

January 2020

January 1st

In the spirit of the holiday season I have decided to share a tale of two different Cabinet Ministers from my time as a Member of Parliament representing the concerns of local citizens here in the riding.

In my first year as a Member of Parliament, a man who was a citizen from another country and had a permit to live and work in Canada, decided to take a weekend trip to visit the United States, a common activity for those who live near the border.

Upon return to the Canadian border, the man in question experienced an unfortunate incident where he was ordered to be removed from Canada within seven days.

The removal order was based on claims that the man was not legally in Canada to begin with.

This occurred despite legal documents the man possessed that clearly indicated this was not the case. It was evident that a mistake had been made but the wheels of Ottawa bureaucracy turn very slowly.

This issue in question was brought to my attention by a local MLA who reached out and advocated on behalf of the man, requesting he be allowed to stay according to the terms of his original admissibility documents.

Fortunately, the Minister of Immigration (at the time) was willing to hear the details of the case and ultimately corrected the error and restored faith in the fairness of our administrative process.

I respect this Minister, who is no longer a MP, to this day for demonstrating the leadership necessary to right a wrong that could have easily been buried behind bureaucracy.

On a different note, more recently I was approached by a small business owner from the Okanagan.

This small business owner has been successfully importing goods for resale worldwide for close to two decades.

Over that time frame this business now employs over a dozen people full time and has invested significantly in a local Okanagan community.

Recently, and without warning, a federal agency refused entry to a shipment of goods destined for this small business.

These were the same goods imported to Canada for close to 20 years without incident.

To add insult to injury, no specific reasons have been provided to the small business to justify what was clearly an arbitrary decision made by this agency.

These unaccountable bureaucrats have refused to assist in any meaningful way to produce a solution or even a course of action to resolve whatever issue is ultimately at play.

They have stated that the products are not in compliance, yet will not offer any forward guidance as to which rules are being broken or how they can be brought into compliance, citing that it is the job of the

small business and not the department in question.

This attitude stands diametrically opposed to the Government's rhetoric of encouraging small businesses to expand and export.

From my perspective, this is the type of situation that gives Government bureaucracy a bad name.

I took this issue directly to the Minister in question who sadly has sided with the department and will not offer any useful assistance.

This small business owner faces the potential of losing a significant amount of money that was invested in the inventory that was paid for prior to shipping.

There was a solution here.

Considering the same goods have entered Canada for close to two decades, this shipment could have been released with a directive that it would be the final shipment unless whatever corrective action deemed necessary is identified and undertaken.

In the absence of that the local small business suffers.

I will not be identifying either Minister referenced in my report today but share this with you to ask one simple question.

To what degree of importance do you believe a Cabinet Minister has a duty to be accountable to the citizens of Canada they serve?

I would like to wish you all a healthy and prosperous New Year in 2020.

I can be reached at Dan.Albas@parl.gc.ca or call toll free 1-800-665-8711.

January 8th

Recently the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard announced that a project would be undertaken on the Fraser River to remove an abandoned 75 year old, nearly 200' long, former transport vessel.

The reason for the removal is that "there are imminent risks of pollution threat, hull corrosion, possible sinking and fire".

The cost of this project is estimated to be \$3.3 million, that may or may not be recoverable from the vessels owners, assuming they can be identified.

That the Federal Government is taking action against derelict and abandoned vessels will certainly be welcome news in many areas that have experienced firsthand the adverse environmental impact of this problem.

My issue is not with this project itself, but rather the importance of being proactive.

Here in the Okanagan, we face the very serious threat of aquatic invasive freshwater mussels.

These mussels can clog water intakes causing serious damage to irrigation infrastructure as well as domestic and civic water systems.

Further, as an invasive species, an infestation of these mussels can also create serious adverse impacts on local fish habitat such as the Pacific salmon, and other freshwater ecosystems.

If an infestation did occur in Okanagan Lake, considering the connected Okanagan river drainage system as well as other surrounding freshwater lakes, the threat of other regions being seriously impacted through contamination would be significant and likely.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board predicts that the costs of managing an infestation are estimated to be \$42 million per year in the Okanagan valley alone.

These would be costs forced onto local taxpayers, pending other financial support from the Provincial and Federal Government.

It is easy to understand why it makes far more sense to be proactive in this situation, provide additional resources now, to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species, than to spend significantly more funds addressing an infestation after the fact.

Despite this reality, the Federal Liberal Government continues to largely ignore this threat creating a situation that I believe all citizens of the Okanagan should find unacceptable.

If this Government can prioritize \$12 million to help Loblaws purchase new refrigerators, surely it can also prioritize the roughly \$2 million in annual funding requested from the Okanagan Basin Water Board to protect the interior freshwater lakes of the Okanagan and British Columbia.

My question this week is:

Do you agree?

January 15th

Before I begin my MP report, I would like to take a moment on behalf of the citizens of Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola, to express sincere condolences to the families and friends who lost loved ones aboard Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752.

This heartbreaking tragedy has been felt across Canada including here in the Okanagan.

Please know that our thoughts are with you at this very difficult time.

Now on to my weekly report.

As some may be aware, medical assistance in dying was legalized in the last Parliament based on a ruling from the Supreme Court of Canada.

During the last Parliament I wrote multiple reports on Bill C-14, technically known as "An Act to amend

the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying)".

I also canvassed support for this bill and our region was largely supportive.

At the same time I also voiced some concerns with the proposed legislation, and several challenges have arisen in the legalization framework.

One of those challenges comes from the fact that in order to comply with the terms of the legislation, one must be considered to be "at the end of life" with the "reasonable foresee-ability of natural death" imminent.

This can mean that someone who may otherwise meet the criteria and wish to access medically assistance in dying may have to suffer for a period of time until end of life can be diagnosed as 'imminent'.

In effect, this counters the original intent of the bill to medically assist individuals to end suffering from serious health challenges.

Recently a Quebec Superior Court has ruled this aspect of the bill unconstitutional.

As a result the Federal Government has undertaken to review of the current legislation to comply with the court ruling.

As part of the review process, the Federal Government has created an online questionnaire that citizens can participate in.

I will be posting a link to that online questionnaire at the end of this article.

Please be advised that the deadline for submissions is January 27, 2020.

It should be noted that Parliament is also set to do its own review of the entire regime as the original legislation included a five year statutory review process and this will address areas outside of this Quebec court decision.

Since medically assisted dying has become legalized, over 6,700 Canadians have utilized the program.

That leads to my question for this week:

What are your thoughts about this potential change to the medical assistance in dying legislation?

January 22nd

One of the subjects that has been raised in many recent media headlines is renewed concerns of the expanded rights of United States border agents working in the "pre-clearance" area at Canadian airports.

"Pre-clearance" applies to passengers departing Canadian airports for United States destinations.

The concerns are based on recent amendments to the laws that relate to the Canada/USA Pre-Clearance agreement. United States border agents working in Canadian pre-clearance zones now have many of the same rights and abilities similar to what exist at U.S land based border crossings.

Some have suggested that these expanded powers may be contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Critics have stated that “Trudeau's government is empowering foreign officials and disempowering Canadian citizens. He is kowtowing to American imperialism.”

From my perspective this is an area where, despite my being a member of the official opposition, I believe that the Trudeau Liberal Government has created a necessary balance in order for pre-clearance to have the opportunity to work successfully.

If a citizen is going to be refused entry into the United States, for whatever reason, it is far more convenient for that refusal to occur in Canada at a pre-clearance location, as opposed to being refused entry after landing in the United States, where a subsequent deportation and related unplanned air travel costs could present a far more serious inconvenience.

In more extreme cases a citizen could be potentially held in the USA, pending deportation, creating an extremely stressful and unpleasant situation.

Pre-clearance here in Canada helps to increase efficiency and eliminate uncertainty, as well as mitigate the risks of dealing with an unexpected situation upon arrival in the United States.

For pre-clearance to work, it is understandable that the United States must have similar measures in place at all border crossings that provide entry into the country.

For these reasons, I believe the Liberal Government has achieved a balance that has resulted in the expansion of the pre-clearance program.

From most of the feedback I have received, pre-clearance has proven to be an easier, less stressful way to fly across the border for those citizens who decide to visit to the United States.

My question this week:

Are you supportive of the pre-clearance program operating in Canadian airports for USA bound travelers?

January 29th

With Parliament now actively underway the new dynamics of having a minority government are beginning to become more defined.

Back in late December, despite the Liberal Government voting against it, a special Parliamentary Committee with the mandate to “conduct hearings to examine and review all aspects of the Canada-China relationship including, but not limited to consular, economic, legal, security and diplomatic relations.” was created.

This new Canada-China committee is now established with meetings being held this week.

I was also honoured to be one of the twelve Members of Parliament to be named to sit on this important

all party committee.

Much as the Canada-China committee was created by an opposition day motion, this week another opposition motion was tabled from the official Conservative opposition.

This week's motion is summarized as:

"That, given the Parliamentary Budget Officer posted on March 15, 2018, that "Budget 2018 provides an incomplete account of the changes to the government's \$186.7 billion infrastructure spending plan" and that the "PBO requested the new plan but it does not exist", the House call on the Auditor General of Canada to immediately conduct an audit of the government's Investing in Canada Plan"

It is often said that Infrastructure is a "not sexy but important" part of Government spending.

I would submit it is critically important for many reasons.

As an example infrastructure costs are historically split three ways with local, Provincial and Federal Governments usually equally splitting 1/3 of the cost of the project.

This is an important point because citizens all pay taxes to those three different levels of government.

When either Federal or Provincial or in some cases both sources of funding are not made available, it means a local government must pick up either 66% or possibly 100% of the total infrastructure project costs.

These costs are then downloaded onto local taxpayers who continue to pay taxes to Ottawa and Victoria.

The absence of federal infrastructure funding can significantly raise costs for local citizens, more so in smaller rural communities with a limited tax base.

For whatever reason the Trudeau Liberal Government has not been very successful in delivering infrastructure projects despite having announced \$187 Billion in infrastructure spending plans.

Rather than speculate on the reasons why, the Official Opposition Conservatives have tabled this motion.

With such a large amount of money being spent, bringing in the Auditor General to fully investigate will ensure there are clear answers.

Canadian taxpayers deserve accountability and transparency on how their tax dollars are spent.

Thus far it appears that once again the other opposition parties in this minority Government are supportive despite the Liberal Government's opposition.

My question this week:

Do you support the opposition motion to bring in the Auditor General to audit the Liberal Government's infrastructure program?

February 2020

February 5th

It is interesting to note that this minority Parliament is the 14th minority in Canadian history.

Many of Canada's previous minority governments have lasted anywhere from one to two years, although some longer.

One reason why minority governments tend not to last relates to the efforts of the minority Government to attempt to form a majority.

Why a majority?

Having a majority is how a government can fully implement its agenda.

In recent times majority governments typically see 75% - 80% of all legislation put forward being passed.

Often this requires parliamentary tactics such as "time allocation" or "closure" to achieve this, however these are also legitimate Parliamentary procedures.

In minority government the success rate for passed legislation is much lower.

National Post columnist John Ivison recently observed that former Harper minority governments averaged under 50%.

To date, there have not been any Government bills defeated in our Parliament, however the Government did lose two opposition day motions.

One motion was to create the Canada/China review committee and most recently a motion to call on the Auditor General to review the Liberal Government's infrastructure spending plan in an effort to find out why there are delays in projects getting built.

On the subject of Government bills introduced to date, I will give the Liberal government some credit for introducing legislation likely to get passed. There have been just five Government bills introduced. Two of these are operating bills such as appropriations and oaths of office.

Bill C-4, the "Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement Implementation Act", and most recently Bill C-5 "An Act to amend the Judges Act and the Criminal Code". that parallels a former Private Member's Bill from retired Conservative MP and interim Leader Rona Ambrose that calls for mandatory training for judges to help provide greater understanding for the impact of sexual assaults on victims.

The final one is Bill C-3, "An Act to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act and the Canada Border Services Agency Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts", that proposes to create independent public complaints and review commission (PCRC) that will be merged with the current RCMP independent civilian review and complaints commission(CRCC).

The intent of the PCRC is to provide independent civilian review of the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA).

While it is unclear if this proposed legislation will be successful, I believe that the intent to increase public accountability at the CBSA is a long overdue and needed measure.

My question this week is, do you agree with Bill C-3 to create a merged independent civilian based review commission for the RCMP and CBSA?

February 12th

The House of Commons is adjourned this week to allow for MPs to be back home in our ridings where we can meet with local citizens and other groups and organizations.

The opportunity to hear concerns and challenges citizens have with our federal government is critically important to the work that we do as Members of Parliament.

This week I am hearing many concerns over the protests that occurred at the BC legislature over opposition to the construction of the Coastal GasLink LNG pipeline.

I have also heard concerns over the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project now that reports recently stated construction costs of the pipeline expansion are expected to cost \$12.6 billion. A significant increase from the previous \$7.4 Billion amount that was announced by PM Trudeau when his Liberal government decided to purchase the pipeline.

There is also another energy related project that I suspect will soon become more well known.

The Teck Frontier oil sands mine project potentially located north of Fort MacKay, AB is currently awaiting a federal approval from the Trudeau Liberal cabinet.

So what is the Teck Frontier project?

It is a \$20.6-billion project that will create roughly 7,000 jobs during construction and generate \$12 billion in tax revenues for Ottawa and \$55 billion in tax and royalty revenues for Alberta over its 41-year life.

The project has spent a decade in various stages of licensing and reviews and has been given conditional approval from the joint federal-provincial review panel who declared the project to be in the public interest.

However, that environmental review process works differently than the process that exists today.

Opponents of the projects point out that the mine will generate an estimated 4.1 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent per year.

There are also concerns related to wetlands, forest impact, wildlife as well Indigenous groups who support or oppose the project to name a few.

If the Trudeau Liberal Government approves the project, opponents question how the Prime Minister can meet his promise that Canada will be net zero on GHG emissions by 2050.

