parliamentary institution.

[English]

Michel, we hope that we are not embarrassing you with this outpouring of praise and affection, because it shows the difference that you have made in our Parliament every day in your work and dedication to our democracy.

[Translation]

Congratulations, Michel Patrice. We will be glad to see you take full advantage of the new adventure that lies ahead of you. Thank you so much.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an emotional time for everyone. We know full well that our deputy clerk has worked hard for everyone and for the good of our Parliament.

[English]

For myself, as leader of the Green Party, of course we are not on the Board of Internal Economy, but, Michel Patrice's work has not gone unnoticed. We are all so grateful.

[Translation]

My colleagues have already said it. I want to acknowledge the tributes given by the members for Gatineau, West Nova, and Salaberry—Suroît, and by my colleague and friend, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby. It is clear that Mr. Patrice worked hard during this unprecedented, challenging time.

[English]

Obviously, the pandemic and the move of Parliament itself from Centre Block to West Block, as my friend from New Westminster—Burnaby recalls, were not easy. Rather, they were massively challenging.

[Translation]

Michel Patrice, you did your work with a generous spirit.

[English]

As colleagues have said, one wonders when you got some rest, given the challenges faced by the administration.

[Translation]

The services on the Hill are incredible, as are all the staff and their teams. These services are nearly invisible, but not to us, the MPs.

[English]

The work that is done by our table clerks and the team that works on Parliament Hill in many functions can be invisible to most Canadians, but not to us. As members of Parliament, we owe you so much for your 30 years of service, first in the Senate and then in the House of Commons. As all my colleagues have said, you definitely deserve a very good retirement, so I will not take you away from what I hope is a lovely party event.

● (1555)

[Translation]

I wish you a very happy retirement. Thank you very much for your work, your career and your service to Canada's democracy.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, I thank Mr. Patrice for his service to the House of Commons.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***CRIMINAL CODE**

The House resumed from October 4 consideration of the motion that Bill S-12, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Sex Offender Information Registration Act and the International Transfer of Offenders Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 3:55 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill S-12.

Call in the members.

• (1625)

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

(Division No. 417)

YEAS**Members**

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Aldag
Alghabra	Ali
Allison	Anand
Anandasangaree	Angus
Arnold	Arseneault
Arya	Ashton
Atwin	Bachrach
Badawey	Bains
Baker	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Barron	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Bendayan
Bennett	Bergeron
Berthold	Bérubé
Bezan	Bibeau
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blanchette-Joncas
Blaney	Block
Blois	Boissonnault
Boulerice	Bradford
Bragdon	Brassard
Brière	Brock
Brunelle-Duceppe	Calkins
Caputo	Carr
Carrie	Casey
Chabot	Chagger
Chahal	Chambers
Champagne	Champoux
Chatel	Chen
Chiang	Chong
Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)	Cooper
Cormier	Coteau
Dabrusin	Dalton
Damoff	Dancho
Davidson	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Deltell
Desbiens	Desilets
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diab	Doherty
Dong	Dowdall
Dreeshen	Drouin
Dubourg	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)

Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Ellis	Epp
Erskine-Smith	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast	Ferreri
Fillmore	Findlay
Fisher	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Freeland
Fry	Gaheer
Gainey	Garon
Garrison	Gazan
Généreux	Genuis
Gerretsen	Gill
Gladu	Godin
Goodridge	Gould
Gourde	Gray
Green	Guilbeault
Hajdu	Hallan
Hanley	Hardie
Hepfner	Hoback
Holland	Housefather
Hughes	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Idlout	Ien
Jaczek	Jeneroux
Joly	Jones
Jowhari	Julian
Kelloway	Kelly
Khalid	Khanna
Kitchen	Kmiec
Koutrakis	Kram
Kramp-Neuman	Kurek
Kusie	Kusmierczyk
Kwan	Lake
Lalonde	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lantsman
Lapointe	Larouche
Lattanzio	Lauson
Lawrence	Lebouthillier
Lehoux	Lemire
Leslie	Lewis (Essex)
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Liepert
Lightbound	Lloyd
Lobb	Long
Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney	Martel
Martinez Ferrada	Masse
Mathysen	May (Cambridge)
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	Mazier
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McDonald (Avalon)
McGuinty	McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLean
McLeod	McPherson
Melillo	Mendès
Mendicino	Miao
Michaud	Miller
Moore	Morantz
Morrice	Morrison
Morrissey	Motz
Murray	Muys
Naqvi	Nater
Ng	Noormohamed
Normandin	O'Connell
Oliphant	O'Regan
Patzner	Paul-Hus
Pauzé	Perkins
Perron	Petitpas Taylor
Poilievre	Powlowski
Qualtrough	Rayes
Redekopp	Reid
Rempel Garner	Richards

Robillard	Rodriguez
Rogers	Romanado
Rood	Rota
Ruff	Sahota
Sajjan	Saks
Samson	Sarai
Savard-Tremblay	Scarpaleggia
Scheer	Schiefke
Schmale	Seebach
Serré	Shanahan
Sheehan	Shields
Shipley	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simard
Sinclair-Desgagné	Singh
Small	Sorbara
Soroka	Sousa
Steinley	Ste-Marie
Stewart	St-Onge
Strahl	Stubbs
Sudds	Tassi
Taylor Roy	Thériault
Therrien	Thomas
Thompson	Tochor
Tolmie	Trudeau
Trudel	Turnbull
Uppal	Valdez
Van Bynen	Van Popta
Vandal	Vandenbeld
Vecchio	Vidal
Vien	Viersen
Vignola	Villemure
Virani	Vis
Vuong	Wagantall
Warkentin	Waugh
Webber	Weiler
Wilkinson	Williams
Williamson	Yip
Zahid	Zarrillo
Zimmer	Zuberi — 314

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Dzerowicz

Gallant — 2

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During the roll call vote, from the government benches, the member for Fredericton voted and then left the chamber before the vote was reported in the House. I would like to know whether that vote will count under the current voting rules or whether it should be stricken from the record.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the member for Fredericton left the chamber before the vote was complete.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, given where we are in the session, we are not going to argue the member's vote should count, unless there is unanimous leave to count it this time around. We will ensure that it will not happen again in the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Do members agree to allow the vote from the hon. member for Fredericton to stand?

Some hon. members: Nay.

Mr. George Chahal: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Calgary Heritage also left his seat while the vote was under way. I think we

Privilege

should allow the votes of both members to count and not play these petty politics.

The Deputy Speaker: We will strike them both.

I wish to inform the House that, because of the deferred recorded division, Government Orders is extended by 16 minutes.

* * *

• (1630)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is customary that on Thursdays we ask the government what it has planned for next week, but next week is a constituency week. I know members of Parliament will be heading back to their ridings and will have the opportunity to celebrate with their loved ones on Monday, followed by constituency work throughout the rest of the week.

Could the House leader tell the House what the government has planned for the week that follows, when we return to Parliament?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, we will return for second reading debate on Bill C-49, the Atlantic accord implementation act.

Upon our return, priority will be given to Bill C-56, the affordable housing and groceries act, and Bill C-50, the Canadian sustainable jobs act. I would also like to note that Tuesday, October 17, shall be an allotted day.

Let me wish all colleagues a happy Thanksgiving, and I hope every member has a wonderful time with their family, friends and constituents over the coming constituency week.

Hon. Filomena Tassi: Mr. Speaker, it has already been mentioned, but I would like to confirm that Tuesday, October 17, shall be an allotted day.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED MISLEADING RESPONSE TO ORDER PAPER QUESTION

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege regarding a response to Order Paper Question No. 1417 and one additional matter with regard to the same. Out of respect for the time of the members present, I will not read the entirety of the question put to the government; instead, I will cut to the heart of the matter. I request that you examine two matters at hand.

On the first matter, this morning, the CBC reported having obtained information clearly demonstrating that the government misled the House of Commons in response to Order Paper Question No. 1417 and, thus, breached members' privileges.

Privilege

The CBC report stated that the Prime Minister's trip to Montana over Easter cost far more than the government reported to the House of Commons through Question No. 1417. The government reported to the House that the trip cost \$23,846. However, the information obtained by the CBC discovered that the trip actually cost \$228,839. Part of the cost of this trip is the provision of security for the Prime Minister, which is a necessary function of this role. To be clear, no one here is questioning the need for the Prime Minister to have access to security. However, the issue at hand is that, from the CBC story, the government appears to have hidden the total cost from a member of Parliament in an official request for details of this expenditure.

Canadians have a right to know how their tax dollars are spent and if they are spent wisely. In the instance of the story at hand, this principle translates to the public having a right to know such things as why the cost of the Prime Minister's trip was so high and whether, as it was a personal trip, he personally paid for the full value of his accommodations. It is impossible for members to debate this issue without the information, which is why it was requested from the government via an Order Paper question. As a member, I was not able to make an accurate determination on this matter, as I was misled by the government's response to Question No. 1417. Recourse on this breach of privilege should be explored.

Recently, the government has been castigated by your immediate predecessor for its response to Order Paper questions. On June 20, your predecessor made a ruling on a question of privilege that I raised when I received an ATI showing how the natural resources department sought not to fully respond to an Order Paper question I posed. When I rose in the House on June 15 to explain this question of privilege, I noted:

In the ATI, the minister's regional adviser for Quebec asks in an email, "What is the jurisprudence on those [types] of Points of Order?" The minister's deputy chief of staff, Kyle Harrietha, responds: "Thanks, heard it after QP and did the inbox search of Q-974. Already in touch with GHLO. I'm expecting the Speaker to tut tut and then say it is not for him to judge the quality of a response."

In your predecessor's response to me on June 20, he did not seem to take too kindly to the statement. He chastised the government, saying:

However, the Chair would like to note that it finds the remarks of public servants reported by the member very troubling. I am especially troubled by the comments from the public servants to the effect that the Chair could not intervene in case of a point of order and that this could justify an incomplete response.

Your predecessor went on to say:

It is true that, based on many precedents, the Chair does not judge the quality of responses, and the reasons for that fact are understandable. However, my predecessors and I have repeatedly emphasized the importance of providing members with the information they need to do their work properly.

Your predecessor continued on and concluded by saying:

In the meantime, the Chair encourages ministers to find the right words to inspire their officials to invest their time and energy in preparing high-quality responses rather than looking for reasons to avoid answering written questions.

However, in the case of Question No. 1417, it appears the government not only did not heed the advice from the Speaker but also went one step further and, per the information disclosed in the CBC article, misled the House. In doing so, it both violated members' privileges and demonstrated blatant disregard for the Speaker's words.

There is precedent for this situation. On December 16, 1980, at page 5797 of *Hansard*, the Speaker said:

While it is correct to say that the government is not required by our rules to answer written or oral questions, it would be bold to suggest that no circumstance could ever exist for a *prima facie* question of privilege to be made where there was a deliberate attempt to deny answers to an hon. member.

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that this is one of those circumstances. However, there is another problem related to this matter that you must address. There is one more element to this question of privilege that is completely unprecedented, which I checked, in the history of our House of Commons. Typically, the task of examining evidence on this matter would fall to you. However, the problem now facing the House of Commons, and your office, is that the government representative who provided and signed off on the potentially misleading response was yourself, in your former role as the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister.

