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

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Chair: Robert Morrissey





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

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• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)):** Good morning, committee members.

[Translation]

I call this meeting to order.

[English]

Welcome to meeting number 17 of the House of Commons committee on human resources and social development and for persons with handicaps.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on June 18, 2025, the committee is meeting on government mandate and key priorities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the standing orders. Participants will be in the room or appearing virtually.

Before we begin, I would remind all members to please silence your devices and choose the official language you wish to participate in during this meeting. Using the headset in front of you, virtually click on the globe icon at the bottom of your Surface. Choose the official language you're going to participate in.

Please refrain from tapping on the microphone boom, for the benefit of our translators. If there is an interruption in translation services, please get my attention. We'll suspend while it is being corrected. To do that, use the "raise hand" icon if you're appearing virtually.

Please address all questions through the chair and wait until I recognize you by name before we proceed.

Before we begin, I want to remind the committee that I have received confirmation that the Minister of Ho is unable to appear prior to his scheduled December 4 appearance, but he's confirmed for December 4.

With us today on government mandate and key priorities, we have the honourable Minister of Jobs and Families, Patty Hajdu. Appearing with her, from the Department of Employment and Social Development, are Paul Thompson, deputy minister, and Sandra Hassan, deputy minister of labour and associate deputy minister of employment and social development.

Minister Hajdu, you have five minutes for your opening statement, please.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

I am pleased to be here with my officials from Employment and Social Development Canada, or ESDC, to highlight the critical work we are doing to strengthen our economy, protect good jobs and give Canadians the tools they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

[English]

With global uncertainty rising caused by trade disruptions and economic change, this work is fundamental to the progress of our nation. Canadians are counting on us to meet this moment head-on and build a stronger Canada for today and for generations to come.

Today, I want to talk about how we protect, empower and build together. Workers and industries across Canada, especially in trade-exposed sectors, remain our first priority. When layoffs happen, not only is it disruptive to families; it impacts communities and, of course, their entire region. That's why we moved quickly on our response to tariffs, including flexibilities to the EI work-sharing program, which is keeping skilled workers on the job and preventing nearly 12,600 layoffs.

We've also made it easier for Canadians to access EI more quickly and we extended EI by 20 extra weeks for 190,000 long-tenured workers. Additionally, we're investing \$50 million to modernize job banks so Canadians can connect to good jobs faster.

This goes hand in hand with driving our economy forward. This means securing industrial peace, strengthening partnerships and alliances across the workforce and equipping workers with the tools they need in a changing labour market. Essential to that are stable labour relations and fair collective bargaining.

[Translation]

The best agreements are reached at the negotiating table, and the federal government plays a key role in this process through the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. Thanks to this service, 97% of conflicts are resolved without a work stoppage.

• (1105)

[English]

From major projects to community infrastructure to building millions of new homes, we are backing this ambition with strategic investments like the union training and innovation program that grows Canada's skilled trades workforce.

[Translation]

At the same time, we're attracting the best talent by accelerating foreign credential recognition and simplifying the process so that qualified workers can contribute more quickly and build a stronger Canada.

[English]

These are not just investments for today; they are generational. They will shape our future and ensure that every generation has an opportunity to succeed. That's why we've also committed \$1.54 billion in youth employment programs to support 175,000 young people, including youth with disabilities. This is on top of the \$3 billion we transfer every year to provinces and territories for similar work.

The government is also focused on bringing costs down for Canadians. That's why we're expanding programs like affordable child care to give parents more choice and families more economic power. Across Canada now, the average cost is \$16.50 per day, with most provinces and territories having reduced fees by 50%. Nearly one million families are benefiting. Women's workforce participation is at the highest level ever in the history of this country—over 85%.

We're also making the national school food program permanent. Today, nearly 400,000 children are benefiting from school food programming supported by federal investments.

The government is also improving financial security for hundreds of thousands of working-age persons with disabilities through the Canada disability benefit. Budget 2025 provides an additional \$115 million over four years for a one-time \$150 payment that will help with disability tax credit application costs.

Mr. Chair, this is the work of building a fairer, more resilient Canada, one that protects workers, empowers families and builds a strong future for the next generation.

I look forward to our conversation today.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

We'll now begin with the first six-minute round of questioning, beginning with Ms. Falk.

Ms. Falk, go ahead.

**Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for making time to be here today.

All families deserve equal access to parental leave, but adoptive and intended parents remain at a disadvantage under our current EI system. In the previous Parliament, I introduced a private member's bill to create a new 15-week attachment benefit that would deliver

parity for adoptive and intended parents. It recognized the importance of securing early attachments and the role that support plays in healthy long-term outcomes.

As you know, my bill did not receive the royal recommendation it needed to proceed. Instead, your government introduced its own version of the bill, copied in principle but with one critical difference: It would only come into force on an order in council. Despite that, the measure received unanimous support in the House and Bill C-59 received royal assent on June 20, 2024.

However, it's now almost a year and a half later—17 months—and parents are still waiting for this benefit to be rolled out. Parental leaves have come and gone, and in the meantime, families are continuing to miss out on these important additional weeks with their kids, though Parliament unanimously agreed that they should have this. Time is a precious commodity for any new family, so adoptive and intended parents simply want the time they deserve with their children.

Minister, on what exact date will adoptive and intended parents finally receive the equal access to the leave that Parliament promised them?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you very much, MP Falk, for that question, but also for the advocacy for adoptive and intended parents.

I've just been consulting with my deputy, and that work is under way right now. I don't have an exact date for you, but I look forward to continuing our work together.

**Rosemarie Falk:** What concrete steps have been taken in the rollout of this benefit?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The work is happening with the department to plan for that benefit, and I hope that when it appears in a budget forthcoming, you will vote for it. In fact, your party has a record of voting against the measures that you advocate for.

**Rosemarie Falk:** If you can't provide a date today, can you please tell me when you can provide a date that this will be rolled out?

It's been 17 months.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Certainly, we're working—

**Rosemarie Falk:** We did the work. I did the work. My office has done the work on this.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but we have a point of order.

**Caroline Desrochers (Trois-Rivières, Lib.):** I'm sorry, but it's very hard for the interpreters when the speaker is being cut off. There are two people speaking at the same time.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I would remind all members to be conscious of the interpretation.

Ms. Falk, you have the floor.

**Rosemarie Falk:** We did the work for this. We had an end date when it would have come into force. Your government copied the bill in principle, and then failed to deliver it. Your government mislead adoptive and intended families that this was going to happen, and it hasn't happened. You can't provide me a date of when this is going to happen. That's unacceptable.

When is the date that intended families and adoptive families can expect this?

• (1110)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** If you're interested in continuing this work together, you have my commitment that we'll include you in the work.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Minister, I can't say that is a true statement. Your party voted against this bill when I brought it forward. Your party refused to provide the royal recommendation that was needed for this bill to proceed. Then you copied the bill in principle and have not implemented it in 17 months. Some of these children are now almost two years old. It's completely unacceptable.

When is the date that this will come into effect?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think the member would know that private members' bills that require the government to spend money are usually not adopted, whether it's from a Conservative member or from a member of Parliament from the Liberal government—

**Rosemarie Falk:** Minister, you don't have a date.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —so your question is a bit disingenuous, member of Parliament.

**Rosemarie Falk:** I'm asking for a date.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I will say this, though. I've just made the commitment to you that the government intends to uphold its commitment and that we will work with you—

**Rosemarie Falk:** Minister, I'm moving on to another question.

Does your department have an internal timeline that it is using to guide the implementation?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The department is at work right now on looking at—

**Rosemarie Falk:** Is it more than 17 months, then?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I certainly will ensure that you're kept abreast of this work, MP.

**Rosemarie Falk:** With all due respect, Minister, this isn't an entirely new program that is being developed. This is literally mirroring the maternity benefit that women who birth a child receive. Adoptive and intended parents already contribute to the EI system. They already have access to the EI parental benefit. Adding an additional 15-week category should not require months, and in this case almost years, of delay.

Minister, if this issue is not political, can you just be honest with the families who are still waiting about why they are still waiting?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I look forward to your support when we do introduce this, whether it's in a budget or another measure. I certainly hope your party will vote for it.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Wasn't it in the fall economic statement of 2024? That was a long time ago. There's been no movement on this whatsoever. I think that's absolutely unacceptable. Would you not agree that this is unacceptable?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I have made the commitment to you, I think repeatedly now, that we'll make sure your office is included in this work.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Okay. Thank you.

Minister, has ESDC completed all internal investigations into ESDC employees who fraudulently applied for CERB while fully employed?

**Paul Thompson (Deputy Minister, Department of Employment and Social Development):** Yes. We have completed that one.

**Rosemarie Falk:** It's all completed. How many ESDC employees in total were investigated for improperly receiving CERB?

**Paul Thompson:** I would have to get back to you with the total number investigated.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Please provide that information to the committee.

**Paul Thompson:** The total number that we took action against was approximately 50.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Will you provide that information to the committee?

**Paul Thompson:** Yes.

**Rosemarie Falk:** How many were cleared, how many had security clearances revoked and how many were formally terminated?

**Paul Thompson:** Again, that information is available. I'd be happy to provide it to the committee. We took action against approximately 50 employees.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Perfect.

I have one last question. Were any cases referred to the RCMP or other law enforcement agencies for potential criminal investigation? Please provide that information to the committee.

**Paul Thompson:** We can provide that as well.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Please provide also the status of those referrals, if so.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Falk.

[Translation]

Ms. Koutrakis, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you, Minister, for being with us today for the full two hours. I look forward to hearing more and learning more about all the important work that is being done behind the scenes.

Thank you to the officials as well for joining us today.

Minister, in your opening remarks you mentioned the modernization of the job bank. Of course, it's part of the tariff response. How is the new system helping workers find jobs faster, and how has uptake changed among EI recipients?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you very much. That's a great question. I think it's one of the quiet successes of the action we've been taking, in particular through the result of the tariff hits that many industries are facing.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we've been transforming EI to rapidly respond to some of the most difficult situations and the sectors that are the hardest hit. One of the tools we've been using is making it easier to sign up for the job bank, automatically connecting people through EI to the job bank, and ensuring that people are able to utilize the tool fully. We're seeing an increase, in fact; 35% of the recipients are now using the job bank, which is huge growth from around the 10% mark prior to that.

The information they receive is useful for them in terms of looking for a skills match within their own region and for understanding what the landscape looks like in their own area. Obviously, we are also doing a ton of work with affected employees in terms of work-sharing, though. I think for us, the best solution is when employers are able to be retained by a heavily hit industry or employer. That's where work-sharing comes into play. Ultimately, being able to retain those skilled workers is what employers say they need the most. There are, unfortunately, smaller employers who may not be able to retain their workforce. In those cases, the job bank can make a big difference.

• (1115)

**Annie Koutrakis:** Minister, have we heard any success stories that this is actually working? Are we hearing from some of the stakeholders providing us with feedback on how this change is helping or they how foresee it helping in that regard?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yes, both on the side of the employer and on the employee. On the employee side, in fact sometimes folks haven't known about the job bank and haven't seen the power of it. There is an opportunity to directly apply to an employer. We are actually even going further to transform the job bank so that soon employees will be able to get feedback on their application.

