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Chair

Mr. Bryan May

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1200)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everybody.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), this committee will consider main estimates 2017-18: vote 1 under Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, vote 1 under Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, and votes 1 and 5 under Department of Employment and Social Development, referred to the committee on Thursday, February 23, 2017.

I'm very pleased to welcome the Honourable Minister Duclos, Minister Patty Hajdu, and Minister Carla Qualtrough. They are joining us here today along with witnesses from each of the departments. Welcome. We have some familiar faces here. You should be getting frequent flyer miles for this committee.

We will be starting with opening statements of 10 minutes from each of the ministers, starting with Minister Duclos.

The next 10 minutes are yours, sir.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, I am pleased to be here today as Minister of Families, Children and Social Development at Employment and Social Development Canada, also known as ESDC, to talk about the main estimates for our department.

I would like to start by congratulating the members of the committee on their excellent work.

[English]

I appreciate your hard work on poverty over these past months, and I look forward to receiving your report and your recommendations, which will feed into the consultations on the Canadian poverty reduction strategy. Your counsel will be crucial for our collective engagement to reduce poverty in Canada.

[Translation]

I have the privilege to be joined by my colleagues, the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, as well as the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities.

I'm also joined by public servants representing the different sectors of ESDC, who will be able to help me answer some of your questions.

[English]

In my statement today, I would like to provide a broad overview of our priorities and progress thus far. I will begin by highlighting our resolute commitment to grow the middle class and reduce poverty. Then, I will describe in more detail our actions to support families and communities, notably our investments in children, child care, seniors, and housing.

My top priority as the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, and the top priority of Prime Minister Trudeau is growing the middle class and helping more Canadians join it. Every single Canadian deserves a fair and real chance at success.

[Translation]

The middle class is facing real challenges. It is also feeling the impact of economic and technological changes around the world. We also know that a stronger middle class leads to a more prosperous society.

We are committed to helping Canadians who are working hard to join the middle class.

Last October, I presented a discussion paper entitled "Towards a Poverty Reduction Strategy" to accompany your work on the first Canadian poverty reduction strategy in Canadian history.

In parallel with your work, we have launched three large initiatives that will support the Canadian poverty reduction strategy. These are: the tackling poverty together research project, the process of consulting Canadians, and the ministerial advisory committee on poverty, for which we recently put out a call for nominations.

[English]

The big picture, for me and for our government, is the imperative to grow the middle class and to reduce poverty. Now, allow me to describe some of the policies we are currently pursuing to make this happen.

Let's start with how we are supporting families. For that, I will focus first on the Canada child benefit and our support for child care and early learning.

Our most important accomplishment to date is without doubt the launch of the Canada child benefit, the most important social policy innovation in a generation. The CCB is a simpler, tax-free, better-targeted, and more generous benefit, to help Canadian families with the cost of raising children.

•(1205)

[Translation]

In July 2016, nearly 3.2 million Canadian families received their first payment.

Also, nine out of 10 Canadian families are receiving an average of \$2,300 more in non-taxable child benefits per year compared with the previous complicated and unfair system. This is reducing child poverty by 40% and will lead to the lowest level of child poverty in Canadian history.

As you know, we also aim to create child care services that are affordable, high-quality, flexible and truly inclusive. In Budget 2016, we committed \$500 million towards this goal, including \$100 million for indigenous early learning and child care.

And over the past year, we have worked with the provinces and territories to develop a framework on early learning and child care, the first in the history of our country.

We have also had discussions with indigenous people to develop a distinct indigenous framework on early learning and child care. This framework will take into account the specific needs and priorities of first nations, Inuit and Métis children and families.

Budget 2017 plans to invest an additional \$7 billion over 10 years to support and create affordable, high-quality child care spaces across the country.

[English]

These investments in the Canada child benefit and child care will help Canadian families and children succeed.

Please allow me to turn now to our significantly increased support for seniors.

[Translation]

The age of eligibility for old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits has been restored to 65 instead of 67. Every year, that change will prevent 100,000 seniors from living in severe poverty. In addition, automatic enrolment in old age security has been expanded, eliminating the requirement to apply for benefits for more than 60% of seniors.

We also increased the maximum amount of the guaranteed income supplement top-up benefit to up to \$950 a year for seniors living alone and the most vulnerable seniors. In addition, we are making significant efforts to come in contact with as many seniors as possible who are entitled to the guaranteed income supplement, but are not yet receiving it.

Old age security and the Canada pension plan are part of Canada's flagship social programs millions of Canadians depend on every day. We want to make access to those benefits simpler and fairer.

[English]

We have made all of these changes for the fundamental reason that seniors deserve to retire and live in dignity.

I now would like to talk about new investments in our communities.

[Translation]

Our communities are the heart of our country, and quality infrastructure is essential to making them into great places to live. That means reliable public transit, solid leisure and cultural infrastructure, water treatment facilities to ensure water safety and the health of our families, affordable housing, and early learning and child care for our young children.

In Budget 2016, we announced an initial investment of \$3.4 billion over five years in social infrastructure. And in Budget 2017, we just announced an additional investment of \$21.9 billion over 11 years. This will allow us to continue to support social infrastructure in communities across the country.

Let me now focus on the importance of making housing more affordable and reducing homelessness.

[English]

Our vision is for all Canadians to have access to housing that meets their needs and is affordable. Housing is a cornerstone of building sustainable, inclusive communities in a strong Canadian economy where we can all prosper and thrive.

•(1210)

[Translation]

In this regard, Budget 2016 included major investments of \$2.3 billion over two years. As the minister responsible for the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, I also want to point out that we held nation-wide consultations on a new national housing strategy, and that a report on what we heard was published last November.

Budget 2017 includes an additional investment of \$11.2 billion over 11 years in a variety of initiatives that aim to build and renovate the affordable housing stock in Canada. They will also ensure that all Canadians have affordable housing that meets their needs.

[English]

For instance, we will be doubling, in that context, our long-term engagement, our investments in the homelessness partnering strategy, for a total investment of \$2.1 billion over the next 11 years. When someone is forced to live on the streets, we are indeed all diminished.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, as you can see, we have made remarkable progress over the past year. But we are well aware that the work is only just beginning. We have a lot more to accomplish.

However, I am confident that we are on the right track. Our initiatives are helping advance the government's main program, which consists in strengthening the middle class and those working hard to join it.

[English]

In developing such an ambitious agenda to give every Canadian a real and fair chance to succeed, everyone's contribution and collaboration is important. Therefore, I look forward to a frank, instructive, and constructive dialogue this morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and colleagues.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Duclos.

Minister Hajdu, for the next 10 minutes.