● (1635)

Question No. 1417, the Order Paper question at the heart of the CBC story about the cost of the Montana trip, concerns the Privy Council Office, which supports the Prime Minister's Office and the cabinet. The PCO was asked to disclose the cost of the trip; however, per the CBC story, it did not. The Privy Council Office would be responsible for planning the logistics around travel and have oversight on budgetary matters. Again, in your role as parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, you signed off on the response to Question No. 1417, which the CBC reported on today.

I believe this situation may present concerns with regard to your ability to impartially rule on this matter. With deep respect to you and the institution of the Chair, I will now argue why this is so and what action I believe you must take in considering a matter in which you may have a conflict of interest.

Prior to making these arguments, I want to be clear that I bear you no ill will, nor am I challenging your office. At the time of your election, there were no rules preventing parliamentary secretaries from occupying the Speaker's chair during the same Parliament. I respect that you occupy the Speaker's chair by virtue of your legal election to it, but here is the rub of the matter: Under normal circumstances, it would be virtually impossible for the Speaker of the House of Commons to ever be in a potential conflict of interest situation when making one of these rulings. That is because the Speaker is a member of Parliament elected to the office by their peers at the start of a Parliament, immediately after an election. Elections wipe the slate of Parliament clean.

However, this week, members had to elect a new Speaker in the middle of a Parliamentary term. The problem in this instance is that you, prior to your election as Speaker, held several official governmental roles. Until September, you served as the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, and you signed off on Question No. 1417. Now you have to rule on whether there is enough evidence for the House to consider if you, in your former role as parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, potentially breached members' privilege by misleading the House when signing off on Question No. 1417.

We both know that the occupant of the Speaker's chair must be viewed as an unimpeachable, neutral arbiter of House proceedings. A Speaker having to rule on a question of privilege on a matter caused by them during their former role in government is an incredible matter without precedent. To re-emphasize, I am honour bound to afford you the respect you deserve in the role of Speaker, out of respect for the office of the Speaker and its essential functions within the institution of Parliament.

However, out of that same responsibility, I believe you are also honour bound to recuse yourself from ruling on this matter. This is a matter that affects the privilege of all members. Speakers' rulings set precedents, and it could breach all members' privilege if you make one ruling for which you cannot conceivably be impartial because of the nature of your previous government roles and your actions within them.

Mr. Speaker, you have the ability to recuse yourself by allowing the House to consider the matter at hand. In this instance, the correct course of action should be to allow a motion to be moved on the matter and allow the House to determine the outcome. Then the outcome would be a decision of the House, not the Speaker, and a perception of loss of neutrality and a further potential breach of privilege could perhaps be avoided. After the last couple of weeks, the Speaker could use a bit of a boost.

There is some relevant precedent on this matter. On December 12, 2021, on a question of privilege concerning allegations pertaining to the former clerk, the Speaker pointed out at the beginning of his ruling that the clerk recused himself from the matter and did not participate in the preparation of the ruling. This would be in keeping with the reference from Bosc and Gagnon, at page 323, which states, "When in the Chair, the Speaker embodies the power and authority of the office, strengthened by rule and precedent. He or she must at all times show, and be seen to show, the impartiality required to sustain the trust and goodwill of the House."

Representative democracy only functions when ordinary people have confidence that the institutions that uphold their representatives' ability to make decisions on their behalf are working. Any issue that erodes that confidence should be immediately and forcefully addressed. Out of respect for Parliament, I ask that you recuse yourself from this matter and allow the House to debate it. Doing so would not be an admission of anything other than your deep respect for the necessity of perception of neutrality by the Chair. However, failure to do so could present problems in this regard, at a time when all of us here need to do our utmost to respect the dignity of Parliament.

Privilege

In any event, should a case of privilege be found, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

• (1640)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member for her presentation. I trust members will respond at a later date, hopefully as quickly as possible, on this particular matter.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to provide an assurance that we will review what the member said and report back at some point with regard to her statement.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we would like to review the blues as well, and we may choose to come back to the House on this matter.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I do not need to review the blues. I listened carefully to what the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill had to say. She presented a cogent, thoughtful and respectful argument. I hope you will take it into consideration and decide that it is the wisest course for the Speaker to recuse himself from this role for this particular matter of privilege.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, moving on from this topic, I just wanted to bring up a point of order on a technical issue regarding the votes.

The Deputy Speaker: First, the point of privilege is in order. Pending the responses that we are going to be getting from the caucuses, we will get back to the House as soon as possible.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to bring it to your attention, and to the House's, the dispute over the vote by the member for Fredericton today.

I wanted to clarify, and I have already clarified with the table clerks, that the member did not vote physically in this chamber today, nor did she intend to do that from the beginning. She had voted remotely and was only entering the chamber to retrieve articles. There was some mix-up in thinking that perhaps she had voted in this chamber and then left before the tallying of the vote.

I would hope that her vote stands as a remote vote.

The Deputy Speaker: I am going to make two quick comments on this.

First, when we are having standing votes, I would suggest that all members should try their best to stay in the chamber. If members are planning on voting on the app, they may leave the chamber as quickly as possible and stay out of the chamber until after the vote is complete. This is just a suggestion on process.

Second, I did confirm with the Table and it was done remotely with the app. I will of course allow her vote to stand.

Government Orders

● (1645)

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Nunavut, Air Transportation.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND GROCERIES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act and the Competition Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed I am proud to be here as part of the blue team. It is always an honour to stand in this House and to debate some of the legislation that is before us. Today we are discussing Bill C-56, the affordable housing and groceries act. First of all, I have to congratulate the leader of the official opposition who tabled his bill, the building homes not bureaucracy act, of which the Liberals lifted part and implemented it here through Bill C-56.

I also have to congratulate the member for Bay of Quinte for his private member's bill, Bill C-339, which was to amend the Competition Act by further defining the efficiencies defence under the Competition Act. Of course, that was also lifted by the Liberals and put into Bill C-56.

I guess it is true, as Oscar Wilde used to say, that imitation is the sincerest, and I would say the greatest, form of flattery. For the Liberals to take Conservative legislation and put into their own government bills is a form of flattery, and it is one that I think we should really recognize. This is Conservative ideology that the Liberals are implementing here.

I think it is also important to point out that the Liberal government is all out of ideas. It has been eight long years. The Liberals are tired, they are weary and they do not have anything else to bring forward, so they are now going to be going through all the private members' bills that the Conservatives have laid before this House and they are going to be lifting parts they can use of the great ideas the Conservatives have. They are going to put those into their own legislation going forward.

I am looking forward to what else is going to be coming forward from the government. When it comes down to the issues of grocery prices and housing, they have no ideas, and for the eight years we have been watching, things have gotten harder for Canadian families. It has gotten tougher for Canadians to live that major Canadian dream, which is to own their own home, but millennials and young Canadians just do not have that opportunity.

After eight long years, we have mortgage rates that have now gone up to the highest levels in 30 years. We have seen mortgage rates increase 10 times. The Bank of Canada preferred rate has gone up 475 basis points. Rent in this country on rent a two-bedroom home is going to cost, on average across this country, \$2,339 as of last month. Canada now has the most expensive housing market in the world, with some communities like Vancouver and

Toronto by far the most expensive places to live, and incomes have not kept up with the cost of living.

It is said that societies often come to the brink of collapse when things like putting food on the table and a roof over one's head exceed 75% of one's disposable income. That is what is happening under those Liberals and their mismanagement of our economy and our government. They are really making it impossible.

We talk about the Canadian dream. When I was 21 years old I took out my first mortgage, under the Liberal Pierre Elliott Trudeau government, and paid a 21% interest rate on that mortgage. It is like father, like son, and now we have again out-of-control interest rates, out-of-control inflation and a government that is running up these massive deficits, contributing to inflationary spending. We are in a situation where those millennials and young Canadians are now not doing what we did, taking out a mortgage and paying it off over 25 years. They are taking 25 years to save up for the down payment to go out and buy that new home.

We always talk about how this is impacting our young people, those millennials out there and the 30-somethings who are still living in their parents' basements. It is also impacting seniors. Edna in my riding wrote to me, and said, "Now, everything costs so much more. Many seniors are suffering and don't have the means to get help". She was talking about her mortgage and insurance on her house, the meagre life insurance she pays for, all the utility bills and her groceries, and she cannot make ends meet. This is in Manitoba where, compared to the rest of Canada, rental rates, mortgage rates and housing prices are still relatively affordable compared to Ontario, B.C., Atlantic Canada and Alberta, yet she is struggling to get by.

● (1650)

What the Liberals are planning here is to give a GST holiday to wealthy landlords who are going to go out and build more rental units. There is no classification on whether this is affordable housing, but they are going to make sure that these are homes that people can afford to live in on their income. They could have looked at what we were proposing. I welcome the Liberals to plagiarize more of the Leader of the Opposition's bill, the building homes not bureaucracy act.

On top of removing the GST over the next five years on new home builds, why do the Liberals not make it easier for all developers so they can build more single-family homes as well make sure we are out there to support the people who want to buy their first home, not rent, whether it is a condo, a multi-family unit or a single home in a new development? Let us make sure that all developers, not just the landlords who are out there, are going to be able to get the GST holiday.

Let us make sure that we are also taking away the bonuses paid to bureaucrats who are part of the problem right now in creating the red tape. I am talking specifically about the bonuses that were paid out to Bank of Canada and CMHC executives. There was \$26 million paid out in bonuses to CMHC executives who, in my mind, are part of the housing crisis as they are not addressing it well, and the Bank of Canada executives got \$20 million in bonuses. Again, this is the Bank of Canada that keeps increasing the interest rates to try to balance off the inflation that was created. The Liberals printed more money for this bank to borrow and the government continues to use that money to run up these huge inflationary deficits.

The current Prime Minister has now run up more national debt than all prime ministers before him going right back to Confederation. That to me is a crisis. It is about passing on debt to our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. We are talking about intergenerational abuse because of the misappropriation of funds by the government and the lack of investment in the future of this country, which is making it tougher for Canadians.

I have to say if we want to talk more about what the Liberals can take and lift out of the Leader of the Opposition's bill, let us make sure we also talk about getting rid of the gatekeepers by incentivizing municipalities to actually build more homes and doing away with all the red tape that is stopping them.

We want to make sure that we take all the excess land and buildings the Government of Canada owns and convert them into housing.

Let us not stop there. If the Liberals want to take another Conservative policy and plagiarize it, I welcome them to axe the carbon tax. If we want to talk about groceries, which this bill has actually nothing to do with, let us talk about taking away the inflationary carbon tax because it is making food more expensive. I am a farmer. My friend from Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa is a farmer. My friend from Portage—Lisgar is a farmer. We were all a bunch of farm kids growing up and are proud of it. When we tax the farmer who grows the food, tax the trucker who transports it to the processor, tax the processor who makes the food, tax the trucker again to get it over to the grocery stores, and then the Liberals not only charge the carbon tax on the grocery stores, but penalize them, fine them, then pass that on to the consumer as well, it means we all pay more for food.

Let us make sure that the Liberals continue to make use of good, Conservative policy, that they do away with all the destructive and wasteful spending on their side and do more to work with our side, follow our lead and take our examples, because then they will make a difference. If they do not, I promise all Canadians they will have a chance to pass judgment on the government, get rid of the Liberals, and bring in the common-sense Conservatives for a better and brighter future.