One of the things that many jobseekers have spoken about is they send their résumé through one of the other job search apps and they don't hear back. They don't know what has happened to their application. People are reporting they're getting a much better sense of response from employers through the job bank. And on the employer side, they're really finding it efficient to be able to use the job bank to reach the broadest set of employees who are well-trained and well-suited for their work.

There's resounding support and success, I would say. I think there's more we can do to use this digital tool that's going to bring its efficiency even higher. Again, it's a credible source of information for employees and worth promoting within each of our ridings as a tool for jobseekers.

**Annie Koutrakis:** We often hear about youth and the issues they're going through due to unemployment. We know they've become an important driver of public policy. What processes or consultations did the government use to gather input directly from

young Canadians, and how did that feedback shape the youth employment measures we see in budget 2025?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** We do a lot of consulting with youth, in fact, on many different programs, and whether it's youth employment services...there's a constant quality feedback loop. We work with a lot of partners, as you know. For example, the youth employment strategy offers training through not-for-profit partners. There are many other partners. It provides us an opportunity to not only meet and engage with youth, which the department does on a regular basis, but also get some quality feedback around what those programs have resulted in.

I was really impressed when I met with a young man just last week in Calgary, Juan Vargas, who was so thrilled to see the Youth Climate Corps in the budget. He's with an organization called the Climate Emergency Unit. He said he felt it was their direct advocacy that resulted in something they could recognize in the budget. Whether it's a program like that or whether it's Skills Link or Canada summer jobs, there's a constant feedback loop with young people about what supports they might need.

The last thing I would say is that you might remember a number of years ago we funded something called the Future Skills Centre. The Future Skills Centre is driving innovation and skills development and talent, and it regularly intersects with different youth and youth-serving organizations to make sure what employers and trainers are designing relates to what youth are saying is helpful.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Minister, we've heard a lot about the major projects and the jobs estimates. Can you give the committee a sense of how the jobs are being created and the level of investment these projects are bringing into the economy right now?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Absolutely. I was very proud to stand with the Prime Minister at the announcement of the first tranche of major projects that have been selected for review just a few months ago. In fact, the Canadian Building Trades Unions was there in full force standing with us. I think it was an indication of the value that building trades see in the investment in major projects. Of course, we will need thousands and thousands of skilled trades workers to be able to build these projects, not just the major projects but the housing that's planned—

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —and that's already under way in many communities across the country. It's going to create great opportunities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. We're well over.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Marilène Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, as well as the deputy ministers, for being here with us today.

I have many questions. We talked about several subjects often connected to areas under provincial jurisdiction.

For my part, I am going to talk about areas under federal jurisdiction. The first subject is a priority for the Bloc Québécois. During the previous Parliament, Louise Chabot, former representative of the Thérèse—De Blainville riding, tabled a bill on employment insurance. The Bloc Québécois will obviously come back to it and table a reform bill. The government has been saying it wants to carry out this reform since 2015.

Minister, when the Bloc Québécois tables its bill, will you vote in favour of the reform your government has been wanting to make since 2015?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you for the question.

It's premature for me to say whether I am in favour of a bill I've not yet read.

[English]

I think it's important that I read the bill.

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** I knew that; I kind of guessed.

The Bloc Québécois's bill was tabled in November 2024. It would therefore be almost the same thing now. It would solve various stakeholder issues. So, it wouldn't be a surprise when the bill is tabled again.

Since Mr. Axworthy led reforms in 1996, there have been consultations. Since 2015, you've certainly held consultations as well. There are therefore no surprises.

This bill responds to requests from various groups. I'm thinking specifically about the black hole. It's very important to solve it for all Canadians, particularly workers in seasonal industries.

Minister, as you know, during a vote, members can send a bill to a parliamentary committee for review and amendment. In any case, since the subject of the bill is employment insurance, it will need approval from the government side.

Would you be ready to support sending this bill to the parliamentary committee for review?

Earlier, you said to one of my colleagues that you could take it under your wing, to make sure it passes and is implemented quickly.

I'd like an answer along those lines, with a yes or a no from you.

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Again, I would not offer resounding support of a bill I haven't seen yet. I think it's important that we work together, though. If you're interested in working with my office, we can build on some of the things that we've already done to transform EI. Maybe they're in the bill you're talking about—for example, extra weeks for long-tenured workers.

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** I must interrupt you, Minister. I have a lot of questions to ask you.

When a bill is tabled in the House of Commons, the first vote is a vote in principle. Given that the government has been promising employment insurance reform for 10 years, I imagine it would agree to send the bill to parliamentary committee.

The principle of the bill is to reform employment insurance. It is therefore not a matter of having read the bill or not. Even if you were not the minister responsible for employment insurance over the last 10 years, this is a governmental commitment; it's the government's theoretical will.

I would like a positive response from you. As it is a matter of principle, I would like you to tell me that the government will go ahead at first reading, because reform is needed.

What I understand is that you're telling unions, employees and employers who want to see employment insurance reform that your government is not willing to send the bill to the parliamentary committee—a bill that would do the government's work. MPs could debate and amend it with the goal of moving reform forward. It's a long-awaited change, and far from becoming a reality.

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** No, I haven't said that we wouldn't or would. What I've said is that it would be irresponsible for any government to agree in principle to sending a bill forward until it's seen that bill. I also have been a minister for 10 years, and I can tell you that there can be all kinds of things in bills that may or may not be feasible. We look forward to seeing your bill, and hopefully we can support it. There is a greater likelihood of that if we work together.

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** Yes, I hope so too.

I would indeed like the government to introduce a bill to that effect.

Do you in fact intend to table a plan for reform? I ask this because the Prime Minister's mandate letter is very broad. We don't know exactly where the government is headed.

I listened to your opening remarks. Naturally, I go through just about everything the government is doing, but there is no mention of employment insurance. You talk about certain measures, but they are always provisional measures that end after a certain period of time. I'm thinking in particular of the temporary measures that end because of arbitrary dates. That puts people in a difficult situation.

Do you in fact have a plan in mind to reform employment insurance? You're the one who can answer, because that's a commitment you've made and I imagine you trust yourself.

Do you plan to table employment insurance reform in the next four years as the Minister of Jobs and Families?

• (1125)

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** We've actually not waited to change a number of measures that are really helping workers right now. For example—

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** Excuse me, Minister.

I'm talking about the promise you made in 2015. It was repeated in your party's various election platforms, which stated that a reform would be implemented.

For 10 years, people have been told that this reform would be implemented.

In the next four years, do you, as minister, intend to keep the promise your government has been making to Quebeckers and Canadians for the past 10 years?

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I'm telling you is that we didn't wait for legislation to change a number of measures that have been advocated for a very long time, including, for example—

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** No, that's not what people want. They want reform.

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, if I could just finish my statement....

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** Actually, Minister, you're telling me that the answer is no. I think that debate is over on this topic.

Let's move on to another question, this time about Canada Post. I'm also interested in this topic because it affects workers. The government says it will create jobs but, at the end of the day, it is making huge cuts.

In June, \$253 million in losses were recorded. At the same time, Purolator was announcing discounts of 65% on its services. We know that Canada Post owns 91% of the shares in Purolator.

I know that your government has been under pressure from a number of political parties to implement legislation.

Since my time is up, I'll come back to this topic later, Minister.

Thank you Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you Mrs. Gill.

[English]

Ms. Goodridge, you have five minutes.

**Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

Since 2017, the price of baby formula has risen 84% in Canada according to StatsCan, and yet, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, it has risen by only 42.9%. Why is the inflation on this product double in Canada? Does that concern you?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** It does concern me when a product like baby formula, which is not easily replaceable, is that expensive. We've had a number of exchanges in the House, obviously. There are things that the government can control. There are things that the government cannot.

One thing we can control, though, is increasing available money for individuals who are—

**Laila Goodridge:** Has this been—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —needing to purchase baby formula.

**Laila Goodridge:** Has this been discussed at cabinet?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** In fact, Health Canada has actually made some regulatory changes to make it easier to get baby formula into this country. I would encourage you to ask the minister—

**Laila Goodridge:** I'm well aware. I actually advocated for that when we were dealing with the formula shortage before.

What I have seen from this government, and from the last government for the last 10 years, is no action and no real care. We are in a crisis. Parents are paying \$50 for a container of baby formula. In 2020, that exact same container of baby formula cost \$29. The amount your government is providing to families has not gone up by that percentage so—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Well, I would actually—

**Laila Goodridge:** —you can't continue saying, "Oh, but we're giving all this money to families."

We need to deal with the root cause of the problem. The root cause of the problem is that food is too expensive. Baby formula is not replaceable for families who rely on it. It is absolutely irreplaceable.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, in fact, the Canada child benefit, for which that party has voted against any increase in since 2016, has kept up with inflation. It is one measure that has deeply alleviated poverty for children in this country.

In fact, between 2015 and now—2019, actually—child poverty rates declined by 42%, and we continue to see an alleviation of poverty through a number of measures.

**Laila Goodridge:** With all due respect—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** You have an opportunity, member of Parliament, to stop fighting against families. Families know that there are challenges—

**Laila Goodridge:** With all due respect, Minister, an 84% increase in eight years on baby formula is far higher than the CPI, so no, you have not done what you need to do.

The real problem is that we are reliant on massive imports for baby formula in Canada. It took Health Canada months to get its act together to allow us to import baby formula from Europe when we were in crisis. Families were scraping by.

There are families right now who are buying baby formula in open tubs because that is the cheapest way for them to do it. I've had families contact me saying that they are buying what they know is stolen formula. Baby formula is one of the number one stolen food items. It is kept under lock and key in Canada.

• (1130)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** So why are you, as a Member of Parliament, against the increases to Canada child benefit, against things like early learning and child care? As we pointed out—

**Laila Goodridge:** Because they're not working. If they were working, one in three kids would not be clients at food banks.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** In fact, if they're not working, their Canada child benefit is actually even higher. For zero to three, those children—

**Laila Goodridge:** That's not enough to cover the difference.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —would be receiving up to \$7,000 or more a year in Canada child benefits, and indexed to inflation, and you vote against it time and again.

**Laila Goodridge:** But the—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I'm curious why you think that extra money wouldn't be helpful to a family that you're describing.

**Laila Goodridge:** What I am saying to you, Minister, is that the inflation on baby formula...because your government has refused to take any real action to make anything better on this file. When I ask about this in the House of Commons, do you know what I get? The school food program. Babies don't go to school.

Families who rely on this do not have another option. There are countless families, whether they're adoptive, whether they can't breastfeed for some reason or they choose not to.... This is their only option for feeding their kids. Your government just keeps saying, "We're giving all this money. Why can't families figure this out?" This is a failure on your government, period.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Well, actually, in fact, one of your members of Parliament derided our socialist programs just the other day when we were talking about things like the Canada child benefit. We understand that the school food program doesn't—

**Laila Goodridge:** Minister, when you go to other places—

**An hon. member:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**Laila Goodridge:** No, that's not a point of order.