If the project is rejected by the Liberal cabinet, supporters of the project believe serious harm will occur

with the relationship between Alberta and the Federal Government that could threaten national unity.

While some dismiss these concerns, it should also be recognized that major GHG emitting projects have not been treated equally by this Liberal Government across Canada.

One example in Quebec is a cement factory that was given an exemption from an environmental review.

This cement factory will emit between 1.8 and 2.2 million tonnes of greenhouse gases a year and will be the largest GHG emitter in the entire province of Quebec.

Another example is from New Brunswick, where the Trudeau Liberal Government gave a 95% carbon tax exemption from dirty coal power.

The Belledune power plant, which burns a combination of coal and petroleum coke, emits up to 2.8 million tonnes of greenhouse gasses annually and was the second largest source of greenhouse gases in Atlantic Canada for 2016.

At that same time the largest emission generator in Atlantic Canada was the Irving Oil Ltd. refinery in Saint John. It is well known that refinery frequently receives oil offshore via tanker from countries who have no carbon taxes and little, if any, environmental policies

My question this week, do you think Canadian energy projects should be treated on an equal basis?

February 19th

In Ottawa, the issue drawing the most debate are the illegal blockades in several areas around Canada, relating to the approval of the \$6-billion, 670 kilometre proposed Coastal GasLink Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) pipeline.

The opposition of this pipeline project is by five Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and their supporters, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal, who believe this project should not proceed without the consent of the five Chiefs' in question.

On the other side of this proposed LNG project are the supporters.

In this case, all twenty First Nations along the route, represented by democratically elected Chiefs' & Councils', have signed letters of support for the project.

These letters of support provide financial, employment and training benefits estimated at close to \$1 billion to the aboriginal communities along the 670 km pipeline route.

The debate has been focussed largely on the Prime Minister's lack of any announced plan on how to deal with the blockades that could soon threaten both our economy and public safety.

Aside from economic interests, chemicals to treat domestic water systems, to de-ice planes so they can fly safely, in addition to propane to heat homes, food, as well as oil and gas, all depend on rail transport to reach Canadian destinations.

So where does the Liberal Government stand?

Does it stand with the will of democratically elected Chiefs' and Councils' who represent the majority of aboriginals in this region who support this LNG project and the much needed benefits?

Or does the Liberal Government stand with the minority of those who oppose this project, in many cases the same interests and activists who frequently oppose Canadian energy projects?

For many this is a complex issue that requires differing interpretations and definitions of the role of unelected Hereditary Chiefs as opposed to democratically elected Chiefs and band councils.

Many point out the need for full reconciliation as a solution while others suggest the Indian Act needs to be abolished.

The Prime Minister has stated that "more dialogue" and "patience" is the solution.

From my perspective I feel it must be pointed out that in no democratic system of governance is there ever 100% agreement on any issue.

I would submit that different perspectives and differing solutions that can be meaningfully debated is part of a healthy democracy.

However in this situation I am greatly concerned.

It would seem that some believe that having all 20 different First Nations' communities along the route signing letters of support for this LNG project by democratically elected band council's is not enough.

The activists and protestors seem to suggest that the five Hereditary Chiefs' in opposition must also fully support this project or it should be cancelled.

In other words there is an expectation for 100% agreement.

This is a threshold that I believe very few, if any, healthy democratic societies could ever hope to achieve.

First Nations are very diverse and it is completely understandable that some will support projects they believe are in the best interests of their community.

It is also understandable that others will oppose certain projects.

This is not unlike what we see with many B.C. municipalities who frequently take different positions on a variety of topics.

Listening to former Chiefs, such as former Haisla Nation Chief Councillor Ellis Ross, I believe democratically elected Chiefs' and Councils' who support projects that can help lift their communities out of poverty must be respected by the democratic will of the community.

February 26th

One of the challenges, with so many different events occurring in Ottawa, is that some become overlooked.

This occurred last week as the 3rd party opposition Bloc Québécois had their first Opposition Day in the House and tabled the following motion:

Mr. Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly): "That the House call on the government to increase the special Employment Insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in the upcoming budget in order to support people with serious illnesses, such as cancer."

After debate on this motion was complete a vote was held with the Bloc, Conservative and NDP voting in favour of the motion passing with the governing Liberals opposed.

In the last parliament, this opposition motion would have been defeated however in this minority parliament, the motion passed.

Prior to this motion passing, the maximum time for the special employment benefit on EI was limited to 15 weeks, a limit that has been in place since 1971.

Unfortunately, how many Canadians might benefit from this change is unknown as the motion was not studied by committee prior to being submitted by the Bloc, as would have been the case with a bill.

This is one of the challenges in a minority parliament where a motion can be established politically and passed very quickly, potentially without sufficient scrutiny.

In this case, EI is a program funded by contributions from both workers and their employers.

This represents an extension of an existing EI benefit that could be of significant financial assistance to a person facing one of life's greatest health challenges.

In certain cases, it very well be the only time some workers might access the EI benefits they have long paid into.

As a result, I supported this motion although I did state some reservations for the lack of proper parliamentary scrutiny.

My question this week:

Do you agree with the motion to extend "the special Employment Insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in the upcoming budget in order to support people with serious illnesses, such as cancer."

March 2020

March 4th

Although the House of Commons is not sitting this week, the Prime Minister announced that he is assembling a "COVID-19" Cabinet Committee to help co-ordinate the response of the federal government to this emerging health threat.

If you are unaware, "COVID 19" is the official name that the World Health Organization (WHO) has used to define the novel coronavirus outbreak, which has also been declared as a public health emergency.

Here in Canada, there have been 33 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 20 in Ontario, 12 in British Columbia and one in Quebec.

South of the border, in Washington State, there have been 28 confirmed cases and 9 deaths reported as a result of the COVID-19 virus, at the time of writing my weekly report.

New cases are also being reported in states like California as well as New York.

To date the virus has infected close to 90,000 people in 60 countries and killed more than 3,000 people, the majority in China.

Our Canadian Chief Public Health Officer has acknowledged that Canada may not be able to contain and limit the virus if it continues to spread around the world.

There is also a government general information line at 1-833-784-4397, for Canadians who have any immediate questions about COVID-19.

In response to the economic impact from the virus outbreak, the Bank of Canada announced it is cutting the key interest rate by half a percentage point, lowering it to 1.25%.

Last week federal Health Minister Patty Hajdu warned people should consider stockpiling enough food and medicine in case of a potential outbreak of the COVID-19.

Many criticized this warning, suggesting it was unnecessary given the low chance of infection here in Canada.

The public health officer has also stated that governments, businesses and individuals should prepare for an outbreak or pandemic.

As a result, provincial health officials are actively monitoring for COVID-19 cases in communities across Canada.

Our public health officer has also asked that travellers arriving from Iran to self-isolate for two weeks to help prevent potential infections.

In turn Global Affairs Canada is currently advising citizens to avoid non-essential travel to Iran, Northern Italy, and to exercise a high degree of caution if travelling to Japan.

Locally, the Interior Health Authority has confirmed one case of COVID-19 has occurred somewhere

within the Interior Health region but refuses to reveal the area where that case has been confirmed.

On this point, I have heard some concerns expressed from the public that it should be possible to reveal the location of the community in question without releasing the name of the patient.

My question this week:

Do you feel that you have the right to know if a COVID-19 infection has been confirmed within your community?

March 11th

It has been seven days since my report last week on the subject of the COVID-19 virus.

Since that time the World Health Organization (WHO) has upgraded the spread of the outbreak, from declaring a public health emergency last week, to now declaring the virus to be a pandemic.

What does a pandemic virus mean?

A new virus is often described in following three different ways.

'Outbreak' which is summarized as an unusual but small virus.

'Epidemic' where the virus is growing larger and is spreading.

The term 'Pandemic' applies where the virus has worldwide impacted and is considered out of control.

In terms of numbers, last week there were 33 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Canada with 20 in Ontario, 12 in British Columbia and one in Quebec.

As of today, there are now confirmed 93 cases with 36 in Ontario, 39 in British Columbia, 4 in Quebec and 14 in Alberta.

There has also been the first COVID-19 related death confirmed in a North Vancouver care home.

Some more positive news, of the 36 confirmed cases in Ontario, five have now recovered.

From a global perspective, last week's numbers showed that the virus had infected close to 90,000 people in 60 countries and killed more than 3,000 people.

As of this week, there have now been nearly 120,000 people in 115 countries infected and more than 4,000 people have died as a result of the virus.

Fortunately it has also been stated that more than 60,000 people have recovered.

What has been the response of the Federal Government?

The Prime Minister recently announced \$1 billion in funding related to the COVID-19 virus.

The majority of the funding will be distributed as follows:

\$500 million to Provinces and Territories, \$275 Million in research, \$100 million in additional public health response, including funding for Indigenous Services Canada and \$50 million in international aid.

The remaining funds will be spent in areas such as communications and public education, personal protective equipment, repatriation of Canadians, work sharing and changes to the EI sickness benefits program, intended to waive the usual one week waiting period to obtain EI sickness benefits.

There is also a government general information line at 1-833-784-4397 for Canadians who have any immediate questions about COVID-19.

For clarification purposes, here some measures that other countries are undertaking to further contain the virus that are not being taken in Canada.

Measures such as, vigorous screening processes upon entry, mandatory quarantine for those who do enter from high risk countries or potentially stopping incoming and outgoing flights from high risk areas.

I mention that as there has been some confusion as to what screening efforts exist, or in this case do not exist, here in Canada relative to other countries.

My question this week:

Do you think the Federal Government is doing enough to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Canada?

March 18th

When I first wrote on the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) three weeks ago there were 33 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Canada with 20 in Ontario, 12 in British Columbia and one in Quebec.

Last week those numbers had increased to 93 confirmed cases in Canada, with 36 in Ontario, 39 in British Columbia, 4 in Quebec and 14 in Alberta.

One death as a result of the disease had also been recorded in B.C.

This week the numbers are as follows: 701 confirmed cases in Canada with 212 in Ontario, 231 in B.C., 97 in Alberta, 94 in Quebec, 12 in Manitoba and the rest in other parts of Canada.

There have now been seven COVID-19 deaths in B.C.

One of the health challenges is, for a variety of different reasons, the tests for the virus are all at maximum capacity.

This means that as more capacity is added to increase the tests, numbers may continue to rise

substantially.

At the same time, the Province of B.C. has declared a state of emergency with the City of Vancouver also proposing similar measures.

The reason why a state of emergency is called is to allow authorities to have more abilities to fight the spread of the virus.

This week in Ottawa, the Prime Minister announced up to \$87 billion in financial assistance to help mitigate the financial impacts that COVID-19 will inflict upon Canadians.

The measures are vast but include temporarily increasing the Canada Child Benefit & GST credits,

EI entitlements for those who would not normally qualify and a labour payroll subsidy of 10% to small business owners.

Other measures include deferring the due date for individuals on personal income taxes. The return filing due date will be deferred until June 1, 2020.

In addition there will be a reduction in the required minimum withdrawals from Registered

Retirement Income Funds (RRIFs) by 25% for 2020.

The Government also proposed two new benefits.

First, the Emergency Care Benefit- which will allow for people directly impacted by COVID-19 to receive up to \$900 dollars every two weeks for a maximum of 15 weeks.

This is to support workers, including the self employed, that find themselves in quarantine, looking after a family member such as an elderly parent or those parents with children requiring care due to school closures and are unable to earn employment income irrespective if they qualify for EI or not.

The second is the Emergency Support Benefit and is for Canadians who lose their job or face reduced hours and are not eligible for EI.

Unfortunately we do not know more, other than they have proposed 5 billion to fund this new benefit and at this time I cannot provide constituents more details.

Both of these new benefits will be available for application only through the internet via a CRA My Account,

My Service Canada Account or through a yet to be disclosed toll free number.

This approach may pose positives and negatives.

The Prime Minister himself has suggested Canadians should stay home wherever possible in order to reduce exposure to the virus.

But on the other hand I am already hearing frustrations that the toll-free numbers for existing programs often result with citizens unable to get through.

While online access works for many Canadians, rural areas lack online access making this option potentially unworkable for some.

Lastly, is speed and responsiveness.

These new benefits will be open for application in April and people are concerned with whether or not they will qualify or if the payments are issued quickly for those wrestling with rent, grocery and medicine bills.

This is only a partial summary of the many measures put forward.

I will give credit to the Government for making efforts to have a comprehensive financial response.

My question this week is will these proposed measures help you?

March 25th

At the time I write this week's report from Ottawa, we have just finished a special all night session of Parliament passing Bill C-13 "An Act respecting certain measures in response to COVID-19".

Despite some initial challenges and delays, it was reassuring to see that we were able to reach consensus.

As much as I would like to share the contents of this bill with you, it is far more important to share with you the program that was announced today enabled by the passing of measures in C-13.

This program is the 'Canada Emergency Response Benefit' (CERB).

Last week the Prime Minister announced two different COVID-19 Employment Insurance (EI)-like programs.

The 'Emergency Care Benefit' and the 'Emergency Support Benefit'.

The fact that there were two programs was complicated to Canadians and also required more administration.

It also became evident that, despite the best intentions of these programs to help Canadians most in need, they were creating many gaps that would result in Canadians not getting the help they needed, at a critical time.

As a result, these programs have now been rolled into a single 'Canada Emergency Response Benefit' program (CERB) that has significantly increased criteria to help eliminate the gaps from the previously announced programs.

CERB is a taxable benefit that can provide \$2,000 a month, for up to four months, to workers who lose their income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CERB is intended to cover citizens who have "lost their job, are sick, quarantined, or taking care of someone who is sick with COVID-19, as well as working parents who must stay home without pay to care for children who are sick or at home because of school and daycare closures."

This program applies to wage earners, as well as contract workers and self-employed individuals who would not otherwise be eligible for Employment Insurance (EI).

Another important aspect is that the CERB program will also apply to “workers who are still employed, but are not receiving income because of disruptions to their work situation due to COVID-19”.