• (1655)

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do not really agree with many of my colleague's statements on I think it was the Conservatives' building bureaucracies act and the lack of housing bill.

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Calgary City Council voted in favour of the housing task force recommendations. Does the Conservative Party support Calgary's housing task force recommendations?

Do you support the Conservative housing critic's support of those recommendations or do you support your leader's and Conservative Party MPs' opposition of those housing task force recommendations? Could you please tell this House whether you support your housing critic or your Calgary MPs?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member he is not to address questions and comments directly to the members; it should be through the Chair.

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

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I will let the member from the Calgary area know I do support our leader on this, because, and I will just repeat it again, it is the building homes not bureaucracy act. It is about getting houses built, not more red tape. It is about making sure we are able to provide more opportunity for young Canadians to actually get into a house of their own, and if they cannot, then let us make sure there is more housing stock out there.

My daughter lives in Calgary, by the way, and luckily they are homeowners, but it is getting more and more expensive for them as well. The question becomes whether the City of Calgary will be willing to work with our federal Conservative Party, when we become government, to make sure we are taking away all of the restrictions and all of the NIMBYs blocking the development of land in Calgary and we are creating more homes and more opportunities for people in Calgary to own their own homes.

If the City of Calgary has some great ideas, we are more than happy to work with it and provide it more infrastructure dollars to ensure that there is that opportunity to build more homes, to build more developments, and at the end of the day everyone is better off.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for a reform of the Competition Bureau system for 20 years or so. For years, we have been asking that the Competition Bureau have the authority to prevent mergers and acquisitions regardless of any efficiency gains they might generate if, at the end of the day, it means higher prices for consumers. That is what happened in the case of grocery stores. Mergers and acquisitions took place. This made them more efficient, but it also enabled them to drive up prices. This measure is specifically covered in in Bill C-56.

I would like to know whether my colleague thinks that this Competition Bureau reform is a good thing for consumers.

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[English]

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, every time we can give more power to the Competition Bureau to actually do its job and create more competition in the marketplace, consumers win. The rules around the efficiencies defence have to be addressed. Efficiencies usually mean fewer jobs, and we know efficiencies that have been applied in the past have meant we have had more concentration of the market and fewer and fewer players, and that has not helped the consumer.

Although there is all this talk about the affordable housing and groceries act, the change that is suggested here, as it was by the member for Bay of Quinte, addresses the entire Competition Act. It goes beyond food production as well as grocers and it talks about every part of the industry so we can have this opportunity to apply a new lens when we are looking at acquisitions and mergers.

• (1700)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, in the member's intervention today, he spoke a lot about how seniors are impacted. I 100% agree with him. I spoke to one of my constituents, Laura, who is really struggling to make ends meet.

Would the member not agree that increasing OAS for seniors across the country, making sure that seniors 65 to 75 get the same amount as seniors over 75 and making sure that, particularly in Alberta, the CPP is protected for seniors are very important things? Would he support our calls for an increase to OAS so that 65-year-old seniors get the same treatment as those who are older, and for CPP to remain in seniors' hands?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I too hear from my constituents all the time, from seniors, that a disparity has been created by the Liberals between those who are 65 to 75 and those 75 and over in the amount of money they receive through their pensions. That does need to be rectified.

I forgot to mention that one of the seniors from my riding, Bill from Beausejour, wrote to me that the big bonuses given out by the Liberals to Bank of Canada executives and CMHC executives appear to be very plainly a slap in the face to Canadians struggling to house their families.

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in this House to debate Bill C-56. Perhaps I will start with my conclusion: I intend to support the bill, and I encourage all members in this House to do the same.

Bill C-56 is about making life more affordable. It is the affordable housing and groceries act, and of course, given the nature of my position as the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, I will focus more on the aspect that will lead to more home construction across Canada to help address the supply gap that is contributing to the relative lack of affordability that we are dealing with.

I think it is important to acknowledge that Canada is experiencing a housing crisis. In order to restore affordability, we need to build homes and we need to build them by the millions. This is going to require us to pull every lever at our disposal to get Canada

building at a rate that it has never built before. However, if we are going to succeed, we have to understand the nature of the obstacles that stand in our way and introduce specific policies that are designed to overcome those challenges.

Over the course of my remarks, I hope to identify the scale of the challenge we are facing, highlight the problems that we need to overcome and demonstrate some of the solutions that are starting to have a positive impact today. I do not mean to suggest that the job is done; we have a long way to go. However, I am very optimistic in light of the response from the home building sector to some of the policies we have put forward indicating that they are having the desired impact.

There are currently about 16.5 million homes in this country. We are on pace to building a few million more over the next number of years, but we have to increase the pace of building significantly if we are going to restore the level of affordability that existed in Canada just 20 years ago.

The reality is that the impact can be felt not only in the statistics outlined in CMHC's reporting, but in the lives of ordinary people who are struggling with the cost of living. The experiences that I hear about include too many young people who are trying to get ahead in life and trying to get their first job in a community they want to live in, but nevertheless find themselves in a position where they simply cannot afford a place to live. Too many people do not have that option. Even young professionals in a two-income household are sometimes unable to find a place to live in the community where they found meaningful work, one they can afford given their rate of pay.

When I talk to students from across the country, they tell me that it is very difficult to find a place to live in a college town that is safe, affordable and near the place they go to school. I have had too many conversations with young people studying on college and university campuses across this country who have told me that they are now sometimes living an hour commute away from their studies. At a time in their lives when they should be focusing on learning and developing skills that will contribute to their well-being, knowledge base and employability, they are focused on figuring out how they can get to class.

There is an opportunity for us, if we continue to engage with the people who are feeling the brunt of the housing crisis, to learn from them the solutions that will allow them to find the kind of place they want to live in.

When I talk to seniors who live in our communities, they want nothing more, as they downsize from the family home where they raised their kids, to find a place that is more manageable for them in the same community where their grandkids are being raised. I do not think that is too much to ask, and we need to realize that the importance to a person's life cannot be overstated when we are dealing with the place they call home.

I have talked to people who have a job that helps them get by in this country, and they tell me that, despite having a respectable income, they cannot find a place to live anywhere close to the place where they work. We need to make sure that we address the needs of workers in this country by working to ensure not only that their wages go a little further and they have a home they can afford, but that they have the kind of home they can raise their family in, with access to the services their family relies on and employment opportunities in their community.

Of course, I would be remiss if I did not also draw attention to the serious challenges facing Canadians who do not have a place to live at all, people who do not have housing security and people who are sleeping rough. We need to continue to do more to support some of Canada's most vulnerable people.

There are a number of challenges that we need to overcome. Primarily, I want to focus today on the need to change the financial equation that home builders are dealing with as they make an assessment as to whether they should green-light a project or let it sit on the shelf. As a result of the recent increases in the cost of supplies and materials, the cost of labour and the cost of land, and of course as a result of rising interest rates from global inflation, too many builders have projects sitting on the shelf that have been approved and could go ahead if the economics of the projects worked.

• (1705)

This is where the GST measure we have advanced through Bill C-56 comes in, and we are seeking support for it from members of Parliament. If we remove the tax on constructing new apartments in this country, we are going to see more apartments go up.

When we made the announcement that we would reduce the GST on new home construction among rentals across Canada, we saw certain provincial governments step up and say they would do the same. I want to thank in particular British Columbia, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador and my home province of Nova Scotia. We are starting to see movement to different degrees in other provinces as well. In some instances, this has reduced costs by 15% overnight when looking at the combined impact of the federal and provincial measures.

What we have seen as a result is that developers are publicly stating they are moving forward with projects that will provide homes for thousands of Canadians that otherwise would not have gone ahead. In particular, I point to Dream Unlimited Corporation's plans to advance several different projects in Ottawa, Saskatoon and Toronto that are going to lead to 5,000 homes being built. I look at Fitzrovia, which announced that it would be moving forward with developments totalling 3,000 homes. I look at Tricon's announcement after the GST measures were revealed. It announced it would move forward with 1,000 new homes.

The reality is that there are many examples of projects, as I have heard from different colleagues and from the home building sector, in every part of this country that are now going ahead that otherwise would have just stayed on the shelf. This policy is having the desired impact, and I am looking forward to seeing many, many thousands of homes be constructed as a result. That is why I am supporting Bill C-56. It would allow the private sector to justify going ahead with the construction of thousands of homes.

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However, we know there are many other areas where we need to continue to advance policies if we are going to overcome the challenges facing home builders, communities and people who have housing needs. We need to fundamentally change the way that cities allow homes to be built or sometimes do not allow homes to be built in this country. We need to encourage cities to legalize housing. In too many communities across this country, it is literally illegal, as a result of municipal bylaws, to build the kinds of homes that people need if they are going to live and thrive in our communities.

Members may have seen that over the course of the last few months, I have been engaging directly with municipal councils and mayors, encouraging them to change their laws so they can permit more housing to be built, can speed up the process of permitting those homes and can make the kinds of investments that will lead to more density in downtown cores, more homes near transit stations so people can access the services or employment opportunities they need and more homes near college and university campuses so students have a place to live as they undertake their studies.

I cannot say how excited I am about the early signs of success with the housing accelerator fund. We have seen a positive announcement by the City of London, which is going to be increasing its ambition as a result of its access to the fund. We saw today the City of Vaughan announce that as a result of a \$59-million investment, it will be able to add, over the next 10 years, 44,000 homes to that city.

We are going to continue to do more to get low-cost financing on the table by increasing the valuation of the Canada mortgage bond program, which is going to add 30,000 homes a year. There are a number of other measures we need to address, but if we change the equation for builders, change the way that cities build homes and continue to make the kinds of investments we have been making since 2017 under the national housing strategy, we have an opportunity to make massive progress in the attempt to address Canada's national housing crisis.

I would be happy to address any further issues, if members in this House wish.

Let me conclude with a final thought. It is not enough for different parties in this House to throw ideas at the wall, as some have done. We need to address the very specific problems that have given rise to Canada's national housing crisis. By having a thoughtful policy approach and by advancing measures like the removal of GST on new rental construction across Canada, we can change the way that homes are built in this country, increase the pace at which they are built and put an end to Canada's national housing crisis. We can do this by having the private sector and governments co-operate to build homes that Canadians can actually afford.

• (1710)

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister gave a great speech.

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You touched on a lot of important subjects, after being been in power for the last eight years. I just want to go over these different subjects. You talked about—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member to address questions and comments through the Chair.

The hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Madam Speaker, the member talked about a lot of subjects that are near and dear to my heart as well.

He talked about students. They do not have anywhere to go when they go to school, and now they have to take transport for over an hour. I heard, at the science committee, that some science students are sleeping in bus shelters just to be able to go to school during the week, and then they go back home and try to get some sleep. That is one thing. The Liberals have had eight years to fix that.

I have heard that many seniors are not able to afford a place to move into. Sure, they can go ahead and sell their home, but they cannot even downsize because there is absolutely no supply. It is good the minister is talking about seniors and does recognize there is a problem. It is very critical, though. These people are in their senior years. Time is ticking, and the government does not have time to address these things.

With respect to young workers and young families, he is talking about a 10-year horizon. The children will be off to university by then and they will still be sleeping in shelters. The Liberals have had eight years to fix this and they have not done a thing. He is still talking about another eight years.

