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• (1705)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): I bring this meeting to order, particularly now that Mr. Ellis has arrived.

As you'll see, there's been a change in the order.

Minister Blair had a medical issue that's he's attending to today. He fully intends to make himself available as soon as possible. I believe I'm allowed to say that it is as soon as Monday, because he does want to appear on this study.

Also, I want to recognize Ted Opitz, a former member, and a former member of this committee.

Welcome.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): He's a retired lieutenant-colonel.

The Chair: Okay. He is a retired lieutenant-colonel and a retired MP. How long he'll stay retired is another issue.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I don't think there's anything else I need to say.

Mr. Bezan, go ahead.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Given the fact that the minister isn't available today—I appreciate that he is going to make himself available as soon as possible—and that the witnesses who are currently at the table will be expected to accompany him again, I'd like to move the motion I gave notice of previously:

Given that, the Minister of National Defence is increasing rent for Canadian military personnel this April, and at a time when the military is struggling to recruit and retain personnel, the committee report to the House, that the government immediately cancel all plans to increase rent on military accommodations used by the Department of National Defence this April.

It is so moved.

On Monday, when we had the military ombudsman here at committee, we heard Mr. Lick speak about that fact. He talked about how he visited a number of our bases and heard directly from members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

He said:

I'm hearing it a lot more, and when I bring up the issue and ask, "Do you know someone who is at risk of being homeless or at risk of accessing a food bank?", everybody nods [during those meetings]. Everybody knows somebody.

We know that charitable organizations are providing money to families, sometimes through the chaplaincy, for them to afford rent and food.

He went on, when questioned by Ms. Mathyssen, to say that it would be "tone-deaf" of the government to increase rents on the Canadian Armed Forces at a time when we hear of them struggling to find proper accommodations and make ends meet.

I know that many of us at committee here have received correspondence from members coast to coast to coast complaining about the conditions of barracks, residential housing units and PMQs, or they are sitting on waiting lists and cannot find proper housing. I have for a fact had correspondence from those who transferred from one province to another, like Nova Scotia—mainly in the city of Halifax—and are living in campers or in their cars. I have received correspondence and heard from parents whose children are in the navy in Esquimalt and have to work two jobs just to pay for a one-bedroom apartment because things are so expensive.

In light of that, I think one thing we can do is support this motion. It allows us to show support for our troops and for those who are struggling to get by.

I know the minister said during question period that the Canadian Armed Forces had done a wellness check. However, as the ombudsman said, there are times when, of course, members would not have the confidence to say this to their commanding officers or to the sergeants in their units, and admit they are homeless or living in precarious situations.

We had testimony in front of a Nova Scotia Legislature special committee on the situation in Halifax. We know there are currently 30 tent encampments across the city of Halifax and there is a possibility there are troops using those tents. We can't leave them literally out in the cold. I think it is incumbent upon us, as members of this committee, to stand up for our troops and call on the government to cancel this rent increase.

We know this is a guideline that comes from Treasury Board. It is tied to market conditions and there is a limitation on how much the members of the Canadian Armed Forces make and how much rent they can be charged. Regardless, I think it's a difficult time in the Canadian situation, with food inflation caused and escalated by the carbon tax charged on groceries. There's the cost of growing food. Even on food that is imported and isn't taxed down in the States or elsewhere, there's carbon tax that has to be paid when it gets trucked into our grocery stores, which makes it more expensive for our troops to go out and buy that food. That's why we're hearing of troops ending up in front of food banks. We hear about charitable organizations providing Christmas hampers to serving members and their families to help them get by.

I think this is something on which there should be agreement around the table. It's a small token we can do for those who are currently living in, and can least afford to be in, accommodation provided by the Canadian Armed Forces through the Canadian Armed Forces housing agency. We know they would appreciate us if we asked the government to cancel the rent increase slated for April 1.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

I have Madame Lalonde, Mr. Fisher, Mr. Kelly and Mrs. Gallant.

Madame Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm trying to stay serious, considering the intention of what this member is asking. I'm looking back at some of the records of what they voted against. In December, they voted against pay increases for our military. I always find it a bit ironic, Mr. Chair, to see this kind of...you know.

I think the intent of the motion is not a bad one. On this side of the House, we take our military seriously. We take Ukraine very seriously. We are actually moving forward on this investment. The Prime Minister mentioned today our investment of over \$400 million for housing.

Since we have witnesses here, and out of respect for our colleague who brought forward the motion, I would propose some very slight and, I'll say, very light amendments that we could debate, or we could hold this thought, hear from the witnesses, and come back to this at some point during this committee.

I really want to be respectful to my colleague and to our officials who are here and made the time to come. At the same time, I very much agree that our military needs the support it deserves. That's why we voted for that pay increase, unlike the Conservative Party.

At this point, Mr. Chair, I would like to know what we can do, according to our clerk. I would like to hear our officials on the study that's in front of us, or I could bring an amendment now. I will leave to your discretion what the best way is of handling this.

• (1710)

The Chair: If you're going to move an amendment, you have to move the amendment. We'll then debate the amendment and go back to the main motion.

Is that what you wish to do?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I will definitely bring my amendment.

I apologize to the officials. I hope I have the co-operation of my colleagues so that we can move on quickly.

Mr. Chair, the original text reads, "Given that, the Minister of National Defence is increasing rent for Canadian military personnel". I would like to scratch "the Minister of National Defence is increasing" and replace it. After the words "given that", we would be removing "the Minister of National Defence is increasing". After the words "Canadian military personnel", we would add the words "living on base is increasing". After the words "this April", we would add, "that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request a comprehensive government response."

For the interpretation and for my colleagues, I will read the amended text to all of you.

It would read, "Given that, rent for Canadian military personnel living on base is increasing this April, and at a time when the military is struggling to recruit and retain personnel, the committee report to the House, that the government immediately cancel all plans to increase rent on military accommodations used by the Department of National Defence this April and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests a comprehensive government response."

I'm sorry. We'd be removing "this April."

The Chair: Okay. The amendment is in order. The debate is on the amendment.

Next, we recognize Mr. Fisher on the amendment.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): It's not on the amendment.

The Chair: I have Mr. Kelly on the amendment.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): I'll begin by asking to clarify the beginning of the amendment so that I understand it correctly. The amendment is to strike the words "the Minister of National Defence is increasing". What is that being replaced with? Is it just struck out?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: It would read, "Given that rent for Canadian military personnel living on base is increasing".

Mr. Pat Kelly: Okay. That's the amendment.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Yes, and then we would also strike "this April" after "the Department of National Defence" and add "and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request a comprehensive government response."

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'll keep it quick then. I think I prefer it unamended.

Again, as the defence ombudsman confirmed in response to one of my questions the other day, making the distinction as to which minister in this government is responsible for raising the rent is not material to the struggles in day-to-day life of military personnel who are living paycheque to paycheque and who are unable to access housing, particularly in Halifax, as we've heard.

While a comprehensive report from the government might be warranted, I would rather have this debated with respect to concurrence in the House of Commons and have members of the House of Commons vote on this motion and stand up and be counted for their constituents as to whether or not they support increasing rent on Canadian Forces personnel.

With that, I'll let it go.

• (1715)

The Chair: We do love our concurrence motions these days.

Mrs. Gallant, go ahead.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you.

Besides the Minister of National Defence, I'm wondering if there's another minister we should refer to. It's really critical that we pass this, amended or not, because otherwise the soldiers in the barracks are actually going to be getting less for more rent, given that over the weekend we found out that 75 of our cleaning employees had lost their jobs and received their last cheque—if it even clears, because they've been bouncing for months now. This may be a matter for procurement, but something certainly doesn't add up. The people working for minimum wage can barely make ends meet, so now in addition to all the responsibilities the soldiers have, they'll be responsible for cleaning out their communal living areas as well.