The details of exactly how that will work in practice are as yet undefined.

Once the online application portal is open through a ‘My CRA’ or ‘My Service CANADA’ account, and a yet to be determined toll free number, the intent is that eligible applicants would begin to receive their CERB payments within 10 days of application.

A CERB payment would be made to applicants every four weeks.

My thoughts on this?

I will commend the Federal Government for recognizing the programs they announced last week were not the response that Canadians needed and for coming back with a simplified, comprehensive and, in my hope, an effective solution.

However the greatest challenge that still remains is the capacity of government to deliver this program to Canadians most in need, in a timely manner.

As many will know, close to one million Canadians have applied for EI benefits- the vast majority applying due to layoffs.

This is the largest week of unemployment in Canadian history.

As of Monday of this week 143,000 of these EI claims have been processed, also the most ever in a single week.

The challenge is, at that current pace, it will be close to six weeks before all of the current claims can be processed.

This does also not take into account the increasing layoffs that are occurring daily.

As the Official Opposition, we are continuing to raise the need to increase capacity to deliver these much needed services and also to raise concerns if there are those who are still falling through the cracks.

My question this week:

Do you know someone who is currently falling through the cracks and needs help?

April 2020

April 1st

This week, after some delay, the Finance Minister announced more information on the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) program and will require the recall of Parliament before it can be implemented.

The CEWS program is intended to provide financial assistance to Canada's business community who are in many cases are facing significant economic losses as a result of the COVID-19 virus.

The CEWS will subsidize wages of workers at a rate of 75% of the first \$58,700 earned by employees, representing a benefit of up to \$847 per week.

This program would be in place for a 12-week period, from March 15 to June 6, 2020.

In order to qualify, an employer must "*suffer a drop in gross revenues of at least 30 per cent in March, April or May, when compared to the same month in 2019*" to access the subsidy.

For any new business created *after* this time frame, at the moment, that business does not qualify, although details may change.

There is no limit to the size of the employer who is eligible and non-profit organizations will also qualify.

Only public sector employers will not qualify.

Any eligible employer accessing this wage subsidy will have it based on the actual wages paid to employees.

Although employers are expected to demonstrate they will attempt to pay the remaining 25% of the wages, it is not required to access the program.

It is unclear how the government will define an attempt to pay the 25% wage top up.

For those that qualify for the CEWS, and make application for the program, it is expected that there will be a 6 week delay before the subsidy will actually be available.

The application process for CEWS is also currently unavailable at this time.

My thoughts?

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) has stated that for some business with small margins, there could be a massive loss of jobs without ever reaching the loss of 30% of gross revenue- a fair point.

From my perspective I am concerned that new businesses, of which we have many in our region, do not at present qualify for the program.

This is something I am hopeful will change.

The 6 week timeframe is also a challenge given that all public information indicates our current public

health restrictions are not expected to change over the next 6 weeks.

This means that many businesses will lack the cash flow to hire staff and take advantage of this program.

My remaining concern is that the businesses who are most able to wait the 6 weeks, and are minimally impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, and can take advantage of this program, are not necessarily the businesses who most need the assistance.

My question this week:

Do you think the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy will provide the support for those business most in need?

April 8th

Most elected officials learn to develop a “thick skin” over time as criticisms and personal insults/attacks are an unfortunate by-product of public office.

This situation occurs more so if you are as active on social media as I am.

The reason I share this is related to recent criticism I received over my support for the compassion shown by the community of West Kelowna towards 19 foreign national farm workers who have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.

My reason for sharing this is not over the criticism, but rather my concern for this situation.

To be clear this situation is in no way the fault of these workers.

When these workers arrived in Canada on March 12th, there was still no screening or travel restrictions in effect at Canadian airports.

These workers received no special instructions and by extension were uninformed.

This is a fault of a lack of federal leadership at our airports that fall under federal regulations.

If anything this situation has demonstrated the critical need for screening and travel restriction at our borders and airports that for too long our Prime Minister refused to implement.

It is unfortunate that many provinces are now forced to supplement these efforts due to federal shortcomings.

For these farm workers, let us all remember that nobody wants to be sick with a potentially terminal virus in a country that is far from home.

I would like to commend the many citizens of West Kelowna who the Kelowna Capital News reports *“reached out to offer help, food, or general support for our seasonal guest workers”*.

It was further reported that this support has *“helped with their morale and feeling of belonging in our community.”*

On a personal note I am very proud of the people of West Kelowna for their kindness and compassion.

Thank You.

We must also not overlook that in many countries we have Canadians who, because of COVID-19, are trapped and are currently desperately trying to come home.

For any Canadian trapped in this situation, in another country far from home, I am certain they would want to be located in a compassionate, kind and welcoming community such as West Kelowna.

On a different but related note I know that, with so many Canadians currently laid off, many question why temporary farm workers from outside of Canada are still needed in local farms.

While I do not speak for farmers, I do hear from them.

This season there will be a significant labour shortage in many local farms and orchards and there will be many farm related jobs available.

Already InfoNews has reported that a well-known Lake Country farm operation has received “hundreds’ of resumes” from laid-off workers after posting help-wanted ads.

Expect this trend to continue throughout the Okanagan.

I have purposely included references that these stories were reported by local news organizations.

The importance of local journalism is critical to our communities. Local media report on what occurs at your local council, regional district or school trustee meetings, as well as local volunteer initiatives or efforts.

Right now supporting local news is vital.

If you have a subscription based local news source, please consider subscribing.

If you are in a position to advertise, now is a critical time to do so.

Two questions this week:

Will you support local journalism?

If so, how?

April 15th

In many ways the ongoing responses coming out of Ottawa resembles the movie “Groundhog Day”.

In this case, the Government makes a major program announcement only to be followed one week later by another announcement that is often significantly different from what was announced the week previously.

For example, in my March 18th report I referenced the newly announced the “Emergency Care Benefit” program and the “Emergency Support Benefit Programs” and shared details of these initiatives.

By my March 25th report, both of these support programs had essentially been cancelled with the creation of new “Canadian Emergency Response Benefit Program(CERB)”

There has been a similar pattern for small and mid-sized business where at first a 10% wage subsidy was announced and was said to sufficient.

Two weeks later a new wage subsidy program was announced that provided benefits of 75% of wages, provided losses could be established from this time of year one year ago.

Last week, this was again changed to reflect losses occurring since January 1st of this year.

Currently the biggest challenge of the wage subsidy program is that benefits expect to be a minimum of 6 weeks away.

Many businesses have stated is too long for them to survive.

This week, the Government announced new eligibility criteria for the CERB benefit program.

A summary of the key changes in eligibility are as follows:

- Those who earn wages but earn less \$1000/month will become eligible to apply for CERB.
- Those expecting a seasonal job that no longer exists will be able apply for CERB.
- Those who have run out of EI after January 1, 2020 will be eligible to receive further support.

Unfortunately, when I and other members asked for when these changes will take effect, the Minister responsible said the timeline for changes is unclear.

Some changes may come faster as they only require a regulatory change.

Others may require a legislative change and require Parliament’s approval which can take longer.

Virtually every one of the changes and re-announcements that have occurred over the past month has been made because

Ottawa has, at first, vastly underestimated the significance of need that exists in our communities. In short these programs as announced, failed to do what was required.

Too many Canadians in need were falling through the cracks.

As the Opposition, all parties have raised these serious concerns and in my view the Government has been listening to these concerns.

There are still cracks remaining and citizens in need that require assistance that they currently still do not qualify for.

However, with the Government and Opposition working together on a “Team Canada” approach I believe, with the CERB eligibility expansion announced this week, this list is getting smaller and we will continue to ensure this progress continues.

My question to you.

Are you satisfied with the work the Government and Opposition are doing in Ottawa on your behalf?

April 22nd

This week, not unlike last week, and the week before, the Government has announced another "Emergency Assistance" program.

This latest program is the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) and is intended to provide supports for those students who do not qualify for the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).

The formal details of this new program have not yet been released, and will require legislation, however the general guidelines of the program are as follows:

Eligibility for this CESB program is said to apply to "post-secondary (college and university) students who are currently in school, are planning to start school in September 2020, or graduated from school in December 2019, if they have lost work or cannot find work due to the pandemic."

It is also open to working students "earning less than \$1,000 per month who also able to apply for the benefit if their hours have been cut due to COVID-19."

This benefit will provide monthly support payments of \$1,250 from May 1st until August of 2020.

This amount can be increased to \$1,750 monthly for those students who are caring for someone with a disability.

There will also be other measures ranging from increased student grants and financial assistance to enhanced scholarships and other initiatives.

As this program will require an in person sitting of Parliament to be implemented, the exact details will become further defined.

In my view this new program will definitely be of benefit for many students who clearly did not qualify for the CERB program and had fallen through the cracks.

The reason why I referenced "clearly" in the context of not qualifying for the CERB program is for good reason.

Some students have expressed both confusion and even frustration trying to determine if they are eligible for the CERB benefit or not.

The confusion is related to recent comments the Prime Minister made in the House of Commons in Question Period stating that: "students who had a job last summer or who worked during the school year are eligible for the CERB if they earned over \$5,000. Many students are eligible."

In fact, the actual legislation has additional requirements including, that aside from earning over \$5,000, the benefit Q&A specifically states "If you are a student who had a job last year and were planning on

working this summer you do not qualify for the benefit”.

As the Opposition, we continue to push the Liberal Government for clarification on this as many students, based on hearing the Prime Minister’s comments, applied for the CERB benefit in good faith.

Unfortunately, as the Liberal Government, BLOC, NDP and Green Party all voted to have only one question period per week, there are fewer opportunities to raise important issues like this one in Parliament.

At this point in time a virtual Parliament has been reported by the non partisan Clerk of the House of Commons as not feasible at this time.

By comparison the British Parliament will sit with reduced numbers for three days a week, along with virtual option for those not in person.

My question this week relates to the House of Commons:

Do you support the decision for the House to sit with reduced numbers only one day per week?

April 29th

Normally, at this time of year, I would be referencing the April 30 deadline to file your personal income tax.

Instead I will be outlining the changes that have been made to the income tax filing deadline.

As part of the federal government COVID-19 response effort, the filing deadline has been extended to individuals to June 1st of 2020.

This change applies to all Canadians who file an individual tax return with the Canadian Revenue Agency.

If you owe taxes for the 2019 taxation year the payment deadline has also been extended to September 1st of 2020.

For self-employed individuals the filing deadline remains unchanged at June 15, of 2020.

It should also be pointed out that if you are expecting an income tax refund or to qualify for other benefits, such as the GST/HST credit or the Canada Child Benefit, the earlier you can file your return the less likely you are to encounter a delay in receiving these benefits.

There is also now more information available for the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program.

This program details indicate that It offers “forgivable loans to eligible commercial property owners so that they can reduce the rent owed by their impacted small business tenants by at least 75% for the months of April, May and June, 2020.”

At the moment to qualify a commercial property owner (landlord) must meet the following criteria:

- own property that generates rental revenue from commercial real property located in Canada.
- the rental property in question must have a mortgage secured by the commercial real property, occupied by one or more small business tenants.
- The landlord must have entered or will enter into a rent reduction agreement for the period of April, May, and June 2020, that will reduce impacted small business tenant's rent by at least 75%.
- The rent reduction agreement with your tenants must include a moratorium on eviction for the period of April, May and June 2020.
- And finally a commercial landlord must have declared rental income on their tax return (personal or corporate) for tax years 2018 and/or 2019.

The initial feedback I have heard from commercial landlords has not been positive.

Landlords who do not have a mortgage cannot, at the present time, apply for this program.

Another common complaint is that the program forces a landlord to undertake a loan with no guarantees or recourse if a tenant defaults.

If anything by agreeing to a non-eviction clause for three months, a landlord could be faced with even higher costs from participating in this program.

From the angle of a small business tenant, if the landlord does not qualify for this program or refuses to apply because of the poorly designed terms, they will receive no assistance whatsoever.

In my view, this program fails to achieve the intended goals to help small and mid-sized business with a meaningful rent reduction and I am hopeful that the federal government will make further changes to fine tune this program.

My question this week:

Do you agree?

May 2020

May 6th

I do not normally issue a "spoiler alert" in my weekly reports however this week I will focus on the recently announced semi-automatic rifle ban from the Prime Minister.

For those with no interest in this subject, this report may be of little value to you.

Aside from strong personal opinions on this recent announcement, I have also been hearing some confusion and misunderstanding that I will attempt to clarify.

From a misunderstanding perspective, many citizens have correctly pointed out that military assault rifles in Canada have long been illegal.

It has been suggested by many that the Liberal Government is intentionally attempting to mischaracterize certain semi-automatic rifles, selected for this ban, as being “military grade” or “assault style” and using other terms that have no legal definition in Canada.

This is true, many of the terms used to describe the rifles chosen for this ban do not exist within the Canada Firearms Act.

Another point of confusion has been the headline:

“Trudeau announces ban on 1,500 types of 'assault-style' firearms”.

While I have already referenced the misleading “assault style” term that does not exist within the Firearms Act, the number “1,500 firearms” has also led to confusion.

There is essentially eleven different types of semi-automatic rifles that have been arbitrarily selected for this ban.

Because these eleven types of rifles are manufactured by several different manufacturers, and in multiple different configurations, there are potentially 1,500 different variations of these core eleven rifle designs affected by this ban.

As for why these eleven rifle designs were selected by Prime Minister Trudeau, the PM has stated:

"These weapons were designed for one purpose and one purpose only: to kill the largest number of people in the shortest amount of time," Trudeau said. "There is no use and no place for such weapons in Canada."

CBC has also reported that the PM has “acknowledged that most firearms owners are law-abiding citizens, he said hunters don't need this sort of firepower.”

The last statement reported from CBC is of interest.

The semi-automatic rifle ban is not being done through a bill nor being debated and voted on in Parliament.

Instead the PM has decided to carry out this ban through an executive regulation change, known as an 'Order In Council'.