Of course, my biggest question is about the GST exemption. How are builders going to be passing on the savings from the GST that they are getting? Is it—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member has taken quite a bit of time. I want to remind members to keep their question to a minute.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, regarding the concern around students who have inadequate or no housing options, I think we have to recognize that everyone should be advocating for more support for people who have inadequate housing options, students or otherwise. I am very proud that the government has doubled the investments in the Reaching Home program to address homelessness, and that we are going to continue to do more, as I outlined in my remarks, to build more stock that will help address the student housing challenges more broadly.

When it comes to seniors, I think we are aligned in our identification of the problem. Where we differ is that the policies we have advanced would actually yield a higher number of homes than the plan the Conservatives have put forward.

With respect to the GST, the most important point in my remarks is that we have to address very specific problems. The GST measure we put in place is designed not only to pass on savings to renters but also to build more supply, which, over time, will bring the rate down as more stock becomes available. I am happy to elaborate in future answers, given that I have run out of time.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-56, but, as it has said, we need to go much further than the bill does.

Currently, when the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, manages a parcel of land, it must sell it at the going market price. To my understanding, the minister has the power to authorize the CMHC to give away the land or sell it at a lower price. Can the minister confirm that he has that power? Currently, there is a situation in Joliette for a social housing project on an enclosed parcel of land. The municipal assessment is not so bad, but the market value is \$1 million and the project is blocked because of that.

Does the minister have the power to authorize the CMHC to sell the land at a lower price or give it away? Ultimately, that would free up social housing projects in Quebec.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, before I begin, I would like to thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to discuss this very important issue and to practise my French. When I started my work on the Standing Committee on Finance, I did not speak French, but the member was supportive of my efforts.

I do not know the details of the situation in Joliette, but I will make an effort for my colleague. We can always work to find possible solutions for his community. Generally speaking, CMHC programs can be flexible. I will continue to work with my colleague. I also thank him for the Bloc's support for this bill.

[English]

Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an incredible honour to rise for the first time in debate in the House of Commons since being elected this summer.

While I will certainly get to the substance of Bill C-56, I would first like to take a few moments to express my appreciation to the residents of Portage—Lisgar for placing their trust in me to be their representative in Ottawa. It is a great responsibility to be their voice and I am humbled by the support they have shown me. I, of course, have some very big shoes to fill in succeeding the Hon. Candice Bergen. I appreciate her friendship and her mentorship over the years, and I will do my best to follow in her footsteps in fighting for our riding and our rural way of life.

I need to thank my wife, Cailey, for her unwavering support, her patience and her love. The life we have entered together is not an easy one, as all my colleagues know, but I am lucky to have her by my side. I would also like to thank my parents, Jim and Shauna-Lei Leslie, for their guidance, their encouragement and their unconditional love.

I need to thank many friends and neighbours who supported me in the nomination and in the by-election. I wish I could name them all, but I have only 10 minutes here today. To all those who played a role, big or small, in helping me over the past six months and throughout my entire life, I want them to please know how much I appreciated their help in becoming their member of Parliament. Together we have proven that when individuals come together with a shared vision, unwavering determination and a commitment to change, we can achieve the seemingly impossible.

The chamber is made up of people from diverse regions, experiences and backgrounds, each working to represent their community and our country. As I said many times during the campaign, I am just a farm kid from Portage. I say “just” because far too often, that is what I would hear folks say, folks like my dad and many others who, when asked what they do, say, “I’m just a farmer.” Farmers are so much more than that and should give themselves credit, as should all Canadians. Farmers produce the high-quality, nutritious food that feeds Canadians and people all around the world. They quite literally bet the farm, every single year, while facing countless factors outside of their control and, currently, a government that is making their job harder. They provide for their families. They help their neighbours and they support their communities.

It is not just farmers who fall into this “just” trap. It is not “just a plumber”. I am not “just a construction worker”, “just a welder” or “just a teacher”. People are more than just that. People are the foundation of our country and are our future. People work hard. People play by the rules, give back to their communities and support their families. They should be proud of it.

In the case of my riding, families choose to live a rural way of life. We live with and appreciate nature. We hunt, fish, sled and quad. We know our neighbours because, during a Manitoba blizzard, even a truck can get stuck in the middle of a gravel road on a windy night, and we might need a helping hand. It is also because we want to know our neighbours. We support our churches, our local businesses, our sports teams and our charities. I am proud of my family, my community and my country. I will be a steadfast advocate for our riding, our province and our way of life.

Today, that starts with speaking to Bill C-56. This bill claims to address two very pressing issues: affordable housing and access to affordable groceries. I can tell members, after knocking on thousands of doors throughout the campaign this summer, that these are two issues that were front and centre at the doorsteps.

In the first six years of the Liberal government, housing prices went up 43% in Manitoba, and it has only gotten worse in the last two years. I cannot tell members how heartbreaking it is to walk up to knock on a door and see a family loading up their half-ton truck with a couch in the back, or they open the door and there are some boxes behind them. These people are moving out of their homes because they can no longer afford their mortgage. Worse, they are moving and paying almost as much in rent for much smaller accommodations elsewhere. Countless people, moms and dads, told me they were being forced to stop buying healthy food for their kids because they just cannot afford it and because Kraft Dinner is cheaper. That is not the Canada that I want to be fighting for. People expect government to improve their life, or at least just stay out of it. Instead, after eight years of the Liberal government, they can

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barely afford to live any more. It is hard to express just how fed up and frustrated people are at the doorsteps.

● (1720)

I found it funny that yesterday, during question period, the Prime Minister confidently stated that he had been speaking with rural Canadians this past summer and that they supported his carbon tax. It was such an absurd statement that I could only shake my head in disbelief, because I can confidently say that my constituents want to scrap the carbon tax. If the Prime Minister had spent time talking to any everyday people in my riding during the by-election, he would have heard that message loud and clear. The common sense of the common people recognizes a tax when it sees it. They know that this costly Liberal-NDP coalition is driving up the cost of everything. It is time to axe the tax.

Recently, the Liberals did begin recognizing that reducing taxes does spur economic growth, and Bill C-56 seeks to remove the GST on new rental housing construction across the country. I am glad to see the Liberals are starting to come around to Conservative ideas. Just a day before the Minister of Finance announced the legislation, our leader introduced Bill C-356, the building homes not bureaucracy act. Its goal is simple: to make life more affordable for Canadians. Bill C-356 would provide a 100% GST rebate on new residential rental properties for which the average rent payable is below market rate. We can talk about actually trying to accomplish affordable housing, but I do suppose that imitation is the highest form of flattery.

However, our leader's legislation would do much more. It would eliminate CMHC executive bonuses if housing targets are not met, and reduce their compensation if funding for new construction is not completed within 60 days. It would create a home completion target and give bonuses to cities that increase the number of new builds completed. It would utilize incentives to build things again in this country and not build bureaucracy. It has to be about results. It is about putting forward policies that get homes built in this country, and it is high time we had a government that focused on outcomes, not process.

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Speaking of that, the second component of Bill C-56 is a prime example of process. The Prime Minister promised Canadians that he would somehow magically lower grocery prices by Thanksgiving, and I guess we can chalk that up as another broken promise on the long tally. Canadians are not holding out hope that, by allowing his bloated bureaucracy to conduct another lengthy study, their grocery bills will start to go down any time soon. When we tax the farmer who produces the food, the manufacturer who processes the food, the trucker who ships the food and the grocer who sells the food, how on earth can we honestly expect prices not to go up?

However, there is an easy solution. We can axe the tax. Instead, we have a tired Liberal government touting the legislation before us as a saving grace for Canadians who cannot afford to live anymore. Copying ideas from our Conservative leader is a good start, but the reality is that there is still much more to do.

The Liberal government's inflationary spending has driven up prices, inflation and interest rates, and it has worsened the lives of so many families, seniors and small business owners. While the Liberals will blame international factors for the current mess we find ourselves in, they cannot bring themselves to take any responsibility for their inflationary deficits that have only poured more fuel on the fire. Even Bill Morneau, the former Liberal finance minister, has admitted that fact, and the government has dramatically grown the bureaucracy and created more red tape. It is abundantly clear that more process does not deliver better outcomes. Instead, the Liberals have frustrated businesses, added costs and headaches for municipalities and not-for-profits that are applying for funding, ignored the priorities of stakeholder groups and provided worse service to Canadians.

After eight long years, the Liberal government has run out of ideas. Everything in Canada feels broken, and we know exactly how we got here. It is time for a new Conservative government to come in and fix it. It is time to bring homes that people can afford. It is time to bring home powerful paycheques and lower prices for food, fuel and home heating. It is time to bring home prosperity for Canadians. Let us bring it home.

• (1725)

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate sincerely the hon. member on his election to the House.

When I listened to his description of the Conservatives' housing plan, it was clear that he has been reading a different document than I have. When I reviewed their plan, it was the most bizarre series of suggestions. It would literally raise taxes on home builders and cut funding for homebuilding. If the member is concerned about bureaucracy, the Conservatives are proposing a Kafkaesque, Byzantine process to identify which homes would qualify. They would cut out middle-class homes from their GST relief, and they were talking about hiring bureaucrats to run a snitch line on people who have Nimbyist attitudes, which is not defined anywhere in their plan.

My question to the hon. member is this: Why is he supporting a plan that would raise taxes on homebuilding, cut funding for homebuilding and actually, according to finance officials at committee

the other day, result in fewer homes being constructed than we were already on pace to build?

Mr. Branden Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. colleague across the way for the kind wishes.

In 1972, we built more homes than we did last year. That is the record. That is what we are dealing with.

We may be reading different documents, but I am very confident with the plan that our leader has put forward. It is a plan you thought was so good that you would snatch parts of it to put in your own announcement. I do not think we need to take any lessons from the option across the way on how to get homes built in this country.

The Deputy Speaker: While it is great to see new colleagues in the House of Commons, I would ask that they make sure their questions go through the Chair and not directly to members on the opposite side. The word “you” is always used very sparingly in this chamber.

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his first speech in the House. I have a very specific question for him. I hope he will be the type of colleague who answers questions in specific detail. That would be helpful.

The government is announcing a housing measure that consists of removing the GST on construction without any guarantee that it will be used for social or affordable housing. We are currently fighting to get the federal government to release the \$900 million owed to Quebec, but the federal government stubbornly insists on imposing conditions on that money, even though housing is not within its jurisdiction.

Does my colleague agree with the Bloc Québécois position that the federal government should transfer this money as quickly as possible so that we can finally have social housing back home?

[*English*]

Mr. Branden Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the well wishes.

The challenge with the question is that it is, of course, best aimed at the government, but the reality is that the government has set up such poor relationships with our provincial leaders across the country that it comes as no surprise that there are ongoing battles over these sorts of challenges.

The challenge here is to ask what affordable housing is. I think we need to undertake our very best efforts to make sure we are providing all types of new housing builds to make sure that those who are currently homeless or living in housing poverty are able to upgrade their way of life. The easiest way we could do that is by lowering the cost of living for all them, allowing them to keep more of the money that they earn and take home more powerful paycheques so that they can live the high quality of life that all Canadians deserve.

• (1730)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me welcome the member for Portage—Lisgar to the House. I also offer my sincere congratulations to him on the election of an NDP government in the wonderful province of Manitoba.

