



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Finance

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 099

Friday, August 11, 2023

Chair: Mr. Peter Fonseca



Standing Committee on Finance

Friday, August 11, 2023

• (1300)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC)): I call this meeting to order. Good afternoon, everybody.

Welcome to meeting number 99 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. Pursuant to a request by four members of the committee under Standing Order 106(4), the committee is meeting today to discuss the pressing affordability challenges facing Canadians and Canadian businesses.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application.

I will now open the floor to the members who submitted the request for this meeting.

Go ahead, Mr. Chambers.

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Chair, would it be appropriate at this time to move the motion that was sent in advance?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Yes.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Okay.

Thank you very much, colleagues, for agreeing to meet with us. I appreciate the resources provided by the House on a Friday afternoon in the summer, when the House is not sitting.

Obviously, inflation and affordability constitute the number one issue. We did provide the notice of motion in advance for the benefit of members, but for those of you who may not be regular committee members or who have not yet been sent that motion from the clerk, this is a one-sentence motion. I'd like to read it into the record.

I move as follows: "That the Standing Committee on Finance call the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to appear before the committee by herself for three hours, and that the minister appear at committee within seven days of the adoption of this motion."

Now, we've debated many motions requesting the minister's attendance in the past. We are, or at least I am, open to some reasonable amendments that would see the minister appear, but we need to have some comfort that the minister would appear.

Inflation and affordability are the number one issue across the country. The impact they are having on Canadians is drastic. Rents

have doubled over the last eight years. Mortgages are up about 137%. When people are renewing mortgages, which is happening every month, for the last six months they've seen incredible increases in monthly mortgage payments. These payments are not tax-deductible; this is after-tax money that people need to find to pay additional mortgage costs.

The CMHC says we need about 3.5 million homes by 2030, but we're on track to have the lowest and fewest housing starts since about the 1970s.

Just recently, OSFI has been concerned about rising insolvencies for both consumers and businesses. I would point out that just before the 2008 financial crisis in the United States, mortgage delinquencies and defaults tracked very, very normally for the months leading up to the financial crisis and then immediately jumped overnight. Just because we might be at a historical low level for mortgage defaults does not mean there isn't an incredible growing risk. I'm concerned that we are not paying close enough attention to what is happening in the mortgage market.

Finally, with respect to inflation, yes, the rate of inflation has dropped, but all that means is that the prices are not going up as fast as they were. The primary reason for inflation dropping, according to the Bank of Canada, is falling energy prices. That has nothing to do with government policy. In fact, the government is trying its very hardest to make energy more expensive, with the carbon tax going up every April, and then the new carbon tax, carbon tax 2.0—the clean fuel regulations—going up every July 1. Then, just yesterday, the Minister of Environment announced new electricity regulations that will increase the cost of energy. If the number one target for dropping inflation is energy and the government is actively trying to make energy more expensive, that is completely counteracting the work that the Bank of Canada is doing.

Now, there is some confusion at the committee around previous motions inviting the minister to attend and whether the minister has actually satisfied those invitations. The motion that was passed in November by this committee, which was the will of this committee—and we heard very much about the will of this committee—was that the minister appear for 90 minutes on a quarterly basis until inflation came back into the control range, which is 1% to 3%. The Bank of Canada governor was also invited. He appeared twice in respect of or in answering that invitation. The minister did not appear.

Frankly, what's most important is that these invitations were supposed to be "in addition". This is from that motion: "these meetings are in addition to other key committee appearances and that these meetings start in 2023."

• (1305)

The only time the Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister appeared before this committee was to advance pieces of her government's legislative agenda. That is not acceptable when the minister has been invited to appear on multiple occasions. The minister was also invited to appear with respect to the inflation study. That has not occurred yet. That study is still open. We're still waiting for the minister to accept that invitation.

The reason we're here, colleagues, is to increase the level of accountability we have with the government and find out what they are planning. Energy prices are very volatile. They might think the job is done. They're doing a bit of a victory lap that inflation is back down within the control range, but it could very easily tick up. I'm very concerned about what's going to happen in the fall when people continue to renew mortgages every month at a much, much higher interest rate.

You know, the minister tweeted just a couple of days ago, "we are focused on making life more affordable...by bringing inflation down". That's a very interesting comment to make. The government wanted no credit for inflation happening in the first place but wants to take all of the glory for inflation coming down. Other than the HST rebate, the doubling of the rebate for one year, which they have renamed the grocery rebate, the government actually has not taken any steps to bring inflation down. By the way, the grocery rebate is a step that helps Canadians with the affordability crisis, but had actually nothing to do with bringing inflation down. It was just helping to give people a little bit more funds to support themselves and deal with inflation. It didn't actually do anything to bring inflation down.

I'd be very interested to hear from the minister on what steps the government has actually taken to bring inflation down in the short term. They might have done some things in the longer term, but certainly they've done nothing to help bring inflation down. By the way, this is a government that also says the Bank of Canada has complete independence with respect to monetary policy.

I'd be very interested to hear the thoughts of my colleagues around the table from the government and from other opposition parties. I would press the minister to accept the invitation, if it is the will of the committee. I would also make one more last-ditch request for the Prime Minister's Office to allow the Minister of Finance to appear and defend the government's economic record.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1310)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Chambers.

Mr. Ste-Marie, I see your hand up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello, everyone.

We are here today in the wake of the statistics released in June by the Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy, the OSB. We see that there is a growing number of bankruptcies by consumers and businesses alike. It is very worrisome. This could have a snowball effect and become even worse in the coming weeks and months in light of the current economic conditions. We will have more figures at the end of the month. In my opinion, this is bordering on an emergency. We need to know what the government plans to do about this.

This week, in Quebec, we found out that the dessert chain, Juliette & Chocolat, an institution back home for many years, is shutting down because of pandemic debt and current economic conditions. Mortgages are harder to pay because of higher interest rates, which is leading to an increased number of consumer bankruptcies.

This is a critical issue. We want to know what the government is doing. I believe that the purpose of this meeting is to invite the Minister of Finance to appear before the committee to explain what she is doing right now, her game plan and how this situation can be turned around.

It would be important to invite her to find out her reaction to the current crisis.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Thank you very much.

I'll start by recognizing, as others have around the table, the importance of the issue. I think it is quite disconcerting to see insolvencies on the rise. We know that these numbers represent a state of affairs that existed prior to a number of subsequent rate hikes by the Bank of Canada. This is certainly something of concern. It's something that the committee has looked at in various other ways as well. We've talked to folks from banks, particularly around fixed-payment variable term mortgages. We can ask what's going on there.

As the committee knows, whether to talk about inflation or whether to talk about interest rate increases, I think the minister ought to come. I think she has a sufficient number of invitations to be able to come if she so chooses. I'm not exactly sure why this particular motion is the one that's going to put us over the top, particularly since this motion retains a lot of problematic and unhelpful elements that have been the subject of a lot of discussion around this committee table before, whether it's the length of the invitation, the idea that she should appear without her officials, or, in this case, the relatively tight turnaround for the appearance.

As I say, I don't think this is a particularly helpful motion in the way that it's constructed. I don't think it's likely to get the minister before us. I do think it would be good to have the minister come quickly to committee at the opening of session in order to address some of these issues. There has been some change, as Mr. Chambers referenced, in terms of the inflation rate since we last met. I think it would be useful to discuss those things. I am determined to be optimistic about getting the minister here in the context of our inflation study so that we might close it off, but I think that is the best way for her to appear.