Having now read this particular order, buried at the bottom is this sentence:

“Recognizing that some Indigenous and sustenance hunters could be using previously non-restricted firearms for their hunting and may be unable to replace these firearms immediately, the Amnesty Order includes provisions for the limited use of these firearms for such purposes.”

This statement clearly acknowledges that in actual fact, these rifles are used for hunting and provides an amnesty to allow Aboriginal hunters to continue to use them accordingly.

The Liberal Government has yet to explain this contradiction.

The rifle ban also proposes a “buy back” plan where owners of these restricted rifles will, at some point in the future, be able to receive financial compensation for “selling” these rifles to the government at a currently unknown rate.

There is also a two-year amnesty for owners of these restricted rifles, while the government determines future steps on how the buy-back will work.

From my perspective, this issue should come before Parliament where it can be studied at committee stage.

Committee stage review is a critically important part of a bill's progress, where experts and other affected groups can provide evidence on the proposed piece of legislation.

Ultimately evidence can lead to amendments and that is how legislation can be improved to better serve Canadians.

It also allows democratically elected MP's the opportunity to vote on such a bill, so citizens can hold us to account.

As it currently stands, this Order in Council allows none of these things to occur and that is not how our Parliament should deal with this topic, in a transparent and democratically accountable manner.

May 13th

There are now currently 7.7 million Canadians collecting the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) across Canada.

This CERB benefit program was one that had support of MP's from all parties in the House of Commons.

I believe that most Canadians would agree with the importance of a financial assistance program to assist citizens during an unprecedented economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 virus pandemic.

At the same time, I also believe that Canadians would expect the government to distribute these funds with integrity and in a manner that is respectful of your tax dollars.

Unfortunately this week we learned that may not be the case.

Both the CBC, and in greater detail, the National Post have reported some alarming news.

To quote from the National Post:

“A memo told employees not to halt payment or trigger investigations for potential abuse, while department has suspended 'compliance and enforcement' of EI program”

It has been further reported that potentially “200,000 (CERB) applications have already been “red-flagged” as possibly fraudulent because of dubious claims of past employment income and other factors.”

And now we learn that federal civil servants have been instructed to ignore CERB applications they consider potentially fraudulent.

I had the opportunity to directly ask the Prime Minister during a recent virtual Parliament session if he or any of his Ministers had signed off on this disturbing memo that instructs civil servants to ignore potential cases of fraud.

Despite asking several times, the Prime Minister refused to directly answer my questions, if he or any Minister signed off on this policy.

The Prime Minister will only state *"In this unprecedented situation, our focus has been on helping as many people as possible, as quickly as possible,"*.

While I suspect no one will dispute the desire to assist those in need, the question remains, did the Prime Minister or one of his Ministers direct civil servants to ignore fraud?

This is potentially \$400 million per month in fraudulent CERB payments.

The Prime Minister stated that, at some point in the future, his government will clean up fraudulent claims *"after the fact"* but then who authorized this policy to ignore fraud as it happens?

The PM only now declaring his government will clean up after the fact, once the possible fraud has been leaked by civil servants, raises serious and troubling questions on how this government spends your tax dollars.

My question this week:

Is there ever a time where you believe a government should intentionally ignore potential fraud when it comes to a taxpayer financed program?

May 20th

In my report last week, I referenced media reports on public servants being directed to ignore potential cases of fraud for the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB).

It had been reported that potentially "200,000 (CERB) applications have already been "red-flagged" as possibly fraudulent because of dubious claims of past employment income and other factors."

Since my report, it's been additionally reported that even the CERB applications where applicants clearly did not meet the eligibility requirements, public servants have been instructed to ignore those facts and ensure the payments are processed regardless.

The Liberal Government's response to these concerns has been to suggest that applications cannot be scrutinized in a timely manner and that all fraudulent claims will be clawed back.

Unfortunately, this response from the Prime Minister fails to recognize that public servants actively discovered these issues of non-compliance and in turn shared them with media organizations after having been told to ignore them.

In other words, it is possible to have integrity screening at the same time CERB applications are being processed.

The Prime Minister has made the political decision to ignore potential cases of fraud.

Why does this matter?

For every program this government has created, it has also created an eligibility criteria.

This process often results in some people not meeting that criteria and potentially falling through the cracks.

That is why it has been important for the Government and Opposition to work together to identify these areas so they can be addressed.

Fortunately because of that work, many of these cracks have been filled.

To ignore fraud will put some Canadians into a situation where the funds they received, but were not entitled to, will be clawed back.

This could happen at a future date where they might not have these funds available.

This can result in other benefit support payments being garnisheed, creating a new level of hardship.

In the case of CERB, there are now close to 8 million people collecting this \$2,000 monthly benefit.

The most recent Statistics Canada labour-force survey showed that roughly three million people had become unemployed.

It was further reported that another 2.5 million people were working less than half their normal hours because of the COVID lockdown.

This is a total of 5.5 million people who, based on the Liberal Government's CERB eligibility criteria, would potentially be eligible for the benefit.

With close to 8 million people now collecting the CERB benefit, there is a considerable debate on why these numbers do not more closely reconcile.

Meanwhile our federal Auditor General is reported as stating that a "lack of government funding has created significant technological, cyber security and staffing issues for the office, hampering his ability to fulfill his mandate."

The office of the Auditor General has requested additional funding of \$10.8 million from the yet to be delivered 2020-21 federal budget.

My question this week:

Do you believe there is enough fiscal oversight on how your tax dollars are being spent during this pandemic?

May 27th

This has been a highly unusual time in Ottawa.

Last week the leader of the Bloc Quebecois threatened the Trudeau Liberal government.

What was the threat?

That the Bloc would not support resuming regular in-person sittings of the House of Commons unless Prime Minister Trudeau agreed to a number of Bloc demands.

Not to be outdone, the NDP also used the threat of returning to regular Parliament as a bargaining chip against Prime Minister Trudeau.

In the case of the NDP, they offered to support continuing the suspension of Parliament in exchange for the Liberal Government attempting to implement mandatory paid sick leave for employees.

As you may have heard, the Trudeau Liberal Government, desperately not wanting regular sittings of Parliament to resume, accepted the NDP terms and are currently having discussions with the provinces and territories.

The reason why there are discussions, or more likely negotiations, is because, with the exception of federally regulated workplaces, the vast majority of Canadian workers fall under provincial labour legislation.

It is deeply troubling that both the Bloc and the NDP used the resumption of regular sittings of Parliament as a bargaining chip against Prime Minister Trudeau.

While the NDP are claiming a victory for their efforts to derail regular sittings of Parliament in return for a commitment for mandatory paid sick leave, there is an inconvenient truth that the NDP is avoiding.

Had regular sessions of Parliament resumed, the NDP could have introduced mandatory sick leave as an opposition day motion, where it could be properly discussed and debated on the floor of the House of Commons.

Already during this Parliament there have been Opposition Day motions that have been passed despite the minority Liberal Government voting against them.

Not only are there no Opposition Day motions, there will also be no private member's business as well as a loss of other Parliamentary debates and discussions.

All of this will be in effect until September 21st of this year, where the same political bargaining situation could resume.

Let's be honest, this was not a health and safety related deal between the NDP Opposition and the Liberal Government.

MP's will continue to sit in Ottawa, in person, four days a week from now until June.

The difference is, that instead of sitting in regular Parliament for those four days, MP's will instead continue to sit as part of the special COVID-19 committee.

As mentioned previously, the special COVID-19 committee meetings have limitations for opposition parties as well as for individual Members of Parliament.

I will state publicly that I am deeply disappointed in the NDP, who have denied the Official Opposition from being able to fully hold this Liberal government to account.

The job that voters sent us to do, to raise concerns on their behalf in Ottawa, is now seriously limited.

If the NDP did not want to do the job voters elected them to do, they could have remained at home in their ridings and allowed the Official Opposition to hold the Government to account.

Instead they cut a deal that diminishes our role to hold the government accountable during a critical time in Canadian history.

My question this week:

What are your thoughts on this?

June 2020

June 3rd

When the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) program was launched, Government of Canada civil servants estimated the total costs of the program would be roughly \$35 Billion in this fiscal year.

However, we now know that the government is projecting the CERB to cost up to \$60 billion when it wraps up later this year.

We also now know that that the Trudeau Liberal Government instructed civil servants to ignore fraudulent applications.

It has been revealed that instructions were given to approve applications that did not meet the CERB guidelines that were set by the Liberal Government in the first place.

This is part of the reason why the revised total for the CERB program will be much higher than expected.

These significant expenditures will come up for debate shortly, and without regular Parliament being in session, there will be only four hours of debate to scrutinize this additional spending.

This is completely unacceptable.

We need time to dig into the books and ensure that taxpayers are being respected.

Sadly, due to the Liberal government and their NDP allies, that will not happen.

Recognizing that CERB fraud has become a significant problem, the Liberal Government has now announced what the media reports as a "CRA snitch line".

Using this "snitch line", suspected fraudulent claims may be reported.

This same method will also be accepting suspected fraud reports of the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) and the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) programs.

Revenue Canada has confirmed it will take all necessary steps to recover any funds obtained by fraud.

The purpose of my report this week is not to criticize the government for taking these steps but rather to inform citizens of the efforts being undertaken by the government to address the problem of fraud, after the fact.

These are important challenges to be aware of.

These are challenges that would be important to include in debate in Ottawa.

Unfortunately, with just four hours of debate being made available, divided among all members of the House, it will be a challenge.

I remain of the strong view that it was a serious mistake for the NDP to support this Liberal Government in shutting down Parliament during this crisis.

My question this week.

Do you believe regular sittings of Parliament must be resumed as a priority?

June 10th

As I write this week's report, the House of Commons special COVID Committee has just adjourned until next week.

The Liberal Government was to introduce a new bill today, an omnibus bill, to propose measures and revisions to the various COVID-19 assistance response programs.

One of these measures was a new, one-time non taxable \$600 payment (expected mid August) that would help some but not all Canadians living with a disability, as it would go to only those who have been approved for the Disability Tax Credit (DTC).

What became obvious early on was that due to this being an omnibus bill, some measures were not supported by all parties.

As an example, the NDP opposed to penalties for citizens who intentionally defrauded the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) benefit program.

The Bloc Québécois also had various demands, such as that the Liberal Government providing a fiscal

update that, despite hundreds of billions in spending, the government has refused to account for.

At one point things looked promising as the Liberal government agreed to split the omnibus bill so that a separate bill, proposing the one time \$600 disability payment, could be potentially debated and passed independently.

However, the Liberal government wanted their legislation to pass all stages in less than a single day, while the Conservative opposition has been clamouring for the responsible return of Parliament.

One that would follow health protocols with less than 50 MP's, but would allow Parliamentarians to scrutinize the proposed bills, have a regular question period, request emergency debates and file questions on the order paper.

Unfortunately, the Liberal government rejected this proposal.

As the minority Liberal government only needs the support of one party to pass legislation forward, some have suggested that by refusing to make a concession to any of the three opposition parties, the Liberals engineered this failure.

Why would a minority government engineer a failure?

Simply to present an argument to Canadians that a minority Parliament is not working and to build a case for a majority and an election.

I do not necessarily buy into this argument as the Liberals, by their own admission, have other means to deliver the one time disability tax credit payment through the Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA) without this bill by using an Information Sharing Agreement.

Information Sharing Agreements are regularly used by government agencies such as CRA to communicate with other federal departments on important benefits like the Canada Child Benefit, Old Age Security or the Guaranteed Income Supplement or GST credit.

When the Liberals wanted to sideline regular sittings of Parliament, they were able to make a deal with the NDP to do so.

That deal, to possibly provide 10 days of paid sick leave, was largely an issue that requires Provincial governments to support if it is to occur.

In this case, all of the demands from the opposition parties depended on actions from the Liberal government and it would appear these demands were considered too significant to be met.

My question this week:

Were opposition parties correct to stick to their demands or should the Liberals have made a concession with one or more of the parties to move a split bill forward?

June 17th

This week the government announced that the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) will be extended by a further 8 weeks, which means the benefits will no longer end this July for the earliest applicants.

There have also been reports that the government may change some of the requirements to remain on CERB, although at this time these changes have yet to be confirmed.

Increasingly we are hearing about other reported challenges created because of the CERB.

Many employers trying to restart businesses have indicated they are often unsuccessful in bringing some employees back, who would prefer to remain on CERB.

This could be due to childcare or workplace safety issues.

In other situations, a worker may be financially penalized if they earn more than the CERB income threshold and may end up actually having less household income from working, rather than not working and just collecting CERB.

This occurs because a worker may earn up to \$1,000 and still collect the full response benefit.

However any amount over \$1000 and the entire CERB benefit is cut off.

For both workers and employers this makes our economic recovery even more difficult.

One possible option is to provide incentives rather than penalties for citizens getting back into the workforce.

For example, instead of clawing back the entire CERB payment if someone makes more than \$1,000 a month, perhaps they could be able to keep 50 cents of the CERB payment for every dollar made from working above that threshold.

The need to modify the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit to transition the re-opening of our economy is an important one.

However, we have to remember that workers should not be forced back into the workplace until it is safe to do so.

My question this week:

Do you think the CERB benefit should be reworked and if so how is the best way to do so?

June 24th

Some citizens currently receiving the CERB benefit were shocked and alarmed to receive news this week that they “will not receive a (CERB) payment when you complete your next report”.

The reason?

“When you first applied for the CERB, you received two payments; a payment of \$2,000 as well as a payment following your initial report. This \$2,000 was an advance on four weeks of the CERB, which was issued in order to get money in your pocket as quickly as possible”.

The communication from the Trudeau Liberal Government than goes on to say:

“Because of this advance, you will not receive not receive a payment when you complete your next report”.

In other words, because the initial CERB payment was deemed to be an ‘advance’, it is now being fully clawed back.

For many citizens, who were completely unaware that this initial \$2,000 was considered to be an advance, they are now seriously adversely impacted having had no prior warning this situation was going to occur.