I would request that we delete the amendment, unless, for “the Minister of National Defence is increasing rent”, we put whichever minister is responsible for that instead.

The Chair: Are you moving that as an amendment to the amendment?

Mr. Darren Fisher: No, she's voting against the amendment.

The Chair: That's the way I interpreted it.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Yes. I don't support that part of it, unless we—

The Chair: Okay.

I think it's Mr. Ellis, Mr. Bezan, Madame Lalonde and Madame Normandin.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I'm still on for the main motion, though. Is that right?

The Chair: Well, we seem to have merged the debate about the two things.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Can you put me back on the list if you're merging both lists?

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Ellis, go ahead.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think Mr. Bezan made some absolutely incredible points here that are really quite germane.

I had the opportunity to serve in the Canadian military for nine years and to serve on bases on each coast, from Shearwater to Comox. Being a physician, I had the opportunity to fill in for my colleagues across the great nation and to really have an incredible view of what military housing looks like.

I think there's another thing that perhaps begins to get lost in committees. What we need to remember is that when people decide to join the military, they sign on the dotted line to serve the country with their life, if necessary. Certainly, we all know people who died in the Afghanistan conflict, and in conflicts before that. I think we owe those soldiers, sailors and people who have served in the air force a duty of respect to give them an incredible place they will call home, whether it's temporary or permanent. We also owe them a measure of respect in terms of how we pay them fairly. Of course, increasing the rent at a time when military housing.... We've heard there are significant struggles with respect to perhaps the physical shape of military housing.

We also know that folks are not wanting to join the military. We have a significant history where I come from in Atlantic Canada of recruiting vast numbers of people to serve in all branches of the military. As I said, I was one of them. I grew up just outside CFB Gagetown. Maybe that's why I joined; maybe it rubbed off on me.

That being said, to serve our country, we need to give those folks a modicum of respect. I do believe that Canadians across our great nation understand this, in terms of veterans who have served in the world wars, of whom we all know there are few left, and those who have served elsewhere, including Afghanistan. With many families I know, their children gave the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan.

When we begin to look at that, and we understand the respect that Canadians do give to veterans and their families, why should we not extend that same respect to those who are serving at the current time? We know that at any moment, at any time, in a world that has become infinitely more unstable and, I might say, dangerous over the last couple of years, they could be called to serve our great nation and, sadly, provide their own ultimate sacrifice on behalf of all of us and, of course, on behalf of their families.

We have heard the incredible testimony, and certainly earlier this week from the ombudsman, knowing that this is an affront to all who serve and have served, and knowing also the difficulty.... Mr. Bezan points out here the struggle “to recruit and retain personnel”. Certainly we know that this is a very significant part of the problem that those in the forces.... I would say that, perhaps as my colleague Mr. Bezan wanted to say out loud, the reason we voted down.... The difficulty was that it's a measly pay increase. We also know that you're giving it with one hand and taking it with the other. That's what we're seeing here. You're saying, “Hey, we'll increase your rent, and we will give you more money.” Well, how much further ahead are military personnel, when we know they have to go to the food banks in order to survive?

I think back to when I was deployed to the Middle East, and to the struggle that that created for my own family, when my two small children and my wife were in Comox, and I was in the Middle East. Of course, you're there; you're in a new place. My wife had never lived outside Halifax, Nova Scotia, or Shearwater, where we were posted before, at that time. There's the struggle that exists not simply to integrate into a new community, to look after your children and to try to find supports, but added to that is the struggle you have to feed your family. It's an incredible insult to know that your significant other, at that point in time, literally halfway around the world, is struggling to feed your family.

• (1720)

I'm not saying that it happened in my family. That's not what I'm trying to portray here. The picture I'm trying to paint is the difficulty that exists for military families when one of the adults in the family is deployed and somebody is left behind to look after the children. That is an absolutely incredible strain on families. We know the mental health issues, the difficulty accessing mental health and physical health, and the problems that can ensue from that. Of course, marriage breakups can ensue from that as well.

I think that is incredibly germane. We need to call upon ourselves inside to understand the difficulties that happen with deployments. Then add to it the significant financial distress. I think that is an incredible remembrance that we need to have to honour those who have decided to sign up for the military with that potential to make the ultimate sacrifice.

I think we need to bear that in mind. I would go with my colleague, Pat Kelly, who also would say that it really doesn't matter which minister is increasing this. People in the military don't care which minister. I would go so far as to suggest that if it's not the Minister of National Defence—because that's who they perceive as their ultimate boss—they would say that the Minister of National Defence, if not responsible, is allowing this to happen.

Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Bezan, Madame Lalonde, Madame Normandin and Mr. Fisher.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Dr. Ellis for that insight. He's someone who has served and who understands what military housing was and what it's become. I think it's great to have that on the record.

I'd just add to this. I know that those who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces expect that when they're deployed, particularly for those in the army, when they go to places, even like Latvia, sometimes they have to be put up in tents for a few months. When they're at home at the base, you would think they would be able to live in a nice home.

We heard from the Canadian Forces housing authority, when they were here, that they're building fewer than 20 new homes a year, yet we have a wait-list of over 4,500 members who currently want to have residential housing units provided by National Defence. That is by no means ever going to keep up. We know that the budget the Canadian Forces housing authority has to upgrade the

current homes isn't keeping up with the challenge that we have with the housing stock that continues to age.

To the amendment, on taking out the name of the Minister of National Defence from the motion, we heard from the defence ombudsman, Mr. Lick, in response to a question from Mr. Fillmore on Monday that it is a Treasury Board Secretariat guideline that ultimately comes into play, but it's done at the discretion of the Minister of National Defence. The minister has the cabinet authority to say no and to actually cancel that rent increase and allow rents to be frozen at their current rate, which was set in 2023.

I would again suggest that taking out the Minister of National Defence is not accurate because, ultimately, under our parliamentary processes we have ministerial authority and responsibility. The minister is responsible for this department, including the Canadian Forces housing authority and including the rent hikes that are going to come into effect on April 1, so I do argue against the amendment to remove his name.

I would also argue that by adding “pursuant to Standing Order 109” to the motion.... For those who aren't familiar with parliamentary processes, what the Liberal parliamentary secretary is trying to do is shut down debate from ever happening on this motion in the House, because it does kill concurrence. The ability to have these motions go to the House and have a concurrence motion allows other members beyond this committee to actually come to the House and participate in a three-hour debate—essentially a take-note debate—on this crisis.

I think this is a crisis that we should address, especially for those who are right now without proper housing in Halifax, where they just recently had another three-plus feet of snow dumped on them. My heart breaks knowing that they are sitting out there literally in the cold, dealing with wet, heavy snow. We know that tents collapse under that. For those living in their cars, they could realistically be trapped in those vehicles because of the heavy snow that's fallen on them. We've seen places with up to five feet of snow.

I think it's unfortunate that there is a push from the parliamentary secretary to undermine what the motion has set out to do, which is to cancel the rent increase—to direct the Minister of National Defence, who is responsible for this department and for these rent increases, to cancel them—and to give the opportunity for other members who aren't part of this committee to have a fulsome debate in the House of Commons.

• (1725)

The Chair: Madame Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I certainly appreciate the member making reference to the standing order.

I have a few clarifications. I think everyone who's listening will understand, I hope.

The reality is that the Treasury Board creates a policy regarding this. The Department of National Defence goes on the regulation. We agree. To say that we're trying to—and I quote the member—“kill concurrence”.... Actually, the standing order only delays it.

I think it's important to say that, when you think about what our military is doing every day, they need our full support. I completely agree. That's why we voted in favour of the pay increase. This is also why we voted in favour of our commitment to Ukraine, unlike the member opposite. When it comes to facts, I really don't want to have any lessons. We do have officials and a study to go by. I would like to think that at this point....

