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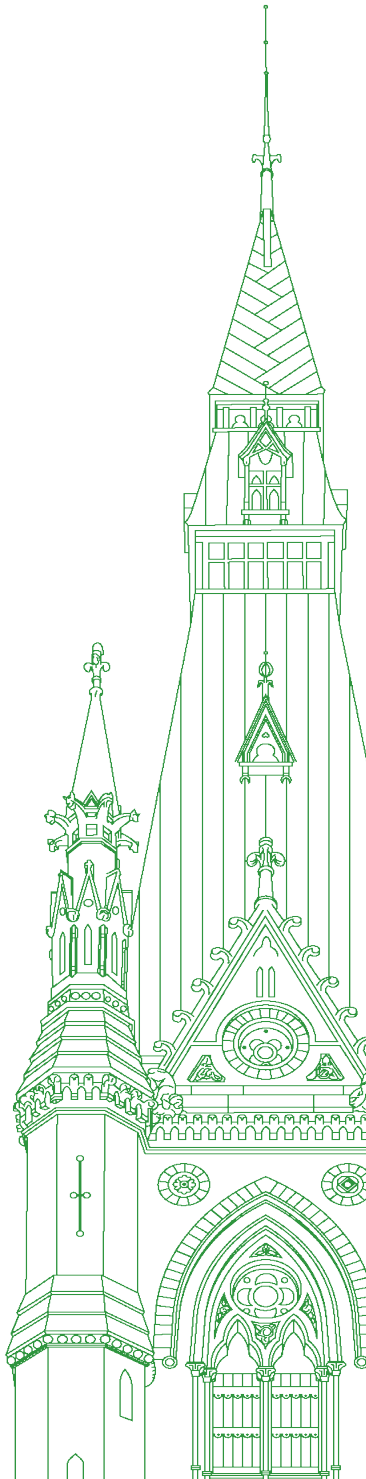
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Chair: Michael Coteau

Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.)): [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we continue, I would like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters. You will notice a QR code, which links to a short awareness video.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Please wait before speaking until I recognize you by name or you are asked a direct question by a member. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: English, French or floor. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I would like to remind all witnesses that committee members may ask questions in either French or English. If you need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare the earpiece, which you should have, and select the listening channel you need in advance in order to take full advantage of the time allocated.

I'll give a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will try to manage the list to the best of our ability.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, April 22, the committee is resuming its study on Bill C-226, an act to establish a national framework to improve food price transparency.

I would like to welcome the witnesses who are joining us today.

From the Daily Bread Food Bank, we have Neil Hetherington, chief executive officer. From the Retail Council of Canada, we have Matt Poirier, vice-president for federal government relations. From Statistics Canada, we have Matthew MacDonald, director of the consumer prices division, and Kyle de March, assistant director, consumer prices division.

Also, substituting for Sébastien Lemire today is MP DeBellefeuille. Welcome to our committee. Thank you for being here today.

We'll start with Statistics Canada. You have five minutes.

Matthew MacDonald (Director, Consumer Prices Division, Statistics Canada): Thank you, Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for the invitation to appear today.

I'm Matthew MacDonald, and I'm responsible for the consumer prices division at Statistics Canada. I'm joined by my colleague Kyle de March, assistant director.

Our program is responsible for producing the monthly consumer price index, Canada's official measure of consumer inflation. As you can appreciate, interest in our data has remained at the forefront of people's minds since the COVID-19 pandemic. We continuously work to provide increased access to our information, assist with its interpretation and provide insights for multiple decision-makers.

The years since the pandemic have been marked by price volatility and uncertainty. Early in the pandemic, public health restrictions limited consumer spending, contributing to initial price declines. Inflation then surged as supply chain disruptions pushed up prices to levels not seen since the early 1980s. Consumer inflation peaked at 8.1% in 2022, reflecting the higher costs of basics such as food, transportation and housing.

As inflation began to ease, global events such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, tariffs and tension in the Middle East continued to put upward pressure on prices. Higher energy and transportation costs have increased the costs of heating homes and moving goods across the country, which are now contributing to higher prices for many goods and services Canadians need.

While food prices have eased, prices have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Prices are still rising, although more slowly than before. After 18 months in which food inflation outpaced the headline CPI, grocery prices increased more slowly than the all-items CPI in September for the second consecutive month. Even so, grocery prices remain nearly 30% higher than they were five years ago.

These increases in grocery prices have been broad-based. Beef prices in particular have risen by more than 50% since 2021. Higher food prices can be affected by a variety of complex factors, some of which are increased production costs, including energy and fertilizer, as well as the effects of extreme weather events and the current uncertainty around geopolitical conflict and tariffs.

Internationally, Canada's inflation rate for the past year has tracked closely to that of European partners, and it remains slightly lower than that of the United States. The pressures driving inflation in Canada are also reflected to a similar extent in other G7 nations, resulting in broad-based increases in food prices across the globe.

All these insights are possible because of the high-quality monthly CPI, which aligns with international standards for price measurement. The consumer price index tracks how the prices Canadians pay for a fixed basket of goods and services change over time. Because Canadians spend most of their money putting a roof over their heads, feeding their families and getting around, price changes in these categories have the largest effect on the overall CPI.

Statistics Canada continues to strengthen the consumer price index by leveraging timely and high-quality data sources. For food prices, the CPI uses scanner data, or point-of-sale, transactions received directly from grocery retailers across Canada. This approach is considered the gold standard internationally and reflects the actual price Canadians pay at the grocery till. CPI indeed accounts for changes in quantity or “shrinkflation”, to ensure that changing package sizes are captured when measuring price change.

Statistics Canada updates the CPI basket annually to ensure that it reflects how consumer spending habits change over time. These updates capture changes in purchasing behaviours, new products, technology changes, shifting preferences and demographic trends.

We also continue to develop new products, such as the personal inflation calculator, to see how your personal inflation rate differs from the averages in the CPI. We maintain a dedicated food hub that contains information about Canadian food prices through the supply chain.

We appreciate the opportunity to meet with you today and the important work you do to help Canadians navigate affordability. This is something we hear about quite frequently from our users. We welcome any questions you have.

Thank you.

● (1535)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to Retail Council of Canada.

Matt Poirier (Vice-President, Federal Government Relations, Retail Council of Canada): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to appear today on behalf of the Retail Council of Canada.

We represent over 65,000 storefronts from coast to coast to coast, employ more than 2.3 million people and contribute over $80 billion annually to Canada's GDP.

Every single day, millions of Canadians walk through our members' doors looking for value, quality and fair prices. Retailers see first-hand the strain households are under right now. That is why enhancing affordability is not just a talking point for our sector; it is a central priority for grocers across the country. We want our customers to leave the store feeling confident in what they spent, which is why we fundamentally share the goal of helping shoppers make clear, informed choices.

To that end, the Retail Council of Canada acknowledges and supports Prime Minister Carney's commitment to establish a national approach for unit price labelling as part of the national food security strategy. It is the right objective and it aligns with where most of the industry is already heading.

When you walk down the perimeter of almost any grocery store in Canada today, you are already seeing unit pricing in action. It has been the standard for decades at the butcher counter, the deli and the produce bins. If you head down the centre aisles and look at the packaged goods, you will see that most major grocers have voluntarily rolled out unit pricing on shelf tags as well.