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a great pleasure for me to be here before you and all the members of the committee for the first time as the new Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour. I look forward to discussing my responsibilities regarding Employment and Social Development Canada's portion of the main estimates tabled on February 23, 2017.

[Translation]

In accepting my mandate as a new minister, I knew that both my personal and work life experiences would give me a good perspective.

[English]

It's very exciting for me to be working on a mandate that, among many other things, includes a focus on ensuring skill development, and in particular, lifelong skills, as you've heard our government talking about. This is very personal for me because I was the first in my family to receive a post-secondary education. In fact, I was able to break an intergenerational cycle of poverty.

[Translation]

As you know, Employment and Social Development Canada delivers a range of programs and services that affect Canadians throughout their lives.

My focus within the department is twofold: to help all Canadians access the right skills and training to find, and keep, good jobs; and to ensure that, when Canadians are at work, they are fairly compensated, their rights are protected, and their environment is safe.

[English]

These objectives are core to our government's goal of growing Canada's economy by strengthening the middle class, and helping those who are working so hard to join it. I'm pleased to be able to share with you some of the work that we're doing to deliver on this commitment.

Let me start with our youth. We know that Canada's prosperity is increasingly going to depend on creating a path to success in education and employment for our young people. Our government's first budget, budget 2016, tackled this challenge head-on by making unprecedented investments in the youth employment strategy,

including a commitment to create more Canada summer jobs for youth than ever before. I'm very pleased that further funding over three years has been pledged in budget 2017 to continue our work. Combined with budget 2016 measures, these investments will help more than 33,000 vulnerable youth develop the skills they need to find work or go back to school, create 15,000 new green jobs for young Canadians, and provide over 1,600 new employment opportunities for youth in the heritage sector.

Our government knows that a highly skilled, flexible, and adaptable workforce is critical for a strong middle class. That's why we've delivered on our commitment to invest more in skills and training, apprenticeships, and access to post-secondary education.

One of the most promising career paths that we don't talk about enough for young Canadians today is the skilled trades, and as the parent of a young welder, I can tell you this first-hand. That's why our government is supporting union-based apprenticeship training, which will give more people the opportunity to start their careers in these sectors. I'm particularly focused on encouraging more women to pursue careers in the trades, critical to closing that gender wage gap we've heard about time and time again.

We've also addressed the importance of demand-driven education and training through the work integrated learning program. We're investing in partnerships between employers and post-secondary education institutions. The goal is simple. We want to align education and training with employer needs.

Through budget 2017, we're also investing in organizations, like Mitacs, so they can nearly triple their co-op placements. This gives young people that critical on-the-job experience that so many employers are looking for on a resumé.

Our government will also be doing more to help adult learners retrain or upgrade their skills to adapt to a changing market, turning challenges into opportunities, and increasing people's earning potential. By showing leadership in a time of change, we're ensuring that every Canadian can be more confident that the next job is indeed a better job.

When it comes to making post-secondary education more affordable, we've accomplished a lot in the past year. Our very first budget included many measures to make post-secondary education more affordable for students from low- to middle-class, middle-income families, and to make debt loads more manageable, and we've built on those investments in budget 2017.

We've increased Canada's student grants and are continuing to expand their eligibility with both budget 2016 and budget 2017. We've brought in a flat-rate student contribution, and we've improved loan repayment assistance so that no graduate will have to start repaying their loans until they're earning a minimum of \$25,000.

•(1215)

I also believe strongly that we need to generate opportunities for those who are traditionally under-represented in the workplace, like indigenous people, newcomers to Canada, people with disabilities, and women.

That's why I'm so proud that budget 2017 also builds on our government's investment in skills and training for indigenous people. Indigenous people are the fastest-growing segment of our workforce, and their success at finding and keeping good, well-paying jobs is critical to Canada's growth.

I also want to take a moment to recognize the members of this committee for the hard work that you undertook last summer to study the temporary foreign worker program. I know you spent a great deal of time hearing witnesses, constructing recommendations, and drafting the report. I want to express my thanks and tell you that your recommendations have played a very real role in our work to improve the program.

In December, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Refugees and my predecessor as Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour took early action to respond to the report by announcing four new measures: an end to the "four-in, four-out" rule, a commitment to a pathway to permanence, an extension of the cap for low-wage workers in seasonal industries, and increased requirements for employers to advertise available jobs to the Canadian workforce before they can apply to bring in a temporary foreign worker.

This week, Minister Hussen and I were pleased to announce further measures our government is taking to improve the temporary foreign worker program. Budget 2017 provides an investment of \$279.8 million over five years starting in 2017-18, and \$49.8 million per year thereafter to support the continued delivery of this program, as well as the international mobility program.

Our goal is always to ensure that Canadians have the first opportunity at available jobs, and to that end we're taking two new key steps. First, employers will be required to do more on targeting the recruitment of Canadian workers, particularly those who are typically under-represented in our workforce, like women, indigenous people, and people with disabilities. The government will work with industry sectors that are heavy users of the program to create Canadian workforce development strategies in partnership with employers, organized labour, and other stakeholders.

To fulfill our commitment to better protect vulnerable foreign workers, we will also increase on-site and spot inspections of workplaces employing foreign workers, and we will work with community organizations that have been devoted to protecting vulnerable foreign workers to ensure these workers are informed of their rights and protections.

In my capacity as Minister of Labour, I'm very proud to be overseeing the passage of Bill C-4, which is currently before the Senate. As you know, our government was elected on a commitment to restore fairness and balance to labour relations in Canada, and that is why Bill C-4 is one of the first pieces of legislation our government put forward.

We're also on track to introduce proactive pay equity legislation for the federal jurisdiction in 2018. Consultation on key design elements of a proactive pay equity system that works for everyone will begin with stakeholders and experts this spring. This legislation will help address gender-based wage discrimination related to the undervaluation of work traditionally performed by women, which will contribute to equality and fairness for all Canadians, particularly those in the middle class and the many people who work so hard to join it.

Budget 2017 also laid out our government's commitment to help workers balance the competing personal and professional responsibilities in their lives. We will be introducing legislation to give federally regulated workers the right to request flexible work arrangements from their employers, a measure that we know from other jurisdictions can have positive impacts on increasing productivity, lower turnover, and lower absenteeism.

With budget 2017, we're also introducing a new investment of \$13 million over five years to strengthen and modernize compliance and enforcement mechanisms under the Canada Labour Code. These enhancements will help ensure that workers are treated fairly and protected from harm in the workplace.