I know that maybe other members would like to speak, so I'll reserve the rest of my considerations. However, when it comes to facts, I'm sorry. It is very clear that, when it comes to facts, we have our military's back, and we vote in accordance with that.

• (1730)

The Chair: Next we have Madame Normandin, and then Mr. Fisher and Ms. Mathyssen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much.

Many of the comments I wanted to make have already been made. I won't repeat them.

As far as the use of Standing Order 109 is concerned, one thing was not mentioned. This standing order calls for a government response within 120 days, which would take us to early June, when the rent will have already been increased.

So the use of the standing order would not simply postpone the debate in the House of Commons on the motion; it would make the motion completely meaningless. The government's response would only come once it has likely decided not to cancel the rent increase. In that case, the response will be about the fact that it did not cancel the rent increase rather than about a request not to increase rents in the future.

In that sense, I even wonder if the amendment is in order. Wouldn't the meaning of the proposed motion be completely distorted if it was added that a government response must be given within 120 days?

I'm not making a request to the chair per se. Ultimately, I'm making an argument to vote against the amendment that adds a government response.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you very much.

I support the idea of freezing rents. I disagree, however, with the Conservatives' decision to freeze the pay of our armed forces members. It's laughable that they would suggest that it's because it wasn't enough. They voted against a raise in pay for every Canadian military member. Mr. Ellis said that it was important to pay our military, and then voted against our raise. He said that it's important to show a modicum of respect; he showed zero respect. The Conservatives showed zero respect when they voted against a raise for our CAF members.

I support a freeze on this. I also support the amendment. I was going to speak to the main motion. I didn't want to speak to the amendment, but then you combined all of the names.

I do not see an issue with removing the reference to the Minister of National Defence. The question was asked of Mr. Lick, and Mr. Bezan quoted Mr. Lick a couple of times in his opening comments. It's not the Minister of Defence who makes the decision, so taking that out makes perfect sense.

It's semantics, at this point, if around this table we agree that we want to freeze rents. I don't quite understand why we're getting into the weeds on something that I feel there's support for around the table.

Adding Standing Order 109 is something I also support, because I've seen what the Conservatives do with concurrence motions. They just do it to get more clips that they can show on social media.

Mr. James Bezan: Do you mean you don't do that?

Mr. Darren Fisher: I don't do that, actually. You can go check. I do not do that. I could have done it when you stood up and voted against the raise in pay for our military members, but I didn't do it.

I support the idea of freezing rents for our Canadian Armed Forces, just like I support an increase in pay for our Canadian Armed Forces members.

The Chair: Ms. Mathyssen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Well, I am certainly disappointed to see the toxic tactics again being used, using this committee for something that is very serious and delaying what I thought was going to be a very insightful study, so I hope the day for those meetings won't be taken away. I certainly do apologize to the witnesses. Your time is valuable, and I want you to know that. I hope the other members of the committee certainly convey that to you—at least in words, maybe not in actions.

Whether we vote for concurrence or not, there's a housing crisis in this country. Ultimately, it has been created over the last 30 years by governments unwilling to invest in housing. The Canadian Armed Forces is experiencing part of that. They are often a microcosm of what we see in the greater Canadian society and, because of other specific issues they must deal with—because of relocation, how they work, where they work and so on—they are impacted greatly.

Let's not kid ourselves: There have been significant clear decisions by government after government—Conservative or Liberal, it doesn't really seem to matter which—that has made choices on housing, whether we're talking about what exists now or under the Conservatives before, when there was a loss of 800,000 affordable housing units. Maybe the Conservatives would like to talk to their provincial counterparts like Doug Ford or Marlaina Smith, who have frozen rent controls. They're making it harder for Canadians to pay those housing bills. Whether we vote on concurrence or not, it doesn't really seem to matter.

After all of that, I support the motion. I would really love to get to it, so that maybe we can get to our witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1735)

The Chair: We'll have to vote on the amendment before we vote on the motion, as long as that's clear.

Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you.

Given that we've had the remarks from the parliamentary secretary for defence and Mr. Fisher, and earlier... I don't remember if Mr. Fillmore was in on it, but what I do know from testimony last week is that there seems to be a real sensitivity on their part around singling out the Minister of Defence.

I'd like to solve this. If there is agreement—and I've heard everybody around the table say they agree with the main purpose of this motion, which is to call for the freeze—I will offer as a compromise a subamendment. We have an amendment that has removed “the Minister of National Defence”. I understand that they don't want that part in the motion. I will offer a subamendment that would read, “Given that Justin Trudeau's government is increasing rent”, and we'll go from there.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pat Kelly: If you don't want the Minister of Defence, if you're trying to protect the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Defence is appointed and serves at the pleasure of the Prime Minister. We could make that substitution and, furthermore, strike the portion of the amendment that prevents the moving of concurrence, because if there is going to be a debate in the House of Commons, and if MPs are going to be given the chance to vote on this motion in the House of Commons, it can't wait for the 120-day period, as Madame Normandin pointed out a moment ago.

That is my subamendment. If that compromise is acceptable, then we can move forward.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: How is that a compromise?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Well, you're trying to protect the Minister of Defence from responsibility for the rent increase.

The Chair: Are you moving a subamendment to the amendment?

Mr. Pat Kelly: I just did. Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I would like a clarification.

If the effect of a subamendment is to reinstate the original motion, is it in order? I am asking this question because, in the amendment, Standing Order 109 is being added, whereas the subamendment withdraws it. Shouldn't we vote on the amendment instead of making a subamendment?

[*English*]

The Chair: I am a little confused, frankly, so I'll let the clerk speak to the position of Mr. Kelly's proposal, because it does change everything around.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Wilson): Madame Normandin is right that, on the section that makes reference to removing Standing Order 109, you can't.... You can just vote against it. The first part amends the amendment, so that should be fine.

• (1740)

Mr. Pat Kelly: I would prefer, of course, to ultimately deal with that portion. I wouldn't want to end up voting against both amendments. I can withdraw the subamendment, and we can—

Mr. James Bezan: Just withdraw the “Standing Order 109” part, then.

Mr. Pat Kelly: We'll stick with the beginning part, about changing who caused the rent increase, and withdraw the portion that is out of order.

The Chair: I understand that you're replacing “the Minister of National Defence” with “Justin Trudeau”.

Mr. Pat Kelly: “The Trudeau government” would work.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Madame Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I think I would be prepared to vote, but before I do that, again, for those who are listening and for those who are here, I really want to apologize. When you're on the defence, it's because you know that you should have voted yes for that pay increase, and you did not. It's interesting to me that what I thought was a very small amendment proposed so we can move on to the study.... We didn't have to do all this. Again, this committee is being ambushed to the detriment of working on this committee.

Again, I am prepared to vote on the subamendment, which I found extremely ridiculous, so it will be a pleasure for me to vote no.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I'll vote against the subamendment, because it shows what I said earlier, that this is all for the clip. If you really care about the issue, the amendment—not the subamendment—is fine; it gets us to the issue. When you say things like what Mr. Kelly said and make some amendments like that, it just shows that it's strictly a partisan issue and that you're just trying to score points.

The Chair: Is everyone ready to vote on the subamendment?

(Subamendment negatived: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: The subamendment is defeated. Now we are on the amendment.

Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: I would like to make an amendment to the amendment. I would like to delete the section after “this April”, the section that adds in “that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request a comprehensive government response”. We can remove a section of it as a subamendment. That would be in order, would it not? There are three different parts in this amendment. There's the change to the front, which takes out “Minister of National Defence”, and there is also the addition of “living on base is increasing”.

I am going to move a subamendment to delete the last part of the amendment put in by Ms. Lalonde, on adding “pursuant to Standing Order 109”. It's based upon Ms. Normandin's intervention, which pointed out quite clearly that this would push this decision back 120 days, which would put us into June and is well past the date of the rent increase on April 1.