**The Chair:** I make those decisions, Ms. Goodridge.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.):** I have a point of order. They're both talking at the same time.

There are too many interruptions, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

Continue.

I would ask all members to please respect the translators who have to translate your comments and to conduct yourself accordingly.

Ms. Goodridge, you have the floor.

**Laila Goodridge:** I guess I'll go in a slightly different vein.

Have you discussed this issue with the Prime Minister, yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The Prime Minister and I regularly discuss affordability. In fact, I am grateful that the Prime Minister has kept affordable programs, all of the care programs—

**Laila Goodridge:** Have you specifically talked to him about baby formula?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —intact in the budget that you voted against.

**The Chair:** Excuse me. I have Madame Gill on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Marilène Gill:** Mr. Chair, once again, I'm concerned about the interpreters. We're being told that it's often inaudible.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** As do I.

[*Translation*]

**Marilène Gill:** I know we have enough time.

Can we deal with it on both sides?

**Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** It's because the microphone wasn't on.

**Marilène Gill:** The microphone wasn't on.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Gill.

Again, it is the member's time to question, but I would ask members to respect the fact that you ask a question and give an opportunity for a reasonable start at an answer.

You have the floor, Ms. Goodridge.

**Laila Goodridge:** Very specifically, Minister, have you specifically talked to the Prime Minister about the inflation on baby formula and the crisis it's creating in families, yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Budget 2025—

**Laila Goodridge:** No, I asked for "yes" or "no".

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I have spoken with the Prime Minister extensively about affordability issues that families are facing—

**Laila Goodridge:** Specifically baby formula?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —and that's why in budget 2025, all of the care programs are protected. All of the affordability measures are protected. In fact, there's a tax cut for 22 million Canadians that you voted against.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you, Minister, so it's—

**The Chair:** Ms. Goodridge, Madam Minister, your time has gone over, and I did pause for all the points of order. Then again, I remind you that one cannot dictate to the witness what the answer should be. You can phrase the question as you choose. It is the witness who chooses to provide the answer.

With that, we will move to Madame Desrochers for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being with us this morning.

First of all, thank you very much for all the advocacy work you've done to keep all the affordability measures in budget 2025. These measures really help our families get through difficult times when they need it. I want to thank you, on behalf of all the families in my riding and, I'm sure, on behalf of the families in my colleagues' ridings as well, including those in the opposition.

I'd like to start by giving you some time to finish your thoughts.

[*English*]

You were going to talk a little bit about some of the reforms to the employment insurance that have already been made over the last few years, and I was wondering if you could start with some of that.

• (1135)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yes.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

It's a great honour for me to work for Canadian families across the country. There's a lot of anxiety right now. The world is a very different place now, given the tariff war and the impact it is having on Canadian families.

[*English*]

I would say that we knew that this would happen in fact, as we saw tariffs increasingly being applied to Canadian families and to Canadian companies. That's why we took immediate action early on in the spring, to transform EI very rapidly to address any situations of layoffs or instability.

There are two things.

We wanted to make sure that companies that have skilled workers they wish to keep employed would be able to do that. We've been able to apply work sharing in greater numbers for companies, which allows for the retention of their employees with the support of employment insurance. Companies can not only keep their employees but keep those skills. If you've ever run a company, you know that there's nothing more dangerous than losing your entire

workforce and then trying to call them back. Oftentimes those people are no longer available, and that company is set back even further. This was not just about families but also about the stability of the sectors.

We also eliminated the waiting period for workers. There was usually at least a one-week waiting period, and we eliminated that waiting period. You can get EI from the moment you're laid off, and you can keep your severance pay. Oftentimes before, your EI would be held back based on any vacation pay you had accrued or other kinds of payments. Now, you can keep that money, so people are able to put that away, hold on to it or pay off some bills, whatever the case may be. There are also longer periods of pay for long-tenured workers, up to an additional 20 weeks for long-tenured workers because we know that it might be harder for them to re-enter the workforce, and they've been paying into EI for quite some time.

These kinds of measures are helping employees who are impacted and protecting employers who often are doing the hard work of pivoting to a new product, a new service or a new approach, and don't want to lose their employees, who are really skilled and really adapted to their workplace.

**Caroline Desrochers:** Keeping on the job side, we were very happy when we saw the latest report from Statistics Canada in terms of the 67,000 new jobs that were created in October. The unemployment rate is down to 6.9%, which is much better than expected.

You mentioned Build Canada Homes earlier and all of the jobs that this is going to create. Can you talk a little bit about other initiatives in budget 2025 that will really drive jobs across communities all over Canada?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** You're right, we've seen some really good numbers for two months in a row. I would say that we're holding stable and they're much better than economists had predicted. I think it's due to the ambition of the country.

In fact, Canada is rated the second-best place for direct foreign investment, after the United States. These are great numbers and it's a result of the investments that we're making in ourselves, whether it's major projects, as the Prime Minister has announced, which are really starting to come to fruition with the support of the Major Projects Office, or investments in building homes, with the announcements in budget 2025 around infrastructure investment.

I come from a semi-rural community. It's important that small communities have things like community centres, recreation centres, libraries and seniors centres. In fact, even in my riding, in the past we've funded things like relining public pools, so that people have an opportunity for work and want to stay in these communities.

We're really making sure that every dollar we spend is actually going to generate jobs. I think budget 2025 has the ambition that the world is taking notice of.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Desrochers.

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Marilène Gill:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank the minister for being with us.

Some of my questions remain unanswered. However, I want to move on to another topic: the forestry industry.

You said many times that job creation is on the rise. We know, however, that 40,000 public servants will be laid off. This isn't in fact job creation, as the Canadian Labour Congress, the CLC, so eloquently pointed out.

In Quebec, the forestry industry is the backbone of the economy. Your government, the Prime Minister and you yourself have said that forestry workers should get retrained.

I want you to talk directly to the people of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, Abitibi and the Côte-Nord. These regions have all suffered job losses. In my riding of Port-Cartier, I believe that we lost about 100 jobs just last week. You're telling workers to get retrained. In my opinion, that's not job creation.

I want to know what you would tell these people.

Does this call for workers to get retrained mean that the government is completely abandoning forestry workers?

• (1140)

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Absolutely not. In fact, in the lumber sector, we have 3,000 positions on work sharing, which means that companies are using the EI work-sharing measures. You were talking about EI earlier. Companies have found this to be a very useful tool to protect their workers while they reorient.

[*Translation*]

**Marilène Gill:** Minister, when companies close their doors because of a lack of government support, what should we do? The government is not agreeing to provide subsidies, like wage subsidies, to maintain the employment relationship. This was done during the COVID-19 pandemic and it's what businesses are asking for.

We're also not making any progress on countervailing and anti-dumping duties either. Workers are being told to get retrained. Retraining is not work sharing. Telling workers to get retrained means that you're telling them that their job is gone, that the industry no longer exists and that they have to find work somewhere else.

That is very difficult to do in some regions, where often only one type of industry exists. In fact, what they need is more development.

I'm asking you what your government means by “retraining”.

Is that the message you're sending our workers? Are you telling them that their industry and their jobs are gone forever?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I, too, come from a lumber-producing area and I'm well aware of what happens when a lumber mill or a pulp and paper mill goes down. I fully understand how difficult this is. That's why we haven't waited to take action. That's why we are working to ensure that employers—

[*Translation*]

**Marilène Gill:** You're not answering the question, Minister.

You're from a forestry region. You know how difficult it is. What I'm asking you is whether your government has abandoned the forestry industry.

Are you telling the people back home that their jobs are gone forever?

That's my question. I, too, come from a forestry region. We don't seem to be reacting in the same way to the forestry crisis.

**The Chair:** Thank you Mrs. Gill.

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Do we want me to respond, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** No. You can address it in a follow-up question, if you choose.

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes.

**Garnett Genuis:** Welcome, Minister.

Budget 2025 proposes to “generally limit...access to the Canada Student Grant for Full-time Students to students attending public educational institutions and not-for-profit private institutions”.

Could you please explain to us why the government is proposing to withdraw student grants from students attending most career colleges and other kinds of institutions that are private?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** In fact, most programs through career colleges are currently ineligible. Programs that are two years or less have been ineligible before. One, we want to make sure that public money goes to public institutions and, two, that we reduce the practice by some career colleges of extending programs from two years to four years so that students are eligible, yet it takes them longer to graduate, sometimes without any further accreditation.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you for your response, Minister.

I would say back that this money doesn't go to the institutions; it goes to the students. There are programs, like to become a chiropractor or to study traditional Chinese medicine, where there simply aren't very many, if any, opportunities to study at public institutions. I don't think anyone's accusing those programs of being artificially extended. I mean, you can't become a chiropractor in one year of study, obviously.

What would you say to a student who comes from a lower-middle-income background who aspires to one of these careers, recognizes that there's demand for that career and is concerned about the budget measures that say that they will no longer have access to grants that students studying at any university would have access to?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I say is that we are ensuring that students who need financial support continue to be able to access it. We are making sure that Canada student grants are available to students who need that. The minister will have an exemption—

• (1145)

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm sorry. Respectfully, Minister, you're not, though. I just gave you an example. You have a low-income young person who has always wanted to become a chiropractor. Through no fault of their own, the institutions that offer that course of study are organized in a certain way and, because of a change in this budget, they will no longer be eligible for student grants. You have people who rely on the services that are provided by folks in this area. What would you say to them? You're clearly making a change that makes that student no longer eligible for grants that anybody else would be eligible for if they went to a different kind of program of study.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I would say that, if a profession is concerned about the changes in a circumstance where it's a very narrow circumstance like you're describing for chiropractic, the minister does have an exemption authority, and I'm happy to work with applicable programs.

I can say that we know that there is a higher default rate for student loans for career colleges. We have seen, in some cases, students graduating from four-year programs that used to be two-year programs. Ultimately, we believe that public funds should go to public institutions.

**Garnett Genuis:** Respectfully, Minister, my mother was trained as an occupational therapist. When she did it, it was an undergraduate program; now it's a master's program. There are many university programs that used to be available for shorter durations of study or used to be available at the undergraduate level that are now master's programs. You're describing the phenomenon of an extension of the requirements to get certain credentials. I think that's an interesting issue to discuss, but it is clearly not an issue unique to the career college world. It's an issue that has been much discussed in the context of universities as well.

It seems to me that this budget has made a political choice to single out those students—and it's not a small number—pursuing particular vocational programs. You're saying that they will no longer be eligible for these programs, while anybody who studies at a university will still have access to those grants. Why are you singling out students pursuing programs that the government doesn't want to fund anymore for discrimination in the grant program?

**The Chair:** Give a short answer, please.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think the political choice that was on display for all Canadians to see was your party voting against \$1.5 billion in student and youth supports, a Canada student loan increase and interest forgiveness. The Conservative Party voted against students and voted against young people time and again.

**Garnett Genuis:** That is not an answer, Minister.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think that's the political choice on display here.

**Garnett Genuis:** I know we disagree, but can you answer the question? These are serious questions on behalf of students who will be discriminated against by this policy.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis. Your time has gone by.