•(1220)

[*Translation*]

A lot in my mandate letter has been accomplished. The steps we have taken are already having a real, positive impact on our economy and on Canadians. Optimism is on the rise, and with good reason, as forecasters are expecting Canada's economy to grow even faster.

After 10 years of weak job growth, our country is coming off the best six months of job growth in a decade. Almost a quarter million jobs have been created.

[*English*]

Canadian businesses are hiring again, because they are confident in our plan for creating long-term growth.

But we're not done. There is a lot of work to do. I am looking forward to working with each and every one of you in the coming years to do the best we can for Canadians in every corner of our country.

[*Translation*]

With that, Mr. Chair, I conclude my opening remarks. I look forward to taking your questions.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister Qualtrough, you have 10 minutes, please.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities): Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, it is a pleasure to be here today with my colleagues Minister Duclos and Minister Hajdu to speak to the 2017-18 Main Estimates funding for disability programs and to update you on the progress I have made on my mandate as Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities. I have also asked senior officials from Employment and Social Development Canada, or ESDC, to be here today to answer any questions you may have.

As you know, our government has spent the last year working to strengthen the middle class and support those working hard to join it. Our objective is a Canada where everyone can participate in society and in the economy, and where everyone has an equal chance to succeed. This includes Canadians with disabilities.

In my capacity as minister responsible for people with disabilities, my priority over the last year has been the engagement process to inform the development of federal accessibility legislation. Once in place, the legislation will eliminate systemic barriers and deliver equal opportunities for Canadians living with disabilities.

I am pleased to report that the engagement process—the largest consultation on disability issues in over two decades—was completed on February 28, 2017. The process involved 18 public engagement sessions held in cities across the country, nine round table discussions with academic experts, industry representatives and disability stakeholders, a national youth forum, and an online consultation.

The consultation set a high standard for accessibility. Canadians were able to participate in the language—English, French, American Sign Language, langue des signes du Québec—and format—in person, online, in writing, video, audio—of their choice. Materials were available in multiple formats, and all public engagement events had real-time captioning, sign language interpretation, both in American Sign Language and langue des signes du Québec, and other communication supports.

In total, almost 6,000 Canadians participated either in person or online. An analysis of the feedback from the consultation is currently underway, and we plan to publicly release the summary later this spring. The report will be used to inform the development of the legislation. Once the legislation is drafted, the bill will pass through the regular parliamentary process and will be voted on by Parliament.

The public consultation process was funded through existing departmental resources. In addition, Budget 2016 provided \$2 million over two years for stakeholders to undertake complementary engagement opportunities within their communities. Five national disability projects, comprised of multiple partner organizations and three indigenous organizations, were funded through Budget 2016 to engage their members, and this funding continues through 2017-18 as part of the main estimates.

While the engagement process has been our top priority this year, it is only one part of broader Government of Canada efforts to increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

• (1225)

[English]

I'm pleased to share those with you now.

The enabling accessibility fund supports the capital costs of construction and renovations related to improving physical accessibility and safety for people with disabilities in Canadian communities and workplaces. It has an annual budget of \$15 million. Budget 2016 committed to providing an additional \$4 million over two fiscal years starting in 2016-17 to support a minimum of 80 additional small community projects. As a result of the 2016 call for proposals under the EAF, 573 projects were approved under the program's workplace and community accessibility streams. This includes 85 additional projects that were funded out of the extra \$2 million allocated for 2016-17 through budget 2016.

We expect this work will continue as budget 2017 proposes providing the EAF with an additional \$77 million over 10 years, starting in 2018-19, to improve the safety and accessibility of community spaces and workplaces through the second phase of social infrastructure investments.

As you know, the government works to help people with disabilities participate in the labour market through initiatives, such as the opportunities fund, which provides funding of over \$40 million annually. This program supports labour market outcomes for Canadians with disabilities by providing more youth with work experience, involving community organizations and employers in the design and delivery of programming, providing more hands-on work experience and targeted employment supports, promoting social innovation, and establishing measurable outcomes.

We also have the social development partnerships program disability component, or the SDPPD, which supports not-for-profit organizations in their work to improve the participation and integration of people with disabilities in all aspects of Canadian society. The SDPPD is in the midst of a program renewal. The goal of the renewal is to design a program that is current and relevant to the disability community, and that supports the capability of the disability sector as a whole. The amount of funding under the renewed program will remain the same at \$11 million per year.

Each year the Government of Canada also transfers \$222 million to the provinces and territories under the labour market agreements for persons with disabilities to improve the employment prospects for persons with disabilities. As announced in budget 2017, the labour market agreements for persons with disabilities will be consolidated with the Canada job fund and a targeted initiative for older workers into new workforce development agreements. The budget proposed to invest an additional \$900 million over the next six years in these consolidated agreements.

We will work with the provinces and territories to ensure that the new agreements continue to support employment programming for persons with disabilities. A strong performance measurement strategy will allow the federal government to monitor and report to Canadians on the labour market outcomes for this population.

As you know, the Canada disability savings grants and bonds are savings initiatives that come under the registered disability savings plan. In the main estimates 2017-18 budget, funding has increased for the Canada disability savings grants and bonds by \$107 million. This increase is due to the steady increase in total registered plans and participation in the program, which is very good news. Participation in the program last year was about 24% of those eligible to claim the disability tax credit, which is a key condition for opening an RDSP, but more work needs to be done in this area.

To encourage more people to open RDSPs, we've been working with the Canada Revenue Agency to send letters to Canadians with disabilities who qualify to claim the disability tax credit, but who have yet to open a plan. After a targeted mail campaign that was conducted in November 2015, we saw a 400% increase in the number of plans opened in December 2015 over the previous year, so the increase in spending on the program is partly due to the success of this mail campaign.

We also had great news in December 2016. The Government of Canada announced that it would begin taking steps toward consideration of accession to the optional protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities. The convention already plays an important role in ensuring people with disabilities across Canada have equal access and opportunity in their communities and their workplaces. The optional protocol establishes procedures aimed at strengthening the implementation and monitoring of the convention.

We're currently engaged in a federal review process, and in consultations with provincial and territorial governments, who have an important role to play in considering our possible accession to the optional protocol. Consultations with civil society and indigenous organizations were recently completed in March 2017.

• (1230)

In accordance with Canada's usual practice on treaty ratification, the decision on acceding to the optional protocol will be put formally to the federal ministers and the Prime Minister. If there is a favourable decision, the optional protocol would be tabled in Parliament, and the Government of Canada would seek the formal support of all provincial and territorial governments for accession. We're working toward completion of this process in 2018.

[Translation]

I am proud to say that Canada is a place where everyone has a shot at success because we have the confidence and leadership to invest in Canadians.