The Chair: Just so it is clear, after “the Department of National Defence”, “this April” is taken out.

Mr. James Bezan: No, it's everything after “pursuant to Standing Order 109”.

The Chair: Okay. Is that clear?

Madame Normandin, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: You may find me to be a bit of a stickler when it comes to procedure, but I don't think we can use an amendment to reject an amendment. However, to solve the problem, we could split the vote on the amendment proposed by Mrs. Lalonde.

• (1745)

[*English*]

The Chair: It is our view, Madame Normandin, that this is in order.

Mrs. Gallant, go ahead.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I have a point of order.

In terms of what seems to be out of order, it's the third part of the amendment by Madame Lalonde, about Standing Order 109. If there is a delay, then it completely negates the purpose of the motion. The point of order is that this part of the amendment is out of order, because it changes the substance and changes the whole intent of Mr. Bezan's motion.

The Chair: That's not my view. The amendment that she put forward was in order. This is an attempt to remove one section of that amendment. Your point is debate, not a point of order.

Is there any other debate on the proposal?

I see none, so we'll have a recorded vote on Mr. Bezan's desire to remove the part about how, pursuant to Standing Order 109, we request a government response.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The subamendment passes. Therefore, we are now on the amendment, whatever remains of it.

Please read the amendment to the committee.

The Clerk: The amendment as amended reads as follows: “Given that, rent for Canadian military personnel living on base is increasing this April, and at a time when the military is struggling to recruit and retain personnel, the committee report to the House, that the government immediately cancel all plans to increase rent on military accommodations used by the Department of National Defence this April.”

The Chair: Is there any debate?

We'll call the vote.

(Amendment as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: The amendment has passed.

Now we are on the motion as presented by Mr. Bezan and amended by Madame Lalonde.

Is there any debate?

I see none. We'll call the vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: The motion as amended passes. We can hardly wait for concurrence.

May we call the witnesses now, or does anyone else have any little surprises?

• (1750)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Chair, I have to take offence at the accusations coming from the other side that Conservatives don't support Ukraine. As someone of Ukrainian heritage, I take that very personally, especially for all the work that I've done over the years in standing up for Ukraine.

The Chair: Is this a point of order?

Mr. James Bezan: No. I'm going to move the following motion, which I've already given notice of. It has been 48 hours.

I move:

That given the Ukrainian Armed Forces are in desperate need of more munitions, and the Armed Forces of Ukraine have officially requested Canada donate surplus CRV7 rockets to Ukraine to aid them in defending their sovereign territory from Russia's illegal invasion, and that given the Canadian Armed Forces are in possession of 83,000 CRV7 rockets that are slated for decommissioning and will cost taxpayers' money to dispose of, therefore the Committee report to the House that the Government of Canada immediately donate all surplus CRV7 rockets to the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, there is a letter that has been circulating online. I think everybody saw it. The Ukrainian armed forces made a request, back on November 24, to the government through the Canadian military attaché in our embassy in Kyiv, knowing that we have these antiquated CRV7 rockets.

Just so everybody is aware, the CRV7 rockets were actually originally manufactured by Bristol Aerospace at the Rockwood propellant plant, which, interestingly enough, is in my riding. These rockets were all built between 1984 and 1994. We're talking about rockets that are 30 to 40 years old.

The Ukrainians realize, as do the Canadian Armed Forces, that they are in a situation where these could be becoming destabilized. Twice now, the Canadian Armed Forces has issued RFPs to decommission and dispose of the rockets. There are hazardous materials in them, such as asbestos, TNT and C4—

Mr. Darren Fisher: Mr. Chair, could I interrupt with a point or order?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Darren Fisher: With all due respect, James, can we release the witnesses, then?

Mr. James Bezan: Yes.

Mr. Darren Fisher: They're very important people who are sitting here. You could have 15 of these motions.

Can we just release our witnesses?

The Chair: Are we content with that? Okay.

Apparently, we're not going to hear from experts today.

I want to thank all of you for your patience. We appreciate your consideration. No doubt we will see you again. We don't know when.

Thank you for your—

Mr. Darren Fisher: Apologies to our witnesses, as well.

The Chair: No, this is the way the system works, so we're not apologizing. They all know. Mr. Fisher apologized and Madame Lalonde apologizes, but the chair is not apologizing.

With that, thank you again for your presence here.

Let's stop with the bickering and focus on what Mr. Bezan has to say.

Mr. Bezan, are you finished?

Mr. James Bezan: No. I will carry on.

I appreciate that and I thank our witnesses for coming today. I look forward to seeing them soon, along with the minister.

I will stay on topic, rather than go off it. On these CRV7 rockets, the letter that has been circulated online shows that the Ukrainian military is aware of the status of these munitions, but wants all of them. If they can be transported to Ukraine, the military will go through the stockpile and use what it can, taking parts from the other rocket motors to build more rockets and utilize whatever warheads we have in our inventory.

These are all sitting around, collecting dust at CFAD Dundurn, south of Saskatoon. It's going to cost the taxpayers of Canada millions of dollars to dispose of these rockets. Some estimates I've heard are over \$30 million for the disposal of these 83,000 rockets. Rather than waste taxpayers' money and have to go through the whole process again of trying to find some entity in Canada or the United States that will dispose of these rockets, let's give them to the Ukrainian military. Let them use these rockets to defend their homeland. Let them push back on the Russian invaders.

All the talk around carbon pricing and carbon taxes.... We, as Conservatives, don't support the carbon tax, and that's why we voted against the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement. Look, we are the party of free trade. We negotiated the first free trade agreement. Guess what? Bill C-57 has passed, so let's do the next best thing right now, which is sending over the munitions and supplies that Ukraine needs.

The government has made lots of announcements about munitions, and we keep hearing about how, over 12 months ago, in January 2023, promises were made to buy NASAMS, a national advanced surface-to-air missile system, from an American contractor for \$406 million to defend the airspace in Ukraine. Guess what? The NASAMS has not been ordered, 12 months after the fact, and nobody knows where the \$406 million is. Zelensky has asked for

the NASAMS over and over again, and it's still not there. They need it to defend their airspace.

For those of us who follow what's happening in the war in Ukraine, things are getting desperate. The Russians continue to push. Avdiivka is going to be the next city to fall. The Ukrainians have positioned their Leopard tanks and Bradley tanks, as well as the Abrams tanks they have, to try to hold the line against the brutal Russian military.

This is a chance for us to do some good, send over these missiles and make a difference.

They have already said—maybe you have seen the Global News story that was out on Monday—that they have built ground launchers to use these rockets from to help them defend territory. They are also interested in putting them on their drones.

We know this war has changed the entire doctrine around warfare. I don't think anyone thought we would go back to tank warfare, but that's what this has turned into. Nobody thought drones would be used to the effect that they have been. Nobody thought the Russian air force would ever be able to achieve air dominance and air superiority over Ukrainian airspace.

We saw just recently, again, maritime surface drones used by the Ukrainian military taking down a Russian missile cruiser—a corvette. It was only hit with about two or three drones and sank. Another ship—

• (1755)

The Chair: Mr. Bezan, can you focus on the motion, please?

Mr. James Bezan: That is on the motion. I'm talking about Ukraine and defending Ukraine. The CRV rockets can be used in these drones. That's what I'm getting at, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm glad you've brought it back to relevance.

Mr. James Bezan: The CRV rockets are going to be used in drones, whether they be maritime drones or aerial drones. There is this huge opportunity to provide some major capacity to Ukraine, especially as our own munitions production of things like 155-millimetre rounds is still stuck at 2,000 to 3,000 a month. The Americans are just ramping up theirs to double up to 100,000 rounds a month. Europeans haven't stepped up.