According to the Liberal Government, when people submitted their first reports, they were told in advance that this would occur and how this would happen.

As the Opposition Shadow Minister with the critic portfolio for this file, I feel that it is important that we refer back to media reports on April 8 of 2020.

In particular Global News reported the headline “Did you get 2 CERB payments? It’s not a mistake, Minister says”.

The article further quotes that:

“Treasury Board President Jean-Yves Duclos clarified during a press conference on Wednesday. The second deposit is a retroactive payment.”

For many Canadians who heard the President of the Treasury Board declare this \$2000 was a “retroactive payment” and relied on that in good faith, they are shocked and confused to be told the payment was actually an “advance” and will be now clawed back.

Aside from the confusion created on part of the government, I also question the government’s logic on this.

If the intent was to “advance” funds “in order to get money in your pocket as quickly as possible”, this raises an important question.

We can assume the intent to rush the payment was to avoid placing people into dire financial circumstances.

So how does fully clawing back an entire CERB payment, with no advance notice, not end up putting

citizens into a dire financial situation now?

All of this confusion occurred because the Liberal Government did not clarify that this was not a “retroactive payment” but rather an advance.

The Prime Minister has had many morning appearances outside of his cottage where this could have easily been clarified.

It has not been.

This follows a trend.

For example, when the CERB program was first announced by the Minister of Employment, Ms. Qualtrough said in the House of Commons that the benefit was non-taxable.

We now know it is taxable.

Similarly, the Prime Minister provided erroneous information regarding student eligibility on the CERB program that to this day not been clarified.

All of these communication errors could result in citizens having support funds “clawed back” unexpectedly.

My question this week:

Does the Prime Minister have an obligation to correct and clarify inaccurate information that Canadians rely on?

July 2020

July 1st

Canada Day has long been one of my favourite days of the year.

It is the one day where we, as a country, come together to celebrate all that makes us proud Canadians.

This year will be much different.

We will not have the large community gatherings, parades, the local entertainers, the important cultural performers or the end of day fireworks.

In our riding we have seen more and more inclusion of Indigenous First Nations in our celebrations, which has been very positive.

This year we will all find new and different ways to celebrate what it means to us to be Canadians, as we collectively honour our great nation.

Over these past few challenging months, we have recognized the many brave and courageous Canadians

who loyally served us in healthcare, in seniors care, in emergency services and in essential services, often retail work environments.

All of these people are deserving of our gratitude and our appreciation and we thank them.

I would also like to take a moment to sincerely thank and recognize members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Yes the RCMP, like any organization, have challenges and certainly have bad actors.

When these bad actors present themselves, it is vital that these institutions use due process and hold those responsible to account in a transparent way, so that public trust is upheld.

However, it is also important that we not tarnish all RCMP officers with the same brush.

We must recognize those who bravely serve our communities and never forget the many officers that have made the supreme sacrifice, in the line of duty, for Canada.

It is often the families of the fallen who are left to deal with their loss privately, while the public moves on.

In addition, we must not overlook that in many communities, the RCMP may be the only resource available.

The lack of resources for mental health services should be rightfully directed to the various levels of government to rectify.

Before I close this week's report I would like to share a few observations.

When we see the recent spike in COVID related cases south of the border and elsewhere, it should serve as an important reminder that we must continue to be cautious and vigilant at all times.

We should also reflect on how fortunate we are to live in a country, that for many decades, has embraced universal health care.

Our healthcare system is not perfect, but no Canadian who might feel they have COVID related health symptoms is afraid to seek out medical help for fear of being unable to afford the cost of that care.

That is a wonderful part of being Canadian.

As we reflect on being Canadian, let us not allow hate to divide us, let us embrace a country where we can all share what makes us unique.

Happy Canada Day to one and all!

My question this week:

How will you celebrate Canada Day this year?

July 8th

There has been growing demand for a fiscal update of the federal government finances following the spending response to the COVID-19 virus, as well as the revenue impact from having large sectors of our economy shut down.

This week the Liberal Government provided what it termed as a “fiscal snapshot”, as opposed to a proper full fiscal update.

The numbers, in a word, are staggering.

The deficit for this fiscal year is expected to hit \$343 billion. To put that figure into perspective, during the world financial crises in 2009, the federal deficit at that time was \$56 billion.

Our total debt in Canada is now expected to hit \$1.06 trillion in 2021, significantly up from \$685 billion in the previous fiscal year.

Keep in mind, this is the spending to date.

There are still many groups, individuals and organizations, who have received promises from the PM for additional financial supports that have yet to be delivered.

Also, of concern is that our debt to GDP has shot up to 49%, from what was projected to be around 30%.

Canada's credit rating has also been downgraded by one major credit rating agency.

The credit rating downgrade is of concern because credit rating downgrades can increase the interest that is paid servicing the debt.

Historically low interest rates are helping to keep debt servicing levels lower, and for now more manageable.

The challenge is when interest rates rise, the debt servicing costs increase significantly.

I suspect anyone with a variable rate mortgage knows this well.

The more notable challenge is that this current level of borrowing and spending is unsustainable.

Many financial experts have already cautioned that Canada no longer has the required fiscal capacity in the event there is a serious second wave of the COVID-19 virus.

As the current program spending is unsustainable, the Trudeau Liberal Government will need to come up with a successful plan to transition Canada back into a situation where there is growth in GDP and employment.

At the same time there will also need to have a debt management plan that has a relationship to government revenues as well as expenditures.

To date the Liberal Government has not released any plan of this kind.

There is no finger pointing in this weeks report.

We are all Canadians in this situation together and we will be dealing with these circumstances in our future.

My question this week:

How concerned are you at the lack of a transition plan to move Canada forward, and is now the best time for one?

July 15th

This week Prime Minister Trudeau apologized for not having recused himself from a cabinet decision that awarded a, sole-sourced, \$900 million program to be administered by a charity with close ties to the Prime Minister's family.

It has been revealed members of the Prime Minister's family received financial payments from the same WE Charity in question.

As you may have also heard, the Ethics Commissioner announced an investigation relating to Prime Minister Trudeau's involvement in this decision.

This would make the third time that the Ethics Commissioner has investigated Prime Minister Trudeau.

The purpose of my report this week is not to question the Prime Minister's judgement nor his apology or the ethics investigation, but rather the decision to outsource the program as many of its details are deeply concerning.

Many Canadians will know that, for decades now, the Canada Summer Jobs program has successfully matched students with employers and, for the most part, has been successfully and efficiently administered by the Government of Canada public service.

The only major complaint over the years has been a lack of funds to meet the all of the requests of potential employers.

Rather than increase funding by \$900 million to the Canada Summer Student Jobs program and increase the mandate to include charities and not for profit organizations, the Trudeau Liberals came up with a different scheme.

\$900 million was directly awarded to the WE Charity, who in turn intended to use teachers and camp operators to recruit students to become paid volunteers.

The recruitment fees payable to teachers and other organizations would be in excess of \$10,000 for a certain number of students. The students in question would then be paid below minimum wage to 'volunteer' for a set number of hours.

Aside from the issue of paying volunteers, there is another challenge.

Even if the program was able to recruit 100,000 students who worked enough hours to earn the maximum credit of \$5000, this only works out to \$500 million.

Where does the other \$400 million end up?

In recruitment fees?

Either way, it does not make sense to spend \$900 million and have only \$500 million reach students who are ultimately being paid less than minimum wage to volunteer.

At the same time, there are small business owners and other organizations who have applied for the Canada Summer Jobs program and have been denied placements due to a lack of funding.

The WE Charity and the Liberal Government have made the decision to end this project leaving the future uncertain.

As the Conservative Opposition, we have recommended the Trudeau Liberal Government should instead use that \$900 million and invest it into the Canada Summer Jobs program and ensure that charities and non-profit organizations have the opportunity to apply.

My question this week is:

Do you agree?

July 22nd

This week the House of Commons reconvened briefly to allow Parliament to pass Bill C-20:

“An Act respecting further COVID-19 measures”.

Bill C-20 proposed a number of different measures, such as allowing the extension of the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) until December 19, 2020.

The bill also included the ability of government to update much of the CEWS program criteria until November 21, 2020.

A CEWS “top-up” subsidy, of up to an additional 25%, will now be available for employers that have been harder hit by the pandemic and are in industries that may be require more time to recover.

Aside from the many changes to the CEWS program, Bill C-20 also allows the federal government to share some personal information.

The reason for this is to complete a one-time payment to Canadians with disabilities.

To qualify, an applicant must hold “a valid Disability Tax Credit (DTC) certificate (eligible persons not yet in possession of such a certificate would be able to apply for one up to 60 days after Royal Assent to be considered for the one-time payment)”.

Canadians currently receiving the Canada Pension Plan disability benefits or Quebec Pension Plan disability benefits as well as those receiving disability supports provided by Veterans Affairs Canada will also qualify.

Those who meet this eligibility criteria will receive a non-taxable, one-time payment of up to \$600.

It is expected that approximately 1.7 million Canadians will qualify for this benefit.

Aside from the debate and passing of Bill C-20 in the House of Commons, there were also two days of question period.

While Prime Minister Trudeau did not participate in question period the first day, he did attend the second day and was questioned heavily on the decision of his government to sole-source a \$910 million volunteer program to the WE Charity, that has since been cancelled.

As the shadow cabinet critic for employment, workforce development and disability inclusion, I was pleased that Parliament was able to pass the much-needed disability benefits in Bill C-20.

My question this week is not about Parliament.

In the Okanagan there have been reports of a growing number COVID-19 cases from local social gatherings.

How satisfied are you about the current actions undertaken by all levels of Government to contain COVID-19?

July 29th

specifically when former Conservative Finance Minister, the late Jim Flaherty, created a very important policy to the Similkameen and Okanagan Valleys.

On July 1st in 2006, Minister Flaherty announced that wines that were produced in Canada, with 100% Canadian grown grapes, would be fully exempt from paying the federal excise tax on alcohol.

This was a policy that, according to Wine Growers of Canada President Dan Paszkowski, has “resulted in more than 400 new wineries and 40 million litres of new wine sales. The annual economic impact of this growth is \$4.4 billion annually. Now that was a smart federal program with a solid ROI”.

Here in the Okanagan, we have all witnessed many wineries and resulting spin off business emerge throughout literally every community.

Flash forward to 2017, the Trudeau Liberal Government introduced a permanent measure to create an “escalator excise tax” in that year’s federal budget.

What is an escalator excise tax?

As I explained in my [June 21st, 2017 MP Report](#), it is a tax that “would be levied on most wine, beer and spirits sold in Canada. Under an escalator tax essentially the tax rate is increased every year and is set by civil servants linked to inflation as opposed to having to come before the House for debate in the annual

budget.”

As the Conservative opposition at that time, we opposed this tax.

Unfortunately, Australia, a country that exports a significant amount of wine into Canada, filed a trade challenge with the World Trade Organization (WTO) over this policy.

The reason is that the Trudeau escalator tax would increase the cost of Australian wine to Canadian consumers every year however, 100% Canadian grown and produced wines would be exempt.

This week it was quietly announced that the Trudeau Liberal government will, over the course of the next two years, remove the excise exemption for 100% Canadian grown and produced wines thus increasing their costs.

How this will impact our local wineries here in the Okanagan and elsewhere at this point remains unknown.

One of the challenges is B.C. wineries already pay a significant amount of taxes to local, provincial and federal governments, that competing wines outside of Canada do not pay.

There is also the added test that currently only three Canadian provinces allow winery to consumer shipping directly from outside of the home province.

With restaurants generally purchasing less wine on account of reduced hours and capacity, these are now tough times for an important local industry to our region.

Ironically with wines sales being reduced, the considerable amount of excise and sales tax on wine is also reduced, thus netting less government revenue in these areas.

My question this week comes back to the escalator tax:

Do you support a tax automatically increasing each year, set in legislation, as opposed to being fixed and reviewed each year in a budget?

August 2020

August 5th

There are times, despite efforts to the contrary, that government at all levels end up running into situations where there is a “no-win” scenario.

Case in point, recently the Trudeau Liberal government announced a federal application (or ‘app’) for smart phones, designed to assist in COVID-19 contact tracing.

This app utilizes Bluetooth technology to exchange random phone codes whenever you are in close proximity to other users who are utilizing the same app on their cell phone.

In the event one of these users has tested positive for the COVID-19 virus, all other app users who were in proximity to this individual can receive a confirmation alert.

In order to satisfy individual privacy concerns the app does not use GPS tracking, nor does it record your identity or any of your personal identification.

Currently this app is fully functional for the purposes of contact tracing in the Province of Ontario however it is my understanding that it will be coming to more provinces in the future.

There have been some criticisms of the app, largely around the fact it is only compatible with smart phones that are not older than five years and also have the latest operating systems from Apple or Android installed.

This leaves those with older devices, as well as those who do not use smart phones at all, out in the cold.

It may turn out that some will be unaware that the app does not work with their existing phone, only to become surprised when it becomes clear that it will not operate on their device.

The bottom line here is the app is not perfect.

From my perspective the government deserves credit for taking an innovative approach that has been successfully used in other jurisdictions.

As with most technological approaches to public policy issues, it is only over time where further refining and enhancements of the technology can lead to widespread adoption and better results.

I have written to the Privacy Commissioner in regard to this and his office has created a privacy framework for reviewing any Government of Canada contact tracing app.

Recently Daniel Therrien, Privacy Commissioner of Canada, stated that "Canadians can opt to use this technology knowing it includes very significant privacy protections," adding "I will use it."

After having done the research for this report and given my work involves a lot of travel and meeting various people at different kinds of Parliamentary meetings, I have chosen to install the app.

My question this week is:

Have you or would you download the Canada COVID-19 alert app on your handheld device?

August 12th

Back in May of 2020 the Trudeau Liberal Government announced their preference of four summer sittings of the House of Commons 'special COVID committee'.