As the minister responsible for people with disabilities, I look forward to the continued work on new planned accessibility legislation. Once in place, the legislation will give us the opportunity and the means to build a truly inclusive society.

I hope this update on our planned expenditures in the main estimates, as well as our efforts to promote inclusion and remove barriers for Canadians with disabilities, has been useful. I trust it has reiterated our commitment to continuing this work in the coming year.

My colleagues and I would be pleased to answer your questions.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

As everybody can see, the bells are going. I'm looking for unanimous consent so that we can actually get in, maybe, a few questions before we have to head into the House.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Excellent.

First up is MP Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Minister Duclos, your mandate letter from the Prime Minister instructed you to, "Lead the development of a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy that would set targets to reduce poverty and measure and publicly report on our progress". To repeat, you were charged to measure and publicly report on progress on poverty.

Your department created the market basket measure. Are you familiar with that?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Yes.

• (1235)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Stats Canada says it is a measure of low income based on the cost of a specified basket of goods and services, representing a modest, basic standard of living.

Can you tell me if food, shelter, and transportation are included in the market basket needed for a basic standard of living?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'm delighted for the occasion to link my former life with my current privilege of being with you today. In my former life I had, indeed—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: In either of those two lives, were you able to learn whether food, shelter, or transportation are included in the market basket measure?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: What I'm going to do, with your permission, is to single out first that the poverty reduction strategy that the Canadian government is currently—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I can help you, then. All three, in fact, are included in the market basket measure. A Finance Canada briefing in 2015 suggested a carbon tax would create a cascading effect of higher prices on these very items.

How much will a \$50 a tonne carbon tax increase the cost of the market basket measure that your department says is needed for a basic living?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'll say it in French because I have a very interesting quotation making precisely the linkages between the importance of building a sustainable economy, both from an economic perspective and from an environmental perspective.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Does your department have any estimation of the increased costs of a market basket for an average family as a result of a \$50 a tonne carbon tax? Does that analysis exist within your department, yes or no?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'm not sure how this committee works, but normally, when we ask questions we listen to the answers. I'm very willing—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: We're not getting any so far.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: —and feeling privileged to provide such answers.

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): On a point of order, it would be nice if you actually allowed the minister to answer the question and did not interrupt him.

The Chair: I would concur with that.

Pierre, if we could maybe let the minister actually get to his answer, that would be appreciated, please.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'll get to the answer you are looking for, but I think I should also get to the answer that we are all looking for when we look at the impact of the importance of building our economy in a sustainable manner.

My quote here comes from Cenovus Energy.

[*Translation*]

The corporation said that it supports carbon pricing, which is one of the fairest and best ways to stimulate innovation to reduce the emissions associated with oils.

[*English*]

I think we have the answer here. When we talk about pricing carbon pollution, we must be looking for ways that are both efficient and suitable—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: With respect, Mr. Chair, we have allowed the minister to go on at length. The question was the impact of a \$50 a tonne carbon tax on a basic market basket of goods that people need for living, and he's come back with a quote from a CEO of a multinational oil and gas company, which is very interesting but not terribly interesting to people who are struggling to purchase the market basket of goods they need to survive.

There's no surprise that the CEO of Cenovus can pay the carbon tax. I'm asking about poverty, which you were tasked to address in the mandate letter you received from the Prime Minister.

For the third time, can you tell us, what would be the increase in the market basket cost for a family once the imposition of a \$50 a tonne carbon tax is complete?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: If you were to join my former life with my current life, you would also make a connection between a policy that needs to be both equitable and effective in sending the right signals to our businesses and workers, as well as protecting the welfare of our most vulnerable Canadians. You've—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Do you not have an answer to the question?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: You've seen in recent months exactly what types of policies these can be. The CCB and the cut in middle-class taxes have been arranged through increases in the taxes that we're asking high-income Canadians to pay and decreases in the family benefits we were sending to millionaires—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, the question was about the carbon tax. He's now talking about child care benefits.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: No, that—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Speaking of the low-income cut-off line, which is what you've used to make your claims about reduced poverty for children, Statistics Canada officials testified here that cost increases for things like food, fuel, and electricity would necessarily increase the number of people below the low-income cut-off line.

How many additional Canadians will fall below the low-income cut-off line—that is, the poverty line—as a result of increased costs from your carbon tax?

•(1240)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I would frame the question differently. I would ask how many low-income Canadians will be lifted out of poverty because of the resources that provinces and territories will receive from taxing a bad thing, which is carbon pollution, and handing out support to families of lower middle-class and lower-income Canadians. How many of these Canadian families will be lifted out of poverty—

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: —because provinces and territories will have more resources to do so?

The Chair: Excuse me.

First, that's your time. Second, we have a point of order from Mark Warawa.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you, Chair.

I do appreciate ministers being here to answer questions, but I think this meeting would run a lot more effectively and efficiently if they answered the questions. For a minister to not answer questions is a disservice to this committee.

The Chair: I don't disagree with that at all. In conjunction with that, I'd also like all the committee members to be listening to the answers and not interrupting the ministers. We can all do better.

Mr. Ruimy, please.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you very much.

I'd like to address Minister Hajdu first.

Minister, sometimes workers are in a job where there is little opportunity for wage growth and upward mobility. It may be a stable job, but it could be in an industry that is on the decline. There are workers who may wonder about it and say to themselves that if they had a little more support to get training, or to upgrade their skills, they would grab that opportunity.

Indeed, I am one who took advantage of that program about seven years ago. It was a self-employment program. Had that program not been available to me, I likely would not be sitting in this position today.

There are plenty of adults who want to be prepared to move on from one job to a better one. Could you go into detail about what the government is doing to help these adult learners?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much for the question.

Like you, this is an issue that's near and dear to my heart, as I'm someone who got my first degree from a university at 28 years old as a single mother with two children in tow. It was a struggle. It was very difficult. I was lucky. I had some supports in terms of family and that kind of thing.

Nonetheless, it increased my earning potential dramatically. I went to a place where I was able to provide for my children in an equitable way in terms of their peers. In fact, both of them now have college diplomas. When we talk about breaking intergenerational poverty, this is key.

I'm excited about the measures we're taking to support adult learners and to support people who want their next job to be a better job. One of the things we want to do is to make sure that it's easier for them to get the financial support they need through improvements to Canada student loans and grants that will allow part-time students or people who have dependent children to receive a bit more financial security, so they can take that leap into the unknown and take on the additional stresses of being a student as an older person.