These are munitions and supplies that Ukraine needs. I encourage everyone on the committee to support the donation of these surplus weapons, which are slated for disposal anyway. They aren't of any use to the Canadian Armed Forces, since we've moved to guided missile systems like the AIM-7 Sparrow and AIM-9X Sidewinder missiles.

This is, in my opinion, a good use of taxpayer money by saving it and not using it to dispose of these weapons. It will be greatly appreciated by the Ukrainian military and the citizens of Ukraine, who are trying to save their country from Putin's war machine.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Chair.

I'm not inherently opposed to this motion, per se, or of course sending munitions to Ukraine and helping Ukraine. To an earlier point made by Mr. Fisher and Mrs. Lalonde, I think the member doth protest too much. They're very defensive. Conservatives have now voted against the Ukraine free trade agreement, and the support to Operation Unifier in December. Obviously, they're trying to save face, to some degree. I think that's a problem.

Certainly, we haven't the ability to talk about increasing humanitarian aid or putting further sanctions on Putin, which I think we need to do. With these arms, my concern here—Mr. Bezan even said it clearly—is that these aren't stable. They're dangerous. DND and CAF personnel have—

• (1800)

The Chair: Mrs. Lalonde and Mr. Bezan, perhaps you could carry on your conversation somewhere else other than in the committee.

Ms. Mathysen, you have the floor.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to send Ukraine the help they need. That's why I voted for Operation Unifier and the support to the humanitarian aid missions. But CAF and DND have to go through the time period they need in order to make really careful examinations of what they can or cannot send. What would happen—I would love to hear from my Conservative colleagues here—if there was an accident during transport? Who would be responsible for that? How could we live with ourselves if that was the case?

Ultimately, yes, these are dangerous times, but I don't think you go forward willy-nilly and say, well, to cover my own butt, I'm going to put this forward.

The Chair: I don't know if that's a parliamentary word.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Well, let's say "behind". I'm not going to do that just so that I can save face.

I would really love to hear what the contingency plan on that is, with this motion, if there are problems and if there are tragic issues.

The Chair: Next I have MPs Lalonde, Fisher, Kelly, Gallant and Bezan.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Chair, I really appreciate being able to follow up on this a little bit with my colleagues.

First of all, the department, CAF, is doing exactly this. We did identify just over 83,000 units of the CRV rocket motors for disposal. One thing that I think we are all collectively acknowledging is that they have been in storage for many years. I would be very displeased and very concerned if there were unintended consequences, for our own forces or the Ukrainians we want to support, from any decision that can be made. I think we can all agree that the assessment is important.

We also want to make sure that they actually work. Like my colleague, I am certainly not an expert. I do believe in our DND. I believe in our CAF. I believe in their expertise. They are looking at this and following the way forward.

We need to make sure, to Ms. Mathysen's point, that these don't actually explode in transport. That would actually put our own

troops at risk. I will not pretend to be the expert. That's why, for me, the intent is that the department is doing this. We are assessing, as we always have as a government, with the support of most of the House. Sadly, recently one party did not. We collectively want to help Ukraine. We said that we will be there for as long as it takes. We voted in support. Already \$2.4 billion has been committed and is continuing.

Mr. Chair, again, on the intent of... With the epiphany of the Conservatives, I really want to make sure that we're not putting anyone at risk, especially not our own troops or Ukrainian troops.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I think it's hard to follow the last two speakers. Ms. Mathysen, I think that may have been your best.

James, you and I have been friends for eight years. We've travelled together. You are not a munitions expert; you didn't serve. I have no idea where all of the stuff you just said came from. You could have made every bit of that up, and you could have really seriously put lives at risk.

I think this is a great idea, if they are safe. We've said we will help Ukraine, or at least our side of the House has said we'll do everything we can to help Ukraine. However, let's not just rush into this. As Lindsay said, let's make sure we do the right things for the right reasons. If these things are still good and we can use them, why wouldn't we want to help Ukraine to every extent?

• (1805)

The Chair: Mr. Kelly, do you have something explosive to say?

Mr. Pat Kelly: No, I'm going to begin by pointing out that I think Mr. Bezan does have some credentials around this table. Mr. Bezan has done Mr. McKay's job. He's done Madame Lalonde's job. He's been at this committee for a very long time, and he actually listens and pays attention to witnesses. He reads the reports. Mr. Bezan did not claim to be an authority on ordnance, but what Mr. Bezan knows, and what we know, is that the Ukrainian government has asked us to do this.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: We were doing it.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'm going to ask you to maybe rein in the government's parliamentary secretary here when I have the floor.

Again, this is something the Ukrainian government has asked for. We are not suggesting there are not logistical concerns to be dealt with. We are merely asking this committee to endorse what the Government of Ukraine has asked of Canada—that's all we're asking of this committee. Surely, that's not too hard for us. Surely, the Ukrainian government is aware of the risks involved in acquiring munitions that have been slated for decommission, and they understand and accept those risks. In their judgment, this is something that's material to their war effort and something we ought to support at this committee.

The Chair: We have Mrs. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We're hearing that the government is getting equipment over there, but what we're hearing on the ground is that the equipment is sent overseas, but it doesn't get into Ukraine, because the foreign affairs minister doesn't put the final signature. They have some anathema to lethal weaponry, and it's costing lives.

For the first two years of this conflict, we were told this was Putin's expansionism; it was his attempt to reconstitute the USSR. However, now the ambassadors are telling us that this is part of a rebalancing of the power in the world, and that what Putin is actually doing is not looking to invade individual countries for the sake of it and rebuild his old empire, but to destabilize the west, take down our institutions. This is far more serious. They are fighting the war on their land so we don't have to lose blood and treasury on our soil.

All that being said, I know the Liberals actually said yesterday that they like to put the cart before the horse, and that's exactly what they did with a free trade agreement that wasn't needed, because if we don't have a Ukraine, there's no country to have a free trade agreement with—which we didn't need anyway.

The Chair: Mrs. Gallant, the motion is whether Canada is going to ship the specified munitions to Ukraine. It's not a geopolitical discussion. It's not about anything to do with whether you like the carbon tax or you don't.

Perhaps you could focus your comments on the motion itself that's in front of us.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Ukraine has asked for the ammunition. It's old. We don't need it. They can make something of it: recycle it, reuse it and keep their country. They are fighting the fight for all of us. Let's give them the tools, the equipment and the ammunition that they need to do so. This motion allows some of that to be done.

• (1810)

The Chair: Now we have Mr. Bezan, followed by Madame Normandin, Madame Lalonde and Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. James Bezan: First of all, I don't think anybody argues with my experience in Ukraine and the people I know in Ukraine. I was contacted through back channels in December and was asked for our political support for a request from the military. Before I moved forward with this, I did all my background checking to ensure that they can be utilized, that they haven't been already contracted for decommissioning, and that there is a way to get them there safely. I have had conversations with the manufacturer. I've had conversations with those in the military and those who are familiar with rockets. I've also had conversations with the Government of Ukraine.

I have in front of me a letter from Lieutenant-General Kyrylo Budanov, and I should say that there are some stories out that he may be the next chief of defence of the Ukrainian armed forces, with the changes that are taking place there right now. He is the chief of the defence intelligence of Ukraine.

I'll read his letter into the record, if that's okay, Mr. Chair: "Canada has been a solid ally to Ukraine. I express my gratitude on behalf of Ukraine. Operation UNIFIER has been invaluable and increased our war fighter survivability on the front as they have passed on the skills the Canadian Armed Forces taught. My interna-

tional team recently met with defence attaché Nicolas Gauthier to discuss our request for the retired CRV7 rockets. I understand that of the 83,000 CRV7 rockets, there is a high percentage that is not functional. However, Ukraine desperately needs munitions, and we have put a task force together to examine each of them if Canada is willing to entertain our request. The task force has identified the equipment needed to update and arm them. We hope to collaborate with the OEM, and will work on the CRV7s in Ukraine at our munitions facility. They will be extremely valuable. I sincerely hope that Canada will consider my request. I want to reiterate my deep gratitude to Canada and its people for the continued support received. We cannot defend ourselves against Russia without it." That's dated November 24, 2023.