These sittings were set in advance to occur on July 8, July 22, August 12 and August 26.

Many MP's and party leaders planned their schedules in order to participate on these days.

As an example, this week I am in Ottawa where I was able to ask several questions to the Minister of

Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion.

Unfortunately the Prime Minister planned his schedule to be away on this week's sitting and as such, could not be held accountable. There are so many important questions right now.

One asked by an NDP MP was: "How can Canadians currently receiving CERB plan for the transition to EI at the end of the month when it is just weeks away and they have no idea what the details will be?"

Unfortunately, the minister advised they are not in a position to provide any details until "next week."

Next week is less than two weeks from the ending of the CERB benefit.

If a citizen currently collecting CERB will end up receiving less funds on EI, this is something they will need to budget for. I asked a number of questions including the challenge facing many expectant mothers who because of COVID were just short of accumulating the required hours to be eligible for the Canada maternity benefit. Unfortunately, the minister was also unable to answer this question.

Also occurring this week, the leader of the Bloc Québécois, Yves-Francois Blanchet, has demanded that that "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, his finance minister and his (The Prime Minister's) chief of staff resign."

Mr. Blanchet has taken issue with details of the WE Charity contract as well as revelations the administration of the commercial rent relief program that went to a company where the husband of the PM's Chief of Staff is employed as a senior executive. In order to carry out his threat, Mr. Blanchet indicated that the BLOC will table a confidence motion against the Trudeau Liberal Government this fall. The only way such a motion could pass is if all three opposition parties, the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and Conservatives voted in favour. Generally speaking, this is how many minority governments ultimately fall.

My question this week relates to this potential non-confidence motion.

In the event the Bloc Québécois was to table a non-confidence vote in the Trudeau Liberal Government that could potentially trigger a fall election, would you vote in favour or against?

August 19th

As you may have heard this week the Prime Minister asked the Governor General to prorogue the House of Commons.

What does this mean?

Prorogation is a parliamentary procedure where the current session of Parliament is ended.

This is done by a proclamation of the Governor General, at the request of the Prime Minister.

What happens next?

The PM announced the date that the second session of the 43rd Parliament will begin is set for Wednesday, September 23rd.

There will be a throne speech, as is the custom of a new session of Parliament, and ultimately a confidence vote following that throne speech. In a minority Parliament that could potentially result in an election.

Why request prorogation?

Although there can be a variety of different reasons, the most common is for the government to outline a new or different direction.

Certainly, that is what Prime Minister Trudeau has indicated in this case.

While it makes sense that the government would want to outline a new direction in a throne speech, there is one other serious consideration that cannot be ignored.

With the exception of a one day sitting of the COVID Committee next Wednesday August 26th, the House of Commons was already adjourned until Monday, September 21st.

So why prorogue the House of Commons when it is already adjourned?

The answer is the fact that several parliamentary committees were sitting and hearing evidence on the details that resulted in WE Charity foundation receiving a sole-sourced contract in excess of \$500 Million.

Having read much of the evidence from these meetings, a clear pattern was emerging where details from witnesses would directly contradict what the Prime Minister had previously and publicly stated on the record.

As one example, the PM stated that when he first heard of the proposed WE Charity's contribution agreement on May 8th, he "pushed back" and instructed the public service to do more "due diligence" before cabinet actually approved the agreement on May 28th.

However, at the Finance Committee, the Assistant Deputy Minister developing the program stated that "We entered into a negotiation of a contribution agreement with WE Charity in mid-May".

Clearly there was no evidence of any "push back" as the PM stated but rather there was a rush to get the sole-sourced contract completed.

Now that the Prime Minister has prorogued Parliament, "no committee can sit during a prorogation."

This means that the Prime Minister has shut down the very committees who were studying and uncovering evidence on the WE contribution agreement that was contrary what the PM had said publicly.

It should also be pointed out that in 2015, the Prime Minister made a promise that his Liberal Government would never use prorogation to escape scrutiny.

My question this week:

Do you agree with the Prime Minister proroguing Parliament and shutting down these committees?

August 26th

I am writing this week's report from Ottawa as this is the week the House of Commons special COVID-19 Committee was scheduled to sit and we would have the opportunity to hold the Government to account.

Unfortunately, despite promising that he would not prorogue the House of Commons, Prime Minister Trudeau did precisely that and this week's sitting was adjourned.

Worse is the fact that the house does not sit again until the end of September.

Why is this a problem?

Last week the Prime Minister announced that the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) would be coming to an end in September and that the regular EI system along with three new benefits.

For instance, for those currently on CERB that are not EI eligible and cannot find work, they could apply for a \$400/week benefit, or \$500/ week if they have dependents.

While these new benefits must be debated and approved before they can be delivered, the government's estimates these changes will cost Canadian taxpayers \$37 billion.

Despite this announcement, there are still many unanswered questions.

One example is many new and expecting parents have been sidelined by COVID-19 and unable to access parental leave.

This has left many without any parental supports during the pandemic.

Despite Parliament passing legislation that would allow this issue to be fixed by the Minister responsible, it has taken months of questioning by opposition members like myself, with government promising but yet failing to fix the problem.

Now, as part of this announcement, those seeking parental leave will only need 120 insurable hours instead of 600 hours- which should take effect at the end of September.

While the government has said this will be retroactive, this change comes very late.

There are also questions raised about new eligibility requirements.

In the case of an individual who only works full time for 3 weeks and accumulates 120 hours, they could potentially be eligible for 6 and ½ months of EI under one of the new programs.

How sustainable this is, in relation to the current EI premiums paid by workers, is an unanswered but important question.

In fact, as the Opposition shadow critic for this portfolio, I have repeatedly asked for the status of the EI account, however the Minister responsible refuses to provide an answer.

This is deeply concerning as the EI account belongs to workers.

There is no reason for the Minister to refuse to tell Canadians workers, who pay EI premiums, what the status of the EI account is.

It has generally been my experience that when this Liberal Government refuses to disclose information it is because that information often does not reflect well on the government's management of your money.

This leads to my question this week:

Do you believe it is acceptable for this Liberal Government to refuse to publicly post the current status of Canada's EI account?

September 2020

August 2nd

In my November 2018 MP report, I focused on newly discovered revelations that Statistics Canada was "demanding access to certain Canadians personal financial and banking information, including all transactions along with bank account balances without citizens' consent or even notification that this is going on".

At that time, I raised this issue in the House of Commons and no surprise, Prime Minister Trudeau fully supported this effort by a government agency to take your personal financial information without your consent or even knowledge.

Later, at the Industry Committee, the minister responsible for Statistics Canada admitted that he had not been made aware of this program nor had he signed off on it, as is required under legislation.

After the Privacy Commissioner announced that he would launch a formal investigation into these proposed actions from Statistics Canada, the project was put on hold.

Why do I mention this incident today?

Earlier this week, Blacklock's Reporter in Ottawa found a Canada Revenue Agency, Labour Board hearing disclosure, that "admits criminals infiltrated its (CRA) databases.

A CRA employee became "romantically involved with a biker gang member and used her access to give the gang personal information about their debtors & their lawyers."

This information is not likely to impact the average Canadian.

I raise it because it reveals the extent that your personal information, within various departments at the Government of Canada, is not as secure as it should be.

It was also announced: "A proposed class action has been filed against the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), accusing both the agency and the federal government of negligence and breach of privacy over the recent data breach incidents".

This lawsuit alleges that "several failings by the government and the CRA allowed at least three cyber

attacks to take place”.

In turn this theft of personal identification can result in fraudulent CERB applications being made, that can adversely impact the citizens who had their personal data stolen.

What greatly troubles me is that the Prime Minister has essentially been silent on this.

There has been no ministerial accountability.

In effect the PM and his cabinet effectively shrug this off and expect Canadians to accept this.

I have two questions this week:

Do you believe there should be ministerial accountability from the Prime Minister when your personal information is compromised?

Do you believe that someone should be held accountable?

September 9th

This week the new Official Opposition leader, the Honourable Erin O’Toole, announced his appointments to serve as his shadow cabinet critics.

I have been honoured to be named as the Shadow Minister for Environment & Climate Change.

This new role is of great interest to me as it relates well to our region in Central Okanagan-Similkameen-Nicola.

As we all know, living in the Okanagan region over the past decade, we have all witnessed firsthand the devastating impacts of flooding as our climate changes.

The “once in 200 year” flood has come and gone twice in recent years.

It is not uncommon to see temperature records being broken on any given day.

The added heat and tinder dry forests can create wildfires of a size and scope rarely before seen.

These conditions, as we are again experiencing this week, can become so severe that air quality is seriously compromised.

However we also have other important challenges to be aware of.

We know that in many regions of Canada there are vulnerable species are at risk.

Here in B.C., the Mountain Caribou is a prime example of this.

We are also very aware of the ongoing threat of aquatic invasive species to our freshwater lakes, particularly here in the Okanagan, remains a serious problem, from freshwater Zebra and Quagga mussels.

All of these challenges require federal leadership as well as partnerships with provincial and local governments including First Nation communities.

I am looking forward to working with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, the Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, who is also from British Columbia.

My intent is to focus more on areas where we can agree and to spend less time debating areas of disagreement.

I believe that Canadians expect us to get to work to produce results.

All too often results in this area get lost in endless debate and lofty promises.

I look forward to this new challenge and working with our great team of talented and hardworking MP's in Ottawa.

My question this week:

From your own views on the environment and climate change, what are your top concerns?

September 16th

My apologies in advance, my report for this week may not be of interest to many of you.

If you do not operate a VHF radio, most often found in marine applications, chances are this report will be of little concern.

For those who do operate a VHF radio you will no doubt be well aware that for many decades now, Environment Canada has broadcast active weather reports to VHF radio users 24/7 365 days a year.

These reports can all include severe weather warnings including small craft advisories.

Here in the Okanagan region, there are transmitters that ensure Penticton, Summerland, Lake Country, Vernon, Peachland, Kelowna, Lumby and Douglas Lake can receive these VHF radio reports.

This service is also provided across Canada via 230 Weather Radio Canada transmitters.

Currently Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) is soliciting feedback on the possible decommissioning of 48 of these 230 transmitters.

The entire Okanagan VHF weather transmitter network is on the list of the potential 48 to be decommissioned, meaning this service would no longer be available in our region.

Other regions in B.C. potentially losing the same VHF weather service include Chilliwack and the Fraser Valley region along with the Kamloops area and will also affect people in Logan Lake.

Obviously much of this weather information can also be obtained through a smart phone, however it should be noted that there are still many areas in our region that do not have a wireless signal available.

I am told this is also a concern for outdoor enthusiasts who use this VHF weather information when engaging in back country activities.

Currently this potential decommissioning proposal is one that Environment Canada is seeking input on.

For those impacted by this potential policy, you can contact Environment Canada directly by email at ec.radio.ec@canada.ca or by phone 1-877-789-7733.

My question this week:

Are you concerned over the potential loss of VHF active weather service in the interior of B.C.?

September 23rd

I delayed writing this week's report slightly in order to share my thoughts on the Liberal Government's throne speech that was announced Wednesday.

Afterwards the Prime Minister was scheduled to address Canadians on television and my report this week was written prior to that television event occurring.

For those unfamiliar with what a throne speech is, here is the definition from the House of Commons:

"The Speech from the Throne usually sets forth in some detail the government's view of the condition of the country and provides an indication of what legislation it intends to bring forward."

The challenge with today's throne speech is that it takes many previous promises made by Prime Minister Trudeau, that ultimately became broken promises, only to be promised yet again.

I will give some specific examples of this.

In this throne speech the PM promises "the Government will immediately bring forward a plan to exceed Canada's 2030 climate goal."

This government has for, five years now, been making this promise and yet GHG emissions only continue to rise.

Once again a promise is made that does not reconcile with previous Trudeau Liberal policy decisions, that include giving a 95.5% carbon tax discount on coal power in New Brunswick.

Another promise is "the Government will accelerate the connectivity timelines and ambitions of the Universal Broadband Fund to ensure that all Canadians, no matter where they live, have access to high-speed internet."

The Liberals have also been making this promise for five years now and there are still many areas of Central-Okanagan-Similkameen Nicola that do not even have a wireless cellular signal let alone high speed internet.

There has been literally no progress in these areas.

Some will recall during the election last year, the Prime Minister promised a twenty five percent reduction on cellular phone bills.

Another lofty, but to date, unfulfilled promise.

These are a few examples of promises made from Prime Minister Trudeau.

Why am I critical of this?

To use an analogy, a session of Parliament is not unlike a dinner plate.

There is only so much room to load up on food.

If far too much food is loaded onto the plate, only so much can be eaten, and the rest is thrown away.

If you have ever been served an overloaded plate of food, odds are you will pick and prioritize the items you prefer and invariably decide what items are left behind.

This is why prioritizing is critically important when a government sets its legislative agenda to get bills through the house.

At Trudeau's cabinet table are many of the same individuals who failed to deliver on these very same promises over the past five years when this Liberal government enjoyed a majority.

To repackage many of these same, now broken, promises and add new ones is simply not credible, given the track record of this Liberal government.

What falls off the table remains to be seen.

My question this week:

Do you prefer a throne speech that realistically advances an agenda that can potentially move through the House or the current Liberal government approach that, while ambitious, will, as history demonstrates, result in more broken promises.

September 30th

Before PM Trudeau prorogued Parliament back in August, it was not set to resume regular sittings until Monday, September 21, 2020.

Once the PM broke his promise not to use prorogation, he did so, in order to shut down the Parliamentary Committees investigating the WE scheme.

Parliament was again further delayed until Wednesday, September 23rd.

Last Wednesday was September 23rd and became the date of the Throne Speech that I covered in

last week's report.

This week the government has tabled Bill C-4 that is the latest COVID relief response bill.

What was disappointing about this is that the Trudeau Liberal Government only allowed a little over 4 hours of debate time on a proposed in excess of \$50 Billion worth of deficit spending.

Why did the Trudeau Liberal Government do this?

Because there was not enough time after existing programs all ran out.