Also, we want to make sure that when people are on employment insurance, they have options that include education and retraining. That's why we'll be making changes to employment insurance so that people can receive EI payments while they go back to school. This is something that I think is very prudent for this government to do, because what it recognizes is that people need opportunities and support to invest in themselves, and when they invest in themselves, the dividends are immense.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: Thank you very much.

Minister Duclos, as you know, this committee has studied poverty across Canada in recent months and has heard about the need for the Canadian government to return to the table to play a leadership role in housing. It's definitely something that we heard about when the committee visited my riding of Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge earlier this year to learn from our experiences.

Investing in affordable housing is about making life better for Canadian families and helping them to succeed. For Canadian families, a safe, affordable home means building healthier lives, more opportunities for jobs, and helping our communities prosper. Could you please elaborate on the measures the government is taking in the field of housing and the fight against poverty? There are a lot

of folks out there who hear the numbers—we hear the billions—but I don't know if they really understand how that applies to them.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: I'm delighted to speak about this. I would like to indicate that not only are the resources, of course, important, but more important, I think, are two additional things.

First is the renewed leadership, and I would say this is in fact the most effective demonstration of federal housing leadership in four decades. This is going to be significantly impacting the welfare and the well-being of our families, businesses, and communities. In addition to that, there are the incredible opportunities this will generate for other partners to collaborate with the federal government. Of course, included in here are provinces and territories, but also municipalities and cities, which have been so voiceful and so effective in the last year in signalling how important investments in housing on the part of the federal government are to them, to their communities, to their businesses, and to their families. In addition to cities and municipalities, there are the social and the private sectors, the importance of which we often underestimate when it comes to housing investments. This is going to lead over time—because it's going to take some time—to renewed collaboration and renewed leadership in the field of housing.

Let me mention very briefly some of the lines along which those investments will manifest themselves.

There will be renewed partnership between the federal government and provinces and territories in the long term, which PTs have asked for. A new \$5-billion national housing fund will help address critical housing issues in collaboration with other departments in this government in order to support, for instance, seniors, handicapped families, or Canadians living in circumstances of family violence. It will also be used to support the other types of infrastructure investments that we're making in transit, in green infrastructure, in transport corridors, in targeted housing support for indigenous people, and people living in the north. There will be renewed and expanded investments to combat and prevent homelessness—and here the word “partnership” is again extremely important—using surplus federal land and buildings for the development of affordable housing.

Finally, there will be important investments in CMHC's role to become and to stay a leader in the field of housing over time in Canada. We know how important it is to have proper data and proper understanding of how housing matters for families and communities. We know this in the context of current significant pressures in some of our regions in Canada. We want CMHC to play a better role when it comes to informing and supporting the development of our communities.

● (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We have time for a very brief question, if that's okay, from Madam Sansoucy, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): You say that I have time for a brief question, but how much time exactly?

[*English*]

The Chair: Pardon me?

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: How much time?

The Chair: I would keep it under three minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Okay.

I will quickly thank the three ministers and their teams for their preparation and today's presentations.

Mr. Duclos, last time you appeared before this committee, we talked about the importance of defining poverty before we begin to address it. Since then, I have participated in a number of debates in the House. I think that we will also need a definition of the middle class because it is interpreted in many ways. The middle class has a very elastic definition.

Our committee travelled across Canada for its study on poverty. Nearly all representatives of organizations and municipalities we met with said that it was important for the various levels of government to work together. I believe that this leadership can come only from the federal government. We were told that it was not only a matter of investment, but that we also had to know how to achieve the goal.

You were right to highlight the impact of the Canada child benefit. You said that child poverty has decreased by 40%. Having worked with troubled youth, I can tell you that, when I hear "poor children", I understand it as "poor parents". Those two things go hand in hand. We should also look into that issue.

Since I am the critic for this particular issue, my colleagues tell me about many situations where the Canada child benefit is taken away from families when their child, for example, goes into foster care for a week. It takes them three months to recover those benefits. Another example is a family missing a document for one child and losing the benefits for all of its five children. Other families may have to provide evidence that their children exist. I hear about many similar situations at my office.

I have one last comment to make before I ask a question. You talked about the guaranteed income supplement. I hope you still plan to ensure that the supplement will one day be automatically provided to those who need it. That is necessary.

You also talked about investing in the infrastructure of our communities. I represent a riding whose largest community has 56,000 constituents. Are you considering allocating funding to the smaller communities because they have fewer resources than the larger cities? When a program is established, there are often only two people who work in those small communities, and they are not aware of community grants. By the time they start filling out documents, big cities have long ago submitted their projects.

• (1250)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm afraid you took up a little more than your three minutes, but I will allow for an answer as long as it's brief.

Minister Duclos, please....

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Thank you very much. It would have been my pleasure to answer you at great length.

I want to thank you for everything you have done to prepare for the committee's work on poverty.

Your information on the way benefits help our families is precious. I invite you to share it with the members of my team, so that the department can do the work it has to do and ensure that the benefits provided by the Canadian government are easily accessible to the families who need them.

As for the questions on assistance for small communities, you will see in the government's infrastructure program an amount of \$2 billion specifically dedicated to smaller communities. As you rightly said, for all sorts of reasons, it is more difficult for those communities to get the resources they need from the Canadian government, and this money should help them.

You talked about the definition of poverty and the middle class. I hear your suggestions. I know that you are working very hard on defining poverty in your work. It's very important because, to have credibility across government, we need to know what poverty trends mean and what policies would help reduce poverty over time.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I apologize, Ministers, but unfortunately we do have to get to our seats momentarily to vote.

The committee will be back whether the ministers will be able to join us or not. I would suspect probably not, considering your other commitments, but I imagine the other department heads will be here.

If you can come back, that would be great, but we do have to suspend for votes. We will be back.

• (1250)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1320)

The Chair: Welcome back, everybody. We have a few more moments before the bells start again here.

Thank you, everybody, for coming back. We're going to get started.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The schedule indicates that the ministers would be with us until two o'clock today.

The Chair: What was agreed upon was that they would be here for one round of questioning. Then they had to prep for question period.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It does say from noon to two o'clock here, and it includes their names below.

The Chair: That is when the meeting is conducted, yes.

We do have the officials here, and we'd like to get going with questions again.

Bob, go ahead.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): I'm just following up on what my colleague just brought up. We originally agreed to this. We agreed to a full set of questions, for our entire opposition lineup to ask the ministers questions.

The Chair: I agree.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: We've been gone for only about 10 minutes, which gives them lots of time to answer questions and still get back to question period.