Ms. Fancy, you have five minutes.

**Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today.

In our previous line of questions, we were talking about bigger kiddos. As a former educator, I'd like to talk to you about littler kiddos, in regard to early learning and child care.

Minister, when I ran in the election, my platform was about the importance of community. How do you have a thriving community? My grandfather always used to say that you take care of the young and the old, and everyone in between will take care of themselves.

In terms of children, could talk to us about the impact of affordability on child care? There's also a broader economic benefit here. Could you speak about how the expansion of early learning and child care is supporting workforce participation, especially for moms like me, and what the long-term economic impact of these investments looks like?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you for a really great question about something that's quite historic in this country. Many economists have talked about affordable child care for a long time and talked about not only the value of this to young brains, young children, as you're talking about, but also the economic policy it represented. As I mentioned in my remarks, we have the highest workforce participation by women in the history of our country. That's generated in large part because of affordable child care.

We have, on average, a rate of about \$16.50 per day. In some cases, provinces have reached \$10 per day. In other cases, they're working to get there. We have families participating regardless of income level, although some people have criticized this.

Women lose a high degree of productivity capacity when they stay at home. It's a choice, for sure, and I respect it. In fact, I think I might have taken that choice had I been able to do so, but I was a single mom and relied on affordable child care to be able to pursue my ambition and support my family.

That's what we're hearing: Families say this is a game-changer. Fees have gone down in some cases. I was at a public event, and a woman came up to me—she was a professional—and said that they were saving \$800 per month on each child. That's \$1,600 a month back in their pockets as a result of affordable child care.

It's also a huge affordability measure. I've read quotes in the House of Commons. People have been able to pay down their mortgages, save for a house or go back to school. All the while, provinces and territories are doing a fantastic job keeping quality in the system. We've worked with a network of professionals, as you know, to make sure that the quality remains.

I really want to give all of the provinces and territories huge kudos for the work they're doing to get this all lifted off the ground.

• (1150)

**Jessica Fancy:** I agree about the momentous occasion that this program has allowed for people from all walks of life throughout Canada.

Along the same theme of reducing fees for families, could you also talk about the creation of new child care spaces under the federal and provincial agreements? I was at one of the announcements about that program a little while ago for Small World Child Care Centre—that's a shout-out for South Shore—St. Margarets—as it was one of the recipients. Could you speak to that?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yes, you're right. The lift for some provinces and territories, particularly in rural areas, has been difficult. Obviously, rural areas don't have as much capacity. That's why we've sufficiently funded spot creation in public systems, and we've also had a blend of public and private care, in cases where there was no public option. We understand the need to protect that public system, but we also understand the need for flexibility for small regions that may not have other options. We've been working really collaboratively with our provinces and territories to get that done.

We've also funded physical infrastructure for spot creation, as sometimes it's been a matter of having actual hard spaces. We've also supported the development of early learning and child care students. I was able to visit one of the programs in my own riding and meet some of the students coming into the program, because labour and jobs are huge inputs into the program.

In Saskatchewan, for example, the education minister said that they've had some asks, from Saskatchewan's perspective, and they have been grateful for the collaboration so far. That was our intent—to collaborate with provinces to really understand what their needs were.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Reynolds, you have five minutes, please.

**Colin Reynolds (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

This government's actions have been speaking much louder than its words when it comes to supporting unionized labour and its use of section 107. Traditionally, Parliament would convene to end a strike and, through that process, would provide a rationale to Cana-

dians as to why they're sending employees and employers to binding arbitration.

During the Air Canada flight attendants' strike, you noted on Twitter that you would be invoking section 107 to send Air Canada flight attendants, represented by CUPE, and Air Canada to binding arbitration. Personally, I would be willing to vote in a special sitting of Parliament to ensure that Canadians are informed about why strike action is being ended. This was a very drastic step.

Why does this government choose to use section 107 repeatedly instead of bringing these labour disputes to Parliament?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** First of all, I'll just note that 97% of the disputes that come to the federal mediation service are solved without any work stoppage at all, and I want to give a huge congratulations to the FMCS. They're incredible individuals who are doing this work every single day with bargaining parties.

In terms of support for labour, I would note that, although I understand your question, what we have done since we took office in 2015 is actually strengthen the rights for unions. In fact, one of the first acts I had the privilege of passing, although others had done some work on it as well, was a bill that reversed the harmful Harper-era legislation that made it harder for people to bargain and organize—Bill C-377 and Bill C-525.

It was a huge ask of the labour movement. We immediately got to work, and it was the first piece of legislation we actually passed in the House of Commons in 2015; it was to protect unions' right to organize.

• (1155)

**Colin Reynolds:** Thank you, Minister.

We recently saw Stellantis use foreign labour for the construction of the NextStar battery plant in Windsor. It shut out Canadian tradespeople. Stellantis has recently hinted that they're planning to move Canadian jobs in the auto sector down to the United States.

This government gave them billions of dollars of taxpayer money and Canadian market access, and all we've gotten in return are jobs for other countries. What is this government doing to protect Canadian tradespeople?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think Canada's Building Trades Unions' support both of our budget and of the Major Projects Office and approach is really an indication of how building trades are seeing this government act in their interest.

Building trades in particular and unions across the country know it's important that we protect Canadian industry and workers. In fact, the buy Canadian announcement was celebrated by a number of unions, including Unifor and LiUNA. The union movement knows that we will continue to have their back.

We're working with the building trades union—

**Colin Reynolds:** Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —right now on the significant skilled trades shortage that we see across the country.

**Colin Reynolds:** Thank you, Minister.

I'd like to move on to my next question.

This government has been speaking a lot about its buy Canadian policy and nation-building projects. Recently, this government announced the next group of projects that are being considered by the Major Projects Office, which includes the Ksi Lisims LNG project.

What I find interesting is that project is majority owned by a U.S. company and is to be built by Samsung Heavy Industries in South Korea and floated over to B.C. These are more jobs for other countries.

If this government isn't supporting Canadian labour with Canadian materials or Canadian companies, how is this project a buy Canadian national building project?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I will remind people that the projects that have been announced have been referred to the Major Projects Office. The Major Projects Office knows that the priority of the Government of Canada is to make sure that Canadian workers and companies see the benefit.

I will also say that is a majority indigenous-owned company.

Am I right on that?

Indigenous ownership is actually a priority of the Major Projects Office.

**Colin Reynolds:** The Major Projects Office—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think everybody at this table knows that there will be a significant opportunity, through the major projects that have been announced as referred, to help ensure there is job creation across this country.

**Colin Reynolds:** Does that mean this won't get built? It's strange to me that it even got referred, if it's going to be built out of our country.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I would say that every major project that has been referred to the office is a project of national interest that the Government of Canada will be looking for ways to support. The Major Projects Office has an important job to do, though, which is to make sure that the project is viable, that it's economically viable, that it uses Canadian labour, that there are benefits to the Canadian economy and that there are benefits to indigenous people.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Reynolds.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I would just say that we're on the cusp of some exciting things.

**The Chair:** I will hold you close to the time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Natilien Joseph:** Thank you Mr. Chair.

Minister, my Bloc colleague brought up the subject of the forestry sector.

I want to give you some time to continue answering the question.

Can you tell us what the government has done and continues to do to support this sector?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Aside from the actions my colleagues are taking in terms of the work to try to ensure that we can lift the tariffs and have a return to tariff-free trade—which I can't speak extensively about because I am not the holder of those portfolios—on my side, it's about protecting companies and protecting workers.

I'll give you a good example. We are really working with companies that are threatened, not just because of tariffs but because of market changes. Kap Paper recently was on the cusp of having to close its doors and needed some time to come up with an alternative approach or products it could pivot to. We were able to support that company in northern Ontario, which is very remote, and all of the subsidiary companies that depend on that company buying the wood, to ensure that it could actually stay in business while it pivoted to a new product. It remains to be seen what its business plan will uncover, but we wanted to make sure we were able to be there for that company.

We're also there for workers. Workers who are impacted are benefiting from work sharing. If a company can keep those workers on, we'll pay for part of their wages through EI. That keeps that worker attached to that workplace.

We are also making sure that EI is easier to get, whether it's ensuring that there's no waiting period or that people can keep any severance they are entitled to or, if they've been a long-tenured worker, that they get extra weeks so they have that stability while they're seeking a job.

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** We recently saw on social media some Bloc members encouraging applications for a summer jobs program.

Is it in fact a different program or is it the Canada summer jobs program?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I'm sorry. Can you repeat the question?

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** We recently saw on social media that some Bloc members are encouraging applications for a summer jobs program.

Are they talking about Canada summer jobs or another program?

Is there a difference between those two programs? I'm not familiar with that program.

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Oh, I'm sorry.

[Translation]

I understand now.

Yes, we have a summer jobs program for students, which is Canada summer jobs.

[English]

Canada summer jobs is available for every region of the country. It's federally funded. This summer, in fact, we're adding almost 35,000 more jobs, so it will be 100,000 Canada summer jobs across the country in a variety of different sectors.

[Translation]

Every member of Parliament will have a list with the jobs being put forward by businesses.

**Natilien Joseph:** Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have a minute and a half.

**Natilien Joseph:** Improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities has been a priority for your department, particularly with the launch of the first-ever employment strategy for Canadians with disabilities.

Could you speak about the government's comprehensive approach in removing barriers, supporting employment and employees, and strengthening the labour market participation of Canadians living with disabilities across the country?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you for the question.

That is a very important question.

People often forget about the needs of persons with disabilities.

[English]

We have a focus on that, and we make sure that we have programs. For example, we have the opportunities fund that works with employers who are willing to match with a person with a disability. That provides the employer the support to bring in a person with a disability and the person with a disability the opportunity to get a job.

We also support many organizations around the country that work with people with disabilities who are looking to find a job, improve their job skills or their ability to apply for a job or be seen by an employer. Indeed, with our youth employment program, many of our programs have a specific focus on youth with disabilities. In fact, about 17% of the youth who take advantage of those programs are people with disabilities, and that's intentionality. We have to be intentional about this work, because so many people forget about the needs of people with disabilities, and people with disabilities are some of the best educated in our country.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Marilène Gill:** Thank you Mr. Chair.

Thank you, once again, Minister, for being with us.

I want to talk now about Correctional Service Canada and correctional officers, whom I would like to acknowledge. The

Port-Cartier penitentiary is located in my region in the Côte-Nord. I'm also talking about Mr. Guimond and all his colleagues.

We're still talking about job creation. However, correctional officers are very concerned and dissatisfied with the 15% budget cuts that have been announced. For example, the retirement income that was negotiated with correctional officers will now be reduced. The government is now stepping in to reduce the retirement income of these workers, which was negotiated under their pension plan.

How can you explain this backtracking regarding the retirement income of correctional officers, which had been negotiated?

Why is the government going after what belongs to them?

• (1205)

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think this is a question for another minister. I'm sorry. This doesn't fall under the role of the employment minister or the labour minister.