I don't think this particular proposal really fits the bill, if I'm being honest. I think there's a lot of context on the record for why I feel that way, so I won't belabour those points any further. I just wanted to make it known that while I do support the idea of the minister coming here, as I have for a long time now, to talk about the issues of inflation and interest rates, I think there are better ways to do it than what's been presented here today.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

I have Ms. Dzerowicz next.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): I believe my colleague Yvan was up first.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Sure.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I'll let Yvan go first, and then I don't mind going after him.

• (1315)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Go ahead, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank very much, Julie. I appreciate that.

Let me start by saying that the underlying issue that's referenced in the request to meet today is incredibly important to my constituents and to Canadians. I think we all agree on that. I have a lot to say about this issue and some of the things that Mr. Chambers in particular spoke to at the beginning, on the underlying subject matter of inflation, the cost of living, and what's being done about it, but I would rather just focus on how we move forward.

I think we've been working throughout the summer to hear from Canadians and to listen to their ideas on a range of topics as well as to improve the functioning of this committee. I think we've all agreed that there have been moments of dysfunction at this committee in the recent past. I recall that we ended our spring sitting of the committee with the objective of reworking, rethinking and working together on how our committee works going forward to make sure it is more productive and better serves Canadians on important issues.

Today we are in an emergency meeting with an invitation for the minister to speak to us within a week. I think this motion is unreasonable. I agree with a number of the points that Mr. Blaikie made about why it's unreasonable. I really think the focus of this committee should be on working together to try to discuss the issues that are most important to our constituents and to Canadians. I do think the motion is unreasonable. I think one of the things we could be

focusing on concretely as a committee, to advance the concerns of Canadians and the issues that are important to Canadians, is the pre-budget consultations that are coming up and that the committee is planning for. To me, that would be the next immediate thing we could do to try to advance the concerns that Canadians have.

As I said, I do think having the minister come in within seven days to speak to us is unreasonable, as well as a number of other aspects of the proposed motion.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Go ahead, Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I think there's a proposal on the table, Mr. Chair, for a few amendments to what has been proposed by Mr. Chambers, so I don't know whether... Oh, there are no amendments that are being proposed. Okay.

I am going to talk for a couple of minutes. I think it's always good to do a point-in-time check.

Mr. Chambers has put forward a very important motion. I think that all of us have been meeting with thousands of our constituents over the summer, and we have been blessed to be able to hear firsthand from them. I have also heard very much from the constituents in my riding of Davenport that they are struggling.

I'll say to Mr. Chambers that nobody on our side and no one in our government—it doesn't matter what political stripe—who's actually doing any type of victory lap. The pandemic and its aftermath, I think, have caused a major ripple within all global economies, and I think it's going to take some time for us to find our way out of it.

I can go on, but I want to let Canadians or anybody who's listening know that we, as a government, have not been sitting idle. We have introduced a number of measures to help support Canadians through this really tough time and to try to find the balance between making sure we are providing targeted support and not in any way spending so much as to fuel inflation. Whether it is the grocery rebate or the increase in the Canada child benefit, whether it is the Canada workers benefit, whether it's the dental benefit or various other things that we have put in place, we've put in a number of measures. We have not been idle. We will not be idle. We will continue listening to Canadians. We will continue to be open to all the best ideas from any political party, from any person, in terms of how to continue to address the affordability issue that continues to make so many Canadians suffer.

I'll also say to you that as I read international newspapers, as I'm sure we all do, I see that we're unfortunately in good company: Most of our peer countries around the world are tackling the same issues. As much as we have it bad—and I know we are struggling—our inflation numbers are among the lowest in the world. I think it's important for us to understand that there is a collective struggle around the world in dealing with affordability issues. I don't want anybody who's listening to think that we are not thinking about this every day, that we're not working on this every day and that we're not open to every single idea that someone might put on the table on how we continue to support Canadians through this really difficult process.

What I'd like to propose, Mr. Chair, is that we vote on the motion that is at hand. I think Mr. Chambers has done a good job of putting forward a motion, and I'm ready to vote on it.

• (1320)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz.

We have a list, and once that's exhausted, then we can definitely go straight to the vote.

Next I have Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be here and it's always an honour and a privilege to serve the Canadian people.

I think it's fair to say, and I think everyone around the table is pretty much agreed, that we are dealing with some very challenging economic times.

The numbers on the uptick or increase in bankruptcies perhaps don't really tell the whole story, because when a business goes bankrupt or an individual goes bankrupt, it has real impacts on Canadians. That's potentially a parent who has to sell their home or have their house foreclosed on. That's a child, as we get up to Thanksgiving and Christmas, who won't have presents or who may not have enough to eat. These are serious consequences.

This government has just undergone a cabinet shuffle, and it appears, from media reports and even internal leaks, that they're looking in a different direction. Given the difficult economic times that we are headed into, I think the Minister of Finance owes it to the Canadian people to tell them in what direction they are going.

I heard Mr. Baker's comments with respect to the dysfunction of this committee and I agree. I also heard some of Mr. Blaikie's comments with respect to some changes he might be looking for to amend this motion and maybe make it a little less partisan, and I'm open to that; I think he's right. He's been consistent in calling for the Minister of Finance to come here. Perhaps we could change some of the parameters, and I would leave it up to him to make the amendments, because I think he's obviously a better choice to speak for the NDP and for himself than I would be. However, I would think it would be—I don't use this word lightly—irresponsible for this committee not to have the Minister of Finance before us, given the fact that we have an uptick in bankruptcies and insolvencies and that we have continued issues in the housing market.

Recently we have even seen troubling international data that maybe some of the advanced economies around the world are also going to be having some struggles as well, so in the background of the new direction that it appears this Liberal government might be embarking on, I think the minister owes it to the Canadian people to come before the people's representatives, before the committee selected to discuss finance—that being the finance committee—and discuss it with us. Therefore, I'm very open to an amendment from the NDP with respect to the parameters if Mr. Blaikie believes there might be a better way to kindly invite the minister to come before our committee and talk about the actions her government is going to take to counteract these very difficult economic times we're facing.

I don't want to be partisan, but the record is clear: Over the last 10 years, we've had the lowest economic growth per capita ever in Canadian history—or since the Great Depression, I should say—and I think she needs to come and explain that she's learned some of her lessons and that maybe she'll be taking a new direction. Otherwise, if she wants to double down, then she should tell the Canadian public that as well. As I said, I know that my NDP colleague Mr. Blaikie has been absolutely consistent in calling for the Minister of Finance to appear, and I trust that he'll keep to his track record of calling for her to appear.

We are very open to changing. I will yield the floor with hopes that Mr. Blaikie will take it, but please do put me back on the list, Mr. Chair.

• (1325)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Lawrence.

I don't see anyone else's hand up....

I see Mr. Blaikie. Mr. Blaikie, go ahead.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Chair, over the past couple of years, a lot of attempts around this table to try to fix motions on the fly have come to naught for various reasons, so I can't say that I'm particularly inclined in that direction or that I think I have a successful solution for today.