Retailers did this because it's good customer service, and consumers genuinely find it helpful. That is why we support the underlying intent of Bill C-226.

However, good intentions in Ottawa can easily turn into headaches and higher costs at the checkout counter if the legislation is divorced from the reality on the ground.

First, we have to respect jurisdiction. Retail store operations and consumer protection fall under provincial authority. Right now, Quebec is the only province with mandatory unit pricing legislation on the books. If the federal government steps in to build a national framework, it must work hand in glove with provincial partners to harmonize standards. The worst outcome for retailers and consumers alike would be a patchwork of conflicting rules or overly prescriptive design requirements that force stores to overhaul perfectly good IT systems, digital displays and shelf tags. Retailers essentially need flexibility and a realistic runway to implement any changes.

Second, and most critically, there is a major red flag in this bill that needs to be addressed. Subparagraph 3(2)(a)(ii) calls for national standards around reporting price increases, adjustments and fluctuations. I ask you what policy end this would serve.

Consider the math of a modern grocery store. A typical supermarket carries between 30,000 and 40,000 distinct products. In any given week, regular price movements, promotional cycles and supplier cost changes affect anywhere from 1,000 to 3,000 individual items. That adds up to more than 100,000 price point adjustments inside a single store every year.

Moreover, the price of any single product on the shelf is the end result of a long, complex journey. It reflects weather events impacting crop yields, global energy spikes, shipping and rail rates, packaging inputs, exchange rates and supplier price adjustments. Grocers do not control those upstream disruptions, yet this provision would place the entire burden on the retailer to track, document and explain over 100,000 fluctuations right on the shelf tag.

In practice, this would simply be impossible to execute. Worse, it creates an enormous administrative burden that does not reduce the cost of a single carton of milk or loaf of bread. In fact, the cost required to comply with such an unworkable mandate would inevitably be absorbed into the grocery bill, hurting the very consumers this bill seeks to protect. For these reasons, we believe that if Bill C-226 moves forward, this section should be removed entirely.

To conclude, retailers will always stand behind empowering Canadian shoppers with clear information, but practical reality must anchor good intentions. The voluntary momentum already under way across our sector works, and if government proceeds with national standards, our members must be heavily consulted to ensure that those rules reflect operational facts on the ground.

Requiring stores to account for 100,000 annual price adjustments on shelf tags is simply impossible. It would add compliance costs without helping family budgets, and we urge the committee to focus squarely on practical measures that truly support affordability.

● (1540)

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to the Daily Bread Food Bank now.

Neil Hetherington (Chief Executive Officer, Daily Bread Food Bank): Good afternoon. My name is Neil Hetherington. I have the awesome privilege of being the CEO of the Daily Bread Food Bank.

Daily Bread is Canada's largest food bank, providing about 90% of the emergency food support across Toronto through a network of 221 food banks. Thank you for inviting me to speak about Bill C-226.

Let me start with where we agree: A national framework for consistent unit pricing, transparency about grocery price changes and public education are all important measures for consumers and for good competition. Daily Bread supports measures that bring fairness and transparency to grocery aisles through clear and comparable pricing.

However, I want to be candid with you about what we are seeing on the front lines every day, because it speaks directly to what this bill can and cannot achieve.

Let's start with the basic facts. One in 10 Torontonians now makes use of the Daily Bread Food Bank. In 2025, there were 4.1 million visits to our food banks, which is a 340% increase since 2019. When we ask our clients why this is happening, why they are relying on the Daily Bread, 96% give the same answer: the cost of living.

Here is the math that our clients are living with.

Nationally, grocery prices have increased nearly 30% over the last five years. In Toronto, average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is up 38%. More than 95% of food bank clients are renters, and when budgets are tight, rent eats first. After paying for rent and utilities, the median food bank client has just $8.33 left per day. That's $8.33 to pay for all of their food, transportation and clothing, everything in their lives. Moreover, one in five of our clients spends 100% of their income on rent.

Consider what unit pricing does for that person. A clear shelf label will show that a large bag of rice is a better deal than a small one, but with $8.33 per day, they can't afford the large bag. The best value per unit is often out of reach for people without the cash up front, the storage space or the transportation to buy in bulk. Information helps people, so we support this act, but please remember that information helps people who have choices, and the people attending the food bank have run out of choices.

Put simply, Canadians are not coming to the food banks because they can't read a price tag: They are coming because their incomes have not kept pace with the cost of housing and food. I would ask the committee to treat this bill as a useful one, but not as a solution to food affordability.

I know this government is focused on results, so I would offer two results-oriented recommendations.

First, connect this work to the national food security strategy now being developed. Price transparency belongs inside a broader strategy whose central test is whether fewer Canadians will be food-insecure.

The second recommendation, and the most important, is to introduce a Canada renters tax credit. Essentially, make rent for low-income Canadians tax deductible. With our friends at the Maytree foundation, Daily Bread is working hard to introduce this refundable tax credit, which would give low-income Canadians the opportunity to have up to $200 per month paid automatically through the CRA. This would target more than two million low-income Canadian households, or roughly the same number of people making use of food banks each month.

We know the numbers and we know the families behind the numbers. We have hope and we still cleave to hope, because we also know that there are policy options available to us. The new groceries and essentials benefit is a welcome step and shows that the CRA can get money into people's hands quickly, but it's temporary, and the Canada housing benefit expires in 2028. The pressures our clients face are not temporary. They are immediate. New housing supply is the long-term answer, but it is the long game, and renters need a bridge today.

Inaction is incredibly expensive for taxpayers. Research from the University of Toronto in 2026 showed that the health care costs for severely food-insecure individuals are double those of a food-secure adult. Every dollar that helps a family afford rent and groceries eases pressures on our hospitals, our emergency services and our charities and lets people participate more fully in the economy and thrive in their community.

A clear price tag is a good start. An adequate income and reduced housing costs, though, are what put food on the table.

Thank you.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start with the Conservatives for six minutes.

Mr. Barlow, please go ahead.

John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today and articulating the concerns with this private member's bill.

It's apropos that you're here, Mr. Hetherington, a couple of days after the Food Banks Canada report came out with what I would say are some pretty disappointing numbers in terms of the number of Canadians who are forced to rely on food banks.

I want to confirm the number you said with regard to Daily Bread specifically. Did you say that the number of users of the Daily Bread Food Bank is up 340% since 2019?

Neil Hetherington: I did.

John Barlow: That's an absolutely shocking number.

I would say that addressing food affordability should be the priority of this government. Is there anything in this private member's bill that you can point to that will make food more affordable for the clients who are using the Daily Bread Food Bank?

Neil Hetherington: As I testified, we don't believe that this isn't about affordability. It is around good transparency in pricing so that somebody can see what is more affordable. However, as we know, the amount of income that an individual has and the cost that they currently are paying for rent make most of those bulk items, those unit cost items, unaffordable.

If we all want to look towards hope, here's the good news. Those numbers that we released two days ago were disappointing, with a 9% increase in food bank usage across the country, but those numbers were taken prior to some of the new initiatives that are out there. They were taking place prior to Build Canada Homes, which is passing the keys to new families. Those numbers took place prior to the groceries and essentials benefit being enacted, and they took place prior to the Canada disability benefit coming in. I hope those are opportunities for us to come back next year with a much better number.