Then, two days ago on Global News, he did another interview, and he is again urging the government to let Ukraine have the decommissioned CRV7 rockets:

Doing so would help Ukraine fend off Russian forces and save taxpayers the cost of destroying them, said Lt. Gen. Budanov, chief of the Ukrainian defence ministry's intelligence directorate.

"We hope it will be a win-win situation," he said.

He's aware of the state of the rockets. He knows that they can utilize them. These rockets will have to be transported some place. They can't sit at CFD Dundurn in perpetuity. They're just collecting dust, and they potentially could become unstable and create an even bigger problem for the Canadian Armed Forces if they're sitting in storage.

Let's utilize them. They were used by the Canadian Armed Forces up until 2009. I think there is an opportunity here. As General Budanov said, it's a win-win. It's a win for Canada, a win for the Canadian Armed Forces and, ultimately, a win for Ukraine.

The Chair: Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I really do not claim to be an expert on munitions, but based on my reading of the motion, it is not asking that the CRV7 rockets be taken to Ukraine tomorrow morning. It's asking for them to be made available to Ukraine.

From what I understand from the media, the Department of National Defence is already conducting studies on the safe transportation of munitions, but regardless of what happens, to decommission them, they will have to be transported and a safety check will have to be done. It's going to happen anyway.

As I understand the motion, it simply asks that these munitions be made available to Ukraine. I also understand that no one is going to move them tomorrow morning without doing further checks. In that sense, I feel comfortable voting for the motion as written, with confidence in the department that this will be done safely, if it is done.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Lalonde, go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I'll let others speak and I'll come back, if that's all right.

• (1815)

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Noormohamed, welcome to the committee. I'm sure you're enjoying yourself immensely.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): I am. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've been very interested in this conversation, particularly with respect to what we're now discussing. I'm just reflecting a little bit on the comments we've heard from Conservatives about how we should do what President Zelenskyy and Ukraine have asked us to do. I think it's important, especially for those of us who may have forgotten—and all of you on this committee may be much more familiar with this—what we have done in terms of the military side of supporting Ukraine.

Since February, I think there has been about \$2.4 billion in military assistance, including air defence missiles. I think there are surface-to-air missile systems. We've seen Leopard battle tanks. There have been 208 armoured vehicles—more than that, almost 300 armoured vehicles now. We've had howitzers, ammunition, drone cameras, the whole nine yards. Whatever Ukraine has asked for, thus far, we have given.

What I am really surprised by, though, is that we're hearing from Conservatives that we should do what Ukraine has asked, whereas they voted against a free trade agreement that Ukraine asked us to take part in. They voted against funding for Operation Unifier. I find it really rich for us to be sitting here talking about decommissioned rockets that may or may not work, that may or may not pose a threat to Canadian military personnel who may have to ship them over. We don't know if they're going to work properly or not, so from a party that has done—

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Noormohamed.

I'm sorry, but I'm having trouble following what you're saying, because Mrs. Lalonde and Ms. Mathysen, to a lesser extent, are carrying on a conversation that makes it difficult for those of us who wish to listen.

Please continue. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're hearing that they really want us to listen to what the Ukrainians are asking for, what President Zelenskyy is asking for. In his own words, President Zelenskyy asked us for a trade deal, which our government and Liberals and New Democrats and the Bloc supported. The Conservatives chose not to support it. He said he wanted funding for Operation Unifier. We stood up in the House and we supported that. Conservatives, including members of this committee who are sitting across, voted against it.

We have given the military supports that Ukraine has asked for. In this particular case, they are making a case for rockets that may or may not work, that may or may not pose a threat to the Canadians who would have to take them over. I think we need to do all the

investigative work that needs to be done before we ask to send things over.

However, I do think it is important for Canadians to understand that the people across the way, the Conservatives who are asking us to do the things President Zelenskyy is asking us to do, should be looking at themselves in the mirror and asking themselves and their leader why they were instructed to vote against funding for Operation Unifier and why they were instructed to vote against a trade agreement that President Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian people asked us to take part in—not once, not twice, but every single time.

I think they have a lot of explaining to do, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Noormohamed.

Go ahead, Mr. Collins.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

You know, when I looked at the motion here today, it was hard for me to contain my emotion because I have a very large Ukrainian community in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. I have a very large Ukrainian community in Hamilton. The votes that my colleague just referenced were slights not just to the Ukrainian president and his government, but also to all those Ukrainians we have living here in Canada. They were slights to the 200,000-plus Ukrainians we've let into the country.

When I read this motion here, it rings hollow, because the member opposite and all the people who are sitting beside him had the opportunity to support Ukraine. They chose not to.

I completely get the politics associated with this in terms of the Leader of the Opposition and his quest to follow President Trump and the alt-right conservative movement in the United States—

Mr. Pat Kelly: I have a point of order.

Mr. Chair, you started off pretty good about keeping everybody in line, but we've gone way off here. You have to rein these guys in.

The Chair: I appreciate that. I don't disagree. I have called the others to order.

We are dealing with a motion about munitions. I can appreciate that President Trump is a rather explosive personality, but I'm pressed to know how he—

Mr. Chad Collins: I was trying to make the point, Mr. Chair, that the Leader of the Opposition has consistently undermined our efforts to support Ukraine. Whether you want me to use the word “Trump” or not.... I can certainly avoid that comparison.

The Chair: I want your thoughts on the motion.

Mr. Chad Collins: No problem.

This motion is about support for Ukraine. I think every single person who spoke around this table has referenced the fact that this motion represents support for Ukraine. It is hard to sit here with a straight face and look at the members opposite, who have consistently voted against Ukraine recently. The great thing about our parliamentary system is that everything we do here is on tape. It's all on video. There is no guessing in terms of what people's positions are, whether you want it or not.

For me, listening to some of the debates and the points across the way about this being all for support of Ukraine, it just really rings hollow. It took the Leader of the Opposition almost two years, I think, to reference the word “Ukraine”. It wasn't until we got to the free trade debate that the Leader of the Opposition could bring himself to say the word “Ukraine” in the House. I think that speaks volumes in terms of where their party is at now.

I was reading an article here, as the discussion was taking place, about when our support for Ukraine and project Unifier started—under former prime minister Harper. Wow, how things have changed in terms of where the party opposite is at right now as it relates to its lack of support for Ukraine.

I'll reiterate that to listen to the comments that have been made across the table, as they relate to providing support for Ukraine in this instance with ammunition, is a tough one because they had every opportunity to support not just the Government of Ukraine, but the citizens of Ukraine who live here in Canada, with \$500 million in December. They chose to vote against it. They had the opportunities that others have referenced to support Ukraine and the citizens of Ukraine here in Canada with support for the free trade agreement. They decided to vote against it.

They will find every wiggle word they can to try to squirm their way out of these debates. They'll find every little excuse as to why they didn't support it. Now they've come to the committee with something that says they're in support of Ukraine. I think their actions speak louder than their words, Mr. Chair.

There were a number of votes recently. We can see where the Leader of the Opposition is taking his party. It is undermining the support of NATO. It is undermining the support of our allies. It is undermining Ukraine.

• (1820)

Mr. Pat Kelly: I have a point of order.

Mr. Chad Collins: I'll leave it at that because you can tell that—

Mr. Pat Kelly: I have a point of order.

Mr. Chad Collins: I'd love for them to keep bringing Ukraine motions because it allows us to talk about—

Mr. Pat Kelly: I have a point of order.

Mr. Chad Collins: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I recognize your point of order.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I would rather you had recognized it on a more timely basis and shut this down.