By proroguing Parliament, and delaying the return of the House, the time that should have been spent properly debating and reviewing this bill at committee stage was entirely lost.

In other words, the Prime Minister created this situation solely to cover for the WE scandal and that has now come at the expense of legitimate democratic debate on a critically important bill.

Why does debate and committee stage review matter?

As many will know throughout this pandemic response there have been a significant number of gaps and unintended barriers that have prevented those in need from getting the help that a response program was intended to provide.

As a result, throughout these past months, the government has been perpetually playing catch up on the fly, typically after these gaps and barriers are raised by the Opposition.

Some are still yet to get help because of this approach.

In this instance Parliament finally had an opportunity to be proactive and study and debate a critically important bill prior to it coming into effect.

Instead the Prime Minister was more concerned with shutting down and proroguing Parliament so that the Parliamentary Committees, who were uncovering uncomfortable and alarming evidence over the WE scheme.

So this opportunity for proactive debate and study was squandered.

This is a massive failure by the Prime Minister, putting ahead the need for political cover over the importance of properly debating and studying the bill in question.

As it would happen the bill was ultimately passed unanimously, however it was not studied and committee nor was it extensively debated.

As a result there are many unknown details.

For example, how smoothly will the CERB benefit transition into the new EI version of this benefit?

Likewise, Canadians still have no idea what the current status is of the EI account (which is paid for, through premiums, by employees and employers) and if these proposed new programs are sustainable.

These are all very serious questions and there is no answer to date.

My question this week:

Are you satisfied with the current direction of this Liberal Government?

September 30th

Before PM Trudeau prorogued Parliament back in August, it was not set to resume regular sittings until Monday, September 21, 2020.

Once the PM broke his promise not to use prorogation, he did so, in order to shut down the Parliamentary Committees investigating the WE scheme.

Parliament was again further delayed until Wednesday, September 23rd.

Last Wednesday was September 23rd and became the date of the Throne Speech that I covered in last week's report.

This week the government has tabled Bill C-4 that is the latest COVID relief response bill.

What was disappointing about this is that the Trudeau Liberal Government only allowed a little over 4 hours of debate time on a proposed in excess of \$50 Billion worth of deficit spending.

Why did the Trudeau Liberal Government do this?

Because there was not enough time after existing programs all ran out.

By proroguing Parliament, and delaying the return of the House, the time that should have been spent properly debating and reviewing this bill at committee stage was entirely lost.

In other words, the Prime Minister created this situation solely to cover for the WE scandal and that has now come at the expense of legitimate democratic debate on a critically important bill.

Why does debate and committee stage review matter?

As many will know throughout this pandemic response there have been a significant number of gaps and unintended barriers that have prevented those in need from getting the help that a response program was intended to provide.

As a result, throughout these past months, the government has been perpetually playing catch up on the fly, typically after these gaps and barriers are raised by the Opposition.

Some are still yet to get help because of this approach.

In this instance Parliament finally had an opportunity to be proactive and study and debate a critically important bill prior to it coming into effect.

Instead the Prime Minister was more concerned with shutting down and proroguing Parliament so that the Parliamentary Committees, who were uncovering uncomfortable and alarming evidence over the WE scheme.

So this opportunity for proactive debate and study was squandered.

This is a massive failure by the Prime Minister, putting ahead the need for political cover over the importance of properly debating and studying the bill in question.

As it would happen the bill was ultimately passed unanimously, however it was not studied and committee nor was it extensively debated.

As a result there are many unknown details.

For example, how smoothly will the CERB benefit transition into the new EI version of this benefit?

Likewise, Canadians still have no idea what the current status is of the EI account (which is paid for, through premiums, by employees and employers) and if these proposed new programs are sustainable.

These are all very serious questions and there is no answer to date.

My question this week:

Are you satisfied with the current direction of this Liberal Government

October 2020

October 7th

With Prime Minister Trudeau having prorogued Parliament, a situation was created where the government must now start over in submitting bills and legislation through the House of Commons.

This is also an important process because it indicates what the government views as important priorities for Canadians.

This week the government tabled two new bills into the House of Commons.

Bill C-6 'An Act to amend the Criminal Code (to ban conversion therapy)' and,

Bill C-7 'An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying).'

Bill C-6 defines conversion therapy as therapy that “aims to change an individual’s sexual orientation to heterosexual, to repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviours, or to change an individual’s gender identity to match the sex they were assigned at birth.”

This bill proposes five new criminal code offences that include: “causing a minor to undergo conversion therapy, removing a minor from Canada to undergo conversion therapy abroad, causing a person to undergo conversion therapy against their will, profiting from providing conversion therapy and advertising

an offer to provide conversion therapy”.

Bill C-7 has come about after a Quebec court ruled that the, previously passed into law, medically assisted dying legislation was unconstitutional because it is too restrictive.

More specifically the requirement that only people who are facing "foreseeable death" can receive aid to die is considered to narrow of a criteria.

It has also been argued this can lead to a situation where there is additional pain and suffering.

The new bill proposes several changes, some of those include: removing the requirement for a person's natural death to be reasonably foreseeable in order to be eligible for medical assistance in dying.

It is also proposed to introduce “a two-track approach to procedural safeguards based on whether or not a person's natural death is reasonably foreseeable.”

At the same time it is proposed that “existing safeguards will be maintained and certain ones will be eased for eligible persons whose death is reasonably foreseeable.”

There will be “new and modified safeguards will be introduced for eligible persons whose death is not reasonably foreseeable”.

I should add that it is the intent of the new proposed legislation to exclude eligibility for individuals who suffering solely from mental illness.

In addition, there will be some proposed changes to the waiver process.

My question this week:

What are the priorities you would like to see coming forward in Parliament?

October 14th

One of the challenges for any government is what is referred to as “getting your message out”.

For example, with so many different media stories in circulation last week, the announcement regarding the potential ban of certain single use plastics may have been missed.

What was announced?

In summary, a list of plastic items that the government hopes to ban by the end of 2021.

What is on the current list?

The following plastic items:

- Grocery store bags
- Straws
- Coffee stir sticks
- Six-pack can holding rings

- Plastic cutlery
- Certain food takeout containers if they are made from hard-to-recycle plastics.

As is often the case with most government announcements, concerns have already been raised.

In order to legally facilitate this ban, the government has suggested it will add these plastics to the “toxic substances list” that exists under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

Unfortunately, the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada has pointed out that these types of plastics are not toxically harmful in the same manner that substances such as mercury, asbestos and lead are.

This creates a challenge for the government with the classification.

Another concern that has been raised stems from trade related issues.

An outright ban on these plastics may contradict principles of the recently renegotiated NAFTA deal, now frequently referred to as the CUSMA (Canada United States Mexico Agreement).

There is some debate on the legitimacy of these trade related concerns, however it is clear that some consultation will be required.

The broader level of concern being heard more from a local level is understandably from the food and beverage industries and more so given that there is currently a pandemic and we are currently witnessing a greater public safety related reliance on single use plastics compared to more normal times.

It has also been communicated to me that, during a crisis, single use plastic may be necessary in a range of areas, from seniors care homes to helping to feed wildfire firefighters and other emergency responders.

It is critically important that alternatives to single use plastics are readily and affordably available considering there will be a significant uptake in demand.

As many of these alternatives will likely be made from wood or cardboard, I see a long-term economic benefit to parts of my riding, and to British Columbia in general, given that our forest industry could play an active role in this.

Consultation will be important, as will a timeline that respects the pandemic and the ability for alternative products to become readily available.

My question this week:

What are your thoughts on this proposed ban of single use plastics?

October 21st

As I write this week's report we are currently in a tense situation in Ottawa as there is a serious threat of a possible fall election.

This raises the obvious question, how did we get to this point?

As many will know over the summer months many disturbing details emerged as a result of the Trudeau Liberal Government giving the WE Charity foundation a sole-sourced contract in excess of \$500 Million.

The fallout included the Prime Minister apologizing, multiple ethics investigations being launched and finally the departure of Finance Minister Bill Morneau.

There were also several parliamentary committees sitting and hearing evidence on the details how it was that the WE Charity foundation received a sole-sourced contract in excess of \$500 Million.

In August, despite the fact that the House of Commons was already adjourned until September 21, the Prime Minister broke his promise to never use prorogation and prorogued Parliament until September 23rd in order to shut these committees down.

Now that Parliament has resumed, these same Parliamentary committees have attempted to resume hearing this evidence but were unable to do so as the Liberal members filibustered them.

In order to avoid the filibustering, the Conservative opposition used an opposition day motion in the House of Commons to propose that a new Parliamentary Committee be created, that would not be chaired by a Liberal MP, and would reflect the minority status of this Liberal Government.

Although this motion was initially supported by the NDP and Bloc Québécois opposition parties, the Trudeau Liberal Government declared it a confidence motion.

This means that if the motion was to pass, the Government would fall and trigger an election.

To be clear, both the Leader of the Conservatives as well as the Leader of the NDP have stated it is not their intention to provoke an election.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister is so determined to prevent the WE information from being further studied at any Parliamentary committee, he would rather call an election.

This raises the obvious question as to what may be hiding in the redacted documents and other unknown details.

The Prime Minister has argued that this motion is by default an expression of a lack of confidence in his Liberal Government as justification for declaring this a confidence vote.

The Prime Minister is wrong.

Until Canadians have all the information how can anyone determine if they have confidence or do not have confidence in this situation?

The entire point of creating a committee would be to learn the facts so that Canadians can have an

informed view on what really transpired.

However the Prime Minister at the moment is determined to prevent that from occurring.

Will this lead to an election?

At the moment there is considerable negotiating going on and I am hopeful the Prime Minister will back down.

The PM may not like a Parliamentary Committee studying the actions of his government however Canadians elected a minority government for a reason and the PM must respect that.

My question this week:

What are your thoughts on a possible fall election?

October 28th

Each week when the House of Commons is in session, I attempt to provide an overview on some of the events going on within the House.

Sometimes MPs will know well in advance what matters will be coming before the House and other times, often when bills or motions are introduced, it may well be a surprise.

The latter was this week when the leader of the Bloc Québécois, Mr. Yves-François Blanchet, introduced the following opposition day motion:

“That the House demand an official apology from the Prime Minister on behalf of the Government of Canada for the enactment, on October 16, 1970, of the War Measures Act and the use of the army against Quebec’s civilian population to arbitrarily arrest, detain without charge and intimidate nearly 500 innocent Quebecers.”

I am not suggesting that this is not an important subject for a debate- it was a controversial event- however I will admit that I was surprised as there are so many very concerning issues arising from this pandemic.

With COVID-19 cases rising in Quebec, Ontario and even B.C., there are more challenges for small businesses, persons with disabilities and families, so it surprised me that the Bloc would choose now to debate an issue that happened half a century ago.

An example of this is a recent report released this week from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) that raises some very troubling concerns regarding the mental health and well being of Canadians during this pandemic.

Here in B.C., there have been over 100 deaths from toxic drugs for six consecutive months.

Once the CERB benefit began to be paid out monthly, deaths increased to 175 in May, June and July, according to the data compiled by PHAC.

Parents, friends, family members, advocates and those working in areas that support vulnerable and at-risk citizens, have spoken out publicly of the harm that CERB support payments have caused to those fighting addictions.

At the same time, we must also recognize that many Canadians have also increased their use of alcohol, cannabis and tobacco during this pandemic.

Surveys from Statistics Canada indicate that alcohol consumption has increased up to 19%, cannabis use is up over 8% and tobacco smoking rates also went up by close to 4% over pre-pandemic levels.

This week Statistics Canada also revealed that between March-July the number of businesses closing exceeded the number either opening or re-opening by 82,000.

For many Canadians, these are clearly very stressful times.

I believe we must recognize that our current approach in dealing with COVID has created challenges to the mental well being of many citizens.

To date, both the provincial and federal governments have been focusing on the many efforts being undertaken to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak.

However, there have not been many opportunities for you to comment on how you feel about your governments response to COVID-19.

So my question this week:

How do you feel about the federal government response to COVID-19 thus far?

November 2020

November 4th

One of the oldest tactics of government is to release potentially unpopular or embarrassing information late on a Friday afternoon.

This was a tactic to attempt to avoid the daily Monday-Friday print media cycle in the hopes that by Monday, different stories might take up the headlines.

In the days of social media, and the widespread use of the internet, governments have had to become more innovative in how they release information that may be unpopular or embarrassing.

Case in point on Tuesday, when many Canadians were closely watching the USA election unfold, the Trudeau Liberal Government released the details of their proposed Bill C-10 -- "An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act".

For those who subscribe to streaming services such as Netflix, Spotify, Amazon Prime Video, Disney Plus, and other non-Canadian based streaming services, this bill may be of interest to you.

Bill C-10 proposes that these non-Canadian online streaming services be forced to “contribute to the creation, production, and distribution of Canadian music and stories.”

The Liberal Government has suggested this could result in these streaming companies paying as much as \$880 million into what the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) decides is "approved content" within this mandate.

For critics this raises a few notable concerns.

Many believe that consumers should have the choice to decide what shows and music they subscribe to and download, not content forced onto them by the CRTC.

Many have also predicted any costs, above and beyond what is already invested into creating Canadian content, will simply be passed onto consumers in the form of higher fees.

Another path streaming companies could take, instead of charging more, is to offer less content.

Rather than fund newly mandated Canadian content, some platforms may respond to new regulations by simply dropping their amount of total content available to stream, in order to artificially raise their amount of Canadian content.

Heritage Minister Steven Guilbeault is reported as saying he does not expect that forcing streaming services to pay as much as \$880 million annually to support this mandatory content will lead to higher subscription costs or potentially less content for customers.

So who does the Minister believe will pay?

Supporters of this bill point out that Canadian based companies providing these types of services are already forced to comply with this Canadian content requirement, as dictated by the CRTC, and argue this simply levels the playing field.