I'm open to continuing a dialogue with my colleagues on the opposition bench about how we invite the minister to try to get her here to talk about these things. I do think that in the context of the inflation study, which has been open now for a little over a year and a half, it would be nice to have the minister appear so that we can wrap up that study and start on some other things as well and I'm open to a discussion about that, but I'm not hopeful that we're going to solve this situation on the floor of the committee here today.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

I just wanted to double-check. I thought I saw Mr. Chambers' hand up.

Go ahead, Mr. Chambers.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Colleagues, if we are going to go to a vote, I think that's fine. Eventually, we will get there.

If the minister continues to wish to appear at committee only when there is legislation to move, we will have or continue to have challenges at the committee. I did not hear any of my colleagues from the government side indicate that there's a willingness for the minister to come, that she's interested in appearing to close out the inflation study, that she's interested in appearing to make up for the two appearances that she did not attend with respect to the previous motion that was passed. Unless we get some assurances that the minister is taking the committee and its work seriously....

If the minister would love to come and tell us the studies she's interested to see the committee conduct to make her job easier, we have opportunities to put more studies forward. I think there's a very good study to be considered with respect to housing and mortgages. We're in the mortgage study right now on how we will meet our housing requirements. If the minister wants to give us some direction or steer us toward what she's interested in before the next budget, that would also be helpful. However, in the absence of any government member indicating that the minister takes the committee seriously or is interested in attending, whether it's for three hours or 90 minutes or even an hour, it's going to be very hard for us to get any work done.

Frankly, it was the will of this committee to ask her to appear for 90 minutes with the Governor of the Bank of Canada. That request was never even responded to. If that's going to be the continuation of the committee, we'll live with the results of a vote today. If that's going to be the continuation of the thought process of the minister and the Prime Minister's Office, we will have a challenging fall and we will have a challenging spring and we could be back to the lectures from Mr. Perkins, which were all very interesting, but we weren't very productive as a committee last year. This is an attempt to put something on the table. If the minister is interested in taking it or if the government is interested in taking it or making some amendments, that's fantastic.

This government—and the minister, frankly—were cheering that we are now down below 3% inflation. You know what? Some will look at that and say it's great news; other people will look at it and say, “Guess what? My groceries are still up by 9%.” There is a discussion to be had there. The minister just recently said in a news conference that “we are very close to the end of this difficult time”, except three weeks later OSFI said that insolvencies were up for consumers and businesses. Therefore, I would like to know which data the finance minister is looking at.

The minister and the government think everything is fine, as they've been saying all along. Canadians have a right to know what the minister and the government are thinking about in advance of the next budget. If we can't get the minister to appear and have a discussion with us, then it's going to be a little difficult to get anything done in the fall.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1330)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Chambers.

I have Mr. Lawrence next.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do recognize my colleague's comments and Mr. Blaikie's comments, but I am an eternal optimist. I still hold some belief that the Minister of Finance will uphold her obligations, I would say, to the Canadian public and appear in front of this committee. At the very least, if she won't do the right thing, then maybe she'll feel the heat for not responding.

In that spirit, I would offer the following amendment to Mr. Chambers' motion. I'll read the revised version, and if the clerks need it, I can go through it and clarify any revisions, and we will circulate the amendment as well.

The amendment is as follows: “That the Standing Committee on Finance call the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to appear before the committee”—we'll delete “by herself”—“for 90 minutes and that the minister appear at the committee within 14 days of the adoption of this motion.”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Lawrence.

Are we going to be drafting the amendment and sending it around? Okay.

What we can do in the meantime is open debate on the amendment. Go ahead, Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Could I request a suspension so that we have a chance to consider what Mr. Lawrence has said?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Sure. In the meantime, the clerks can send that amendment around to everybody.

We'll suspend.

● (1330)

(Pause)

● (1345)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): All right, everybody. I call the meeting back to order.

Everyone should have received the amendment in their inboxes by now. Thank you to the clerks for getting that out to everybody.

Ms. Dzerowicz, you had your hand up before the amendment was moved. Did you want to speak to the amendment at all?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I could talk to both of them. I could talk to anything, Mr. Chair.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Sure. We're on the amendment, so we'll open the floor to debate on the amendment.

Go ahead, Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, and you say my last name very well, Mr. Chair, so thank you.

I see a couple of other colleagues after me and I would stop talking, just for the record, if we were going to go for a vote, but I do see Mr. Redekopp and Mr. Chambers who would like to speak as well. I'm just going to repeat something. I just want to reiterate to everyone around the table that there's no victory lap that is happening on this side. Again, as I said, I don't think there's one member of Parliament, no matter of what political stripe, who doesn't understand how difficult these times are right now.

I think there was a question from Mr. Chambers that asked whether the government will want to be held accountable, and what I wanted to say is that we have shown that we want to always be accountable. Our deputy prime minister has been before our committee five times now, I believe. I think she will absolutely be coming before the committee a number of other times in the coming days, weeks or months, as is appropriate.

The other thing I was going to indicate is that I felt that Mr. Blaikie made a very good suggestion. He said that we don't do very well at committee in discussing amendments. If we felt we needed some more time to discuss this amendment off-line and come to an agreement outside of this meeting, I think that is also an option.

With that, I'll just pass the floor along. I always have more to say, but again I think we're all trying to look for some sort of resolution, and I will say to you that there is nobody on this side who thinks that Canadians are not struggling. I want to reiterate that we have put a number of measures in place to try to alleviate some of the stress, to provide some additional dollars and put them into the pockets of Canadians to provide some relief and provide some support. We're always open to the best ideas that are out there. I think it should always be the case that we should always get together as many times as possible to discuss the best ideas about what more we can do to support Canadians.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will take down my hand and pass the floor to the next speaker.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz.

I have Mr. Chambers up next.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Mr. Chair, just as a matter of procedure, I would accept the amendment as a friendly amendment just to make it cleaner and make it easier for the committee so that it's just one vote, up or down, on the 90 minutes.

I would just add that I'm not really sure what else we would need to discuss. It's either the minister is interested in appearing before the committee outside of a regular appearance with respect to legislation or she is not.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): We still have a speaking list before we get to any vote on the amendment. Next I have Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Everybody knows that I'm not a regular member of this committee. I thought it was kind of interesting that what I'm hearing from everybody is that they want to work together and they want to see

the minister appear and they want to all work together for the benefit of Canadians and everybody's on the same page on that, yet it's interesting that there doesn't seem to be the will to do that. I just hope that the committee will actually begin to talk about functioning better as a committee. This is the place to start, from what I can see.

Of course, as I said, as an outsider, I'm new to this committee. It seems like this is a pretty simple motion. The amendments, I think, are reasonable. I think a good way to start the new fall session would be with some good progress on that motion. I think it's very reasonable for the minister to appear before this committee as well.

I want to also mention that people are struggling in my city of Saskatoon, as has been mentioned before. Many people with modest incomes live in my riding. I was speaking with one particular woman in the summer, a single mom who can't buy meat for her family, so she's feeding her children cereal. That's not an isolated story; I've heard that kind of thing many times. Our food bank usage in Saskatoon is up 35%. According to the CEO, 18% of the users are working people and 43% of the users are children, so this is a big issue that's affecting all of us, regardless of party, regardless of where you are in the country. I would really put my pitch in to have the minister appear to talk about some of these things and see what the plans of the government are to solve these problems, to fix things for the benefit of Canadians.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

• (1350)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

I don't see anyone else on the speaking list.