John Barlow: I appreciate that, Mr. Hetherington, but in your own words, the food and essentials benefit is temporary. The issues facing your clients are not temporary. A one-time handout of a few hundred dollars is not going to solve the food affordability crisis.

As for your point, I would say that there's nothing in this bill that would make food more affordable for the clients who are using the Daily Bread Food Bank. Is that correct?

● (1550)

Neil Hetherington: It's correct that the transparency allows them to make more affordable choices—

John Barlow: However, it's not going to make food more affordable.

Neil Hetherington: That's fair.

John Barlow: To Mr. Poirier, my concern with this bill would be similar to what you said. Not only does it not make food more affordable, but there are also some issues in here that would be contrary to this and would actually increase costs. We can look at the plastics registry, which may have been an interesting idea in concept, but the consequences of that kind of legislation actually increase the cost of food at the grocery store shelves.

Are there some elements...I know you did mention one, but could I reiterate the point that a piecemeal framework that would ask provinces and retailers to do things differently would pass those costs on to the consumer? Is that correct?

Matt Poirier: They would inevitably be passed on, yes.

As I mentioned in my remarks, the only law on the books right now is in Quebec. Our members and grocers who operate there have created a system that works there. Then building on that, they created more of a national standard, or their national approach. Those that are doing it are certainly most of the large grocers. If other provinces come forward with different ideas of how to do it, it will just create chaos.

The concern for us is that if the government were to be very prescriptive in how this needs to be done, we would be throwing out systems, IT and all this stuff. We would have to start from scratch, and these are not insignificant investments in the first place. That is our concern.

It's a voluntary approach right now. We're doing it, and there's a lot of momentum to keep doing it, but anything like that would be concerning. You can just imagine it, from staffing levels to the IT systems to the relationships with suppliers. These are very complex calculations that happen, frankly, on a daily basis.

John Barlow: Certainly we have seen this before. I mentioned the plastics registry, but there's also the front-of-pack labelling. These are all things we warned the government about, and the numbers were there. There would be $8 billion in additional costs just on front-of-pack labelling, but they went ahead anyway.

Rather than focusing on concrete steps that would reduce the cost of groceries and reduce the cost to produce, manufacture and transport those food products to the shelf, this seems to be more of a window dressing than anything else. They need to be focused on what the potential consequences are.

With my last minute, I want to focus on what we heard from witnesses and from government officials on Tuesday, which is that this is provincial jurisdiction.

As you said, most retailers are already doing this. Do you see any need to reinvent the wheel here, or impose it on provincial jurisdictions or on retailers that are already doing this? Does this seem like something that's already being done by your retailers?

Matt Poirier: It is already being done. I would say that we definitely do not want to reinvent the wheel, because we've already invented it.

What would be helpful, perhaps, is a national standard or a coordinated approach to make sure that if other provinces.... Manitoba is contemplating putting in a similar structure. If that's going to start happening province by province, a focused national approach would certainly be welcome, but at this point, the reality on the ground is that there's natural momentum behind this.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to the Liberals and Mr. MacDonald for six minutes.

Kent MacDonald (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses who are here today.

I'll start with you, Mr. Hetherington. I want to thank you first for the valuable work that you carry out in the Toronto area.

Across the country, unfortunately, we have food banks in every region. Many valued employees and volunteers carry out that work, and I will give a quick shout-out to Norma Dingwell in the Southern Kings and Queens Food Bank in my region for the efforts she puts into the local food bank.

I know you spoke about a couple of recommendations to the government, and we've been very focused on bringing forward some affordability measures over the last year and a half since we were elected. Could you elaborate a little more on what types of programs would work?

You talked about the rent program. Could you speak a little more about that, and then on the actual programs that we have in place, such as the food and essentials benefit?

● (1555)

Neil Hetherington: Sure.

We've already discussed the groceries and essentials benefit. This was an initiative that Food Banks Canada supported, and we were very grateful for that.

Over the past number of years, we worked very hard for the Canada disability benefit. The government's approach to reducing barriers to that program is needed. We know that about one-third of the individuals who make use of food banks have a disability. Right across the country, in every single province, they are legislated to live in deep poverty, so initiatives like that will have a concrete effect. I am hopeful for next year's numbers.

With the Canada renters tax credit, right now we have the ability to contemplate a new tax benefit for low-income Canadians who are paying the vast majority of their income on rent. Allowing them to have a tax credit associated with that would quickly provide a refund into their account so that they could pay the rent and put food on the table. We have been working with Maytree and with your colleagues from both sides of the aisle to make that a reality. We think there is great merit there. Once you tackle affordable housing, food insecurity starts to diminish.

Those are some of the initiatives.

For immediate relief in terms of getting food to food banks across the country, in Ontario there is a farmers' tax credit for farmers donating to food banks. It's been incredibly effective in Ontario, and a few other provinces have it as well. We would love to see that happen at a national level as part of the national food security program.

Kent MacDonald: You mentioned that Bill C-226, to your mind, wouldn't help people who are really vulnerable because of their poverty status, let's say.

One component of the bill is education. How do you feel that plays a role with consumers?

Neil Hetherington: To clarify, the bill would help individuals. There is transparency, which allows them to make better choices at the grocery store and, it is hoped, allows them to purchase items that have a reduced price tag on a per-unit basis. There is value in that. I just wanted to clarify that.

On the education component, it makes radical common sense that we should understand how to read these labels very quickly and make sure that people are making the best possible decisions with the limited income that they have.

Kent MacDonald: I'll move to Mr. Poirier.

I was a primary producer, so I'd like to blame everything on the Retail Council of Canada. I'll just say that up front.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Kent MacDonald: People reach out to say that they feel that producers are charging too much, but you talked about the various things in the supply chains that affect the price. The ongoing war in Ukraine and the price of fuel from the war in the Middle East have been major factors, and are still major factors, in the cost of transportation and in food security for Canadians.

You had some reservations about the bill. What is in the bill that you like? In terms of unit pricing, that gives fairness to everybody. Just comment on that.

Matt Poirier: Certainly.

We're a net positive, I would say, with the rationale and the philosophy behind the bill. Our caution, or our hesitation, is with how this will be put into practice.

We're already doing unit pricing, for the most part. We'll be happy if we can get standards that work for industry and work for government. That would be great. The education component is excellent as well. We would strongly support that.

Where we have an issue is with the very nebulous concept of reporting and having all this information on price, which is kind of thrown in there. What does that mean?

As I said in my remarks, the prices are controlled by infinite variables. To put it all on retailers' shoulders to explain—

● (1600)

Kent MacDonald: I'm going to interject now, because I don't—

The Chair: Thank you. You're out of time.

We'll do another round for the Bloc for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Claude DeBellefeuille (Vallée-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Poirier, you mentioned Quebec a number of times. It has an important law, a flagship law, the Consumer Protection Act. When the subject of internal trade barriers comes up, the law is seen as a barrier even by some provinces.

In Quebec, red flags definitely go up when the government starts talking about a national framework. Consumer protection groups in Quebec wonder whether this will be a way to weaken consumer protection standards there. Yes, in Quebec, we're used to seeing certain information on our labels and having certain warranties. We have our own food transparency legislation. We're quite advanced. There's no doubt that people in Quebec are concerned that, if the bill is passed, it would provide a good opportunity to lower food price transparency and even food origin standards. That's the first concern, and I think you articulated it well.