The schedule agreed upon was until two o'clock. We knew that we would have a lot to do in this period of time. We certainly had a lot more time between our committee business and 12 o'clock. We had another half hour, so we could have easily had the ministers in a bit earlier. I just find it troubling. It seems that they are using this as an excuse not to come back, because there were votes. If this is what's happening, I would certainly call upon you that we have the ministers reappear and provide adequate time for us to ask questions.

The Chair: I think we can discuss that. Are there any other thoughts around whether we would want the ministers to reappear? Guys, let's be honest. This is not how we wanted this to go, either. We've been gone for significantly longer than 10 minutes. I'm afraid I'll have to disagree with you, but we've been gone for nearly half an hour. Apparently, we have another motion coming as we speak.

Mr. Di Iorio, go ahead.

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Before we suspended, you did indicate that the ministers would not be here—

The Chair: I said it was likely that they would not come back.

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: —and I didn't hear any comments. Nobody insisted that they be back.

The Chair: Bob, go ahead.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: What was discussed at committee is what we agreed to, to be clear. When we agreed to have the ministers here, we agreed on the basis that we would all have a chance to ask them questions. Just because you said they weren't coming back, that doesn't mean we agreed to it, to be fair.

I think we need to have the ministers back to fully and adequately answer questions before our committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'm not sure our timetable allows for that, but we can definitely look into that and see. I would have to look at the calendar. I don't know if the ministers would be.... This was the date when we could get the ministers here in the room. As I said, the events of this morning were not anticipated, and I know that everybody would have liked to ask questions of the ministers.

Unfortunately, it doesn't look like that's going to happen today, but we do have the department officials. I would request that, before we get called away again, we do in fact ask questions of the department officials.

Mr. Zimmer, go ahead.

●(1325)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: On the same point, I guess I'm looking for an answer as to whether the ministers are going to be requested to appear at committee again. Is that still up in the air?

I'm asking you to ask them to reappear, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I think it's fair to say that we, as the opposition, are asking for that to happen. We would like that to be asked of the ministers.

The Chair: What I can commit to today, Bob, is that we will look at the schedule and see if there is an opportunity. We have until May 31 in order to have these meetings before the deadline. If there is a day that allows us to do that and doesn't infringe on other commitments of this committee, and if the ministers are able to actually meet that schedule, then I think everybody would like to have that.

I can't say at this point, "Yes, we can do it on this day, and yes, the ministers can arrive."

Mr. Bob Zimmer: I'm just asking for them to be asked, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Fair enough.

Mr. Ruimy, go ahead.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: I have a point of order.

This happens when we have witnesses. We can't control what goes on in the House. We don't call back witnesses. I'm failing to understand why this is even an issue right now. The chair controls the agenda, but we are at the mercy of what happens in the House. I'm not sure why we are even contemplating this right now.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I thank Dan for giving me that power, but in fact, this committee controls the agenda.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: That's right.

The Chair: I don't quite have that much power yet.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I do have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Just to clarify, we're not talking about a House of Commons interruption of committee proceedings that prevented the ministers from finishing their testimony. They were told in writing that they would be here until two o'clock. It's 1:25. There are 35 minutes left in the period that was allocated for the ministers to appear.

I appreciate that they might want to get out the back door as quickly as possible rather than answer those questions, but let's not create a phony pretense based on false logistics. The House of Commons, for the millions of fans who are watching back home, is 90 seconds down the hallway. They could be back here by now. They could have taken a round of questioning by now.

The Chair: I cannot speak for the ministers. You, being a former minister, know perfectly well that there are things that they need to do prior to question period. My only assumption is that they are preparing for question period. I'm not going to speculate as to why they aren't here.

Can we please get back to the reason we are here today?

I'd like to welcome—I apologize, I didn't recognize you to begin with—the witnesses now at the table from the Department of Employment and Social Development: Louise Levonian, deputy minister; Lori Sterling, deputy minister, labour program; and Leslie MacLean, senior associate deputy minister and chief operating officer for Service Canada. We also have, I believe, chief financial officer, ESDC, Mark Perlman.

Mr. Zielonka, CFO and senior vice-president, capital markets, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, is also here.

Welcome to all of you.

Did I miss anybody? I'm sorry. We also have Mr. Evan Siddall, president and chief executive officer, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as well.

How could I forget you, sir? You've been here so often that I just assumed that we would have announced you already.

I believe we ended with cutting off Brigitte Sansoucy. She still actually has a few minutes left, but seeing that she is not here, we'll move on to Mr. Long for six minutes.

Mr. Long, you're up.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our witnesses.

Again, I apologize for the tone and line of questioning from my counterpart across from me, earlier.

When I decided to run for politics, I wanted to give back to my community. I was involved with sports and hockey before that, and we did certain things like food drives, cereal drives, and coat drives to try to give back to those in need.

I felt compelled to try to do more so I wanted to run, and some of the first places I went when I started my campaign were priority neighbourhoods. I started knocking on doors and talking to families. Saint John leads the country in child poverty. We have a lot of issues with affordable housing, and certainly lots of challenges. In fact, some of our priority neighbourhoods, wards 3 and 4 have child poverty rates of 50% to 70%.

While going door to door, I asked a lot of those families about boutique tax credits like credits for dance or credits for hockey lessons. I was looked at, to be perfectly honest and transparent, with dismay. A lot of people in those communities couldn't afford to take their children to dance lessons or hockey. They were trying to survive on a day-to-day basis.

I asked those same families if doubling the tax-free savings account would be beneficial for them. Again, I couldn't find a family in a priority neighbourhood that invested in a tax-free savings account, let alone in the doubling of it.

To you and your staff, I want to thank you for your vision. I want to say thank you that our government is moving forth with a national poverty reduction strategy. I think that transformational change comes from national initiatives. I thank you from my heart for coming to Saint John on September 2 and announcing the tackling poverty together project. It talks to people with lived experience, consults people with lived experience, and is very inclusive.

For us to develop a national poverty reduction strategy we need to have everybody involved. What I saw, going door to door initially, was despair, no hope, and a group of people who lived in poverty and were forgotten by the previous government. I believe that things such as the Canada child benefit, which is better for nine out of 10 families and helps those living in need is transformational and will continue to make a difference.

In particular, for this budget, budget 2017, the minister stood up and talked about the significant, historic amount of investment in affordable housing to come up with a national housing strategy. Saint John has 1,300 people on a wait-list for affordable housing, and over the past 10 years that number has continued to grow. The fact that we announced money for a national housing strategy, I think, is another transformational measure.

My question to you today is about early learning and child care, which I was also thrilled about. In Saint John—Rothesay, I work alongside Erin Schryer from Elementary Literacy in New Brunswick and Shilo Boucher from the YMCA. We've developed an early learning pilot called "Learning Together" that we feel will be transformational.