Oh, it's Mr. Baker. Go ahead.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I just wanted to say, on the issue.... We're speaking to the amendments, correct?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): That's correct. We're on the amendments.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I appreciate the effort made to make these changes. I think the motion as amended is still not reasonable and I don't know that it helps to advance a more productive approach to covering these issues at committee, whether it's the cost of living or anything else.

I do think that the committee's time is.... When I think about some of the priorities before us, I think about pre-budget consultations. I think about where we can hear from folks about how they believe government and all of us as MPs can address the cost of living and other issues that are important to people. There are other things that members of the committee may want to study, but I do think that this is the path forward, rather than a sudden emergency call for the minister to appear, especially given that the minister did appear near the end of our last session. That's my position.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Next I see Mr. Blaikie with his hand up.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I suppose I find myself in a position of pleasing nobody on the committee, perhaps, but I would say this: It still strikes me that even with the amendment, this is a motion that's designed to fail.

One of the ongoing frustrations at this committee, and rightly so, has been that the minister has been invited to appear on very many things and hasn't appeared on anything but her own legislation. That's the crux of the matter. There have been a lot of issues that go beyond the scope of the minister's legislation that this committee has wanted to examine and has wanted to interview the minister about, both to glean more insight into the government's approach to these matters and to appropriately challenge the government on its response to a number of things. That is the job, after all, of the parliamentary committee, but I think when we have a long-standing issue, running at least a year and a half now, of the minister not responding to invitations, I just don't think it's very realistic to expect her to suddenly change her long-standing position of snubbing committee invitations, whether it's a seven-day or a 14-day turnaround.

I think coming back into session is a more likely timetable. I don't know what time the minister has spoken for or not, but presumably she plans to be in Ottawa around the time of the opening of the session. I think that would speak to the committee in preparing its work for the fall in a way that the amendment doesn't do.

I share the exasperation of other opposition members over the minister's unwillingness to come and talk about inflation and interest rates except in the context of her own legislation, but I have to ask....

The definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over and over again, and this play of trying to issue new invitations just frankly hasn't been effective. What could be effective is for the committee to spend even half the time that we've spent over the last two years talking about ministerial invitations in talking about the issues that we all say we want to talk to the minister about and talking to other people in Canadian society who are experts, whether they're economists or advocates in the housing space or in the grocery space or whatever. As Mr. Redekopp mentioned, the folks who are running food banks around the country are becoming experts on the economy and really have their fingers on the pulse of what's going on and what's wrong with the current state of affairs. Those are people who are also worth hearing from.

The minister can come any time she wants. I think that's pretty clear. The issue isn't whether the committee has issued enough invitations: The issue is whether the minister is going to come. I think our time could be better used. If we want to issue another invitation for when we come back in the fall, fine, but I don't think that's going to break the logjam here. Instead of waiting on the minister and spending all of our meetings talking about when the minister is going to come, when I think a lot of us already know the answer to that after a year and a half of waiting, we should be talking to other folks who have that expertise so that we can be issuing reports back

to the House that talk about what the government should be doing and what its shortcomings are. I'm sure there are many of us who would like to point out some of those shortcomings; I'm sure there are others on the committee who'd like to point out areas where they feel the government has done a bang-up job.

That's the meat of the work of a committee, and after spending two years on this committee, I'm concerned that we haven't been doing enough of that work. We've been waiting for a minister who isn't coming, except when it's about her legislation, and I think it's time that we started.... What I'm hearing from opposition members is that they want to put pressure on the government to act otherwise. I think it's time for us as a committee to come up with some real recommendations for what government ought to be doing that it's not doing or things that it is doing that it shouldn't be doing. That's another legitimate way of building political pressure and holding a government to account.

Spending more time talking about the length of time a minister is going to appear or setting deadlines we know are not going to be met, like the 14-day turnaround on an invitation when there have been invitations open for 18 months that she hasn't taken us up on—or, as Mr. Chambers pointed out, in some cases hasn't even responded to, either in the affirmative or in the negative—is just not the best use of our time.

● (1355)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Mrs. Dzerowicz, you're up next.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Chair, I think you said “Mrs.” Dzerowicz. I'm not married, so you can call me “Ms.”

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): I'm sorry.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: That's okay; just call me “Ms.”

Speaking to the motion, and I'll reiterate this again, I believe our government very much believes in accountability. Our Deputy Prime Minister has come before this committee five times since we were last elected. Just to refresh everybody's memory, on December 9, 2021, on Bill C-2, she came for two hours and 20 minutes; on May 2, 2022, she was here for one hour and 10 minutes on Bill C-19; on October 3, 2022, she was here for an hour on Bill C-30; on November 28, on Bill C-32, she was here for an hour; and then on May 16, she was here for an hour and 30 minutes on Bill C-47.

I'll also indicate to you, to put this on the record, Mr. Chair, that between 2006 and 2015, when the Conservatives were in the big boss seat, the finance minister came 15 times in 10 years, and only for a maximum, by the way, of one hour each time. I would like to put that on the record in case people need a bit of extra history.

I'm going to agree with Mr. Blaikie on two things, and I have already mentioned one. It's been hard for our committee to reach a decision on the different amendments when we're in committee and in session. I think we can take this off-line and come to an agreement on what we need to be doing moving forward. There have been different ideas put forward, such as moving right into pre-budget consultations and starting to tap into some of the really excellent ideas that Canadians have in terms of addressing issues, whether it's the cost of living issues we have right now or whether we start looking at how we can create a more resilient and prosperous Canadian economy moving forward. As Mr. Blaikie has also suggested, we could continue with the inflation study, which is something that is very front and centre and top of mind for all Canadians right now. I'm open to all of those options.

I also do not believe that we are going to be resolving all the issues if we have the Minister of Finance, our Deputy Prime Minister, come before us. I would rather be hearing from a number of people in terms of some of the creative things that are actually happening in the world. I would rather be hearing about what we could be doing to increase productivity and increase growth here in our nation.

There are a lot of excellent ideas that don't cost money. Some have been mentioned already, whether it is relaxing our interprovincial trade barriers or reducing regulations. A lot of our businesses, whether small, medium or large, are saying there are far too many regulations and too much red tape, and maybe we could focus on eliminating some of those.

I'm not sure if we can look into supply chain issues, but I know there are some issues there. There are a number of ideas that we could be looking at that would actually improve the internal economy within Canada and make Canada more efficient. We could look more closely at why business investment has been so low and why productivity has been low. It's been mentioned by my Conservative colleagues that this has been the case, but it's been the case for a lot longer than the last eight years; we've had very low productivity rates for 20 or 30 years. Many have suggested that it has to do with our competition policy, and maybe that's something we need to look at.

In terms of Canadians struggling, believe me, every day you cannot help but be moved by how difficult the current economic climate is, and the current cost of living, and the impact it's having on our constituents and on Canadians. I think we're all moved by it and all troubled by it.

We're starting to see some of the data, as my colleague Mr. Ste-Marie mentioned, in terms of the bankruptcy rates. That's why it was very important for me to indicate that...it's awful. It's also important for us to remind ourselves what happened in terms of the economic impact of the pandemic, which has been literally unheard of. The reason I mention that aspect is that it's taking a long time not only for Canada to recover but also for the global economy to recover as well. It's important for us to understand that.