I prefer the name Canadian framework rather than national framework. Whenever a bill refers to a Canadian framework, which infringes on provincial jurisdiction, it tends to be hard to implement. Ultimately, such bills require negotiations between the federal government and the provinces, so they can't be imposed on the provinces. From the get-go, the major barrier we see regarding this bill is that mandatory discussion, but with the obligation of result. This bill raises a lot of red flags for a variety of stakeholders in Quebec.

I want to ask you a question about price. When I do my groceries, I see the shrinkflation and skimpflation on products I regularly buy. I have to tell you that I love Leclerc cookies in Quebec, and I've noticed that the boxes are smaller and that they contain fewer grams. As consumers, we don't have that information, unlike France, where it has to be displayed two months before the product hits shelves.

When a product's size or ingredients change, do you think it's right that consumers aren't necessarily made aware so they can make a free and informed choice?

Matt Poirier: No, certainly not.

On our end, as far as grocers go, those decisions are usually out of our control. We sell the products, but we don't make them. When manufacturers change the size or ingredients of the product, we still sell it.

Certainly, it's very problematic for consumers. We understand that as well. We are keeping a close eye on the situation, and we really do share that concern.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Basically, Mr. Poirer, I take it that you're at the end of the chain.

Matt Poirier: That's correct.

Claude DeBellefeuille: You get the complaints from customers. It would be easier to require manufacturers or product suppliers to provide more specific information on the package and label. That would make consumers aware that they used to pay this much for this many grams, but that now the same product contains fewer grams.

We haven't really seen that transparency. Have you noticed that?

Matt Poirier: Yes, we see it happening already in the market. I would also advise against too much reporting or red tape as a way to deal with the problem.

However, in many cases, what we see is beyond our control.

● (1605)

Claude DeBellefeuille: Take me, for example. When I do my groceries, the only dairy products I buy are those made by Quebec or Canadian dairy farmers. I often find that product descriptions or labels are deceiving. We've seen people who thought they were buying eggs that were Canadian but that were actually from the U.S.

Do you think Canada should be stricter within federal jurisdiction when it comes to what appears in the product description and what's displayed on the label?

Matt Poirier: I would say the current system is very robust. In that area, what we see in our stores is highly complex. I said this earlier: A store carries between 30,000 and 40,000 products. Sometimes mistakes happen.

We have a relationship with Health Canada, the department responsible for managing these systems. When mistakes are made, we work together to fix them, but it represents a small proportion of a large number of things that are generally done right.

I really don't think taking a stricter approach will improve things. Certainly, it's a highly regulated area.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Next we'll go to the Conservatives for five minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Gourde.

[*Translation*]

Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Poirier, I'm going to start with you, because that was an interesting discussion.

I have to tell you, I'm skeptical about the bill. It might help with transparency, but it won't necessarily bring down prices or make food more affordable.

With your experience in the grocery industry, you know that the farm-to-fork chain involves a lot of transportation, many wholesalers and a lot of workers. Food travels great distances. Do you see opportunities to save money across the value chain, without losing the margins you and others need?

As I was saying, I see Quebec cattle being sent to another province for slaughter before the beef comes back to Quebec. Sometimes the beef travels 2,500 kilometres or 3,000 kilometres before it gets to consumers. That's one example. Are there other situations we could pay particular attention to, to save consumers a tremendous amount of money?

Matt Poirier: A lot of foods are going up in price for a variety of reasons. You talked about beef, but there are others. The reason is that we are dealing with circumstances we haven't seen in a long time. The conflict in Iran and the conflict with Russia are putting a huge strain on global supply chains. That includes a lot of small things, particularly gas and diesel prices. It's affecting the entire supply chain, from farmers to us, the retailers, whose truck fleets deliver the products.

We are being hit by so many things at once that it's hard to say what we should do to reduce prices. That is the reason for the higher prices, which are all going up at the same time. It's constant, and it's been that way for a few years now.

Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

My next question is for you, Mr. Hetherington. Thank you for what you do for food banks. It's really important. Thanks go to everyone doing that work, whether they're paid or not. It's essential.

There's an urban belief that giving the money to disadvantaged Canadians would be easier. Would it be easier to give more money to those who are struggling financially? Would that money necessarily be available to people to buy food so they could eat? I'm sure a lot of it would go towards rent. What's more, some Canadians have substance use issues, and they might use the money to buy drugs or alcohol. Unfortunately, when someone in the family has substance use issues, no matter how much money you give them, the family still doesn't have food on the table, because the money is going somewhere else, not necessarily where it should.

● (1610)

[*English*]

Neil Hetherington: Every single day, I have the opportunity to work alongside the volunteers and the staff who serve an incredible population throughout the city of Toronto. One in 10 Torontonians has to make use of the food bank, and in my experience over the last close to 10 years, I've yet to see the experience that you're speaking of.

Canadians don't choose to come to the food bank. They don't choose to cross the threshold of a doorway of a food bank for any reason other than that they're out of choices. They have to be there.

The issue that we are dealing with is not a food issue but an income issue, and there are two sides of the income statement. On the top side, it's the income that they have. We've seen a rise in precarious employment, and we know that in every province, we legislate individuals on disability to live $1,000 below the poverty line. Of course they need additional income.

In the 1990s, we removed ourselves from a national strategy of co-operative housing and we weren't in the housing game nationally. We started to feel the effects two generations later, and we will feel it for three or four generations more, until we build back that supply.

Individuals who come to the food bank need the food bank. Individuals who come to the food bank need additional income and they need the cost of living, whether for food or for housing, to be reduced.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to the Liberals and MP Louis for five minutes.

Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank everyone for being here today to talk about this private member's bill.

I'll start with the Retail Council of Canada.

As we've talked about, if this bill passes, it will not create a law that says we're doing unit pricing. It just creates a national framework, because this is provincial jurisdiction, so we're speaking only in hypotheticals.

However, if it passes and we get the provinces to sit down and we talk to the provinces that have it already, or the ones that are maybe doing a pilot project or the major grocers that would contribute, and say, “This is how we do it”, in the hypothetical situation, what implementation period do you think would be necessary?

You mentioned the words “realistic runway”. If people made the decision, what would be a reasonable deadline for it to come into force?

Matt Poirier: It would be a period that is reasonable.

In the scope of rolling this out, even though it's already happening nationally, you would be setting the level for people who aren't doing it and for smaller independent grocers who are doing it, but not as much as the larger ones.

It would be less a matter of time, but the time would take years. It would be more the costs associated with it, because you're talking about national systems, IT systems and developing the staff who are going to have to be responsible for it as well, which is a challenge in smaller operations.

It's a time commitment, but it's more the resources commitment that would be the biggest hurdle.

Tim Louis: Okay. Yes, hypothetically, maybe it could be recognizing it in other provinces without necessarily standardizing it.

You did mention independent grocers. You said that the large grocers, which are the majority of the grocery stores, are doing this voluntarily, but what can be done to make sure those independent grocers are not hit with a higher compliance cost? What can we do? Would the threshold be built in? What kind of suggestions could you bring?

Matt Poirier: The threshold would undermine the whole intent of the bill. If you wanted, hypothetically, to have a consumer walk into any grocery store and have this available to them, then thresholds would get around that.

Playing along, the biggest challenge for small or medium-sized grocers or for those who haven't done it would be the capital costs, because you're talking about expensive systems and staff, so help would be needed there.