Can you talk to me more about the investments you are making in early learning and child care?

• (1330)

Ms. Louise Levonian (Deputy Minister, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you for the question.

As you likely know, the 2017 budget announced \$7 billion for early learning and child care. This is in addition to the \$500 million that had been announced in budget 2016, so that's a total of \$7.5 billion for early learning and child care. Approximately \$5 billion of that is for funding to the provinces and territories, for an early learning and child care framework that we are working to develop and finalize with the provinces right now.

Mr. Wayne Long: I just want to jump in. Can you elaborate a little on the plan moving forward and working with the provinces? How will that go?

Ms. Louise Levonian: Sure. Do you want me to just finish the—

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Louise Levonian: Then another significant part of that would be \$100 million over the period for innovation, innovation around early learning and child care, and then another \$95 million is for better data to be able to assess the impact of the funding that would be provided. Then there's a further \$100 million next year, and then I believe it's \$130 million, and \$130 million going out for the 10-year...for indigenous early learning and child care as well.

What we have been doing over the last while, initially, with the provinces and territories is discussing what an early learning and child care framework could look like and what the components are: quality care, availability, who the focus should be on, is it most in need, etc. That framework is being developed and is fairly close.

We would then agree with the provinces on this framework, and following that, there would be bilateral agreements that we would have with the provinces, and funds would be transferred. We would ensure also, working with the provinces and territories, that outcomes are achievable and that we are tracking outcomes for Canadians to ensure that's being done.

•(1335)

The Chair: Thank you.

Sorry, we are out of time there. Maybe if we come back around, we'll get to the second part.

For the next six minutes, we have MP Dhillon, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you.

My question was for the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, but I will put it to the witnesses who are here.

Over the past few meetings, the committee has heard that women were under-represented in trades in Canada. When it comes to women's participation in the workforce, Canada ranks high compared to other OECD countries.

However, Canadian mothers, especially those with young children, are less likely to participate in the workforce than women from the best-performing OECD countries. Women with children are often unable to fully participate in the workforce owing to maternity-related challenges and the balance between family and work.

Can you tell us about initiatives the current government has taken with regard to equal opportunities for women and men since it took power and about the gender-based analysis carried out when Budget 2017 was drafted?

Ms. Louise Levonian: I will answer.

Many measures aimed at women have been taken. For the first time, the budget contains a specific analysis on the impact on women, but I will leave that to the Department of Finance.

When it comes to Employment and Social Development Canada, there are, of course, the child benefits. Minister Duclos talked about that a bit. There is also what we just talked about. We have also talked about early childhood development, learning and care. There are some measures related to employment insurance. There are also benefits for seniors, and we have increased those for people who are

living alone. Normally, a large proportion of those individuals are women. We are talking about an increase of \$947 a year. There are measures for the homeless. Money is set aside in Budget 2017 for that.

Ms. Sterling, perhaps you would like to add something.

Ms. Lori Sterling (Deputy Minister, Labour Program, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you for the question.

Concerning employment, a consultation on pay equity is underway. Of course, that will help women. One of the priorities included in Minister Hajdu's mandate letter is the development of a pay equity regime—in this case, proactive—that would apply to federally regulated workplaces. That is one of our priorities. Moreover, we announced policies in the latest budget to make workplaces more flexible.

•(1340)

[*English*]

It was announced that there will be a package of reforms to assist in making the workplace more flexible. This generally favours women in the workplace, who tend to enter and exit. It includes a right to request flexible work, and it includes leaves, for example, for family care. Those would be two additional measures—plus an extension on maternity leave—that would be protected in the Canada Labour Code.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Could you please give us more details on the Budget 2017 measures to help women and families such as maternity leave, parental leave, as well as leave for family caregivers?

Ms. Louise Levonian: Yes. In terms of employment insurance, women have been given more flexibility. First, more flexibility has been provided for starting maternity leave 12 weeks before the due date. It used to be eight weeks. The period has been increased to 12 weeks. Second, the length of maternity leave has been increased from 12 months to 18 months, but the benefit amount has been reduced. Essentially, those are the two measures to help women.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Okay.

Can you elaborate on family caregiver leave?

Ms. Louise Levonian: Sorry, I didn't understand the question.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: I'm talking about leave for family caregivers. Can you explain to us what you provide?

Ms. Louise Levonian: Okay.

Here are the details. I believe we have added 15 weeks of benefits for people who must provide assistance to an individual in a serious or critical situation. That is added to the number of weeks currently being provided; the existing benefits remain in place. This is an increase of 15 weeks.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Lori Sterling: There will also be changes in employment insurance in that regard. We are talking about 17 weeks. Family caregivers' jobs will be protected by the Canada Labour Code.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Sorry, we have to move on.

MP Poilievre is next, please.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, if I could, I'll begin by apologizing on behalf of my colleague across the way for taking so much time and leaving so little for our witnesses to respond to his comments earlier.

I'd like to ask the deputy minister of the Department of Employment and Social Development, Ms. Levonian, does the department have any data on the effect of a \$50 a tonne carbon tax on the cost of a market basket?

Ms. Louise Levonian: I think the minister responded to many back-and-forths on that. What I would add is that, obviously, we are in the process of elaborating a poverty reduction strategy. Part of that elaboration is to determine what the best measures are. Once that elaboration has happened and we have a sense of what the best measurement of poverty reduction is, then would be the opportune time to see what the impact would be from those kinds of things on that kind of measure.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: In the case of the market basket measurement, is there data?

Ms. Louise Levonian: Like I said, that specific measure hasn't been determined to be the best measure, the measure that we would end up using as a target or something that we would use, so it's premature to determine.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The minister mentioned a 40% reduction in child poverty as a result of the Canada child benefit. On what date did this new benefit arrive with Canadian families?

• (1345)

Ms. Louise Levonian: When did the CCB start?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: On what date...?

Ms. Louise Levonian: I think it was July 1, 2016.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The 40% reduction in child poverty rates, that's over what period of time?

Ms. Louise Levonian: The base would be what the situation was pre-implementation of the CCB, and then post-implementation. We would look at data from 2014-15 and then look at the impact post-implementation of the CCB.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have no doubt that it would be pre- and post-implementation, but what was the starting point and the end point?

Ms. Louise Levonian: The starting point, from what I understand, would be that we looked at data from 2014-15, and then the post-implementation would be 2016-17.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I have the table here that your department gave the minister on this very question, and it starts in 2013 and goes to 2017. Does that sound right?

Ms. Louise Levonian: It's over a period of time.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I note here that about half of the reduction in child poverty, then, would have occurred prior to the Canada child benefit actually arriving in July 2016.