● (1400)

I don't know what you guys do during the summer, but other than meeting constituents, I do a lot of reading. I was reading Adam Tooze, who is a Columbia University historian, who said that with-

in the first six months of the pandemic, 95% of the world's economy suffered a simultaneous contraction. That has never happened before. Three billion adults were furloughed from their jobs and had to work from home. That had never happened before. More than a billion and a half young people had their schooling interrupted. The sum of lost earnings in just the first six months of the pandemic was \$10 trillion U.S., more than a tenth of the global GDP.

Why do I say that, you guys? It is to let you know that we had a massive heart attack, a global economic heart attack, and it takes years to recover from that. That doesn't make our jobs easier, and you know what? Nobody wants to hear about it when they're on the streets and they're just trying to put food on the table and pay the rent and get to where they need to go or get to their jobs, but it's important for us to understand the context.

I just want to remind everyone that our government has not stood still. We have at every moment tried to find ways and provide targeted support to Canadians. We have introduced the grocery rebate. We have increased the Canada child benefit, and on the seventh anniversary, which happened this year, we increased it by 6.3%. We have done a number of things for students. I was thinking about all the students who are going back to school now; we have now forgiven forever any interest on any Canada student loans, starting from August 1 and moving forward. We've increased grants up to \$4,000, and we have increased the amount of loans that students can take.

We've introduced the dental benefit and we're about to introduce the national dental care plan. We've introduced national child care. We've increased the Canada worker benefit. There are so many measures that we've put into place.

I going to mention one more thing, because it's been mentioned a number of times: I'm looking for ideas. If there's more that we need to be doing, without negatively impacting the economy from an inflationary perspective, I'm open to those ideas.

One of the things I've been hearing at this meeting has been about what you call the "carbon tax", or the price on pollution. I'm going to say to all of us that this is a very dangerous road to go down. If we have not noticed the impact on all Canadians of all the forest fires—and I just wrote this down—this wildfire season is on track to destroy four times more land than in any previous year. Disaster assistance by the federal government has been at a cost of \$2.9 billion this year alone. We need to move faster to move to a low-carbon future and we need to move faster to a low-carbon economy.

I know there was an announcement by Minister Wilkinson the other day around a clean electricity grid. If we move forward with that as expeditiously as we are proposing, all the clean-energy experts are actually saying that electricity costs will actually go down for Canadians, so we want to move faster in tackling climate change and reducing emissions. That is the responsible thing to do for our kids, for our grandkids, for our future and for our world. It's also the responsible thing to do if we actually want to reduce our energy costs, both now and moving forward into the future.

Mr. Chair, it's a pleasure. Thank you for letting me speak for a few moments. I'll pass the baton on to someone else. Thank you.

• (1405)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz.

Next I have Mr. Lawrence on the speaking list.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Thanks very much.

The fact that the Minister of Finance will not appear goes very much to the role of Parliament. The role of Parliament since the time of the Magna Carta has been to hold the government responsible, and those in the opposition parties have a sacrosanct responsibility. Even when their attempts are ignored, just brazenly sloughed off as if the voice of the people were not important, it doesn't mean that Parliament should go away. In fact, it's just the opposite: Parliament should double its efforts when the government is being non-transparent and refusing to be held accountable.

I will say that NDP leaders of the past, such as Tommy Douglas and Jack Layton, would never have allowed the government to simply be unaccountable. They would never have just given up and gone home. In fact, I might even say to the member from the NDP, "Why not make it part of the supply and confidence agreement that the Minister of Finance should actually respond to committee invitations?"

The NDP has made a large deal in the press in saying that committees will operate independently, irrespective of the supply and confidence agreement. Why not prove that this is the truth? Act independently. Let's all do our duties. The Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party—we're doing our duty. We are attempting to hold the government in power to account. We are trying to speak truth to power; in fact, we are speaking truth to power.

We have had a very non-partisan, very vanilla motion for the Minister of Finance to come for 90 minutes, at a time when we just heard the Liberal member saying that we're in extremely difficult, perilous economic times and that Canadians are struggling. We're asking for the Minister of Finance to come, and I might say that it's in the background of a recent cabinet shuffle. On that note, I don't believe we even have a parliamentary secretary for finance as of yet. Not only do we have a Minister of Finance who's unwilling to speak to us, but we also don't even have a parliamentary secretary yet.

By the way, my congratulations go to Mr. Beech in joining cabinet.

Despite disagreeing on many ideological grounds, I would expect that the party of Jack Layton and the party of Tommy Douglas

would stand with the Conservatives, and in this case with the Bloc Québécois as well, in holding the government to account and asking the Minister of Finance to appear, rather than simply throwing up their hands and saying, "Well, it didn't work before." Let's not give up. Let's hold the Minister of Finance accountable. Let's hold the Deputy Prime Minister to account.

Unless other colleagues have other comments they'd like to make, I would like to see this go to a vote so that we can see which parties believe in accountability and, quite frankly, which parties want this committee to be functional as we put forward a very reasonable motion and are even willing to amend it and water it down for the benefit of the committee, and see as well which parties don't believe in accountability.

• (1410)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Lawrence.

I have Mr. Blaikie next.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad that I get a few moments to say a few things after that. It seems to me that perhaps Mr. Lawrence and I have a different view on what's involved in holding a government to account.

I've been sitting around this table for quite some time now, and as he well knows, I've voted many times with the Conservatives and the Bloc on a number of things, including ministerial invitations. I've helped to amend government legislation in a number of areas where I didn't agree with the government, so I do act independently on this committee. I've never done anything but that, and today is no different.

What I'm suggesting to Mr. Lawrence is that his so-called strategy to hold the government to account actually hasn't been very effective, because what is happening by continuing to do the same old thing, which isn't working, is that the government gets to derail the good work of the finance committee by simply having the minister refuse to appear. We spend all our time talking about whether she's going to appear, when at this point we know full well that appearing is not her preference and we also know full well that we don't have a way of compelling her to appear.

I'm not talking about giving up; what I'm talking about is doing other things that might actually compel her to come here—not because we can coerce her, because we know we can't do that, but because this committee, instead of just navel-gazing all the time and whining about the fact that she's not going to show up, could actually do some work for a change to generate some interesting policy ideas that the minister would feel required to respond to.

I do think that not showing up is reprehensible. I think that ministers owe it to parliamentary committees to show up. I have said as much. There are extant invitations that she continues to ignore.

This isn't about whether or not people are willing to hold the government to account. This isn't about whether or not people believe in the role of Parliament. The member will know that I believe very strongly in the role of Parliament. This is about whether the opposition strategy on committee to get the minister here and to hold the government to account has so far been successful. I put it to the committee that it hasn't. Do you want the evidence of that? When have we successfully managed to get the minister to appear, outside of appearing for her own legislation?

What we have today is another attempt to do the same thing that hasn't worked. What I'm saying is that it would be nice to try something different. It would be nice to try to have the committee actually focus on a study. What studies, outside of legislation, has this committee reported back to the House in two years? None come to mind. It may be that there was one and I missed it, or it's just not occurring to me at the moment, but there haven't been very many.

We have an open study on inflation. We have an open study on fiscal federalism. We have an open study on green finance. It's not for lack of studies; it's for lack of time, because we spend most of our time talking about whether or not the minister is going to come and about the wording of a particular invitation, when I think all of us—on the opposition side, anyway—are pretty sure she's going to ignore it anyway.