Tim Louis: To Mr. MacDonald from Statistics Canada, I would like to know about the existing price database and what it can and cannot show about food inflation, package size changes, regional variations and individual retail prices.

Are there gaps right now? If so, where are those gaps in measuring unit prices, package size changes and regional food price differences?

● (1615)

Matthew MacDonald: We extensively leverage scanner data, which is transaction data that comes directly from retailers, and we control for outlets, products, brands, sizes and quantities, and that allows us to ensure that we're measuring pure price change over time. We receive data that's a combination of existing standardized unit prices and what I would call traditional sticker labels. Both of those have showed fluctuations and high levels of inflation over time. This doesn't necessarily mean that one would change inflation rates.

Lastly, I'll say a few words on shrinkflation. We have always standardized these quantities and package sizes. For this, this is a quantity adjustment, and it's not new. It's a reflection that, for us, it's not a cause of inflation; it's a type of inflation, and we're responsible for covering both of them.

Whether it ultimately feeds the consumer as a higher sticker price or a reduced quantity, it's an indication of an earlier cost pressure somewhere upstream.

Tim Louis: Help me understand. When you're talking about CPI measures, to what extent can those measures distinguish between a genuine price increase from shrinkflation or a change in quality, substitutions or promotions? How do you measure something that could be—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Tim Louis: That's it?

Matthew MacDonald: Our systems aren't designed to measure price change attributable to quantity change versus regular sticker price. Periodically, we go in and do studies. We did one between 2021 and 2023, which showed that about 29% of products experienced some type of inflation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to the Bloc for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Poirier, we hear a great deal about dynamic pricing. It frightens many consumers. I gather that you aren't particularly supportive of the bill before us today. However, if it were to move forward, would you consider it necessary to ensure that the national framework includes sufficient flexibility to address this issue? This is a fairly significant matter. Dynamic pricing is a tool that consumers may find very—if I may say so—perverse. The more of a product we buy, the more its price increases. With artificial intelligence, consumers are—in a sense—being spied on when it comes to their purchasing habits. What are your thoughts on this? Should we take this into account?

Matt Poirier: Yes. However, for us, it's simple. We don't do this. No grocery store in Canada engages in these activities.

We're careful when we talk about this phenomenon. Dynamic pricing provides a number of other benefits for consumers. There are loyalty points, discounts and all kinds of personalized features that help consumers save money. That's a positive development, and we support it.

The practice of monitoring all consumer information in order to raise prices has never taken place in our industry.

Claude DeBellefeuille: I thought that a major grocery retailer in Canada was considering this. However, you're saying that none of your members are doing this.

If you had a final recommendation for us regarding the bill, what would it be?

Matt Poirier: The part that concerns us—the one that I mentioned—is the requirement to report all price changes. In practice, it's impossible to do this in stores, given the volume of products that we carry.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll do one more round of four minutes each.

We'll start with Mr. Epp for four minutes.

Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

I'll start with Statistics Canada. You mentioned in your testimony that you collect data at the scanner, so you have the ability, and in answers to some questions, you've indicated you can segregate that data.

Quebec has had mandatory legislation since 2001, so 25 years. Does your data show that prices are lower in Quebec vis-à-vis the rest of the country?

● (1620)

Matthew MacDonald: For the latest period, year over year food price inflation in Quebec is 1.6%. Canada is 1.7%, so it's very close. For the last five years, Quebec is 32% and Canada is 33%, again very close. For the last 25 years, since 2001, Quebec is 93% and Canada is 100%, which is 7% less over a fairly long period of time.

Dave Epp: Do you attribute that to the mandatory legislation?

Matthew MacDonald: It's very difficult to attribute food inflation to any particular cause. A variety of factors go into this.

Dave Epp: That's right. In fact, I appreciated your testimony on exactly that, when you indicated that the data we're talking about is actually reflective of the cost pressures.

Specifically, you were referring to shrinkflation. In your collection of data, have you noticed an escalating amount of shrinkflation? You've been normalizing the weights for reporting purposes, but have you seen an escalating amount of shrinkflation?

Matthew MacDonald: As I said, we looked specifically between 2021 and 2023, when it seemed to emerge as a popular thing, and we found that the majority of it was in 2022. There was less in 2021 and 2023. It averaged out to about 29%.

Dave Epp: Let's go back to the comment earlier. Would you link that to cost? What's driving retailers or packagers to do that? Would it be cost pressures in the system?

Matthew MacDonald: It's a combination of factors. That's what we're hearing from data providers. Particularly in food, you get a lot of weather events, transportation charges and increased input costs, and whether we like it or not, we import some of our food inflation as well.

Dave Epp: Thank you.

Mr. Poirier, there's been a bit of, I would say, conflicting testimony as to the percentage of foodstuffs that are covered right now by unit pricing. You're indicating that most of the large retailers are doing it and that some smaller ones aren't. Can you give a rough indication of what is covered by unit pricing on the store shelf right now?

Matt Poirier: Do you mean which products?

Dave Epp: No, I mean broadly—all the offerings on the store shelf, everything that would be potentially affected by this legislation. What is that?

My point in asking is this: No one is arguing that transparency isn't a good thing. The question is, what is the best way to get there? Is it through mandatory legislation or, as you've indicated, through the voluntary efforts of industry?

Let's determine the size of the gap.

Matt Poirier: We're agnostic on the approach, as long as it includes us and isn't overly burdensome.

To answer your question, most of the stores already do unit pricing. As I mentioned, around the perimeter of the store, you have your meat, your deli and your produce. That's all unit pricing, and it's been in place for decades. Increasingly, it's in the centre aisle goods as well, which are more packaged goods. We're getting at the remaining bits of the store that aren't already covered, which is a positive thing, but it's a smaller number than people would assume.

Dave Epp: I assume from earlier testimony that it would be easier for larger retailers to adopt than for smaller ones. There's been talk about exemptions for smaller retailers because of the cost, and then there would be the inflationary effect on food pricing for those who shop there.

Can you comment on that? Does that defeat the purpose of even considering this kind of legislation?

Matt Poirier: If the whole goal is to create a system under which a consumer can go into any grocery store and see unit pricing, and then you start having exceptions to a national framework, it defeats the purpose. You do it or you don't.

Dave Epp: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Finally, for the last four minutes, we'll go to the Liberals.

Mr. Casey, you're up.

Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to start with Mr. Poirier as well.

Mr. Poirier, you talked about having a “realistic runway”. The legislation calls for the minister to develop a framework within 18 months of the coming into force of the legislation. That 18 months presumably would involve some significant consultation, and then undoubtedly, once the framework is developed, there would need to be enabling legislation, agreements or other measures to give it some teeth.

We're talking about a minimum of 18 months. Add another five months for it to get through Parliament. We're talking about two years, maybe more.

How much is “realistic”?

Matt Poirier: That timeline sounds good. It depends on what we're talking about.

The concern for us, as I've mentioned before, is that the legislation is very short and very short on details. There's a whole lot of concern when something is as nebulous as that.

The timeline you described would be what industry expects, but is it realistic to consult all grocers and all the provinces? I'll leave that up to you guys to decide, but certainly it's a project that could happen in that time.