The member talked about the carbon tax a lot. We are very familiar with this at the agriculture committee. He knows as well as I do that there are exemptions in the existing act. He also knows that there is room for improvement, which is why I voted for Bill C-234.

However, what I never hear Conservatives talk about is that, over the last three years, we have seen the oil and gas industry increase their profit margin by over 1,000%. Why do Conservatives never talk about the gross profiteering of the oil and gas companies off the backs of working families right across this country from coast to coast to coast?

Mr. Branden Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his sincere words. In a past life, I had the pleasure of working with him, and I look forward to working collaboratively with him here.

The legislation the member mentioned is an important piece. There are currently exemptions, but so many costs are passed on to the farmers, who are at the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to this. I appreciate his support for Bill C-234, and I would encourage my hon. colleagues in the other place to quickly pass that legislation to expand the carbon tax exemption for farmers across Canada.

The last thing I will point out is that profits are not a bad thing. I think wealth creation is a good thing, and given that we are invested heavily in all of our pensions, we should want Canadian companies to succeed.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise to speak on behalf of the folks from Kitchener Centre with respect to Bill C-56, the signature measure of which would involve removing the GST from rental home construction.

I will start by saying very clearly that I certainly support this bill, as does my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands. It is an important and good measure. However, it is not nearly the kind of ambition we need to meet the moment we are in, and that is a very deep and protracted housing crisis.

Specifically, in my community, in the last three years alone, the number of people living unsheltered has more than tripled to over 1,000 people. Let us compare home prices. In our community, back in 2005, the average house price was around three times the average person's income. Today, it is over eight times. House prices

have gone up 275% and wages have gone up 42%. It is pretty clear that wages are not keeping up.

We are also losing 15 units of affordable housing to rent evictions and the financialization of our housing for every one new affordable unit getting built. What that looks like, day to day, is that the shelter system in my community is overflowing. The week before we returned here, I showed up to a community meeting at an apartment building in downtown Kitchener. More than 40 people showed up on that night, invited by their councillor. I was there, as was bylaw enforcement.

We heard from folks there about the living conditions in their building, everything from cockroaches to bedbugs. The residents of that building were clear in telling us that they knew they did not have any other options. There was no recourse. There are insufficient recourses. We could talk about the Landlord and Tenant Board and the backlog there. However, the fact is that, because we have not building the kind of social housing we need in this country, people are left with no other options.

As I have heard from other colleagues here, I could talk about what I heard when I was knocking on doors this past summer. I spoke with a young man who is engaged. He is working in the trades, living at his parents' house. His fiancé is a teacher, and she is doing the same. They do not know when they will ever be able to afford a place of their own.

To help restore affordability, CMHC is telling us that we need to build 3.5 million more units than planned by 2030. If we are going to do that, we need to be looking at two sides of this. The first is significant transformational investments in housing. This has been done in this country before. Back in the 1970s, 40% of all building starts across the country had federal assistance. That went down to 8% by the 1980s, and today, no surprise, if we look at the total stock of social housing across the country, we are way at the back of the G7 at 3.5%.

Even a call as bold as saying, "Let us double the social housing stock" would only get us to 7%, which is only the middle of the peer average amongst G7 countries. To do that, though, we need to get serious about having CMHC get back into building housing the way that it used to. Many colleagues have been talking about an acquisition fund, which non-profits across the country have been calling for, a fund that would allow non-profits across the country to preserve what are currently affordable units to avoid losing them to the financialization of housing, and in so doing ensure that those might remain affordable over the long term.

In my community, for example, I spoke with a leader from a local non-profit organization. She was able to share with me, and sent me afterwards, 12 different properties that they have already identified. Should an acquisition fund, such as the one being called for by ACORN Canada and many others, be made available, they would be so keen to jump in and preserve those units. This is an organization that has operated in my community for decades, focused on ensuring that we preserve affordable housing, and it is ready to go. However, they are going to need the federal government to step in and ensure that the funds are there to help them preserve those units.

Government Orders

● (1735)

We could also talk about, for example, investments in the rapid housing initiative. It is a fantastic program. It is not that the government is not doing anything. The issue is that it was in budget 2022, and we have not heard anything since about the next round of rapid housing. We need to see sustained, permanent, ongoing funds that organizations across the country can count on.

It is the same when it comes to co-op housing. I was one of the first to cheer when we saw \$1.5 billion of new money invested in co-op housing in budget 2022. Unfortunately, none of those dollars have actually rolled out yet to build co-op housing. We need to see that money get spent, but we also need to see ongoing, year-over-year investments so that we can get back to where we used to be before the early 1990s, when we saw federal and provincial governments pull out of the really critical role they have to play in building affordable housing.

This crisis did not happen overnight. It is decades in the making. I appreciate how clearly the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities has articulated that. He said very clearly multiple times that multiple parties at the federal level have led to this housing crisis. If that is his admission, we are going to need to see investments today reflect the reality of the crisis we are in.

The second thing we need is to be honest that homes should be places for people to live. They should not be commodities for investors to trade. That is what is different between folks who are looking to rent and buy homes today versus my parents in the 1980s. When they were looking to buy a home, they were competing with other people. Today, people in my community are competing with massive corporations, and that has been incentivized.

As members may know, I have spoken many times in this place about one example that I see as a bit of a litmus test. If we were honest about addressing the financialization of housing, we would not have tax exemptions for the largest corporate landlords in the country, but that is exactly what we have. Real estate investment trusts have almost exclusively been buying existing units, the reason being that it is more profitable for them to do so. One of the CEOs of these real estate investment trusts was in the news this past summer for saying exactly that, that it primarily buys existing units to get the best return possible. Why are they are tax exempt? What is the social value of that exemption?

If the government were serious about addressing the financialization of housing, why not take what the PBO has now told us and spend \$300 million over the next five years? It is not going to solve the housing crisis, but it is pretty clear that, if we are going to address financialization, we would start by removing the incentives that corporate landlords are currently benefiting from, which only accelerate the financialization of housing. We would obviously move into things like ending the blind bidding process and increasing vacancy taxes. Right now, it is a 1% vacancy tax, which likely is not going to really influence the behaviour of a large corporate investor in the housing market. If we were to increase that, it might change. We also need to move towards more meaningful protections for tenants. If we are going to build this volume of housing, we need to also be doing it with the climate in mind.

We will continue to advocate for the federal government, when it is looking at the new building code in 2025, as I know it is, to accelerate that building code to ensure that provinces and territories can follow the federal government's lead in bringing more resiliency into the code and ensure we are building the kind of housing that is resilient to the climate crisis we are already in the midst of.

As I shared earlier, I am happy to support Bill C-56. I am glad to see this measure moving ahead, and I am looking forward to seeing the federal government step up far more quickly when it comes to addressing the housing crisis we are in.

● (1740)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a great deal of emphasis in the member's comments was on housing. This is the first time in generations, since 1993, which was when there were constitutional changes to the Charlottetown accord, and all political parties, with the exception of the Greens, wanted the provinces to play a role and marginalize Ottawa. Since 2016, when we first came to office, this government has invested hundreds of millions to billions of dollars into a housing strategy, support for non-profits such as Habitat for Humanity and the expansion of housing co-ops. Local and provincial governments want to co-operate in investing in non-profit housing.

My question to the member is fairly straightforward. Would he not acknowledge that Ottawa plays a very important role, but it is going to take a lot more than Ottawa alone to resolve the problem? Does he agree that we need municipalities, non-profit groups, many different stakeholders and the provinces to all get on board so we can tackle this issue in Canada today.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, I will agree with the member for Winnipeg North on this point any day of the week: We need all levels of government to step up.

However, we also need to be honest. With respect to the investment the member mentioned for co-op housing, which is one that I mentioned in my speech, I am really glad. The fact is that there were zero dollars for co-op housing in budget 2023. In fact, it was not just co-op housing; there were zero new dollars for housing at all in budget 2023 if not for one line item on indigenous housing that is not going to be starting for a few years still. No level of government can take a year off from funding housing. If the Region of Waterloo did the same, it would have people lining up outside the doors. The federal government cannot either.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member from the governing party just reminded us that the government has reinvested in housing. However, the federal government prefers the concept of affordable housing over that of social housing, which includes co-operatives. For us, the concept of affordable housing is vague, which means that the money earmarked for it is often not used to build affordable housing.

Would my hon. colleague care to comment?

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Joliette for his question, which is so important.

The definition of affordable housing differs from one government program to the next. If one definition of affordable housing applies to just 80% of the market, we are not really talking about affordable housing. We therefore need to push the government to establish a definition of affordable housing that is truly affordable.

• (1745)

[English]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we heard the hon. member speak about the housing crisis. I would like to suggest that what we have is a crisis of capitalism. We have the commodification of people's very existence, identified in the real estate investment trust that the member has highlighted. We have Vanguard, BlackRock and others. In my community, we have nine apartment buildings that are facing renovictions and demovictions.

To the people who are going to be meeting in Hamilton in about an hour, from those nine apartment buildings, what do you have to say about the crisis of capitalism and the impacts it has on housing?

The Deputy Speaker: I have nothing to say as the Chair occupant.

The hon. member for Kitchener Centre.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Mr. Speaker, I would say that housing is a human right and it deserves to be more than a preamble in a bill. It needs to be enshrined in legislation.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from May 17 consideration of the motion that Bill C-314, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

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 on an issue that has been fairly extensively debated over the last number of years. Members will recall that the reason we are having today's debate goes back to 2015, when a Supreme Court of Canada decision ultimately obligated parliamentarians here in the House to develop and pass a law that took into consideration the ruling made by the Supreme Court, with the necessity for the government to provide a framework.

Private Members' Business

It was not a very easy challenge when that decision was ultimately made. I do not know how best to put it, but the Government of Canada, at the time run by Stephen Harper, ultimately sat on the issue until there was an election. That election saw a change in government, and it was one of the first orders of business that the Government of Canada, under the current Prime Minister, had to deal with.

Over the years, I have been engaged in many different types of debates on all forms of legislation. When I am talking to young people who are trying to get a sense of what we do here in Parliament, I talk about legislation, and I will often make reference to Bill C-7. For Bill C-7, a very passionate debate took place on the floor of the House of Commons back in Centre Block. I can recall it vividly because of all the different emotions that were being expressed on the floor and all the discussions that took place.

It was not taken lightly. If we take a look over the years at the number of Canadians who have been consulted in one form or another with regard to medical assistance in dying, we are not talking about tens of thousands. We are talking about hundreds of thousands of Canadians from coast to coast to coast, in many different forms. They came together to voice opinions and concerns. In fact, we had a standing committee that did an incredible number of consultations, not only with individuals in our communities but with many different stakeholders.

In the debates that I have seen, I do not think we referenced our health care professionals and the important role they played in the debates. I want to start off by talking about that, because I think it is really important that, as Bill C-314 will ultimately be voted on, we understand and appreciate the number of discussions and the amount of effort that took place for the current legislation we have, which was amended.

As we saw, there were some issues that ultimately came out of Bill C-7, which caused another government bill to come to the floor. Again, a lot of repeat discussions took place and it ultimately passed. I think that is why the member has made the decision to propose his private member's bill. The changes that were made in what I think was Bill C-39, although I am not 100% sure and the member can correct me if I am wrong in his closing comments, are what might have brought forward this particular piece of legislation.