When we call extraordinary meetings, it would be nice to do it in order to get some work done and in order to highlight issues for Canadians that might cause the government to feel that they need to respond to those issues.

Again, I absolutely think the minister should be coming. That's why I have supported invitations in the past. Those previous invitations for the minister to appear didn't pass on the steam from the Liberal bench; they passed because I supported them. I'm still waiting for an answer on some of those things. I think we have more work to do, of a different order, to get the minister into a place where she feels that she had better respond.

I would prefer that she had a more deeply ingrained respect for Parliament. I think that's important, but I don't see any evidence that this is the case, so I think we should spend our time talking about those issues that matter to Canadians and consulting with experts in order to get those things done. I think that's very much in the tradition of the NDP on Parliament Hill.

If we want to talk about the politics of it, I think it's convenient for the official opposition to be able to talk about the fact that the minister won't come instead of talking about what they share in common with the Liberals, which was that Pierre Poilievre initially said, when the mandate for the Bank of Canada was up for review, that it should remain narrowly focused on targeting inflation, which is why interest rates continue to go up and up and up.

• (1415)

New Democrats were talking about building into the mandate of the Bank of Canada a concern for full employment. We've heard from the Governor of the Bank of Canada at this very committee—because he does respond to our invitations, which is a good thing—that he's going to continue to raise the interest rate until unemployment goes up. That was the very thing that we were talking about

when it was the appropriate time to talk about it, when we could have made a difference by actually building full employment into the mandate—not the preamble, which is what the Liberals did, but substantially into the mandate. Instead, they took Pierre Poilievre's advice.

He admitted as much. We were on a panel together in the fall of 2021, after the election, and I said so on that panel. He threatened legal action and said he'd have to talk to his lawyers about maybe getting a gag order because that hurt his feelings. He knew it was true, and incidentally, I don't think anyone who supports freedom of speech and expression should be talking that way as a response to a legitimate political criticism anyway.

Also, when we talk about inflation, New Democrats are the only ones talking about the role of corporate greed in driving inflation, so I think it's kind of convenient for Conservatives to want to keep talking about how the minister never shows up as if somehow she's magically going to change her mind instead of talking about the substance of the issue.

I'm still open to issuing some kind of invitation to the minister, but I'm done trying to fix everything at the table. I think we have an appropriate invitation for the minister, and in the meantime, instead of convening to continue to talk about how she continues to ignore our invitations and how maybe if we get the wording right on this one, it'll change her mind, we should start examining some of the issues that are really affecting Canadians and coming up with ideas and statements as a committee that she feels compelled to respond to, because I'm tired of doing the same thing and getting the same results. While I get that this approach is great for cheap political point-scoring for the official opposition, I don't think it actually does much for Canadians.

That's my point, and that's got nothing to do with not doing my job as a parliamentarian. It's got everything to do with honouring the role of Parliament and beseeching us to do it better around here instead of just doing the same old thing that hasn't been working.

Just before I conclude, I know that in her remarks Ms. Dzerowicz alluded to agreeing with me on a number of things. I had said that I thought it would be very helpful if the minister would show up in the context of our inflation study to help us wrap that up this fall. I just wonder if that was one of the things that I said that she agreed with.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

I don't see anyone else on the speaking list, so I guess we'll go straight to the vote on the amendment first.

I'm sorry; I see Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Mr. Chair, once we're done the vote, I have something I'd like to say.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Sure, okay.

We'll start with the vote. We'll have a recorded division.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Mr. Chair, is this vote on the amendment or on the motion?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): It's on the amendment. We will call the vote now.

We have five yeas and five nays, so I'll be the tiebreaker. I'll vote in favour of the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

• (1420)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I have a quick point of order, perhaps, for the clerk to clarify.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I know that in the House, the rule for a Speaker, if there's an amendment, is typically to extend debate. I think typically on the floor of the House, if there is an amendment, the Speaker would vote against it in order to break a tie. I'm just wondering if at committee some of those same rules that inform the vote of the Speaker would likewise inform the vote of a chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you for your comments, Mr. Blaikie.

The clerk has something up here for casting votes. It is:

The Chair is not bound to give reasons for his or her vote and is free to vote either way.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you for that, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Chambers, I see your hand is up.

Mr. Adam Chambers: It's a different point of information.

I had accepted those amendments as friendly. I don't know if that changes the procedure, trying to negate the requirement for another recorded division, but it sounds like since we've already had that vote, I'm not sure we can....

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Chambers.

Since we've already had the vote on the amendment, we will go to the vote on the main motion, unless anyone else wants to debate it as amended.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: That's on division.

Mr. Yvan Baker: We'll have a recorded vote.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Madam Clerk, we will have a recorded division.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): The motion, as amended, has been defeated.

Mr. Redekopp, you said you had something to add afterward.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I said, I'm new to this committee, but you may not know that I am a former home builder. I built houses in the Saskatoon area. I built about 60 houses over about 10 years, and I saw the struggles from both sides of the fence. I saw them from the way the buyers

had to deal with all of the issues that they faced in coming up with down payments and dealing with banks and cost increases that directly affected them. Of course, on the flip side, as a home builder, I saw the other side of the story, which was all the increasing costs and the pressures that contractors and builders face in trying to keep up with the changes in the government building codes and all of the pressures that came along there.

Saskatoon right now has a vacancy rate of 3.4%. It's very low. Because of that, rents are increasing. We have a lot of students coming into our city. We have a lot of newcomers and people moving into Saskatoon, and that's causing more and more people to look for housing. Especially at the lower levels of rent, those prices are going up significantly.

There are also a lot of changes that happen in building codes, changes that make it more and more difficult for builders of my type. There are new rules to follow and new things builders need to do, and they of course add costs, which puts upward pressure on prices.

We talk a lot about gatekeepers. Building codes can be one of those things, but cities are also there when it comes to building permits and the places where they allow you to build. There are restrictions, and in different ways they can really make life difficult for builders. Of course, we have that problem in Saskatoon, and I know we have it right across the country.

Conservatives have talked a lot about ideas on this. One of the big ones is to work with cities to encourage them to build houses more quickly and reduce some of the red tape, rules and restrictions that are making it very difficult for builders to build and are making houses more expensive.

The other idea that we've talked about is using federal money as a carrot for cities, essentially, to encourage them to build more housing, to build housing near transit infrastructure and those types of things, and use the money that we have in the federal government to encourage cities to do that sort of thing. Of course, the idea of selling excess federal buildings and converting them into housing is another of the ideas we have. We have a lot of ideas that we've talked about on our side of the fence.

We also need to build three and a half million more houses in Canada. To put that into context, it equates to about 130% more houses than are being built today. If a homebuilder like me was building, let's say, 10 houses a year, that means I would have to build 23 instead of 10. If I was building a hundred, that would be 230. Those are very significant and difficult numbers to achieve, because even just finding the tradespeople to do those kinds of jobs.... The reality is that we're using the same technology, more or less, to build as we were 40 years ago. There are lots of things that have to be done and lots of things that need to change.

I noticed that we have a new Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities. He was the previous immigration minister. I sit on the immigration committee, so I did a lot of work with that minister, and he actually showed up to committee when we asked him to. For that reason, I think it would be very helpful for this committee to hear from him and to talk about some of these ideas, because housing is one of the biggest pieces of inflation and the biggest cost that the average Canadian faces.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion. I'll read it now. I move as follows: "That the Standing Committee on Finance call the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Sean Fraser, to appear before the committee for 90 minutes, and that the minister appear at committee at the earliest opportunity and no later than 14 days from the adoption of this motion."