● (1625)

Sean Casey: I want to drill down on your proposed amendment. You have suggested that we should delete subparagraph 3(2)(a)(ii), so let's just be clear on what you're suggesting. That subparagraph says:

> (2) The framework must include measures
>
> (a) to establish national standards for the grocery retail sector respecting

Then it continues:

> (ii) transparency regarding price increases, adjustments and fluctuations

Matt Poirier: Yes.

Sean Casey: Then you are asking us to delete from the bill any measures regarding transparency with respect to price increases.

You're not going to tell me that the Retail Council of Canada is against transparency with respect to price increases, so let's talk about what a reasonable standard would look like.

Matt Poirier: The vagueness of this subparagraph is the concern for us. If you were to follow it to its logical conclusion, it would mean that any price change in a store, for any reason, needs to be justified or explained somehow. That's the concern—that it's just completely impractical in reality.

Sean Casey: Then let's agree that it's an unreasonable level of transparency. What's a reasonable level? The Retail Council of Canada is not going to say there should be no transparency. What I want from you is, what are the retailers prepared to live with?

Matt Poirier: I don't think it's just the retailers. Prices are determined by a whole bunch of factors and are accumulated throughout the supply chain. To put all the burden on retailers because they happen to be at the end of said supply chain is unreasonable. This is what we're talking about. They have to explain all the prices, but they're not the ones controlling up to 80% of the prices they charge in the store.

Sean Casey: Mr. Hetherington, can you say a word or two about a basic income guarantee before I run out of time?

Neil Hetherington: I wish it was fully studied.

In response to the last question that was asked of me, I would encourage the member to read a report from 2024 by North York Harvest, which indicated that when you give low-income families additional funds and track them, they don't spend them on the items he discussed.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to suspend for about five minutes so that we can set up for the next panel, but I want to thank all of our witnesses for joining us here today. I know many of you travelled to get here, so I appreciate your efforts.

● (1625)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1635)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Pursuant to the order of reference made on Wednesday, April 22, 2026, the committee is resuming its study of Bill C-226, an act to establish a national framework to improve food price transparency.

I won't go over all the introductory statements, but I will say, for those on Zoom, that at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation.

Please, if you are a witness today, be prepared to answer your question by making sure that you have the right channel selected.

Also, consult the guidelines that are on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio feedback incidents and protect the health and safety of our participants and our very hard-working interpreters.

That said, I'd like to welcome our witnesses here today: from Dan's Legacy Foundation, Barbara Coates, executive director, who is joining us by teleconference; from Food, Health & Consumer Products of Canada, Michael Graydon, chief executive officer; and from Option consommateurs, Sara Eve Levac, lawyer.

Welcome. Thank you for joining us today.

Each of you has up to five minutes, and then we'll open up to questions.

Why don't we start online with Dan's Legacy Foundation for five minutes?

Barbara Coates (Executive Director, Dan's Legacy Foundation): Thank you.

Hello, everybody. Thank you for this opportunity to provide recommendations to the committee.

I'm Barbara Coates, executive director at Dan's Legacy Foundation.

I'd like to acknowledge that I'm joining you today on the traditional and treaty lands of Tsawwassen First Nation.

Dan's Legacy is a charity that provides trauma-informed counselling, wraparound supports and job skills training programs to youth at risk across metro Vancouver. The young people we work with are dealing with overwhelming anxiety and depression, which are attributed primarily to earlier trauma in their lives. They're unable to go to school, find work or maintain housing due to their mental health challenges. They're also facing debilitating food insecurity, which affects their ability to function and has long-term health impacts.

Last year, our team worked with over 500 youth and had a 69% success rate in helping them stabilize and develop self-regulation and coping skills in only four months of weekly counselling sessions. Our data indicates that a good part of our success in therapeutic counselling can be attributed to the wraparound supports we provide, which include a grocery hamper program. The youth have the autonomy to select nutritious food each week at our pop-up store, which is stocked with donated surplus food that we collect every day from five grocery store partners. Our clinical data from the past six months shows that just over 70% of clients accessing our grocery hamper program say they also support up to four other people with the food they bring home. Further, 99% of the youth report that access to free groceries allows them to eat regular meals, and 100% confirmed that this program of ours supports their ability to function in their daily lives and helps them stretch their small budgets.

Let's talk for a second about what it means for these young people to have a small budget.

The 2025 Living Wage BC report indicates that a person living in metro Vancouver needs to earn about $53,000 a year to cover basic needs such as rent, transit and food. The majority of our young clients live on income assistance provided by the Province of B.C., which for a single person amounts to $12,720 a year. That's only a quarter of what they need to survive. Imagine trying to stretch what little funds you have four times over to avoid sleeping on the street and to eat a meal.

There are lots of food banks in metro Vancouver, but they're under mounting pressure as demand for support increases. Food Banks BC's "Hunger Report 2025" identified a 79% increase in people accessing food banks since 2019. While our grocery hamper program is definitely making a difference in the lives of our young clients, we don't have the capacity to help every young person in metro Vancouver.

The ones who are going to the grocery store to buy food with very little money to spend would benefit greatly if they saw at a glance unit pricing on food items. Prior to the break, you were discussing unit pricing. This would help youth understand the best value for their money, allowing them to stretch their small budgets a little more.

Unit pricing might seem to be a small thing to ask for. You spoke earlier about how long it would take to implement and how many stores are doing it, but I can tell you from personal experience that many stores are not. When a young person on income assistance can make informed choices about their food purchases, ensuring that they get the best value for those purchases, it increases the likelihood that they will eat regular, nutritious meals. This in turn has a positive impact on their physical and mental health, benefiting both the individual, of course, and the community at large, so we recommend that unit pricing be standardized, clearly displayed on shelf labels, as well as online, and applied to sale prices.

We support Bill C-226.

I thank the committee for providing us the opportunity to contribute to this conversation.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to Michael Graydon for five minutes.

Michael Graydon (Chief Executive Officer, Food, Health & Consumer Products of Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for inviting me here today to discuss Bill C-226.

Food, Health & Consumer Products of Canada represents the companies that manufacture approximately 80% of the products you see sold centre store in a grocery store or pharmacy in Canada. Our sector employs more than 350,000 Canadians across nearly 10,000 manufacturing facilities and transforms close to 40% of Canada's agricultural output into value-added products.

We support the objective of clear, consistent and accessible unit pricing. Canadians should be able to compare products and make informed decisions, especially when household budgets are under such pressure. Put simply, unit pricing shows what a product costs for a standard quantity, such as 100 grams or one litre. It helps shoppers compare value across brands and package sizes.

Manufacturers buy the ingredients, employ the workers and invest in the production facilities. We manage the costs of packaging, energy, transportation, foreign exchange and regulatory compliance, and all of these costs factor into affordability. The framework needs to reflect how products are priced and sold, giving Canadians information they can use when they shop.

With that in mind, I'd like to offer three considerations.

First, if this is going to be successful, we'll need to work toward one harmonized Canadian approach. Comparable products should use the same units, and displays should be easy to read in stores and online. Provinces, retailers, manufacturers and consumer organizations should help shape the approach, with reasonable time for smaller retail operations to adapt.

Second, unit prices should be displayed where consumers make their purchases, which is on store shelves and online. Manufacturers provide the quantity on the package. Retailers set the selling pricing, including promotional pricing. Retailers are therefore best placed to calculate and display the unit price shoppers need to see. As the framework is developed, it should avoid requiring manufacturers to print retail prices on packaging. These prices can vary between stores and change with promotions, and they will add significant cost to each of the products.