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** I think the question is a bit of a cross-cutting one. Workers' pension plans might involve Treasury Board, the government or the industry. I imagine that the minister's decisions carry a lot of weight in these situations as well. The government is saying that, ultimately, it is not reducing the quality of public service jobs. However, the government is starting to reduce the number of employees in the public service.

I talked earlier about the 40,000 public servants who will be laid off. There will also be cuts to benefits and pension plans. The quality of jobs is being reduced.

I think that the quality of the jobs is the responsibility of the minister and the department. That's why I wanted to hear your comments on the matter.

I could have also discussed the CX-4 positions occupied by some correctional officers. They also carry out management work. They will see their purchasing power reduced year after year because negotiations are going to be held for certain CX-1, CX-2 and CX-3 positions, but not for CX-4 positions. Again, instead of solving the problem, the government is making cuts.

Sorry, Minister, do I have your attention? It's a bit difficult to ask a question in order to get an answer when you're not being listened to.

Do you want me to repeat my question?

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I'm listening.

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** Okay. That's good.

You can do both at the same time. That's good.

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** No, I don't need you to. I just wanted to make sure that I—

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** I think my time is up, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you can send us your response in writing.

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Can I respond or not? I just wanted to make sure that I wasn't—

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** Could we get a response in writing, Mr. Chair?

[English]

**The Chair:** Madam Minister, if you could provide a written answer, that would be helpful.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Chair, what I can say is that this doesn't fall under my area of responsibility. I would say that this is a public safety question. Obviously, the Labour Code applies—

[Translation]

**Marilène Gill:** We will have that information in writing.

**The Chair:** Thank you Mrs. Gill.

[English]

We will move to Mr. Genuis for five minutes.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, is the government planning to increase EI premiums in the coming year?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** No. There's an annual process that the EI commissioners undergo, so we'll have more to say.

**Garnett Genuis:** It's ultimately the decision of the government. I know that there's a process by which recommendations are made.

Just to understand your response, are you saying that no decision has been made yet, or are you saying that the government will not increase EI premiums?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I'm saying is that we will wait to hear what the commission says.

**Garnett Genuis:** So you're not prepared to rule out an EI premium increase.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I would say is that the chief actuary will advise the government. We will listen to the experts and determine the next steps at that time.

**Garnett Genuis:** The government will make a political decision, ultimately, in response to whatever feedback they get. It sounds like you're saying that you would be open to either possibility, based on the advice you get. Is that correct?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I would say is that the commissioners set the rate. We will have more to say in September when that happens.

**Garnett Genuis:** Okay. I would say, based on the situation in the economy and the challenges around employing people, that it

would be a terrible time to increase EI premiums. I'm sure you'll be hearing more feedback on that.

Has Shaykh Ibrahim Memon Madani, or affiliated organization Darul Uloom Canada in Amherstburg, received funding from your department?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I would not know that. I would have to ask the department to look into that information.

**Garnett Genuis:** Okay. There may be a funding agreement signed in October 2025 with that organization. I'd appreciate it if you could get back to the committee in writing on that. Would you be able to do that?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yes.

• (1210)

**Garnett Genuis:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

I had previously asked you about how the budget pulls student grants for students at career colleges. You noted that this budget change could be reversed or partially reversed through a ministerial exemption. Can you clarify whether the government is planning a ministerial exemption to reverse this change, or parts of this change, or whether you just meant that as a kind of hypothetical possibility?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** No, in the budget there is ministerial authority to exempt certain programs.

**Garnett Genuis:** Are you planning specific exemptions?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I'm interested in hearing from interested parties what programs ought to be exempted. Then we'll take action accordingly.

**Garnett Genuis:** What I'm hearing from interested parties is that you should simply not undertake this change at all, rather than hold out the theoretical possibility of an exemption. It sounds like you don't have any immediately planned.

I want to also note that the budget says that this particular change would effectively be a cut in outlays to students of \$1 billion. Would any proposed exemptions reduce the savings, or do you think you can make exemptions and still stay within that figure of \$1 billion?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, I'm not going to engage in hypothetical mathematics right now. I think what we need to hear is what the proposed exemptions might be. If there are exemptions that—

**Garnett Genuis:** Effectively, that answers my question. You're saying it's hypothetical. That answers my question, which is that you don't have any exemptions planned.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Well, we haven't had any asked for yet. If you do have parties who are interested, please have them contact my office. I'd be very interested to speak with them.

**Garnett Genuis:** Again, I don't understand the rationale for the change at all. Why make the change and then undo it with maybe some exemptions that would change the budget numbers?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I will point out to the MP that the default—

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm sorry. I want to get in one more question before the end.

You announced in the budget a foreign credential recognition action fund, so-called. The government already has, and has had for a long time, a foreign credential recognition program. Is this a second fund to do the same things the first fund is supposed to be doing and is not doing? Why is there the existence of a new parallel fund as opposed to increasing the amount in the original fund or making changes to make it effective?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** It's a different kind of approach that supports provinces and territories that are largely in the space of having the key to foreign credential recognition—

**Garnett Genuis:** But that's what the first fund is supposed to do.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** This fund will support provinces and territories to share information, to be able to work with the regulatory bodies, to be able to more quickly improve their processes so that they can make faster—

**Garnett Genuis:** Minister, I hear what you're saying, but that is exactly the mandate of the previous fund. Could you tell me precisely what the mandate is of the second fund that's different from the first fund? Do you have two funds that are doing essentially the same thing?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think the previous approach was much more focused on individuals who were seeking to have their credentials recognized. That will continue, by the way. People will be able to apply for loans to help with the administrative and financial costs of seeking foreign credential recognition.

**Garnett Genuis:** Why have two funds? Why not have one fund that does this work—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What we are in, as I would remind you—

**Garnett Genuis:** —especially when it's not working right now?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —is an unprecedented time, when we are seeing real challenges and real commitment by provinces and territories to do this work together. In fact, it's on my agenda later—

**Garnett Genuis:** I agree that there are real challenges. I don't understand why you have two funds.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

We now move to Madame Desrochers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Desrochers, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you Mr. Chair.

I'd like to come back to the topic of the forestry sector, which we had started talking about earlier.

As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, I have visited many prefabricated building businesses in the past few months.

Last week, I visited a company where entire walls were built using Canadian lumber. I know that our commitments will double the rate of homebuilding and that this will greatly help the forestry industry. In fact, I met with workers at Arbec Forest Products, who

were thankful for the measures taken by the government. We're also in the process of implementing these measures. We know that this is a difficult time for workers in the forestry industry.

Can you talk a bit about the measures that the government is implementing to protect these workers during these challenging times?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you for the question.

We have done a lot for employers who are affected by the tariffs imposed by the United States, particularly in the forestry sector.

• (1215)

[*English*]

In addition to some of the EI measures I spoke about earlier—which I can repeat but won't, in the interest of time—we've also committed an additional \$500 million, through provinces and territories, for training in the tariff-exposed sectors—forestry being one of those sectors. Why is that important? You spoke about modular housing, but there are also, for example, people who produce timber and lumber that may not be suited for the specifications and the building codes that need that lumber, and so those mills are rapidly transitioning to new equipment, new products and, in some cases, new markets. In many cases, that means new skills for employees. We've been there to support provinces, territories and employers with helping their employees rapidly upskill.

Again, the worst-case scenario for any company is when they have to lay off a whole bunch of employees and, then, try to find them again when their business restarts. Those employees disappear into the labour market, their skills get stale, in some cases, and it gets harder for a company to have the workforce they need to restart. This is why an approach that keeps workers attached to the workforce and supports them with their training needs is so important.

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you very much.

Can you talk a bit about how budget 2025 expands the union training and innovation program? We've been talking a lot in this committee about the importance of skilled trades and ensuring that we prepare workers for the work that's going to be needed in the coming years, with all the projects we have as a country. If you can talk a bit about that, that would be helpful.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yes. The union training program has been a really important pillar of the approach we have in building up skilled trades. Unions do a fantastic job of training and helping young people through the process of getting from apprentice to Red Seal. Actually, my son is a skilled tradesperson. He's with the operating engineers. Having watched his journey, from joining the union to becoming a Red Seal crane operator, I think it's really impressive to see what unions do to get young people these skills—and not just young people, by the way. Many people go back to the trades after completing a course of study at college or university, because these jobs are so high paying.

We've supported the unions to accelerate that training and attract more people to the trades because, as you point out, there are hundreds of thousands of tradespeople who are due to retire in the next five years, leaving an even bigger gap between what we need and what we have in terms of the skilled trades workforce.

This budget also includes another \$75 million for unions, in a way that they have asked for, that will help flexibly support them with the space they need. In some cases, unions are doing this training in very cramped or aged spaces, and it will allow them to use these monies in a more flexible way so that they can not only attract people but get people through the skilled trades.

I'll just give a huge shout-out to all of the skilled trades in the Canadian building trades union, as well as many others that are doing this important work every day. It is very important that young skilled tradespeople, or people who are studying the skilled trades, have places as apprentices so they can get those hours and complete their apprenticeships. For that, they work closely with employers to make sure that employers are able to receive those apprentices.

This is really an “all hands on deck” moment. The government has to support unions, the unions have to do their great work training new apprentices and corporations have to commit to having apprenticeships in their work plans.

[Translation]

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Desrochers.

[English]

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Chair.

Picking up on this discussion about skilled trades, I do think there's a real disconnect between what you're saying and the reality of the policy.

Our party has been pushing for increases in support for union training. I'll mention as well that polytechnics educate the majority of people in the skilled trades. Polytechnics Canada has called this budget a missed opportunity. They're wondering and I'm wondering, why the government chose to put a whole bunch of new money into attracting foreign talent to universities, but to completely ignore and leave out polytechnics? We have the attack on career colleges, but then also the complete absence of support for polytechnics.

Why was that the choice made in this budget?

• (1220)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** We have been working with educators of all different stripes for a number of years supporting education. In fact, our investment in research and education is unparalleled.

I will point out that your party has voted against it every single time. I will also say that—

**Garnett Genuis:** I voted against the budget. Could you answer the question though?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I would also say that it is important that we recognize the incredible value that unions have in skills training. I mentioned part of that.

**Garnett Genuis:** I 100% agree, and we've been pushing for that long before you did it, but could you answer the question, please, on polytechnics?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Why did you vote against it, then? I'm really curious to know why you voted against Canada's Building Trades Unions, which celebrated this budget and said that it was a generational investment in the skilled trades.

**Garnett Genuis:** Minister, I'm not going to play this game. I'm happy to justify my vote on the budget in the appropriate fora.

This is your opportunity as a minister of the Crown to answer important policy questions. Why were polytechnics, which educate the majority of people in the skilled trades, completely left out while significant new money was put into universities?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Our record on investing in post-secondary education—supports for individuals, as we've talked about, and for research, science and education—is actually unparalleled.

**Garnett Genuis:** Minister, this is precisely the point. When you talk about post-secondary, you're only thinking about universities. This is a big issue when we're dealing with the shortages in the skilled trades and the need for parity of esteem here. Whenever you think post-secondary, you think universities only.

I'm trying to ask you about polytechnics, about career colleges. Frankly, this budget is attacking and undermining support for those institutions.