You were very narrow on relevance early on this motion. I'd like you to continue to be narrow on relevance.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will continue to interpret this the way I see fit.

We have Ms. Mathysen up next.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I come to the point that I made before. I am really concerned. I'm hoping there is an amendment that will be coming forward shortly because I'm concerned about the wording that Mr. Bezan is going forward with.

He acknowledges that the CRV7s are dangerous. He talked about not wanting them to just sit on a base, but the fact is that that's not what's going to happen to them. Ultimately, there is an agreement right now that they are supposed to be transported to a disposal company. They will be kept in a facility where it's safe. We have to negotiate.... I am fine that the Canadian government would potentially negotiate, if it's all done safely, for them not to go forward with that disposal, but that was the whole process. Just providing these slogans that Conservatives have, just to cover, without any further explanation, is dangerous. To just say, “Well, let's get them off our plate” and send them to somebody else without actually thinking that through is highly irresponsible.

Until I see some further language on this motion that talks about the assurance that we are not just offloading our dangerous munitions that are problematic onto somebody else who is in a desperate situation and taking advantage of that desperation, I can't.... They may want them, but they want them to be safe. They need them to be safe, and we need to ensure, in terms of our relationship with the Ukrainians, that we respect that relationship and that we ensure that it's safe. We don't just offload our problem onto them.

I don't see that language here now, and until I see it, I don't understand how this committee could actually have the conscience to move forward with this.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I thank you, because we do have, on this committee, military personnel who actually served. I would agree on the safety and the transport.

Mr. Chair, I'm just going to say that I almost came forward to bring an amendment to show our experts here in this committee how working together means having these discussions, but probably not overall tonight. Maybe we should bring an amendment to allow the member, Mr. Bezan, to be authorized by the committee to travel to inspect the munitions so we can guarantee that they are safe to travel.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: However, I will not do this because, for me, this committee was a serious committee when I joined. I know that our force, our military, wants us to improve.

Ukraine needs our help. We have consistently made a point of the support that we have provided, and my colleagues have made this point. My colleagues have also made reference to how the leader of the official opposition has referred to a faraway country. The Conservatives have voted against every measure in support of Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, I will be proposing an amendment, and I hope my colleagues will understand the seriousness of this committee and everything that we do going forward. We have been there for Ukraine. We'll continue to be there. This is my proposed amendment, and I hope it will make this committee happy, as well as our military who are here and Ms. Mathysen. I would like to add, at the end of the final sentence of Mr. Bezan's motion, “provided that they are safe for transport and are operationally effective.”

The reason I'm saying this is that we need to make sure not only that they are safe and that they don't blow up somewhere else where we don't want them to blow up, but that they are safe to be transported across other countries. We also need to make sure that the other countries are comfortable with this. Again, I am certainly not the expert, but I would like to propose this amendment so that people out there see the seriousness of this committee.

• (1825)

The Chair: Let me just make it clear. Just so we all understand, it is “provided that they are safe for transport and are operationally effective.” That would be the addition.

Go ahead, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Can I speak to the amendment?

First of all, I was going to suggest some rewording. Instead of saying “immediately donate”, we'll say “to safely donate and transport”.

I would also just add that I didn't appreciate the slam. I know where Dundurn is. I'll drive there if I need to. It's not far from Manitoba.

They want the other rockets, though, even if they are not functional, because they can use them for parts. There is a request from the Ukrainian armed forces for everything that can be disposed of.

Mr. Chair, I'm not opposed to the safety part. In my research on this, there are NATO and UN standards that we have to meet for the safety aspect of transport. We know that these will end up going into Ukraine from Poland, so they have to meet the NATO and UN standards for safe transportation.

I'll also just say, based upon the reformative intervention by Mr. Collins and that line, that I would like to remind them about all the broken Liberal promises to Ukraine.

They promised, on September 22, 2022, 35 high-resolution drone cameras valued at \$76 million—not delivered. This is all factual information from the Department of Defence's own web page, where you can track everything that's been promised and what's been delivered. On November 24, 2022, there were 11,000 assault rifles and machine guns with nine million rounds—not delivered. I've already talked about the January 10, 2023 NASAMS, worth \$406 million, that were not delivered. On June 10, 2023, 10,000 105-millimetre rounds—

The Chair: You're starting to wander away from—

Mr. James Bezan: —and 250 AIM-7 air defence missiles were not delivered. You can sit there and give all the nice words and announcements, but you guys aren't delivering.

This is a chance for all of us to get together. These are things that can easily be certified, packed up and shipped over. Ukraine has asked for this stuff. You guys have said you're going to send it, and it hasn't even been sent.

How is that helping?

• (1830)

Mr. Chad Collins: You don't have to explain it to me. You have to explain it to your constituents.

The Chair: Do we think we want to carry on bickering back and forth for the balance of the time, or do we want to actually deal with the motion as proposed and with the amendment?

I have two speakers left. They are Mr. Fisher and Madame Lalonde.

Okay. Mr. Fisher is done. Madame Lalonde is done.

I see no other speakers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Chair, could we reread the motion?

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll vote on the amendment first.

Can you read it, so we all know what we're talking about?

The Clerk: Absolutely.

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, I have only the English version.

[*English*]

The amendment would add at the end of the motion, after “to the Armed Forces of Ukraine”, “provided that they are safe for transport and are operationally effective”.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We're now on the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I see Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: This will be very quick, Mr. Chair.

We're all talking about ammunition. Certainly, I'm no expert. At one point, it would be nice to note—maybe it's just a point of order—that this ammunition we're referring to and these rocket motors are actually solid fuel rockets. When we think about experts, maybe that's something we want to talk about here in this committee at one point, either this session or next session. We can talk about the ammunition, what works, the type of equipment that's needed and the transportation safety.

The Chair: That may or may not be a good idea. I have no opinion on it. If you wish to put it forward as a motion to have experts called on these kinds of munitions, or any kinds of munitions, it can move forward in a similar sort of vein that all of our motions move forward here.

Is there anything else?

Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: We have some time left, do we not? We're here until seven o'clock.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. James Bezan: I just want to bring back for debate the motion that was adjourned on Monday, January 29.

The Chair: Remind me of the motion.

Mr. James Bezan: I'll read it again. It states:

That, given the testimony from witnesses at the Nova Scotia Legislature's Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, which repudiated denials from the Department of National Defence regarding military homelessness, and that given that there is widespread and incontrovertible evidence that after eight years of Justin Trudeau as Prime Minister our military members can't afford food or housing, the committee invites: the Minister of Housing; the Executive Director of the Royal Canadian Legion Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command; the Director of Emergency Management for the Halifax Regional Municipality; and the Executive Director of the Halifax & Region Military Family Resource Centre to answer questions on the military housing crisis.

The Chair: That's a dilatory motion.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Do we have anything else?

Have we emptied the cupboard on motions? I'm sure we can dream up a few more.

We'll look forward to seeing you at the concurrence debate when this meeting is adjourned.

We had Monday set up. I think that's how we'll proceed, unless I get guidance otherwise. I think I'll stay with what we have for Monday, and then we'll see how we can make up this meeting that we had today.

• (1835)

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'm sorry. Can you say that again?

The Chair: We have witnesses set up for Monday on the study that was supposed to happen today.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Before we adjourn, can I read for the record a motion that I brought forward, please? I am within my 48 hours.

The Chair: All right.

I haven't adjourned yet. You're lucky.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I know. You did not. I'm listening.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, I would like to move the motion for which I gave notice on January 31:

That the committee add two additional hours of study to the "Lack of Housing Availability on or Near Bases for Canadian Armed Forces Members and Their Families and the Challenges Facing Members and Their Families When They Are Required to Move Across the Country" study to allow for the invitation of additional witnesses to provide testimony and answer questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any conversation or debate about that?

Mr. James Bezan: I just have to pull up the motions.