Third, the bill's provisions on transparency about price change need a clear scope. When package sizes change, consumers should see how much they are getting and what they are paying for a comparable quantity. Consistent unit pricing gives them that common measure. FHCP recommends focusing on these clear comparisons rather than requiring manufacturers to provide separate explanations of past package sizes or formulations. The goal should be having useful information that helps Canadians make purchasing decisions and informed choices.

Finally, clear price information is valuable, but lasting affordability also requires us to address the cost of making and distributing food. That means greater productivity, predictable regulations, and dependable trade and investment in Canadian manufacturing alongside a competitive grocery sector.

FHCP is ready to help develop a practical framework that gives Canadians useful information and recognizes the roles of manufacturers and retailers.

Thank you.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to Sara Eve Levac for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sara Eve Levac (Lawyer, Option consommateurs): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our observations with you today. My name is Sara Eve Levac. I'm a lawyer and an analyst at Option consommateurs. Since its founding in 1983, Option consommateurs has been dedicated to helping consumers and advocating for their rights.

Through the course of our work, we've observed that Canadians are concerned about grocery prices. In 2026, the cost of groceries and food remains the budget item that concerns them the most. Since the cost of groceries weighs heavily on Canadians' wallets, we support the establishment of standards to improve food price transparency. Unfortunately, Bill C-226 merely proposes the development of a potential national framework for pricing display. The exact content and requirements of this framework will be determined at a later date.

Committee members, the cost of food is the spending item that concerns Canadians the most in 2026. However, it was also the top concern in 2024, 2023 and 2022. Now is the time to act. Given the need for swift action, we propose instead that clear consumer protection standards be included directly in the bill. Option consommateurs recommends the immediate strengthening of transparency standards that fall under federal regulations.

First, Canadian consumers care about where the food that they purchase comes from. Yet only certain food products must include a label indicating their origin. The labels “made in Canada” and “product of Canada” are optional. Furthermore, a product may be made in Canada but contain components or ingredients from other places.

A product's packaging may also feature a wide variety of labels highlighting its added value as a Canadian product. These labels include “prepared in Canada”, “developed in Canada”, or “proudly Canadian”. Consumers may mistakenly interpret these labels as indications of origin. As a result, knowing exactly where grocery store food products come from is a real headache. Option consommateurs proposes the mandatory labelling of food origin and the establishment of clear and standardized scales for determining origin. This would follow the example of Australian regulations, where a logo and a graduated scale help to quickly identify where products come from.

Option consommateurs also proposes the regulation of practices designed to conceal food price increases. These practices include shrinkflation and skimpflation. We've been making these recommendations for a long time. When consumers see the price on the label go up, they may turn to other cheaper options. However, when retailers try to cut costs—for example, by replacing expensive ingredients with cheaper ones or by reducing package sizes—consumers pay the same price for products whose quality or quantity has been reduced. In short, they get less for their money without realizing it. Yet shrinkflation and skimpflation can be regulated. In France, consumers are informed during a two-month period of a reduction in a product's quantity and an increase in its price per unit of measure. To help Canadians make informed choices about feeding their families, they should be notified of these changes through clear labelling.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to answering your questions.

● (1650)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before we proceed, I want to welcome two members who are substituting today. For MP Casey, we have MP Tesser Derksen, and for Mr. MacDonald, we have MP Hirtle.

Thank you so much for being here, and we welcome you.

Mr. Lemire is here.

Welcome.

We'll start with the Conservatives for six minutes. Go ahead, Mr. Barlow.

John Barlow: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being with us today and explaining some of your concerns or support for the private member's bill.

Mr. Graydon, I'll start with you. We had Retail Council of Canada in here earlier, and they raised some concerns with one portion of the proposal. It was in subparagraph 3(2)(a)(ii), and the wording of that says:

> The framework must include

Then it specifies:

> transparency regarding price increases, adjustments and fluctuations;

Now, that is a very broad statement. My concern would be, does this mean or is it asking retailers to then justify price increases all along the supply chain? Should the rail price increase, labour prices go up, input costs go up, your electricity bill go up, the industrial carbon tax go up, that will certainly increase or impact the cost of groceries on the grocery store shelf. If I read this requirement, it could be pretty broad if it is taken to the literal level.

Is this something you guys have taken a look at that would raise some concerns?

Michael Graydon: Yes, very much so. I would agree with Mr. Poirier in regard to his comments.

We have seen over the last couple of years the volatility in the input costs. To try to continue to keep up with that in regard to the levels of broadness that have been proposed would be very difficult to do. We see the fluctuation in fuel prices, sometimes on a weekly basis, and it transpires that this finds its way into some of the retail pricing you see.

John Barlow: I certainly understand some of the goals of this private member's bill, but we have Ms. Coates here, from Dan's Legacy Foundation, and other witnesses, and they're talking about income and the cost of living.

Is there anything in this private member's bill that would address the actual cost of food and make groceries more affordable for consumers, Mr. Graydon?

Michael Graydon: I don't see anything. The potential is that it could go up, if you start to talk about some of the potential labelling costs and some of the transparency and the communications.

On labelling alone, as was addressed previously, we had an $8-billion cost in front-of-pack labelling. What would be the implications of further labelling requirements? It would be another $8 billion. We have to be very conscious that those costs cannot be absorbed within existing margins, and they would transition into and actually increase the inflationary impact.

We have to find better mechanisms of communicating with the consumer, possibly in consideration of things such as digital labelling, so that we can have just-in-time information available, rather than this constant investment in packaging and the cost implications and the inflation that creates.

John Barlow: You made a statement in your presentation that really caught my attention. You said in your second suggestion that the labels are not added to the package itself. This has not been discussed.

You bring up front-of-pack labelling and the incredible additional costs it put on manufacturers, which were passed on to consumers. Is that a concern with this bill? Would it require the manufacturers to add that label to the package?

● (1655)

Michael Graydon: Because of the broadness, yes, that is a consideration.

We've heard some testimony today from others which would indicate that maybe this is a direction one should consider. We have to consider the cost implications. If affordability is a consideration, let's find other ways to communicate with the consumer rather than utilizing our packaging as the only mechanism for information.

John Barlow: Mr. Graydon, I have a final question for you.

If food affordability and lowering grocery costs is really the ultimate goal, which I think we would all want to see, what would be your suggestion or maybe just a couple...? What would be a better approach to this to actually reduce costs and reduce the price of groceries on the grocery store shelf?

Michael Graydon: I don't think you should use this bill for that mechanism. This bill is designed to try to create better transparency so that consumers can make informed choices and we get to unit pricing, and it's pretty simple to do that. There is such a complicated mechanism in regard to pricing. It's going to require a very complicated solution: tax policy, regulatory modernization, red tape reduction and better trade policy. All those components will contribute.

You can't put all your eggs in one basket in this particular bill. Utilize it for its intent. Create some more transparency on unit pricing and utilize other mechanisms to try to address the affordability issues here in Canada.

John Barlow: Yes, and I appreciate that. I think this is where there's some misguidance from the witnesses who have been asked to testify. This is being described as a private member's bill that's going to reduce grocery prices, and I think we've seen that it's simply not what this is going to achieve. If anything, it could actually go the other way.