My question this week:

Do you support the CRTC dictating to online streaming companies, such as Netflix, how much mandatory Canadian content they must offer at the expense of Canadian consumers?

November 11th

Last week, with so much Canadian media attention focused on the American election, many events in Ottawa did not receive the headlines they might have.

The increasing lack of transparency we are experiencing from this Trudeau Liberal government, that promised it would be “open by default”, is a growing concern of mine.

I will provide some examples.

Last week Yves Giroux, the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO), released several reports.

One of these reports was an assessment on how much the Liberal Government's pay equity program would actually cost.

This program aims to level out pay disparities between men and women in the public service.

I will quote directly from the PBO:

"The PBO requested the Government's fiscal analysis of how much more money is expected to be spent to comply with the legislation. However, the Government refused to share this data."

This is alarming.

The PBO has suggested the federal wage bill costs could rise by \$477 million starting in 2023-24.

The PBO also reported that the Finance Department had provided a

"thorough public accounting every other week until August, but that practice ended when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau prorogued Parliament."

Since the PM appointed a new Finance Minister, there have been no financial reports made available to the PBO, or to Canadians for that matter.

Yet another example occurred back on June 3, 2020.

In my former portfolio, as the shadow cabinet critic for employment, workforce development and disability inclusion, I asked if the Minister could please tell us the current balance of the EI account.

Despite the Minister promising this information as of this week, it has still not been made available.

This is very troubling as the EI account belongs to workers and the EI premiums paid must be sustainable.

Considering so many Canadians pay into the EI fund with every pay cheque, why will this government not tell Canadians the ba

lance of the EI account?

When this Prime Minister was elected, he wrote an open letter to Canadians where he;

"committed to set a higher bar for openness and transparency in Ottawa. Government and its information must be open by default. Simply put, it is time to shine more light on government to make sure it remains focused on the people it was created to serve."

In reality we are witnessing a Liberal Government that refuses to provide critical information to the Parliamentary Budget Officer and to other Members of Parliament.

To this day several Parliamentary Committees continue to be filibustered by Liberal MP's.

We gone through the longest period in Canadian history without a federal budget being presented.

A budget that is a necessary economic plan to get us through these challenging times.

My question this week:

Are you concerned by this growing lack of transparency from this Liberal government?

November 18th

It was back in January of 2019 that I last referenced the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei.

In that weekly report I mentioned that this technology company, aside from wireless devices, also produces hardware such as servers and other technologies that enable 5G wireless networks.

5G networks empower autonomous vehicles and other automated machinery to operate and is widely considered to be essential for the emerging new digital economy.

The reason why Huawei is frequently referenced is because many of Canada's allies including the United States, Australia, New Zealand and Japan have all banned Huawei 5G technology citing security concerns.

The Conservative Opposition believes that Canada, as a member of the "Five Eyes" intelligence network, should stand with our allies in banning Huawei from participating in our 5G rollout in Canada.

After my January 2019 report, the former Liberal Public Safety Minister, Ralph Goodale, stated his Liberal government would make a decision on Huawei before the 2019 federal election.

That was May 1st 2019.

Then on July 30th 2019, the Trudeau Liberal Government broke that promise and said the decision would not be made until after the 2019 election.

Fast forward to present day and it's been over a year since the federal election and still Canadians cannot get a clear answer from this Liberal Government on whether they stand with our 5G allies or not, when it comes Huawei.

This week the Conservative Opposition in the House of Commons tabled the following motion:

"That, given that (i) the People's Republic of China, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, is threatening Canada's national interest and our values, including Canadians of Chinese origin within Canada's borders, (ii) it is essential that Canada have a strong and principled foreign policy backed by action in concert with its allies, the House call upon the government to: (a) make a decision on Huawei's involvement in Canada's 5G network within 30 days of the adoption of this motion; and (b) develop a robust plan, as Australia has done, to combat China's growing foreign operations here in Canada and its increasing intimidation of Canadians living in Canada, and table it within 30 days of the adoption of this motion."

Although the vote has not yet occurred in the House of Commons at the time of my writing, early indications are that this motion will also be supported by the NDP and Bloc Québécois.

My question this week: How would you vote on the Conservative opposition day motion?

November 25th

This week the House of Commons is sitting in Ottawa in a hybrid format.

One of the Liberal Governments signature bills – Bill C-12 -- has come before the House for debate.

Bill C-12 is the “Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act” that the Liberals say will respect “transparency and accountability in Canada's efforts to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050.”

Here is some history on where Canada stands with GHG emission reductions.

In 1993, former Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien promised to reduce our GHG emissions to 20% of 1988 levels by 2005.

That promise was broken.

In 1997, then Prime Minister Chretien signed the Kyoto accord that promised to reduce our emissions by a smaller amount of 6% below 1990 levels that would be achieved by 2012.

In 2006, when the Liberals were voted out of office, Canada was 30% over that target and as a result, former Prime Minister Harper withdrew Canada from the Kyoto agreement.

In 2009, at the Copenhagen climate conference, former PM Harper matched the U.S. target to cut GHG emissions by 17% of 2005 levels by 2020 and 30% by 2013, in what was a non-binding agreement.

In 2015, shortly after the election Prime Minister Trudeau sent the largest Canadian delegation in history to attend the Paris Climate Change Conference, at a cost in excess of \$1 million dollars.

And we know, while there in Paris, despite often criticizing the former Harper Government, this Liberal Government adopted those exact same targets.

The targets the Liberals adopted in 2015 are reported as being astray by 123 million tonnes in 2020, meaning that once again we are failing to meet our GHG emissions target reductions.

In Bill C-12, the Liberal government has taken a different approach.

Rather than announcing a new plan for today, the Prime Minister has announced that Canada will achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050.

How does that happen?

The legislation is silent on that.

Rather than providing a roadmap on how to achieve that goal, this bill instead proposes that it will be to some extent the current government, but mostly future governments to set binding climate targets to figure out a solution by 2050.

This would be accomplished by requiring future federal governments to set five-year interim emissions reduction targets over the next 30 years but that process would not begin until 2030.

Critics have pointed out this means that there will not be any binding target for the current Trudeau Liberal government.

Many have also asked what happens under Bill C-12 if a future federal government fails to reach its emissions targets, as in the past and present, with our current Liberal Government.

The answer is that there is no formal penalty built into this bill.

This fact has drawn a strong rebuke from many critics.

The bill also calls for the creation of a 15-person panel who will make recommendations to the Minister of the Environment.

What is most interesting about this bill is that it will not hold the current government accountable for its many climate related promises made since 2015.

It is largely focused on future governments, that the current government does not need to be accountable for.

My question for you this week:

What are your thoughts on Bill C-12?

December 2020

December 2nd

It may seem difficult to believe today but there was once time where Parliament was a highly secretive place where citizens had no access to what actually occurred during debates.

Not only did this make it incredibly difficult for citizens to hold elected officials to account, it also created a situation where the public would hear different and competing characterizations of events that could differ significantly between opposition and government.

Fortunately, a gentleman by the name of Thomas Hansard came along and began publishing the events that occurred within the British Parliament and eventually this evolved into the system now known as "Hansard".

Today we reference the Hansard Index as the key resource to information about what is said by Members of Parliament, in the House of Commons, during a session of Parliament.

This is not only transcribed into written text, but we also have audio and video records as part of the Hansard Index.

Hansard is how citizens can hold elected officials to account and allow Canadians to view debates and

form their own opinions on events without partisan influence.

An example of this dates back to February of 2018, when the House of Commons was debating the idea of taxing online streaming services such as Netflix.

During this debate the NDP asked Prime Minister Trudeau why online companies such as Netflix and Facebook do not charge sales tax to Canadians.

The Prime Minister, in reply stated:

“It is not web giants that the NDP wants to charge, it is taxpayers. The New Democrats want to make taxpayers pay more taxes.”

When the NDP followed up with a second question on this the Prime Minister this time stated:

“Once again, the New Democrats are misleading Canadians. They are talking about making web giants pay their fair share. It is not the web giants they want to pay more in taxes; it is taxpayers. We made a commitment to taxpayers that they would not have to pay more for their online services. We on this side of the House plan to keep that promise.”

This week the Trudeau Liberal Government released what they called, a fiscal update.

In this update there is increased spending that will result in the budget deficit hitting at least \$388.8 billion in 2020-21.

While there has been much discussion on the spending, there has been less focus on the fact that this budget update also proposes new taxes.

Specifically, the Liberal fiscal update proposes to tax online streaming services such as Netflix.

The Trudeau Liberals have indicated they expect to take \$1.2 Billion out of Canadians pockets from these new online taxes over the next five years.

Back in August, when Parliament was prorogued, and the Prime Minister was asked by a reporter if he would increase taxes, his answer was clear:

“No. The last thing Canadians need is to see a rise in taxes right now,”

My question this week:

What do you think of the Prime Minister's performance in this matter?

December 9th

One of the roles of the official Opposition is to hold the Government to account on where your tax dollars are spent.

Historically journalists have also been part of this process and more recently, at least in Ottawa, also the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Since mid-March, when the pandemic began, and up until the end of November, the Federal Government has spent approximately \$240 billion on various pandemic programs and services.

For some context, on that works out to over \$6,300 for every Canadian.

This raises the obvious question as to where that money has gone.

Recently Canada's former Parliamentary Budget Officer was quoted as saying, after looking at the Trudeau Liberals latest fiscal update:

"It's impossible to read. I have done this for years and I can't even follow the money,"

As Parliamentarians in the official Opposition, we have experienced similar frustrations trying to get more detailed financial information from the Finance Minister, thus far without much success.

Fortunately, the investigative journalists at CBC have also been looking at this topic and have made some important progress.

The large numbers have been well known as they are publicly available.

The \$240 billion breaks down into three categories.

\$105.6 billion was spent on programs for individuals, \$16.1 billion on supports for government related programs and finally \$ 118.3 billion on programs for businesses.

It is this last category, and attempting to identify exactly where these business supports have gone, that has raised many concerns.

CBC has used corporate filing information to track down over 400 companies that have received financial assistance from the federal government.

The Financial Post has taken this investigation further and identified, to date, 68 publicly traded companies that received this taxpayer financial assistance in the form of wage subsidies and at the same time paid out shareholder dividends.

In other cases, executive bonus money has been reported to have been paid out as well as stock buy back programs have been used.

The Liberal Government has been clear that the wage subsidy program is to be used to pay workers, not to pay for dividends or executive bonuses.

However, at the same time the Liberal Government is refusing to disclose what other companies accessed these funds.

Were it not for investigative journalism, the public would be unaware of these 68 companies that have been identified to date.

My question this week:

Given the Liberals refusal to disclose this information, should it be a requirement for a company applying for taxpayer assistance programs to be publicly listed as a recipient of this funding?

December 16th

Back on June 3rd I asked the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion a very simple question:

“Mr. Chair, can the minister please tell us the current balance of the EI account?”

I ended up having to ask the Minister three times for an answer to this question.

The Minister promised, and I quote: “out of respect for this House, I would prefer to give (the member) an accurate answer, which I promise to provide as soon as possible.”

That was in June and we are now in December and the Minister still has not answered this question.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) also took note of the Liberal government secrecy around the EI account and referenced this topic in last week’s PBO report, pointing out that there was no “outlook for the Employment Insurance Operating Account.”

The PBO has further stated:

“Given that forecasted EI expenses far exceed projected program revenues, the EI Operating Account is on track for a cumulative deficit of \$52 billion by the end of 2024.”

Why does this matter?

By law, the EI premiums that Canadians pay must cover the expenses of the Employment Insurance program.

If the expenses exceed the revenue, as is currently the case, the Government must, within a seven-year time frame, recover the deficit of EI funds that have been paid out.

The PBO report points out:

“The Government has not indicated in Fall Economic Statement 2020 (FES 2020), or elsewhere, whether it plans to address the projected shortfall in EI revenues through higher premium rates, reduced benefits or through payments from the Consolidated Revenue Fund.”

This is a critically important question.

It is very concerning that the Liberals have, for five months now, refused to disclose the current status of the EI account to Canadians.

Why the secrecy?

Canadian workers’ pay into the EI fund every pay period.

The EI fund belong to workers and Canadians deserve a full accounting from the Trudeau Liberal government on the status of the EI account and if it is currently sustainable.

My question this week –

Do you think the Trudeau Liberal government is serving the interests of Canadians well by withholding the EI account balance from you?

December 23rd

As Canadians prepare for a 2020 holiday season unlike any other, we are all feeling the collective impacts of travel restrictions.

For some, this may be the first Christmas spent somewhere that is not your usual destination with your friends and family.

With so many different travel restrictions, many have turned to Canada Post or other couriers, not just to acquire goods, but also to send gifts to loved ones who are unable to come home.

For those of you in B.C. who may have attempted to ship a bottle of our amazing Okanagan wine or your favourite local craft beer or an artisan distilled spirit to friends or family in another province through Canada Post, you likely discovered your shipment was refused.

With so many restaurants running at reduced capacities and travel restrictions resulting in less local winery visits and sales, one of our key local industries, like many others, has been significantly impacted by this pandemic.

Unlike some other industries who can take advantage of online sales to the rest of Canada, our local producers of wine, craft beers and spirits are shut out of major provinces, such as Quebec and Ontario solely because of provincial liquor monopolies and their restrictive policies.

For this reason, before Parliament adjourned, I introduced my latest private members, Bill C-260.

This bill, often referred to as the "Buy, Ship & Sip bill" would amend the Canada Post Act so that Canada Post can bypass these repressive provincial monopolies.

Strong support from consumers as well as industry has been received thus far, but it is unclear if the government and other opposition parties will support the bill.

I will provide a further update on this once Parliament resumes.

Before I close this week's report, I would like to sincerely wish everyone a Merry Christmas and joyous holiday season.

Particularly I would like to thank all front-line workers and also those in working in healthcare and seniors' homes.

For all of our essential service workers this holiday season will mean considerable time away from their

families serving the public.

My question this week:

How will you spend this holiday season differently from years past?