To be clear on what Bill C-314 does, it proposes to permanently exclude the eligibility to receive medical assistance in dying on the basis of a mental disorder alone. Wording is really important. I know that in the original debates with all the different stakeholders, and I made reference in particular to our health care professionals, the quality of the presentations and the understanding of the serious nature of the issue were, I would suggest, second to no other out of the debates I have witnessed, in particular given some of the things we heard coming out of committees.

Private Members' Business

• (1750)

As I reflect on that debate, I think that, in good part throughout the process, we saw many members of Parliament put their party position to the side and reflect in terms of what each believed as a parliamentarian. Maybe it was a crossover of personal beliefs versus the canvassing that many people no doubt had in terms of their constituents and wanting to reflect the general will of their constituents.

At the end of the day, when we think of medical assistance in dying and the issue of a mental disorder, I do not think that we want to try to simplify the message. As we all know, I am not a medical professional, but I have an immense amount of respect for what our medical professionals have to go through in order to be put into a position, because it is not just any and every doctor or nurse practitioner; there is a whole lot more that is involved. Towards the end of the debate, particularly on the second piece of legislation dealing with this particular issue, we had members who stood up and said, "Well, just put in your order", almost as if someone were going through a drive-through and then it is done. We all know that is, by far, not the case.

I will fall back on the fine work that our standing committees have done. I am going to fall back on the issues and how they were explained, in good part, by the different stakeholders. I am going to stand by what the health care professionals brought forward to us. I will look at the information that was provided and ultimately reflect on what I believe in this particular situation and what a vast majority of the constituents I represent would want me to say on this particular issue. I will do this with very much a sympathetic heart, understanding the difficult situation that, unfortunately, far too many people have to face.

We can have as much sympathy as we want for those individuals who are looking at the possibility of getting medical assistance in dying, but it is one thing to sympathize and it is another thing to empathize. Based on everything I have looked at and listened to over the last number of years, I have not been convinced that this is, in fact, the direction that we should be going with regard to Bill C-314. I am just not convinced.

I think that what we ultimately need to do is continue to monitor and look at ways in which we can ensure that there is no abuse of the MAID legislation. We need to continue to show compassion in every way we can. We need to continue to listen to what the experts, individuals and stakeholders are telling us and try to build more value to the legislation so there is a higher sense of comfort in the broader community, which I believe there is today. The mechanisms are there, and there are opportunities to continue to be able to review.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am going to address the subject of Bill C-314; that goes without saying. However, I feel especially compelled to condemn the excessive and inappropriate nature of this initiative from the hon. member for Abbotsford. His bill is being tabled in reaction to an important, sensitive social issue, namely medical assistance in dying.

The fact that my colleague from Abbotsford wants to amend the Criminal Code to include the notion that mental disorders should not be considered grievous and irremediable medical conditions for access to medical assistance in dying is a proposal that does not even need to be made. Mental illness is an extremely complex issue, even a controversial one in medical circles. There are many reasons for that. To begin with, it would be imprudent and dangerous to rush the process of providing access to medical assistance in dying when the sole underlying medical condition is a mental disorder. However, that is not what is happening right now. The Criminal Code will be revised in due course, if necessary. On this point, experts feel that the current provisions of the Criminal Code are adequate to allow for further work on medical assistance in dying.

What I want to speak out against today is what I see as the official opposition's blatant politicization of this issue. Everything looks normal, or almost, when one reads Bill C-314 objectively, but it is the whole message surrounding the introduction of this bill in the House that I want to condemn. I would like to be able to say that some members just do not understand, but I cannot even use that explanation as an excuse for their behaviour.

Although I agree that being unable to afford a home and dealing with inflation and rising grocery prices are not pleasant experiences, associating them with medical assistance in dying for mental disorders is the worst kind of populism. This just shows an appalling ignorance of the many realities experienced by people living with mental illness or just plain ignorance in general. This is a position of contempt toward people who are working on many fronts to lead a somewhat normal life, despite the suffering caused by their mental condition. With Bill C-314, the Conservatives are putting on their agenda generalizations and falsehoods that they think will win them votes, and I do not see anything good about that.

This debate is a societal debate. When the official opposition claims that the work that will be done next spring is to allow Canadians who are "losing hope", the phrase used by the leader of the official opposition, to access medical assistance in dying, I think that is completely irresponsible. There is a difference between a request and the acceptance of the request. That is the first thing the member should take into consideration. Just because a request is made does not mean it will automatically be accepted. I want to come back to the fact that the Conservatives are driven by purely vote-seeking motivations and that these statements are false. At press conferences, they tell Canadians that the intention is to provide medical assistance in dying to people whose only condition is depression or other mental health problems. Come on. Depression is reversible. Suicidal ideation is also reversible. They need to stop for a minute and think. In my opinion, it is completely irresponsible to say such things. However, it gets worse. In March, the leader of the official opposition went so far as to include the following generalizations in his preamble:

Those going to The Mississauga Food Bank [are] seeking help with medical assistance in dying, not because they are sick but because they are hungry...

Here is another quote:

...1.5 million are eating at food banks, and some are asking for help with medical assistance in dying because they cannot afford to eat, heat or house themselves.

Honestly, my colleagues cannot be serious. There are plenty of other passages from Hansard I could quote. In any case, if the Conservatives seriously believe that not being able to afford a house or dealing with the challenge of finding a place to live during post-secondary studies are two factors that lead people to want to end their lives, then I would say that things are an absolute mess.

● (1800)

We expect the official opposition to put an end to its demagoguery and simplistic approach, and instead take a more collegial approach where real discussion can take place and where all opinions can be expressed to allow a full understanding of what is at stake. The Bloc Québécois believes that the strategies and messages coming from the official opposition on such an important and sensitive issue do nothing to advance everyone's understanding of the issue.

The subject we are studying deserves serious consideration. We have a duty to Quebecers and Canadians, and it is certainly not to tell them a bunch of nonsense, as the opposition leader did last March in the quotes I cited earlier. Medical assistance in dying is not a form of treatment for people with depression or suicidal ideation. It is the last resort, after decades of care, interventions and numerous therapies have all failed, when suffering is never-ending and the disease is incurable. I cannot emphasize that enough.

We believe that suffering is not exclusive to people who have a degenerative disease or who are at the end of their life. There is no need to rush this work, since the outcome has not yet been decided, contrary to what the Conservatives would have everyone believe with their message and their populist election strategy.

In its report, the Expert Panel on MAID and Mental Illness made 19 recommendations and proposed more stringent safeguards. For example, in recommendation 10, the panel proposed that a psychiatrist independent from the treating team and an independent assessor be consulted. Recommendation 16 involves the implementation of prospective oversight. There are other recommendations.

Under no circumstances would the Bloc Québécois condone providing access to medical assistance in dying in this medical context without the following: a thorough analysis of the practices and standards being considered; discussion with civil society groups, patients' rights representatives, professional associations and other stakeholders; a clear interpretation of the criteria regarding incurability, irreversibility and enduring and intolerable suffering; and the establishment of all of the safeguards and legal processes related to the ability to consent.

Members can count on the member for Montcalm, the Bloc Québécois critic on this file, to do a very thorough job.

I invite all members of Parliament, especially the members of the official opposition who might be tempted to repeat their dangerous generalizations and falsehoods, to read all of the recommendations. There are recommendations that have to do with the assessment process. The Criminal Code requires consultation with a specialist, and the key recommendation is for that specialist to be a psychiatrist. There is also the prospective oversight that I was talking about earlier.

Private Members' Business

The recommendations relating to implementation fall into three categories: consultation, training and data collection. Simply put, in order to access medical assistance in dying when a mental disorder is the sole underlying condition, there must be a significant history of treatment and therapy. Nothing is taken lightly.

In closing, we have to consider our capacity to pay for the health needs of the patients in question. We have to provide care to these people with irreversible illnesses. As a compassionate and empathetic society, we must take care of patients who meet the eligibility criteria for medical assistance in dying and provide them with a gentle and dignified death. Let us allow this work to continue early next spring without polarization or disinformation.

● (1805)

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in March 2023, legislation to extend by one year the temporary exclusion of eligibility for MAID where a person's sole medical condition is a mental illness received royal assent and immediately came into force. This means that persons suffering solely from a mental illness will be eligible for MAID as of March 17, 2024. Bill C-314, the bill before the House today, would remove this eligibility at least until we have satisfactory answers and guardrails to ensure that we can extend this profoundly permanent step with confidence. In my view, we do not have that necessary confidence today, and I think the majority of Canadians and health professionals, and the data, concur.

Data released in September 2023 from the Angus Reid Institute found that a majority of Canadians, 52%, worry that treating mental health will not be a priority when MAID eligibility is expanded to include individuals whose sole condition is mental illness. A vast majority of Canadians, 80%, are concerned with the mental health care resources available in this country, namely that they are not sufficient. Overall, one in five Canadians says they have looked for treatment from a professional for a mental health issue in the last 12 months, and in that group, two in five say they faced barriers to receiving the treatment they wanted. These obstacles appear to be more of an issue for women, among whom 45% of those who sought treatment say it was difficult to receive, and young Canadian adults aged 18 to 34.

A majority of Canadians support the previous rules governing MAID, first passed in 2016 and then updated in 2021, but there was more hesitation when it comes to this next step. Three in 10 say they support allowing those whose sole condition is mental illness to seek MAID, while half are opposed.

Private Members' Business

I will turn to some of what the professionals are telling us, starting with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. A survey recently of CAMH physicians found a lack of agreement on whether or not mental illness could be considered “grievous and irremediable” for the purposes of MAiD and what criteria could be used to determine whether a person is suffering from an irremediable mental illness. The survey also found significant disagreement among physicians on whether or not a request for MAiD can be differentiated from suicidal intent. These physicians also highlighted the concerns they had about access to mental health care in the context of expanded eligibility for MAiD.

Canada's mental health care system has experienced chronic underfunding, leading to a significant shortage of community- and hospital-based mental health care across the country. Between one-third and one-half of Canadians with mental illness were not getting their mental health needs met before the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the mental health crisis and increased the burden on our mental health system and therefore on Canadians. The results of that survey replicate the findings from the Canadian Psychiatric Association's member consultations in 2020 and the conclusion of the Council of Canadian Academies' expert panel working group report in 2018.

Let me turn to the Canadian Mental Health Association, Canada's premier organization dealing with mental health:

CMHA's position, first articulated in a national policy paper in August 2017, and later, in testimony to the Senate in November of 2020, is that until the health care system adequately responds to the mental health needs of Canadians, assisted dying should not be an option....

First, it is not possible to determine whether any particular case of mental illness represents “an advanced state of decline in capabilities that cannot be reversed.”

Second, we know that cases of severe and persistent mental illness that are initially resistant to treatment can, in fact, show significant recovery over time. Mental illness is very often episodic. Death, on the other hand, is not reversible. In Dutch and Belgian studies, a high proportion of people who were seeking MAiD for psychiatric reasons, but did not get it, later changed their minds.

Third is the issue of whether this distinction for mental illness vis-à-vis all other types of illness is inherently discriminatory. Denying access to MAiD for mental health reasons alone does not [necessarily] mean that those with mental illness suffer less than people afflicted with critical physical ailments.