I don't know if we need to take a minute for the clerk to send that around. I think we have sent that to the clerk.

• (1425)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. Is this motion not out of order?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): First, thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Ms. Dzerowicz, I'll recognize your point of order. I'll get some clarification from the clerk, if I can just have a minute.

• (1430)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Chair, once you have had advice from the clerk, I may wish to add to this point of order before you rule.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I actually have a second part to it, depending on what he says.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Before I make a ruling, I'll turn the floor to Mr. Blaikie and then to Ms. Dzerowicz. Mr. Blaikie had his hand up first.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I certainly appreciate that.

I want to add my own understanding of this. When a meeting is called under Standing Order 106(4), the purpose of the meeting is defined in the letter that calls for the meeting. It's not just a general meeting; the meeting is specifically for the business mentioned in the letter.

That is my understanding, and I await your ruling on that. I thought that this was the established practice.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Go ahead, Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I move to adjourn.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Ms. Dzerowicz, since there's a point of order on the floor right now, we'll have to deal with that before we move on to any other business.

Colleagues, if you are okay with it, I'll need just a minute before I make a ruling after discussion with the clerk.

Thank you.

• (1430)

(Pause)

• (1435)

Thank you for your patience, colleagues.

As you know, this is my first time being a chair in public. I'm fulfilling my responsibility as the vice-chair of the finance committee and I want to thank the clerks for all their help along the way today in making this meeting as smooth as it has been.

I made the decision, after consulting with the clerks, that the motion is relevant. Given that within the context of Standing Order 106(4) there is a section that says other business or other matters can be discussed in that particular meeting, the discussions that took place on the floor today made the motion relevant, so I will rule that the motion is in order. It is now a motion that is up for debate on the floor.

I'll recognize Mr. Blaikie first, because I think he had his hand up first.

• (1440)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you, Mr. Chair. However, I believe Ms. Dzerowicz had her hand up first, in fairness.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Okay. I apologize. Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Go ahead, Ms. Dzerowicz. I'm sorry about that.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Yes, Mr. Chair. I'll just let you know that this is the third time, and that's okay, and I don't mind, but you're not noticing when my hand is up. It's the third time I've had it up before someone else and someone else has come before me.

Anyway, on what Mr. Redekopp has put forward, there's nobody in our country who's not going to agree that we have a housing crisis or that it is not critical. I will say to you, though—and I wouldn't mind, if the clerks have this available—that I think the current inflation study we have under way actually indicates housing as a main focus before us.

I don't know if that's inconsistent with what Mr. Redekopp is proposing in proposing that a particular minister come. What I will say is that the minister should come as part of the study that we already have under way. If my recollection is good, we started that inflation study with a very specific emphasis on housing, because that is where we were seeing the greatest impact of inflation.

That's my only comment at this point. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I just wanted to thank you for your ruling. While you were consulting the clerk, I had the opportunity to do a bit of my own research, and I believe I found the section you're referencing on page 1096 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. It's always nice when we can learn a little something about parliamentary procedure in a meeting.

What's unclear to me in the wording is whether members are free to present anything subsequent, or if the committee has to make a decision that it's interested in considering other matters at the meeting. It says:

While it is considering the matter

—that is, the matter in the letter—

—the usual rules of debate apply. As such, there is no obligation on the committee to conclude debate. If it decides to consider the matter, it may do so as and when it wishes. In addition, the committee may consider other matters at that particular meeting as it sees fit.

Is the process for that to just have members propose motions, or does the committee have to make a decision that it's open to considering other matters in the context of that particular meeting?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

On a point of order, I see Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: I believe you already made your ruling. I believe that question is out of order.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Lawrence.

Once—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair; can a question be out of order?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Mr. Blaikie and Mr. Lawrence, what I'll do once again, because this is my first time doing this in public, is revert back to the clerks to help me out on this decision, if you can give me just a moment.

Thank you, everyone, for your patience today. After discussing it with the clerks, I'll answer both Mr. Blaikie's and Mr. Lawrence's questions.

Mr. Blaikie, the clerks confirmed to me that basically the decision in my ruling had already been made and that the discussions were relevant based on what the letter had inside of it, especially with all of the discussions that took place on the floor today. That is what led me to my decision today.

In the same vein, that's why I believe that what Mr. Lawrence said was true, in that my ruling had already been made. That's why we're now going to open the floor to discussion on the motion that is on the floor now.

I had Mr. Baker next on the speaking list.

• (1445)

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks very much.

On Mr. Redekopp's motion, there are a few points I'd like to make.

First of all, I think we started this meeting dealing with a motion that a number of members of the committee felt was not reasonable and not a constructive way to move forward. Again, in the spirit of being constructive and moving forward on really important issues, like housing and inflation, for example, if we take a step back for a moment, I think Ms. Dzerowicz made the point, and I'd like to

make it as well, that this committee has spent a significant amount of time studying housing affordability, and within our inflation study we have the capacity to do that. As Mr. Blaikie pointed out earlier, that inflation study is not complete. We have the ability to evaluate those matters. We have the ability to do that and we did so, and we have the ability to do that under the inflation study if that's something the committee wants to do.

The other point I would make is that on this particular topic, my understanding is that there is already another committee looking into this and that they've already invited the minister to appear. The committee I'm thinking of is the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. I'm open to being corrected on that if I've been misinformed, but my point is that having two committees studying something very similar and asking the minister to speak to a lot of the same issues and answer a lot of the same questions, to me, would not be the best use of our resources as a committee, because in doing so, we would be taking time away from other things we could be studying.

Mr. Blaikie spoke to this earlier today in our discussion about how we could be productive in our committee and what else we could be looking at and spending time studying. I agree with that point. I don't think that occupying the committee's time with something another committee is already doing would be a productive use of time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Next up is Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to raise a couple of other things.

To think that this is an important issue that should not be studied by the finance committee is short-sighted. Two-thirds of household spending is related to housing. As the committee talks about inflation and its impact on Canadians, there's nothing more significant than the impact of housing on Canadians' budgets.

The government has pretty much admitted that housing is a huge problem in Canada and that it needs a lot of attention. I think that's why there was a shuffle and there is a new minister with, presumably, some new marching orders.

There is an interesting thing here, as far as this committee goes, on why it's important to bring the minister here. We have talked about the dysfunction of this committee, and here's another opportunity to start the fall session with something productive. I suspect, as we have a new minister and he's working out a few things, that maybe the plan hasn't fully crystallized yet. This would be a great opportunity to get the minister in front of the committee to hear the ideas and for the committee to provide some feedback to the minister on strategy, so that as he goes away to figure out how to best tackle this problem, the committee will have had a chance to provide some input and thoughts on that.

This is why I think it is very relevant and timely for this particular committee to interview and speak with the new minister on this issue.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to Mr. Redekopp for the motion. As he rightly highlights, this is an important issue. It's one that, as I had mentioned earlier, I think would be a good idea for this committee to study, not just in one meeting with the minister but actually a little more systematically.