The Chair: Is the motion in front of everybody? Do we all know what it's about? Okay.

I see Mr. Bezan is the first speaker.

Mr. James Bezan: Mrs. Lalonde, do you want to talk about it more?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: No.

Mr. James Bezan: I think that, instead of "two additional hours", we need more meetings and we need to name some of the witnesses we want to hear from.

I would amend the motion as follows: "that the committee add two additional meetings to study the lack of housing availability". At the end, after "answer questions", I would add, "including the Minister of Housing and the Minister of National Defence."

Mr. Darren Fisher: Doesn't the motion suggest witnesses?

Mr. James Bezan: It's only two hours. I think each minister will be one meeting, so you're going to need two meetings.

Plus, there are other witnesses we talked about who appeared at the Nova Scotia Legislature, as reported in the Halifax Chronicle. We need to hear from them.

The Chair: Okay. Does everybody have it?

I see Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I think it's more of a clarification, if I may.

I know we were studying and are continuing to study Mr. Bezan's housing motion. What I'm asking is to reflect on adding.... I want to understand how many of the original motions were agreed upon, in terms of our original study. Where are we with our witness list? I think there is ample opportunity for all of us to send in witnesses. Do we still have space on the current motion to add some of those witnesses? That would eliminate the extra hours Mr. Bezan is asking for.

The Chair: The clerk is looking that up.

The Clerk: The original motion was for a minimum of four meetings, which we have hit. As far as our witness list is concerned, the military family resource centre was invited and declined the invitation. I could reach out to them for another meeting. That was more or less everyone who was provided for on the list, if I remember correctly. I'm just bringing it up right now.

The Chair: Is that the end of your intervention, Marie-France?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: For me, the point is this: Why do we need to name them? We're acting in good faith. This motion would add more time and an opportunity for all of us to bring forward additional witnesses. Certainly, on the additional two hours for the study, I know there have been challenges throughout the weeks leading up to finding and adding.... This provides a bit of flexibility for the clerk—adding the additional two hours for our study.

Then, we can propose—since Mr. Bezan originally put this forward—extra witnesses. I don't see the relevance of naming them, at this point. We had this study started. We want to be collaborative in expanding on it.

• (1840)

The Chair: I have Kelly, Mathysen, Gallant and Bezan.

Mr. Pat Kelly: If I may speak in response to the question that Mrs. Lalonde put of why we need to identify witnesses and whether two hours are enough, I think the point is that the witness we would most want to hear from is the Minister of Housing. A minister is not going to appear as one witness on a panel of three or four other witnesses. If we're going to have a minister, which would be our priority, and in fact we want not one but two ministers, if we have each minister for an hour, that's a meeting and that's your two hours.

I think having two meetings is more appropriate. That would be a way we could hear from a minister, who would be our priority witness. We have other witnesses and you can guess who they would be based on the other motion we just adjourned debate on.

I don't see how we could accomplish any of that—or very much of that—by simply adding two hours. Two hours are fine if you have four witnesses in two different panels, but those aren't the kinds of meetings I envision on this. We need to hear from the Minister of Housing on this, at a minimum.

The Chair: Is it two additional meetings, rather than two additional hours?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Yes, that's per Mr. Bezan's amendment to the motion.

The Chair: Okay. We have Mathysen, then Gallant and then Bezan.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I like the original motion. I don't understand why the Conservatives feel they have to.... They would already have the opportunity within those meetings to add the witnesses they choose. They get quite a lot of witnesses. They have longer witness lists certainly than other parties do, and they can make the choices within them. I don't think it's fair, necessarily, to then continue to add all the witnesses they want, and then they get another set of witnesses they can add as per the original motion.

I think that it's fine. My concern, of course, is whether this will take place immediately, or as immediately as it can, disrupting the calendar we have already negotiated. All of these conversations should be happening at the subcommittee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Chairman, one type of witness we haven't heard yet—and maybe one of these witnesses could be in support of a minister—is the base commanders, the people who actually live on the ground and have to deal with this, day in and day out. They know their bases best, they know the infrastructure, and they'd probably give it to us straight and not give some polished answer from an ivory tower here in Ottawa.

It could even be the one for Petawawa, for CDSG. I think he's pretty plain-spoken, and he'd probably tell us the way it is on base. Also, he's responsible for a number of bases.

The Chair: Do you like him more than you like the Minister of Defence?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I don't care whom you ask, but I think a base commander can give a perspective that we won't hear from someone who is just out of Ottawa.

The Chair: You can put him on the witness list.

Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To Ms. Mathysen's point, we don't have a calendar at this point in time. It's still being developed. Second, we've already exhausted.... There are four meetings, and we've already used up those four meetings. Also, new information came out during the Christmas break. We're all aware of the sad story coming from Halifax. Therefore, we want to hear from those witnesses from Halifax.

We haven't heard from the Minister of Defence on this issue. Also, we should hear from the Minister of Housing, who ultimately is responsible for housing across this country. Housing is in a dire situation. It is impacting our forces wherever they're stationed across this country. It seems to be more chronic in places like Esquimalt and in Halifax. Largely, it is our navy officers situated in both of those cities who are being impacted desperately by the housing shortage we're experiencing. That's why I think we need to have two more meetings.

Not to bring forward witnesses, but I would suggest that Peter Stoffer has also been part of these stories. Peter would provide some expert, on-the-ground knowledge on what's happening in Halifax. I would be willing to hear from him as well, and I'd hope that Lindsay would suggest him as a witness.

The reason I'm suggesting two meetings is that, as I see it, we'd have one meeting with both the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Housing, either together or one hour each, followed up by the witnesses who were quoted in the Halifax Chronicle newspaper about the crisis we're seeing in Halifax.

This is germane to this study, and it is imperative that we undertake hearing from everyone before we prematurely shut down this committee study and start drafting a report without getting all the intel, especially where the crisis seems to be greatest, which is coming out of Halifax.

• (1845)

The Chair: I might take issue with “prematurely shut down this committee study” because that was what the committee agreed to, and it hit pretty well every witness who was submitted. This is an entirely different motion.

Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I am still finding it quite fascinating that we are using an entire meeting to argue whether or not we should hold an additional meeting.

That said, I understand the purpose of having both ministers appear. It is true that the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities is a relevant guest for our committee insofar as many military members do not necessarily live on bases and the general housing situation must be part of a comprehensive study.

I also find it relevant for us to have a little more time to hear from some of the other witnesses, including the Nova Scotia/Nunavut Command of the Royal Canadian Legion, whose statement with regard to food banks, according to some articles reported to us, contradicts the National Defence's statement.

I will vote in favour of Mrs. Lalonde's amendment proposing the addition of two meetings and the invitation to the two ministers, in the hope that it can put an end to this debate so that we can finish this study and move on to something else.

I know this is wishful thinking and I doubt it will happen, but I support what my colleague Ms. Mathyssen said and fervently hope that in the future this type of debate will be held in subcommittee, given the incredible amount of time we are wasting debating the schedule instead of hearing from witnesses.

[English]

The Chair: Is that it? Are there other interventions?

The vote is on the amendment.

(Amendment negated [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: The next vote is on the main motion, unamended.

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: May I reiterate Ms. Normandin's last intervention? This is not the way to go about trying to set up an agenda. The clerk and the analysts worked very hard on our instructions, and then when we change all our instructions, it becomes "let's do this all over again".

As a point of clarification for the chair, do you consider this motion to be an extension of the original motion, or is this a stand-alone motion? That will affect how the report actually takes place.

The Clerk: It's adding two additional hours to the study.

The Chair: We will treat this as open until we exhaust these two hours. Okay.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: I would just ask when the additional witnesses and those lists are due.

The Chair: Should we say as soon as possible, but no later than Monday?

The Clerk: No later than Monday would be great.

The Chair: Okay.

The meeting is adjourned.

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