That is true. The statement continues, saying, “What is different about mental illness specifically, is the likelihood [or not] that symptoms of the illness will resolve over time.”

• (1810)

We do not have the benefit of appropriate guidance from the Supreme Court of Canada on this issue, and that is something we need to take into account.

It is also noteworthy that with only 7.2% of Canada's health budget dedicated to mental health care, Canada spends the lowest proportion of funds on mental health among all G7 countries. For example, in the U.K., the National Health Service spends 13% of its budget on mental health care. According to the OECD's recent analysis of spending on mental health worldwide, it concluded that even that is too low, given that mental illness represents as much as 23% of the disease burden. The historical underfunding of mental health has been most pronounced in community-based mental health services and I think that ought to be taken into account.

According to the Canadian Psychiatric Association, perhaps Canada's foremost experts on mental health diagnosis and treatment, its members are profoundly split on this issue. The CPA's most recent member consultations in 2020 found that 41% of respondents agree that persons whose sole underlying medical condition is a mental disorder should be considered for eligibility for MAiD, 39% disagree or strongly disagree, and 20% were undecided.

According to CPA president, Dr. Grainne Neilson:

Balancing the commitment of psychiatrists to provide treatment, care and hope for recovery with a person's lived experience of suffering and right to enact personal choice in health-care decisions, including MAiD, is a fundamental challenge, particularly where death is not naturally reasonably foreseeable.

Equitable access to clinical services for all patients is an essential safeguard to ensure that people do not request MAiD due to a lack of available treatments, supports or services. Poor access to care is particularly relevant for people of low-socioeconomic status, those in rural or remote areas, or members of racialized or marginalized communities.

The Canadian Psychological Association, another very important group in this matter, states the following:

Many mental disorders are managed, not cured. Medications for mental disorders are largely palliative. While it is possible that medications and psychotherapy may successfully treat an episode which then doesn't recur, it is often the case that mental disorders require management across a lifetime.

In assessing whether a condition is incurable and irreversible, consideration must be given to equity of access to interventions. Wait lists for publicly funded services are long. Services, like psychotherapy offered in communities by psychologists, are not funded by Medicare. Needed services are not always available in rural or remote communities. To fully address whether a condition is resistant to intervention, that intervention must be accessible.

It is not.

The mental functions required to give consent to MAiD are the very ones sometimes impaired with a serious mental disorder, despite the grievous and irremediable suffering the disorder imposes. Consideration must be given to how to assess capacity despite the impairment in thinking that can accompany serious mental disorders.

I believe that we must act cautiously and prudently, and we must take a phased approach in this area. As has been noted by all parliamentarians, this is an intensely sensitive issue with grave moral and consequential concerns.

Adequate time, in my view, is needed to facilitate a comprehensive national conversation about acceptable safeguards and the availability of medically assisted dying for those suffering from psychological or mental health conditions alone, so that we minimize negative impacts on people living with mental health problems and illnesses when they are most vulnerable, and on their caregivers and health professionals.

I think holding that national conversation must involve people living with mental health problems and illnesses, and their experiences because they play a central role. We must get their input into what mechanisms must be there to minimize the risk of wrongful death.

It is going to be my position to support this bill and I think we must move very cautiously. I do not think that we can say that we can never move into this area, but I think we can say with confidence that now is not the prudent time.

• (1815)

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak to Bill C-314, an act that would amend the Criminal Code in regard to medical assistance in dying.

This enactment would amend the Criminal Code to provide that a mental disorder is not a grievous and irremediable medical condition for which a person could receive medical assistance in dying.

This is not the first time I have risen in this House to speak on the issue of medical assistance in dying, MAID, and I thank the hon. member for Abbotsford for the opportunity to speak to his bill.

As we know, MAID is an extremely complex issue that has generated some strong opinions on both sides. In May 2016, when I rose here to speak in support of the MAID legislation, I stated that, “when it comes to something as personal and sensitive as death, it is better to have options available, even if we do not like them, even if we do not believe in them. It is better to have some legal framework [in place] than none at all.”

I quoted from many letters I received from constituents in my speech back then and read letters from Ken, Connie, Valerie, Debra Lee, Catherine, Tracey, Doug and David. They all shared their personal perspectives with me, and it was extremely helpful in my own personal deliberations.

In the years since MAID was legalized, I have come to have known a number of people who have found comfort, personally and for their families, in the MAID process. Their death was foreseeable, there was no chance of recovery and when the dying process appeared to be both prolonged and cruel, it was an option they took advantage of. Their death was dignified, it was planned and it was peaceful. It allowed them to say their goodbyes to their loved ones, to their friends, when they could.

However, that being said, I am a very big proponent of hospice and palliative care, which must always be a viable and an available option to someone contemplating MAID. In the strongest of terms, MAID cannot be seen as a substitute for good palliative care, and it should never be.

Through my family’s volunteer experience with Hospice Calgary, and later with my wife’s final days with breast cancer at the Agape Manor Hospice care facility, I saw first-hand how critical it is we have a proper, well-funded palliative care system here in Canada. I saw then how underfunded this specialized care is within our health care system, and it is still that way today.

Canadians should have access to the support and care they need while living through one of the toughest times in their lives. We

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need to do better and we can do better, but we certainly have a long way to go.

However, today we are here to address the concerns of Canadians when it comes to the implementation of MAID with mental illness as the sole eligibility. This is the gist of Bill C-314. Should there be a permanent exclusion from MAID for people whose sole underlying condition is a mental disorder?

Back in 2016, during the original MAID debate, I had a meeting with a constituent, a young man named Anton. He came to my office, and Anton is the reason I am rising to speak today. He was a 25-year-old or 26-year-old, fit, good looking, articulate, intelligent and healthy young guy. When I say “healthy”, though, I mean in the physical sense only.

Anton came to my office to discuss his desire to have access to medical assistance in dying. He literally wanted to die. He shared with me his mental struggles and he said he was tired of living and he just wanted to die. It was something I just could not comprehend. This young guy seemed to have everything going for him and he wanted to die.

Anton felt the requirement in MAID that one’s death be foreseeable was unfair, a barrier and should not be in the legislation. He felt if one wanted to die, one should be allowed to through MAID, no questions asked. It should be as easy as going to get a haircut, he said.

• (1820)

I did ask him if he ever thought of taking his own life and why he would need MAID. He said he did not want to put a bullet in his head, jump off a chair with a noose around his neck or cut his wrists. That seemed too fearful for him, too painful and unfair for whomever would find him. We talked for what seemed like hours in my office.

I found it odd that he never once mentioned anything about a doctor, any treatments he was receiving or any medication he was on, so I asked him if he had seen a doctor. He had not spoken to a single health professional about his desire to end his life. I encouraged him to, and I said he needs to talk to somebody because I was certainly not the guy to talk to about suicidal tendencies. When he was leaving the office, he said he would seek some help. I gave him a hug, and I have had many sleepless nights since wondering if there was anything else I could have done.

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About three months later, Anton requested another meeting with me. He told me that he had sought help and went to see a doctor. Whether it was a psychiatrist or psychologist, I do not know, but he told me of his horrific episode. The very doctor who Anton went to seek help from called the police, saying that Anton was a danger to himself and needed to be protected. Anton was taken away by the police and locked in a padded room for 14 hours without any food or water. He told me he only got out because he finally convinced authorities that he was fine, that he was normal and that things were good. He basically had to lie his way out. He said it was the worst experience of his life. He asked for help and had gotten none.

That is the problem. Many Canadians are just not getting the mental health assistance they need. Clearly, we need to put better supports in mental health and people's access to that help. We should be careful in asking police to be mental health professionals. We need to make sure we have the right people in the right place at the right time. I am pleased to hear that some police forces are now using health professionals in the field, but we still have a long way to go.

We need to put vulnerable Canadians back in control of their lives. We want to see them get the help they need and provide them with the social and mental health supports they need. We must never give up on them and allow them to prematurely choose MAID over access to mental health care.

Since 2016, I have heard nothing from Anton. I have often wondered whether he is still alive or dead. Before this speech, I tried to seek him out, and I went to social media. I had some assistance and found some information on Anton. I discovered that he had found love abroad. He is working to bring his new wife or girlfriend to Canada and is excited to start a new business. I know that if MAID legislation in 2016 had permitted mental health as a sole reason, it is quite possible that Anton would have ended his life without exploring all of his options. He never would have found the love and support that he has today.

I am very grateful for the perspective that Anton has given me on this issue, as it has profoundly convinced me that those whose sole condition is a mental disorder should not have access to medical assistance in dying. That is why I support the hon. member for Abbotsford's private member's bill, Bill C-314.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

M. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to pay my respects to my colleague, whose personal accounts were very moving. Our hearts go out to Anton's family.

As we know, Bill C-314 amends the Criminal Code to provide that a mental disorder is not a grievous and irremediable medical condition for which a person could receive medical assistance in dying. The Bloc Québécois supports access to medical assistance in dying when a mental disorder is the sole underlying medical condition. We agree with the expert panel that the safeguards currently in place in the Criminal Code are sufficient. We think the exclusion should be maintained for one more year in order to give health care professionals a chance to develop standards of practice for cases of medical assistance in dying related to mental illness and to become familiar with those standards.

I would remind the House that the Bloc Québécois's position on medical assistance in dying has always been to uphold the consensus in Quebec, which came about following five years of consultations, specifically that medical assistance in dying is a right. Everyone has the right to die with dignity, of their own free will and with as little suffering as possible.

The Bloc Québécois is of the opinion that it is wrong to draw false analogies between the different problems in society and the specific issue of access to medical assistance in dying when a mental disorder is the sole underlying medical condition. We are of the opinion that it is possible to defend the right to self-determination, which is what medical assistance in dying is, while contributing to improving our health care systems, especially our mental health services. On that note, the Bloc Québécois would remind the House that the government has not substantially increased health transfers. That is affecting the system.

I would like remind the House that, in this debate, it is not a matter of offering people euthanasia as an answer to society's ills, contrary to what the Conservatives are saying. It is frankly irresponsible to suggest that the government's actions are causing people to become depressed and that the government's solution is to offer them medical assistance in dying.

It is also important to remember that the Conservative leader spread disinformation by failing to mention the context, when he stated in his communications that the government decriminalized dangerous drugs. The context is that Ottawa authorized a three-year pilot project in British Columbia to decriminalize the possession of small quantities of drugs. It is a pilot project based on practices used in Portugal with the explicit goal of curbing the overdose epidemic that is happening in British Columbia. The hope is that this pilot project will set a course to help Canadians and Quebecers with addictions.

What is more, it is misleading to say that the governments will be providing medical assistance in dying in less than a year. That suggests that people will have their request for medical assistance in dying approved in less than a year, when that is not at all the case. As the experts on the Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying pointed out, it will take at least a decade, maybe several decades, before a person can get medical assistance in dying for a mental disorder. It will have to be established that decades of therapy using multiple approaches have done nothing to treat the patient's mental health condition. In short, that is the complete opposite of what is being said by the Conservative leader, who is suggesting that a temporary depression is sufficient grounds to access medical assistance in dying.

In the Truchon and Gladu ruling, the courts had determined that the criteria were too restrictive, hence the evolution of this legislation. At the end of a press conference, a journalist asked the Conservative leader if he was prepared to use the notwithstanding clause to block access to medical assistance in dying. The Conservative leader skilfully dodged the question by mentioning that it is not currently before the courts. The Bloc Québécois is curious to hear what his colleagues think of this.