I take Mr. Baker's point that another committee has already looked at this issue, but I do think the finance committee may have a point of view that is a little different from the other committee that had examined it. I think we should be particularly focused on the question of how investor activity is heating up the real estate market. Often the conversation in Parliament has been around whether government spending in general has been fuelling inflation that's contributing in some way to what's going on in the housing market, but I think you can glean, from the comments of Mr. Redekopp and others around the table today, that it's not just a function of government spending.

In fact, in my view, government's not spending enough on housing. There are some other things it may be doing that may have contributed to increasing prices, but there's no question that investor activity in the private sector, independent of whatever government is doing, is also heating up the real estate market. That's true at the corporate level, where large corporate landlords are cannibalizing affordable housing in order to turn it into condos or higher-rent luxury units. It's also true at the level of smaller investors, who are acquiring four, six or eight different properties and renting them on Airbnb. That's creating more demand, as you have people who aren't just looking to buy houses as homes but are looking to buy houses as investment properties, with no intention that they be lived in for significant portions of the year but just enough occupancy to be able to make a reasonable return on investment from a financial point of view with short-term rentals.

Those are just some examples of things that are happening in the housing space outside of things that are directly under the government's control that I think we need to take a bigger look at. When New Democrats are talking about the role of various kinds of financial greed in the economy, and the nefarious impact that it's having on the budgets of Canadians households, those are some of the things we have in mind that we think we need to look at and ask some good questions about in terms of what kind of society we want to be. Wrapped up in that is whether we want to treat housing as strictly a commodity and a kind of investment tool or whether we want to see housing as a social good and a human right.

There are some big discussions there, and I think they're worth getting into. Obviously, we're having a bit of a discussion now. I'm not going to take up all the rest of the time until two o'clock, because I know there are others who want to say some things. I am in favour of keeping to our originally scheduled adjournment time of

two o'clock. We've dealt with the business that this meeting substantially was called to deal with.

In parting, I would just say that a few months ago, I think we got a lesson from Mr. Genuis on how challenging, sometimes, subs can make the life of a committee. Of course, in June we had a meeting to discuss a prospective schedule for the fall and what that might look like for the committee, including pre-budget consultations and the existing open studies that we have. I do think that we could make time for this in the fall. I would rather do it as part of the kind of study that I've suggested, and that Mr. Chambers suggested earlier, on the financialization of housing. If we issue a stand-alone invitation to the Minister of Housing, and then a few weeks after we come back we're issuing another invitation to appear as part of our study, I don't think we're going to get both invitations answered. I'd much rather have him appear in the context of an organized study of the issue than as a one-off.

This wasn't something that I was aware was going to be brought to this meeting. It's not something that I'm in a mood to make a quick decision about. I think we absolutely should be seized with this issue as a committee, but we should try to do it in an organized and structured way that will bear the most fruit and allow us to make the most of a ministerial appearance. I'm hopeful that Mr. Fraser will be more inclined to respond appropriately to the invitation of parliamentary committees than the other minister we've spent our time discussing today.

• (1450)

With that, I'll close. I see we still have some time before our scheduled adjournment time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Next on the list I have Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, you're doing a fine job today on your first day in the chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I want to make a few brief points. I'm conscious that others have their hands up as well, and of the time available.

This is obviously an incredibly important issue for all of our constituents. I too am in favour of studying it more. What's important, though, is to be conscious of the work this committee has already done on this matter within the inflation study. Certainly the permanent members of the committee will recall that there was a component that was focused on housing, and we had some really thoughtful folks come in here to give us advice on the kinds of things that need to be done to address the challenges people are having with the affordability of housing. That inflation study isn't complete yet, so if we're serious about those insights, then I think we should also find a way to wrap that study up so that we can offer that to the minister as advice.

Going back to the idea of a separate study, we've done work and other committees are and have been doing studies on housing, so I think we need to be conscious of that. I want to be clear that I don't mean that I don't want to study it further, as it is a priority for folks, but in my view it should be done in a targeted and thoughtful way. This is so we'd be studying the aspect of the problem that touches Canadians the most and where we could have the most impact, and so that we wouldn't be restudying things that have already been done. That would not be the best use of our time as a committee and it would not be in the best interest of Canadians.

I am open to looking at how we can do more studies on housing along the lines of what Daniel proposed today, for example. I think it would be interesting to scope the study in such a way that we'd be studying an aspect of this problem that really touches Canadians but doesn't repeat what we've done in the past.

I do think this has to be thought through and discussed off-line by members of the committee so that we can structure a study that really has the best impact for people.

• (1455)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Next I have Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I'll try to take only two minutes so that I can allow my colleague, Monsieur Ste-Marie, to have the final word.

I'm going to pick up the baton from where my colleague Mr. Baker just left off.

I know that the HUMA study right now is focused on financialization. I think that maybe there would be something for us to be able to continue on with from that study. I'd suggest that we have some sort of an agenda meeting, for lack of the sophisticated words to say that, so that perhaps there could be a discussion on how we could fit it in based on some of the decisions we've already made around pre-budget consultations and wanting to start with that.

I think we do have an excellent study on inflation, and housing was a core part of that. That needs to continue. By no means do I think that's actually over, but I think there will be many other people we may want to hear from, besides Minister Fraser, who could contribute to that and perhaps provide helpful recommendations to our government.

The only other point I would say is that I have met with a lot of developers, as well as those from non-profits, who are trying to make new housing in my riding. There are a lot of issues at the provincial and city levels as well, so it will be interesting to have some of those comments come out.

I'm at 2:58, Mr. Chair, and I have a lot more comments, but I want to honour my colleague Monsieur Ste-Marie, so I pass the baton to him.

Thank you so much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz.

Next up we have Mr. Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You are doing excellent work.

The purpose of today's meeting was to invite the Minister of Finance to come present her plan for dealing with the growing rate of bankruptcies, which is very worrisome to me. It justified recalling committee members during the summer.

Mr. Redekopp's motion is on point. Having been the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Mr. Sean Fraser is very familiar with the Standing Committee on Finance. I am sure that if we invite him, he will agree to meet with us. That would be very valuable.

However, as many of my colleagues have said, I think we can do this when regular committee meetings resume in a few weeks. The purpose of today's meeting was really to react in an urgent manner to statistics that seem very worrisome.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Next I have Mr. Baker on the list.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Chair.

[*Translation*]

I would like to add a few words in French to respond to what Mr. Ste-Marie just said.

I think we should talk about this outside of the committee, during a subcommittee meeting for example. We could talk about how to proceed and plan the work of the committee and establish how to study this issue as effectively as possible, whether by addressing what Mr. Blaikie raised or by inviting the minister.

There seems to be a desire to study this issue, but we should come to a consensus on the number of days we want to spend on studying it in detail.

That is what I propose.

• (1500)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Thank you, Mr. Baker.

I don't see any more discussion on the floor, so we can go to—

Mr. Yvan Baker: I move to adjourn.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): There's a call on the floor to adjourn, so we'll go to a vote on that. We'll have a recorded division on the motion to adjourn debate.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I have a quick point of clarification. Is this a vote to adjourn debate on the motion or is this a vote to adjourn the meeting?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's the meeting.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): According to Mr. Baker, this is a motion to adjourn the debate on the—

Mr. Yvan Baker: No. It's the meeting.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: No. It's the meeting.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): It's to adjourn the meeting.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 3)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan): Everyone, thank you for your patience and time today. The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>