Not on post-secondary in general, but specifically on polytechnics and career colleges, where young people are gaining this vital vocational knowledge and experience, why are there the decisions in this budget that move against those critical institutions and the students who go there?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** One of the elements of the budget was an increase to student work placement, something that universities, colleges and—

**Garnett Genuis:** That's not my question, Minister.

My question is specifically about polytechnics and career colleges.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Right, polytechnics use student work placements extensively to support their students, to make sure they're gaining the skills that the employers need.

I just want to read you this quote, though, from LiUNA. "LiUNA welcomes the government's continued commitment to apprenticeship, union-led training and workforce development."

**Garnett Genuis:** Minister, I'm going to jump in. I think this is revealing enough. You keep trying to go off in unrelated directions—

[Translation]

**Natilien Joseph:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[English]

**Garnett Genuis:** —when I'm trying to ask you about polytechnics and career colleges. Anyway, we've heard you on that.

I want to ask about Canada summer jobs' duration.

The average duration for Canada summer jobs is eight weeks. I talked to a lot of employers and, generally speaking, if you're hiring a student for the summer you're trying to hire a student for the summer, not half the summer.

What it looks like when the government shortens the duration of these jobs is that you're trying to artificially show a high number of jobs created when, in reality, most employers and most young people would rather have a job for the full summer instead of for half of the summer.

Could you explain to us why the approach of your government is to fund half-jobs as part of this program?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** All across the country, 100,000 students are going to have jobs this summer. That's almost 35,000 more students who will have jobs this summer.

**Garnett Genuis:** On average, they're going to have jobs for half the summer.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I would point out that not-for-profit organizations, community businesses, small businesses and all kinds of different organizations are thrilled about the Canada summer jobs opportunity, which provides them a subsidy of the wages that they would pay—

**Garnett Genuis:** Minister, can you just answer a very specific question? I'll give the floor back to you, but it's a very specific question and the public will see whether you answer it or not.

I'm asking specifically about the eight weeks, because if you gave actual summer jobs to students, I think employers and students would be happier. Why is there the average eight-week duration?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I would say that this allows for a broad diversity of jobs and opportunities for youth across the country, 100,000 jobs this summer. There are 100,000 young people who are going to get to participate in a small business, in a not-for-profit, in a community recreation centre—

**Garnett Genuis:** You're talking half-jobs, though.

**The Chair:** Thank you—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —in a senior centre.

I will say that corporations and not-for-profits look forward to applying every year, and I certainly look forward to seeing the stories come from your riding, and hopefully you'll share those.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now move to Madame Koutrakis.

[Translation]

Ms. Koutrakis, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

**Annie Koutrakis:** Minister, we know that personal support workers are key in helping take care of our loved ones when they age, like my father who is 94. I am fortunate enough to be able to provide him with the care that he needs. We know that many families cannot.

I'm just wondering if you could update the committee on the federal measures recently introduced to support personal support workers in terms of wage increases and the new tax credit available to workers across the country.

• (1225)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think you point out something really important, which is that most people who are aging need some kind of support at that age, at 93. I hope that, when I'm 93, I have some of the incredible talent that we see across the country helping me. I hope I make it to 93, too.

I've had the pleasure of meeting these support workers across the country. I went and visited with some on Labour Day to hear their stories about what they were doing. They were working on Labour Day. They weren't marching. They were taking care of people's parents and people's loved ones.

They're often the poorest paid people in the economy. The care sector economy is something I'm personally very interested in digging into and working on. This credit was something that the SEIU, a union that organizes personal support workers, had advocated for on behalf of their members.

You mentioned that this is in the budget. This is an \$1,100 credit every year that will go directly into the pockets of personal support workers. When we announced this, one of the recipients of the credit, who was at the announcement, said that she felt it was the first time that she had been seen. Imagine that. She's doing this work every single day on behalf of her community, on behalf of all of the people who need her care, and she doesn't feel seen.

Not only did we do that, but we also announced a \$25-million investment into a retirement savings plan through SEIU. Members will be able to contribute through an RSP and have a contribution from the union help them grow the safety of their own retirement.

This is an area of the economy and a sector of work that I think deserves our focus, and I'm really pleased to partner with the SEIU in supporting these members.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Minister, we've also heard across the country from many people and stakeholders about the Canada dental care plan that has been described as one of the most significant expansions of health care in a generation. Could you provide the committee with an update on how the program is rolling out across the country, and what the early results look like for Canadians who previously couldn't afford dental care?

Before you respond, I have to share a personal story. There are quite a few dental clinics in my riding of Vimy in Laval. On one of the visits that I made with a previous minister of health, there was an elderly gentleman sitting in a dentist's seat. He got out of his seat because he wanted to come and shake our hands. He had tears in his eyes saying what a difference this had made in his life.

I'd be interested to hear what you are hearing about the impact that this program is having and how we're faring across Canada.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** It is something that I'm incredibly proud of, too, member of Parliament. It's just such a transformational thing for people who haven't had dental care in so long.

I worked extensively with a number of different dentists in the early days to make sure that they understood the program and that they could sign up. Now a majority of dentists are signed up and receiving Canada dental care patients. It is a game-changer.

In fact, I can't go to an event without someone talking to me about the changes it's made in their lives. Oftentimes, they are older people who don't have benefits and who don't have coverage, and for the first time in 10 years, in some cases 20 years, they've had their teeth cared for. Not only have they been in pain, but there's a high degree of shame if you have dental decay. For younger people, it can prevent your ability to land a job.

I worked for years in public health. One of the campaigns that we had back then was an affordable dental care plan, because it was an inhibitor of employment for people who had severe dental caries. There was a pilot project at that time somewhere in Ontario that demonstrated that, if you could repair people's teeth, they had an easier time landing a job.

This is an asset for Canadian families. Young people who are aging out of their parents' care don't have benefits yet in their career. I was in that place myself. It's very tenuous to be in a position where you have a job, but your job doesn't include benefits, and you still need care. This is a game-changer for so many Canadians across the country, and it's great to see the number of people who have signed up for dental care and who are receiving treatment.

• (1230)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Koutrakis.

I'll turn to Madame Gill.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Marilène Gill:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, allow me to indulge in a bit of Bloc Québécois humour. You said earlier that labour issues might fall under the jurisdiction of a different department, so you couldn't answer the question.

However, since the start of the meeting, we've heard a great deal about issues that fall under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. Yet the government has no qualms about getting involved in these issues. I can see that the limits suit us when they work to our advantage.

Now, on to federal matters. I spoke about Canada Post, employment insurance and Correctional Service Canada. I would like to talk about Canada Post again. I didn't have time to finish my thought at the start of the meeting. Once again, jobs are being lost at Canada Post.

Canada Post recorded losses of \$250 million in June. However, Purolator offers a 65% discount on its services. Canada Post owns 61% of Purolator. It seems that phagocytosis is taking place. In other words, Canada Post is being absorbed to a certain extent.

Madam Minister, do you think that Canada Post is doing itself a disservice?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I don't feel that I have the ability to speak about an independent Crown corporation's business practices, but I can say that we're there to support the negotiations between the union and the corporation. We are encouraged by the last news that they have arrived at an agreement in principle.

[*Translation*]

**Marilène Gill:** I understand. However I could ask you the same question without naming Canada Post. If a company owns another company that works against it, is the company doing itself a disservice? This seems obvious.

I would now like to discuss a completely different topic, which concerns the decision to forego a department of diversity, inclusion and persons with disabilities.

This issue has come up repeatedly. A number of groups have expressed concerns about this matter in meetings with me. You said that you were going to work for people with disabilities, as discussed earlier. For them, however, this sends a strong message of ignorance about their condition and their needs.

I would like you to explain the reason for the decision to forego a department of diversity, inclusion and persons with disabilities.

In any area, when no one takes on a matter, it's dropped.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

**Marilène Gill:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Give a short answer, Minister.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** We remain focused on inclusion of people with disabilities. There wasn't a separate department. I do also have a parliamentary secretary who assists me in this work.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Seeback, go ahead for five minutes.

**Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** In your opening statement, Minister, you talked about how important fair bargaining is, yet you used section 107 pre-emptively to order the flight attendants back to work under their existing contract and took away their right to strike.

How do you square that circle that you care about fair bargaining when you took away the right to strike, which is an integral part of fair bargaining?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I'm not sure if you were in the room when I mentioned that the first piece of legislation that I had the pleasure of finalizing in 2016—it was the first piece that we introduced—was to reverse the union-busting bills of Stephen Harper, Bill C-525 and Bill C-377.

**Kyle Seeback:** With all due respect, that's not my question. My question is, based on your statement you just made earlier today, how important is fair bargaining?

How can you say how important fair bargaining is and take away a union's right to strike by ordering them back to work?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think I also mentioned that 97% of disputes that arrive at the federal mediation service are resolved without any work stoppage at all.

**Kyle Seeback:** Do you know how tone-deaf you sound to flight attendants when you won't answer a direct question and you tap dance around with other statistics?

You ordered flight attendants back to work under their existing collective agreement before they even exercised their right to strike. It was pre-emptive. Then you have the audacity to come to this committee and say how important fair bargaining is.

How do you justify to the flight attendants that you care about fair bargaining, but you ordered them back to work and took away their right to strike?

• (1235)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think the best deal is the deal that the two parties arrive at when they're at the table. I've been clear about that and, in fact, our party has stood up for that.

**Kyle Seeback:** Except in that circumstance.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Not only have we reversed union-busting legislation that Stephen Harper presented, and that many of the members praised, but we've also, as you know, passed anti-scab legislation.

**Kyle Seeback:** Which we voted for.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Which is great. That's exactly what we would hope, that we would see all parties stand up for collective bargaining rights.

**Kyle Seeback:** How do you justify your belief in fair bargaining and belief that the best deals are made at the table when you took that away by eliminating the collective process and ordering them back to work under the existing collective agreement?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** There are very few disputes that result in the need for government action. I believe that governments of all stripes have found themselves in this place, where both parties declare themselves at an impasse. That is exactly what happened—

**Kyle Seeback:** You've used it eight times in 14 months. No other government in the history of this country has done that.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** In fact, there was a lot of labour action under previous governments—

**Kyle Seeback:** No. There only one section 107.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Section 107 says that the minister, when the minister deems it expedient, may do things to secure industrial peace.

What do you say to the organized labour members who are working in auto plants or other kinds of facilities or organizations? What do you say when there is a labour disruption that impacts the entire economy of Canada?

**Kyle Seeback:** The auto sector is not affected by a flight attendant strike.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I would say that these are reserved for extremely rare circumstances.

**Kyle Seeback:** Minister, you put out a video on Twitter on August 16, where you said that nobody should be expected to work for free.

Do you recall that?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I sure do.

**Kyle Seeback:** Great.

You had a meeting with CUPE air on July 3, 2024. They told you that they were unpaid for pre- and post-flight activities. You met with them on July 23. They told you they were unpaid for pre- and post-flight activities. You met with them on August 12. They told you they were unpaid for pre- and post-flight activities. You met with them on August 15, and they told you, "We are unpaid for pre- and post-flight activities."