Ms. Louise Levonian: There are fluctuations in the level of child poverty over time.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Right. It's just that the reduction that you're citing starts in 2013 and ends in 2017.

Half of the reduction in poverty that your minister was boasting of occurred before his child benefit actually took effect, according to the table that your department provided him in a briefing note last year.

Ms. Louise Levonian: As I was saying, the period of time is reasonably accurate that I think you're talking about. This is all based on data that has lags. Right? So you look at the data when you have it, and then it needs to be adjusted. There is a change from one year to the next as to how many children are in poverty prior and before.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Sure.

Ms. Louise Levonian: Then you get to the point where, okay, there has been an adjustment. You look at what the impact will be again, and of course, that varies over time.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Here is my final question, then. Is it fair to attribute to the child benefit a reduction in poverty that actually occurred before the benefit came into effect?

The Chair: Please keep your answer very brief.

Ms. Louise Levonian: The answer would be that there is definitely an impact as a result of the CCB on child poverty. There's no question. The data shows that. The exact number will change over time. There's a forecast, and then years later an actual impact. For all we know the impact could be 50% by the time we have all the data accumulated.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ramesh.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question goes to the deputy minister of Employment and Social Development Canada. I started living in Canada after coming as an immigrant. I obtained a law degree. It took me more than six years to complete my law degree and join the legal profession. Generally, immigrants who come with a foreign credential are not getting their credentials updated in a timely manner. They have to go to some other jobs that do not correspond with their professional qualifications. They go for small jobs for less pay.

Could you take us through the system? I know that some system is coming into place. What are the approaches you are going to follow in an innovative way and how are they going to be effective?

Ms. Louise Levonian: I think you're talking about the foreign credential recognition program.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Yes, please.

● (1350)

Ms. Louise Levonian: Unfortunately I'm not 100% familiar with the program. I'm familiar with it at the very high level, but you're looking at the specifics. I know that we provide support. I think micro-grants are provided. Also, we're in the process of providing assistance from a loan perspective to ensure that individuals have sufficient resources to be able to take the necessary courses, and so on.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Is it your opinion that their credentials will be recognized as part of the new program that you are going to adopt?

Ms. Louise Levonian: Looking at what the program does and what supports there are to recognize foreign credentials is something we provide assistance for. The recognition of credentials is done throughout the country by provinces and territories in various ways. One thing we are doing is working with the provinces and territories to try to provide best practices, to potentially convene the provinces territories so that we could have a consistent approach to foreign credential recognition.

If you are asking whether the new program would recognize foreign credentials specifically right away, that's not something that the program would do itself. It's something we need to work on with the provinces and territories to ensure that we're doing it in the fastest, most efficient way possible. We're doing a stream of work right now with the provinces and territories to try to ameliorate that process.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Nearly two weeks ago, Minister Hajdu and Mr. Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, were in Brampton in my riding, in my city, and there were announcements regarding the new immigration system for those people who are coming as immigrants. Can you update us on those?

Ms. Louise Levonian: We are working with our colleagues at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada as well. I don't have that part of the information with me, but what I can do is ask that we put a little paper together articulating the work we're doing and what specifically those aspects are. If you like, we can provide that to the committee.

Mr. Ramesh Sangha: Could you please provide that, then, to the committee? Thank you very much.

The Chair: Nicola, you have about two minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: My question was for Minister Qualtrough. I really liked her presentation.

I would like to begin by thanking your team and each and every one of you for the excellent work you have done to prepare your presentations. They were very informative and very appreciated.

I saw a comment on federal accessibility legislation. That project is generating a lot of excitement and a lot of expectations.

Could you tell us about the next steps until the bill is passed?

Ms. Lori Sterling: Thank you for the question.

As Minister Qualtrough was saying, we conducted a nine-month consultation across the country, even in the north. We are waiting for a report, in the spring or the fall, on everything we have heard. We will study the report, and then we will enact the legislation.

As Minister Qualtrough has already said publicly, we would like that to happen by early 2018.

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Do you have an idea of the major features of that bill on accessibility?

Ms. Lori Sterling: I'm not sure I understand.

Mr. Nicola Di Iorio: Relevant provincial legislative measures exist, but we will finally have a federal piece of legislation on accessibility.

Can you tell us about a few of the main ideas, or major themes that would be part of that type of legislation?

Ms. Lori Sterling: There are legislative measures in Quebec, in Ontario, in Nova Scotia, as well as in Manitoba. Those are different legislative measures, but they all have standards, be it in the area of technology, employment or transportation. The standards are different, but this way, all companies or individuals have the right to accessibility.

● (1355)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mark, I know your question is up next, but I need at least three minutes to wrap some stuff up, so if you can do it in a minute or a minute and a half, go for it.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Thank you.

The minister said last year, "We have moved the age of eligibility for old age security to 65, which will prevent 100,000 vulnerable seniors from falling into severe poverty." When did this take effect? My understanding was that it was in 2023 to 2029 that this change from 65 to 67 was to take effect. If the government is changing it back to 65 now, then the phase-in doesn't start until 2023. Am I correct in saying the status quo is 65, and therefore, the change has zero effect on OAS benefits to Canadian seniors?

Right now, in 2016 and 2017, there is no effective benefit to seniors because what was proposed was in the future, and it's been scaled back. There was no benefit to seniors regarding reducing the age back to 65, is that correct?

Ms. Louise Levonian: My understanding is that it would have been the impact at the time of implementation. Whether it was 65, and then brought to 67, and then brought back to 65, the impact would have been at the time of implementation.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Right now, in 2017, it does not have an effect.

Ms. Louise Levonian: There is no impact.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Correct. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mark.

We do have votes scheduled for today on estimates. I'm going to suggest that we defer those until we can determine whether or not we can get the ministers back. I don't think it makes a lot of procedural sense to vote on these now, and then have the ministers come back at a later date.

Can I get everybody's agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Can you just clarify what you just asked us again, Chair?

The Chair: We have votes on the estimates.

Mr. Dan Ruimy: When are they due?

The Chair: They are due on May 31. We have time between now and then, if we need to. If, for whatever reason, we can't get the ministers back, we can add this to a later session of this committee.

Are there any other questions?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: What are you asking for exactly?

The Chair: We're not going to vote. It's more of a clarification.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Okay.

The Chair: We're not voting on these today. We could, but it wouldn't make sense to then bring the ministers back to speak with us.

I will adjourn for the day. Thank you to all of you for coming and sharing your time with us today.

Thank you to all the committee members and support staff. We may be seeing you again shortly.

The meeting is adjourned.

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