It should also be noted that the expert panel did not recommend deferring the exclusion measure. This is a request by professional associations. Although the expert report is entitled “Final Report of the Expert Panel on MAiD and Mental Illness”, the experts recommend changing the terminology to “mental disorder” because “mental illness” does not have a standardized definition. The panel finds that its recommendations on safeguards, protocols and directives should apply to all clinical situations in which several or all of these important concerns are present, namely incurability, irreversibility and capacity. The expert panel considers that the safeguards currently included in the Criminal Code are adequate for cases of medical assistance in dying when a mental disorder is the sole underlying medical condition.

• (1830)

As my colleague from Repentigny said earlier, the panel made 19 recommendations to proceed with requests for medical assistance in dying when a mental disorder is the sole underlying medical condition. They fall into five broad categories: the development of practice standards for medical assistance in dying; the interpretation of the term “grievous and irremediable medical condition”; vulnerabilities; the assessment process; and implementation.

Briefly, the panel recommends that practice standards be developed and shared with professional associations so they can adapt and adopt them. It should be noted that the government set up a task group to address this and that these practice standards were published in early 2023.

When it comes to interpreting the expression “grievous and irremediable medical condition”, the criteria of incurability, irreversibility and enduring and intolerable suffering, which are currently contained in the Criminal Code, must be duly established. They must be appropriately interpreted in applications for MAiD when a mental disorder is the sole underlying medical condition. Although the expert panel acknowledges that it is impossible to establish fixed rules surrounding treatments, their duration, number and variations, they must nonetheless be part of the considerations for accessing medical assistance in dying. Simply put, for someone to have access to MAiD when a mental disorder is the sole underlying medical condition, that person must have a significant history of treatments and therapies.

With regard to vulnerability, this involves ensuring that applicants have access to sufficient resources—housing, pain management, community support—so that their choice to access medical assistance in dying is not based on an adverse social circumstances. Again, the Bloc Québécois reiterates that increasing health transfers and funding the construction of social housing must be permanent priorities for the federal government.

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As for the recommendations regarding the assessment process, the key recommendation is that the Criminal Code requirement, in this case consulting a specialist, involve a psychiatrist.

Finally, the recommendations for implementation can be broken down into three areas: consultation with stakeholders, training, and data collection for monitoring purposes.

As my hon. colleague and friend, the Bloc Québécois member for Repentigny, explained, this is a serious subject. We must set partisanship aside and work with the expert panels.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Abbotsford for his right of reply.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, medical assistance in dying will soon be expanded to include those with mental illness, including depression. My bill, Bill C-314, would reverse this terrible decision. My bill is very narrow and would not repeal the other provisions of Canada's medical assistance in dying laws.

There is no national consensus on expanding MAiD to include mental disorders, none. The most recent Angus Reid poll found that a very small number of Canadians actually favour expanding assisted suicide to the mentally ill, somewhere around 28%.

The mental health community has raised significant concerns. A recent letter to government from the heads of seven Canadian psychiatry schools implored decision-makers to hold off on expanding assisted suicide to the mentally ill. Similarly, the Canadian Psychiatric Association does not support the expansion of MAiD due to the many ethical and clinical concerns that have not been resolved. They argue that mental illness is often highly treatable and that patients should be provided with the treatment they need to manage their symptoms and lead fulfilling lives.

Stakeholders have deplored the lack of social and economic supports for persons with mental illness and how this can lead people to consider MAiD. They have pointed to the fact that the federal government has not fulfilled its promise to deliver dedicated mental health and palliative care funding to the provinces, leaving Canadians without access to the support that would lead them to choose life rather than death.

Many others have joined the chorus. They note that the issues of suicidal ideation, irremediability and competency have not been resolved, ensuring that Canadians will needlessly die because we have rushed ahead with expanding MAiD.

Adjournment Proceedings

At greatest risk are those suffering from depression, veterans suffering from PTSD, the opioid addicted on our streets, our indigenous communities and those seeking to escape a life of poverty. The government has even signalled its openness to allowing children to access assisted suicide, presumably without their parents' consent.

Last year, in my home town of Abbotsford, Donna Duncan was swiftly approved for assisted suicide after failing to receive proper treatment for chronic mental health issues. Her assisted death happened so quickly and so totally blindsided her daughters, Alicia and Christie, that they referred the case to the RCMP. Is this the dystopian world we are leaving behind?

Has anyone consulted with our first nations? Meaghan Walker-Williams of the Cowichan Tribe recently wrote in the National Post:

As a Sixties Scoop survivor, my lifelong personal journey back to my community of Cowichan has also been marked by the painful consequences of policies that didn't respect or understand Indigenous cultures. Another policy, blind to my culture, may soon join them: assisted suicide for mental illness.

She concludes by saying, "it's crucial that the narrative remains firmly rooted in upholding the sanctity of life—a cornerstone of Coast Salish teachings."

I note that the government originally excluded the mentally ill from its MAID regime and went to great lengths to explain why that was necessary. It was only after the unelected Senate included the mentally ill in Bill C-7 that the government suddenly enthusiastically embraced the idea.

The question is this: Should Canadians be able to trust their government to act in a way that values the life of every Canadian, or do we give up on the most vulnerable among us? Someday, all of us will have to give an account.

A famous world leader by the name of Moses once challenged his own people with a choice and a promise: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live". I want my descendants to live, to prosper, to thrive, and I want the same for our mentally ill, our Indigenous peoples and indeed all Canadians. It is time to end this experiment. With so much uncertainty, surely we should err on the side of life, not death.

I respectfully ask members to support Bill C-314.

● (1835)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: 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.

Hon. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I would ask for a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, October 18, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, the cost of flights in Nunavut is astronomical. All 25 communities that I represent are fly-in communities. A flight to Ottawa can cost over \$5,000. It costs more to fly within our own country than it does to destinations such as Mexico, London or Nuuk.

Most of my constituents cannot choose to take vacations, because it is simply not affordable. There are no other options. Flying is an unfortunate reality of living in Nunavut, yet Nunavut does not have adequate airport infrastructure to ensure that prices are affordable.

Nunavummiut have seen increases in fares since the government first approved the Canadian North-First Air merger. I understand these increases were a result of Transport Canada undertakings that made it impossible for Canadian North to maintain sustainable operations. It is difficult and expensive to run an airline in a territory as large and sparsely populated as Nunavut. Imposing onerous conditions on one of Nunavut's only airlines is not the solution. The 25% annual fare increase that Transport Canada has allowed for is also far too high. That is four times the rate of inflation. For a \$3,000 flight between Ottawa and Iqaluit, the fare could be raised by \$750 this year.

When the government announced its new deal with Canadian North last April, they promised to maintain fares and departures while providing a more efficient service. In the last few months, I have received many complaints about the disruptions experienced by my constituents.

Gjoa Haven only has one or two flights per week, which can leave families in southern facilities for extended periods of time. For example, if a person from Gjoa Haven has a medical appointment in Yellowknife, that patient will most likely end up in Yellowknife for weeks because of cancelled or overbooked flights. These are patients who, because of the lack of a health care system, are forced to leave their territory to access basic health care services that are available to the rest of Canada.

The mayor of Arctic Bay wrote to me, saying they are seeing nine fewer flights per week compared with last year. This is unacceptable for communities that rely on these flights for food, health, education, tourism, infrastructure and economic development. My office is hearing many similar stories from constituents who have been stranded due to cancellations, delays or rescheduled flights.

Nunavummiut struggle every day with the excessive cost of living in the North. Not only are they battling the rising costs of food, fuel and housing, but they are also paying thousands of dollars more for essential appointments. According to the federal government release, the deal signed with Canadian North would provide “the access to air services they need, while at the same time ensuring Canadian North remains a viable service provider”. When will the government admit that it will not do so?

● (1840)

Mr. Vance Badawey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the First Air-Canadian North merger was approved, as was mentioned earlier, in 2019, with terms and conditions around pricing, scheduling and employment, amongst other elements that would be in place until mid-2026.

The sudden onset of the pandemic, which drastically changed the air transportation landscape in northern Canada, has had a lasting impact on Canadian North's ability to comply with these conditions while continuing to serve communities, return to profitability and maintain services. Passenger levels in the North remain below 2019 levels and are lower than in other regions throughout the country.

The lasting impacts of COVID have required us to vary the original terms and conditions, while at the same time ensuring that important safeguards remain in place for northern Canadians for the remainder of the period subject to obligations.

In this context, Transport Canada has negotiated new terms and conditions with Canadian North, which were subsequently approved by the Governor in Council. These conditions are intended to strike a balance in ensuring the airline's continued operations and financial resiliency, while maintaining some conditions to maintain the public interest, such as imposing caps on fare increases and profit margins, as well as ensuring the balance of service. These terms and conditions will be in place for the next three years.

Furthermore, the new terms and conditions include an obligation by Canadian North to be subject to assessment by an independent monitor, reporting to the Minister of Transport, and to provide financial and scheduling data to ensure compliance with the new terms and conditions.

The Government of Canada shares concerns over air affordability and accessibility in northern Canada, which is why the Government of Canada insisted on maintaining safeguards for Canadians when deciding to vary the terms and conditions.

At the same time, we have acted to ensure that Canadians in northern communities continue to receive the air services that they rely on. It is our understanding that the merger related terms and conditions to which Canadian North is subject do not supersede the contractual obligations it has with the territories around medical and duty travel. In this context, Canadian North will need to adhere

to the conditions laid out in the agreements it holds with the territories.

I will add, and the member does recognize this, that we on the transport committee are working with the member for Yukon to look at these arrangements, as well as other arrangements to, once again, strike that much-needed balance in the northern part of our country.

● (1845)

Ms. Lori Idlout: Uqaqtittiji, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his response. I did have the pleasure of travelling with him when he was part of the indigenous and northern affairs committee, and know that he has direct experience with the challenges of travelling in my region.

Another example of what it is like to fly in Nunavut is that one of my constituents was on a routine flight from Iqaluit to Ottawa. This flight was cancelled twice, then re-booked for days later. It would have caused her to miss an important meeting. As a result, she had to take a much more expensive flight with Air Canada through Edmonton.

She was told that she was not eligible for compensation and would have to dispute her claim through the Canadian Transportation Agency. She was also advised that this process would take up to 18 months. This is unacceptable. Nunavummiut do not have thousands of dollars and many months to wait for compensation for essential travel. Are these delays what the government had in mind when it introduced the air passenger bill of rights?

Mr. Vance Badawey: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is concerned with ensuring that northern Canadians have access to the air transport they require.

COVID-19 placed serious pressure on the ability of Canadian North to continue to provide services to northern Canadians while at the same time avoiding financial losses. To ensure ongoing service in the north, Transport Canada recently reached the agreement I spoke about earlier with Canadian North to vary their merger related terms and conditions. These aim to strike a balance between addressing public interest concerns while maintaining the sustainability of the airline.

In conclusion, the Government of Canada, in approving these new terms and conditions, ensured there remained safeguards for Canadians, especially in the north, such that each community will continue to be served and that fare increases would be representative of the new realities of the market and capped to ensure that the balance is maintained.

Adjournment Proceedings

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

(The House adjourned at 6:49 p.m.)

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