Then you ordered them back to work under their existing agreement, which continues them being unpaid for those activities, and then you put out a statement saying that nobody should work for free.

You knew that they were working for free; they told you in those meetings.

Are you familiar with the term gaslighting? You just gaslit every flight attendant with that video, or are you saying that, when they told you they work for free, they were lying to you?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I said was that we would conduct a probe to understand the perspective of flight attendants and the industry—

**Kyle Seeback:** Did they or did they not tell you, in those five meetings I mentioned, that they worked for free in pre- and post-flight activities?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** In fact, in those five meetings, many things were discussed—

**Kyle Seeback:** Was that discussed?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —including the impasse that they found themselves at—

**Kyle Seeback:** Was that discussed?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —that they needed to resolve in order to get to a new collective agreement.

I will point out that two days after this was referred to the Canada Industrial Relations Board, the parties did agree, so the collective agreement—

**Kyle Seeback:** Because they wouldn't follow your order.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Are you saying that the flight attendants signed a collective agreement that they don't agree with?

**Kyle Seeback:** No, they—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** They have a collective agreement now.

**Kyle Seeback:** —defied your order.

You didn't answer my question.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** But they did sign a collective agreement, and you just said that they're still—

**Kyle Seeback:** Did they advise you in those five meetings before you ordered them back to work that they were unpaid for pre- and post-flight activities?

It's a simple question; just answer “yes” or “no”. Did they advise you of that?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** There were many things discussed in those meetings.

One of the things that was discussed was—

**Kyle Seeback:** I can't wait to put this testimony to the flight attendants union when they come. You won't even answer a simple question as to whether they advised you of that.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I asked the labour department, “To our knowledge, have there ever been any complaints of unpaid work?” In fact, the labour department could not find any.

**Kyle Seeback:** CUPE ran an entire campaign on unpaid hours.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister and Mr. Seeback.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Natilien Joseph:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, the national school food program is the first of its kind in Canada. It was made permanent by the budget implementation bill.

Could you tell the committee about the positive impact that this program has already had on families?

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

This is a new Government of Canada program. It was set up in collaboration with the provinces and territories. It's a key program.

Often, a program is available in one province or territory, but it isn't enough to meet the needs of all the children. This program supports the work of the provinces and territories in their education systems.

• (1240)

[*English*]

It's very important because it is a partnership with provinces and territories, but you've probably visited some of those schools, where you're seeing young people getting a healthy breakfast, or maybe it's at lunchtime. I certainly have.

We're getting incredible reports back from provinces and territories, as well as individual school boards and families, about the difference this is making. On average, it's saving parents about \$800 a year, but it also gives you that freedom from worry, whether you're a lower-income parent or a middle-class parent. People forget lunches. There can be times when students show up and they haven't eaten breakfast that day. This school food program is really levelling the playing field for education.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** Speaking of families, Madam Minister, we often hear about the impact of child care on affordability. However, there are also broader economic benefits.

Can you talk about how the expansion of early childhood education and care is boosting labour force participation, particularly for mothers, and the long-term economic benefits of these investments?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Absolutely, and I would say that early learning and child care is an economic policy. It's about making sure people can get to school and to work and not worry about their children while they're doing that.

Obviously, it is also a huge affordability measure, and I mentioned that families are saving sometimes \$1,500 a month for a family with two children. That \$1,500 can go towards purchasing food and enrolling their children in school. Some families have reported saving up for a down payment on a house or paying their mortgage. The relief that we're hearing from families across the country who, on average, are paying \$16.50 a day—in some provinces, it's \$10 a day and in others, it's just slightly higher—is incredible.

I will say that this is supported by all provinces and territories, regardless of whether they're a Conservative province, a Liberal province or an NDP province. Provinces and territories see this as a huge economic driver for their own economies, because the more people they can actually support in being active in the workforce, the better the outcome.

[Translation]

**Natilien Joseph:** Madam Minister, let's talk about Canada's early childhood education and child care system. It's one of Canada's most important social investments.

Can you update the committee on the progress made across the country, both in reducing costs for families and in creating new child care spaces?

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Absolutely. That's the work that we've been doing with the provinces and territories as we have worked to expand their systems. It's work we have to do together because provincial authorities have the jurisdiction over where child care will be offered, how it will be licensed and a number of different criteria around regulations for employees.

We've been there to support not only the investments needed to create those spots and bring down costs, but also physical infrastructure costs, supports for training of early learning and child care workers and making sure that provinces and territories have what they need to expand their systems into rural communities.

We've shown flexibility with the provinces and territories. Not every province looks the same. Some have different challenges with very rural populations. Some have really dense urban populations. We've been working with each province and territory to make sure that kids in that region can benefit from quality care and parents can get the care they need.

[Translation]

**Natilien Joseph:** Do the federal and provincial governments work well together?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yes, the federal government works with all the provinces and territories. For example, Quebec has a strong child care program with a proven track record.

We supported Quebec financially, but it has a strong approach. The other provinces and territories often draw inspiration from Quebec's program. They're applying the lessons that Quebec has learned.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

• (1245)

[English]

Mrs. Goodridge, you have five minutes.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yesterday, Minister Hodgson confirmed at committee that cabinet actually votes on the projects that get referred to the Major Projects Office, which I think is an interesting space.

Do you support new pipeline projects, yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I've been really clear that I don't support hypothetical projects, but I support projects that are cleared by either a cabinet process or by the Major Projects Office. I think it's important that projects go through a rigorous analysis on the measures that I indicated.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you. We have very limited time.

Alberta is bringing forward a proposal to be a proponent on a pipeline project. It's not a hypothetical project. Alberta has brought this to the government quite a few times.

Do you support a pipeline project that will create thousands of important, good-paying jobs, yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Again, there isn't a project in front of the table that has Alberta as the proponent for a pipeline. If there is, I look forward to the analysis.

I think it's important, as politicians, that we understand what we're saying yes or no to. That has been my experience over the 10 years. Major projects come to cabinet. They are well analyzed and then cabinet makes a decision.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you.

I have very little time.

I think it's a slap in the face to all Albertans, who feel completely excluded by the fact that you guys have listed all kinds of projects right across the country and left out one region, very mindfully. That is the region of Alberta. It is the creator of a lot of jobs in this country and the driver of a lot of economic opportunity. As the minister responsible for jobs, families and social development, I would have thought that you would be in favour of something that would create so many jobs—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** If I could give another example—

**Laila Goodridge:** —but you refuse to and give hypothetical answers, and I will accept that.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** This is not a hypothetical answer, Mr. Chair.

**Laila Goodridge:** Have you specifically brought to the Prime Minister the baby formula inflation crisis?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** If I could just continue, in fact cabinet approved a pipeline—you'll remember the TransCanada pipeline—and when it was experiencing financial difficulty, we purchased the pipeline. I was involved in those decisions. I think that speaks for itself, in terms of my flexibility to support projects that are viable and that are in the national interest.

I would say that's the approach our government is taking. We believe projects need to be viable and need to be assessed. The Major Projects Office is going to do that lift.

**Laila Goodridge:** Minister, this is my time. We have a very limited amount of time.

Let's go back to your portfolio, because you're not going to answer this specific, very important question.

Will you answer this one? Have you specifically brought forward the baby formula inflation crisis to Prime Minister Mark Carney, yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** As I said earlier—and you asked this question before—the Prime Minister and I speak regularly on issues of affordability. The measures in budget 2025, which you voted against, would actually support families just like the one you're talking about. In fact, the woman in Thunder Bay who was quoted in CBC said that she could hardly wait until the 20th when her Canada child benefit arrives.

**Laila Goodridge:** They are waiting on these things because they can't afford—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yet, of course, this woman on disability would also benefit, hopefully, from our Canada disability benefit.

**Laila Goodridge:** Chair, come on.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** At the end of the day, these are all measures that you voted against.

**Laila Goodridge:** Minister, do you think families should be able to afford to feed their own families, yes or no?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Of course.

You quoted a woman in the House of Commons the other day. The woman was on Ontario disability and relied on the Canada child benefit, and she specifically said that. Yet you voted against her very interest.

**Laila Goodridge:** Well, guess what? Due to inflation, baby formula prices have gone up higher.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** When you are not advocating for all parents, including those who cannot work, I actually find this question a bit shallow. Quite frankly, I want to say that—

**Laila Goodridge:** Minister—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —there are opportunities for affordability in budget 2025—

**Laila Goodridge:** —there is nothing shallow.... Minister—

**The Chair:** Order, please.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —that support struggling mothers, and you voted against them, time and time again.

**The Chair:** Ms. Goodridge, you have the floor.

It's your question.

**Laila Goodridge:** Thank you.

There is nothing shallow in advocating for something. This has gone up by 84% in eight years alone. This has gone up way higher than any other food item in this entire country. This is critical. Families are paying the price. They don't have a choice. There is nothing

else that can be done. There are families who are literally forced to introduce cow's milk earlier than recommended. They are introducing solid foods earlier than recommended because they cannot afford to feed their babies formula. They are buying what they know to be stolen baby formula. Baby formula is the number one stolen food item in this country.

What I am saying to you—

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Is there a question?

I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

**Laila Goodridge:** My question to you is this: Have you brought this to the Prime Minister, yes or no?

• (1250)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** As I have said, the Prime Minister is laser focused on affordability. You had a chance, as a member of Parliament, to support struggling mothers, and you chose to walk away from them. Every single time—

**Laila Goodridge:** I support struggling families and all families, every single day.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —people say that they need support, this government steps up, whether it's through a generous Canada child benefit, through supports for people living with disabilities, by reducing the cost of child care—

**Laila Goodridge:** Mr. Chair, this is completely unacceptable.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Goodridge.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —or whether it's making sure we are there for people who are struggling.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

I give reasonable flexibility.

We'll now move to Ms. Fancy for five minutes.

**Jessica Fancy:** Chair, thank you.

Through you, Chair, once again, I want to thank you, Minister, for coming today.

I would be remiss, as a rural advocate and researcher, if I didn't ask you some questions regarding rural. Rural economies like mine in South Shore—St. Margarets feel national labour disruptions very quickly. Could you highlight how the government's approach has actually helped maintain economic stability in regions like mine on the south shore while still supporting workers' rights.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Absolutely. There are two ways. We've talked about sectors that are deeply impacted by tariffs. In that approach, what we're doing is supporting companies and supporting workers. That's really to primarily make sure that companies have the time and the breathing room to be able to pivot to new products and pivot to new markets.

I would also say that, when you're talking about labour disruption, that's such an important component. It's why section 107 exists in the code. A minister of labour's responsibility is, of course, to uphold the rights that are established for unions and for collective bargaining. But as you will note in section 107, the minister also has an important role to establish industrial peace. As I said, 97% of disputes that arrive at the federal mediation service don't require work stoppage. They are resolved through the diligence of both parties and the mediators who work to find a new collective agreement. However, there are times when parties say they are at an impasse.

In fact, that is what both parties said in the Air Canada dispute. The union workers and the corporation said they were at impasse despite all the efforts of the federal mediation service. In that case, it was my opinion that, given both stated impasses, we needed help from the Canada Industrial Relations Board. The board, by the way, is an independent board that can provide advice to the minister and the parties and can sometimes resolve disputes.

**Jessica Fancy:** Perfect.

In terms of regarding advice, I'd like to talk a little bit about the Conservative anti-union history we have in this country. Compared with past governments that undermined those collective bargaining agreements, this government has taken a very strong pro-worker approach. I'm wondering if you could speak to how that commitment has improved labour relations and helped support fair negotiations.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I just don't think we would have seen Canada's Building Trades Unions standing beside us if they really felt we were not pro-union. I think unions understand that there is a deep economic impact when there is prolonged labour strife in this country. Everybody works really hard to prevent that. But we have seen—I have quote after quote after quote from unions—that there is a respect for the work we've done legislatively to improve the right of unions to collectively bargain. I mentioned reversing Harper-era union-busting legislation. We made key changes to the Labour Code as well that increased protections for some of the most vulnerable workers in the workforce.

I do want to congratulate unions for the work they do, not just for their members but also for the non-unionized members who often need the protection of, for example, paid sick days, which we added to the Canada Labour Code. We've also, as you know, recently passed anti-scab legislation, something for which unions have advocated for a very long time. They stood with us as we were able to celebrate the passage of that bill. I do thank all parties who voted for that legislation.

We've also invested in unions. We've invested in building trades unions to build up the skilled trades members that we know we're going to need for these major projects. What I can say is that unions understand that no government can be perfect. The idea of perfection is something we all strive for, but we have to ultimately ensure that people are protected, wages are protected, pensions are protected and rights are protected along with industrial peace. That's a balancing act, and that's what a minister of labour is required to do.

• (1255)

**Jessica Fancy:** Thank you very much.

I want to commend your modernization efforts with EI and OAS. I know that my constituents who are coming to my office need help navigating systems. I have four university degrees, and sometimes it's hard to navigate some of these systems. I can fully appreciate these streamlined approaches that your ministry and the CRA are taking to help streamline and modernize and help protect seniors, for example. They're the ones who predominantly reach out to my office.

I just wanted to commend that. Hopefully, there's more to come.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Fancy.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Marilène Gill:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll try to ask you two questions in two minutes, Madam Minister.

For people with disabilities, we've been looking at the whole housing issue. We know that the Build Canada Homes program should come to fruition at some point.

Have people with disabilities or their rights advocacy groups been consulted, or will they be consulted, when it comes to adaptable housing?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Certainly, that is a continued focus of our work, and I've been communicating with the Minister of Housing about the importance of ensuring that we have accessible units available for individuals. We also have the accessibility act, which I'm responsible for monitoring—although that's more for federal buildings. We want to make sure that we can continue to advocate for access, for people with disabilities, to all spaces.

[*Translation*]

**Marilène Gill:** We're talking about adaptable housing, not accessible housing.

There can be accessible housing, but we must also ensure that adaptable housing is available.

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** There's a gap because....

[*Translation*]

I'm sorry, but my French is terrible. I can try to answer you in French, but I often can't find the right words.

The answer is yes. I hold many meetings with the spokespeople, stakeholders and communities.

**Marilène Gill:** Thank you.

I don't want to interrupt you. However, I would like to ask you one last question about employment insurance applications for caregivers.

Many groups contacted us, and I'm sure that people contacted you as well, to discuss this matter. They told us that caregivers can't access benefits. Caregivers' applications are rejected on purely administrative grounds. Caregivers are asked for a medical certificate showing that the life of the person in their care is in danger. Yet this isn't always the case. This isn't the only situation that may require a caregiver.

Will you change these criteria to ensure that the benefits are available to everyone who needs them?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

Give a short answer.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yes, I'd be happy to look into this and to work with you on that.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

[English]

We conclude with two four-minute rounds, beginning with Mr. Genuis.

**Garnett Genuis:** Minister, the UN has found that track 2 MAID violates the rights of people with disabilities. Krista Carr, from Inclusion Canada, testified that MAID is regularly raised with people with disabilities who are trying to access unrelated public services. Are you concerned about Krista Carr's testimony and the UN's findings?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I'm sorry, but can you repeat that?

I thought we were out of time, Mr. Chair. I was here for two hours.

**Garnett Genuis:** I wonder whether you can start my time again, Chair.

The UN has found that track 2 MAID violates the rights of people with disabilities. Krista Carr, from Inclusion Canada, testified that MAID is regularly raised with people with disabilities who are accessing unrelated public services. Inclusion Canada hears complaints about this on a weekly basis, according to their testimony before the finance committee. Are you concerned about Krista Carr's testimony and the UN's findings in this regard?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Medical assistance in dying is a deeply personal issue, and, certainly, we have heard the disability community's concerns around medical assistance in dying. We've also heard from many other Canadians about the need to have relief from irremediable suffering, and that is a delicate balance.

● (1300)

**Garnett Genuis:** I guess, Minister, if I can just add some precision to the question, Krista Carr's testimony was about people who have disabilities and are seeking unrelated public services, so we're not talking about people who are asking for MAID. We're talking about people seeking unrelated public services who are having

MAID proposed to them, offered to them. I wonder whether you think that's acceptable.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Mr. Chair, my job, as Minister of Jobs and Families, is to make sure that people with disabilities have every opportunity to participate in society that people without disabilities have, so I'm responsible for the accessibility act and the opportunities fund. I regularly intersect with people with disabilities, and I would say that it's important that we make sure—

**Garnett Genuis:** Minister, again, if I can clarify, the issue we're talking about is people who are seeking other public services—so people interacting with government—who have disabilities. There have been reports, repeatedly raised by Inclusion Canada and other stakeholders, about people trying to access those services, and I think that you, as the person who's supposed to be a champion for Canadians with disabilities around the cabinet table, should be seized with this. I mean, do you think it's a problem that people, who are trying to access unrelated public services, have people who are representing government, in positions of authority, repeatedly offering them something they're not looking for in this regard? Is that a problem?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** If there is a non-medical professional offering medical assistance in dying then that would be completely out of scope for the legislation. This is something that is a deeply personal decision.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm glad you said that because this is what Krista Carr has said at the finance committee.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I have no reason to doubt any witness. I would just like to know details because, quite frankly, the legislation is quite clear. It's not meant—

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Minister, I appreciate your response on that.

I want to squeeze one more question in.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —to be something that a non-medical professional would offer any individual and that would be a violation of that person's dignity.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Minister.

In the time I have left, do you think the government's immigration policy decisions have contributed to youth unemployment?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think it's important that young people have an opportunity to succeed in a market that's very tight. What economists say is that it's a blend of things. It is definitely the canary in the coal mine when it comes to a worsening economy and many dips have proven that. There is a change in the way people are hiring—

**Garnett Genuis:** It's a very specific question as we don't have a lot of time. Do you think decisions made by the government as they relate to immigration over the last 10 years have contributed to this problem?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think that the problem is complex and I'm looking forward to my meeting later this month with provincial and territorial colleagues.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm not saying it's the only factor. Do you think it's one of the factors, though?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think that there are a number of factors going into why youth are experiencing a higher unemployment rate—

**Garnett Genuis:** Is immigration one of them?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —and that's why budget 2025 has so many measures to support youth.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'll just ask it again.

Do you think immigration is one of those contributing factors to youth unemployment?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I think there are many factors that are going into why a young person can't find a job—

**Garnett Genuis:** I agree there are many factors. Do you think immigration is one of them?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** —and that's why budget 2025 has specific measures to alleviate those challenges.

**Garnett Genuis:** Do you think immigration is one of those factors, Minister?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I am saying there are multiple factors.

**Garnett Genuis:** I agree there are multiple factors. Is immigration one of them?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Economists have a number of perspectives.

**Garnett Genuis:** Is immigration one of those factors?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** One of the biggest things that is affecting youth unemployment from an economist's perspective is the challenging economic times posed by tariff action.

**Garnett Genuis:** Minister, is immigration one of those factors?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Your time has concluded.

We'll now conclude with Madam Koutrakis for four minutes to end.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Minister.

I thought I would give you some uninterrupted time to perhaps speak to us about some issues that perhaps are very important for us to hear as a committee and for all Canadians who are watching right now.

Are there some issues that you would like to speak to us about that we have not already touched upon today?

I want to sincerely thank you for all your answers. They've been wholesome and to the point. I would like to offer you the rest of my speaking time to end this amazing committee meeting today.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Well, that's very generous.

What I'd like to speak about is budget 2025 and the transformational change that it represents for not just young Canadians, but Canadians in general. In fact, you'll remember we were just in an election seven or eight months ago. What did Canadians talk about? They talked about their fear of what a changing relationship, from a trade perspective, with the United States would represent in their day-to-day lives. People were afraid of what it might mean for their

jobs, for their families and for Canada's outcome. There's a huge swell of nationalism and pride in Canada.

This budget actually meets the moment. It invests in the kind of building that will take us into the next generation, whether it's a major project, a clean energy project, a pipeline, a dam or an expansion of roads or ports. Those things are the kinds of investments that Canadians know are not just job creation efforts; they're wealth creators for Canada. They allow us to diversify to other economies.

The second thing I'll say is that the budget invests in people. It is a care budget. There is a commitment to holding on to all the things that make people's lives better. You talked about dental care; that is retained. You talked about early learning and child care; that is retained. There's a commitment to making the national school food program permanent. That is a care commitment.

There is a commitment to Canada student loans and grants, which is something that we know students need. There are commitments to continue with the Canada child benefit and in fact to continue to index it to inflation. That's something that these Conservatives are voting against and have voted against. While we see politics rear its head and people talk about issues that they say are deeply important to them, what could be more important to a struggling mom than the ability to have a few extra dollars in her pocket?

Why do I know that? Because I was a single mother. I can tell you as a single mother raising two boys, when you have a little bit of extra money in your pocket, regardless of where it comes from, it's money you spend on your kids. It could be for formula, it could be for karate, it could be so that you could take your kids to the movies or maybe they need a new pair of shoes. That's the discretion that these programs give parents. They give them the flexibility and breathing room, so that they can actually make decisions for their family.

When Conservatives vote against those kinds of things, they're voting directly against the extra dollars that a mom like I was could desperately use. I remember those days. There was a time where I worked three jobs. I worked full time. I had a part-time gig as a graphic designer. Lots of people make fun of that work online—many of our colleagues' supporters—but that was an important part-time job for me that supplemented my income.

I was also a lunchroom supervisor. Actually, they called them monitors. We would go in and help kids get their lunch. That to me was a really important job in retrospect because—wow—now with a national food program, I can tell you that, hopefully, gone are the days when people have to scramble for an extra two bucks so that a child they're watching doesn't feel left out of pizza day. Hopefully, there will be less hunger in our schools.

• (1305)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Koutrakis.

That concludes this particular meeting. We'll meet again on Thursday, November 27 as we begin the temporary foreign worker program.

Madam Minister, thank you for appearing for the full two hours before HUMA, along with your staff.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** We're adjourned.

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