I apologize. I said that was one last question, but I'm going to change my mind. You also said that the only way this is going to work is to have a harmonized standard across the country. We have heard from officials over and over again that this is provincial jurisdiction. Quebec is the only province that has done this, but the industry is doing this on its own.

In your opinion, is it possible to convince all the provinces and territories to work together to have one standard that even possibly would make this work?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Michael Graydon: It is possible. I've been in front of this committee before in talking about a grocery code of conduct. We pulled it off and made it happen.

With the right initiative and the right people working together, it can be accomplished, but it doesn't necessarily have to be through regulation. The fact that the retailers have taken a very proactive approach to this is an amazingly good sign, and we need to continue that momentum.

The Chair: Next we'll go to the Liberals for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Daniel Gobeil (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, Lib.): Thank you.

I would like to thank the three witnesses for their testimonies.

Ms. Levac, I would like to hear about your experience in Quebec. Option consommateurs has been working with consumers in that province since 1983. We know that Quebec has a requirement to display the unit price of a product. How does this benefit consumers in Quebec?

Sara Eve Levac: In Quebec, the Consumer Protection Act and its regulations have required the display of prices per unit of measurement for the past 25 years. When consumers go grocery shopping, they see the price per unit of measurement on the label. I know how much I'm paying for my orange juice per 100 millilitres. I can compare it with another brand of orange juice to see which one is cheaper.

Other standards were recently added through Bill 72—I believe that's the correct number. These standards state that products of the same type must be measured using the same unit of measurement. This means that products of the same type are no longer labelled in ounces and millilitres. I don't need to pull out my calculator. I can compare all similar products using the same unit of measurement in order to make informed choices about the most cost-effective option.

Daniel Gobeil: Good.

Someone from Statistics Canada told us earlier that food inflation was slightly lower in Quebec compared to the rest of Canada. Do you think that this affects consumer purchasing power?

Sara Eve Levac: This certainly helps consumers make better-informed choices. I'm not an economist, so I can't comment on inflation. However, by having this information at their fingertips, consumers can make better-informed choices. Consumers can spend less on groceries because they can choose the least expensive products, since they can compare all the products on the shelf.

● (1700)

Daniel Gobeil: Thank you very much.

Mr. Graydon, I have a question about strategies. You represent processors and distributors. There's a lot of interprovincial trade, so a lot of different containers can be found on the shelves. Do you think having a unit price could help consumers with their purchases whether for juice or for the various containers? Could that help them make an informed decision for products with the same quantity?

[*English*]

Michael Graydon: Absolutely. I see absolutely no concerns with it. We have the information. It would need to be changed radically, but it is very doable. I think the experiences in Quebec are transferable to other jurisdictions within the country.

[*Translation*]

Daniel Gobeil: You talked about a framework and said it would be important to harmonize certain containers for the benefit of consumers. Do you think it could be realistic for Canadian processors to have a framework that gives a better idea of the different containers?

[*English*]

Michael Graydon: Absolutely. Eighty per cent of the grocery retail in this country is controlled by four national brands, and they have the expertise and ability to do it.

From a manufacturing perspective, 80% of the products that you see in a grocery store are produced by 20% of the manufacturers. They do have the capability to coordinate and work together to find a solution, but we need one solution harmonized across Canada—not five, six, seven or eight different solutions—or else it will not work. The cost-effectiveness will evaporate.

[*Translation*]

Daniel Gobeil: Thank you very much.

There's a timeline for consultations on the bill. You think these elements could be added to these consultations, if I understand correctly.

[*English*]

Michael Graydon: I don't think the timelines laid out are prohibitive or challenging.

I would suggest that by the time government gets to the point at which they are ready to operate, the retailers will likely be further ahead and will have implemented...based on the momentum of these discussions and activities they're already undertaking. I can't speak for them, but I work with them very closely. They're very proactive. I would not be surprised if you see that proactive nature so that they can ensure, by doing it on their terms, that there is harmonization. Not having to deal with different provincial jurisdictions and taking the lead on that would be my judgment of them.

[*Translation*]

Daniel Gobeil: Thank you.

Ms. Coates, I wanted to congratulate you on your work and your remarks in support of the bill. Thank you for your dedication to your organization.

I know it's a bit off topic, but the government introduced the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. Does this type of initiative help with affordability in your populations and communities?

[*English*]

Barbara Coates: Thank you for your question.

On the Canadian grocery benefit, the best way I can answer is to describe the challenges that our youth clients have, such as in being able to navigate any system at all. They come to us for outreach and social work support as well, because they don't know where to go. They don't know how to fill out a form. They don't know how to access anything. They may not even have a bank account that they can use.

The Chair: Thank you so much. I have to stop you there. I apologize for interrupting you, but we've gone over the time.

We'll go to the Bloc Québécois for six minutes.

Mr. Lemire, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Levac, I want to begin by thanking you for your level of preparation and your work at Option consommateurs.

I would like to ask you this: Who is responsible for consumer protection?

Sara Eve Levac: Consumer protection is a shared responsibility. Consumer protection laws are provincial. We have the Consumer Protection Act in Quebec, but the federal government also has jurisdiction and areas of intervention that concern consumer protection.

There are also consumer protections that come from federal standards, such as in air transportation, the banking system, telecommunications, and food health and safety. Those are federal regulations.

● (1705)

Sébastien Lemire: Whose role is it to educate consumers?

Sara Eve Levac: Whose role is it to inform consumers? It depends on the organizations.

In Quebec, there is the Office de la protection du consommateur. At the federal level, there's the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, for example, or the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.

There is also the Office of Consumer Affairs, whose mission is to inform consumers and support consumer associations. However, we learned that the bureau will be abolished in 2027, and so consumer associations will lose that support. If I may, this program funds consumer associations' research. Option consommateurs has done research on undersizing and prices per unit of measure. It is thanks to this program, which will be abolished next year, that we can testify today and provide you with our expertise and perspectives on Bill C-226.

Sébastien Lemire: I'll jump in and denounce that: you are right, it makes no sense. That will be one of the consequences of this Liberal government's actions.

That said, we talked about duplication in some cases. Obviously, we can't give consumers too much information, but what would be the risks associated with a national framework on consumer rights in Quebec? Might some things slip because the federal government wants to get involved in provincial jurisdictions?

Sara Eve Levac: What we're saying is, if a federal framework on price transparency is adopted, it shouldn't lower the protection standards we already have in Quebec. We have very good consumer protections in Quebec. The important thing for a federal framework is to establish minimum measures that could be improved by the provinces and that won't go against the rules we already have in Quebec.

Some situations could have raised concerns in the past. In 2016, Bill C-29 provided for a review of the Bank Act so this act would take precedence over provincial legislation. It has been an issue in that regard. That's why we're saying it's possible to create a federal national framework, because food health and safety falls under federal regulations. However, we don't want to lower the protections in Quebec.

Sébastien Lemire: Are there any past cases where federal standards could have reduced consumers' rights?

Sara Eve Levac: As I was saying, there was Bill C-29 in 2016.

Sébastien Lemire: Okay, but I was asking if there were other examples in which there was a risk.

Act 72, which you talked about earlier, allowed for more price transparency on certain elements, conversion being one, obviously. Should this act be used as a model for the national framework? Are there elements of Act 72 that could be applied to this national framework?

Sara Eve Levac: Yes, certainly. The Quebec act provides for the harmonization of the price per unit of measure, which I mentioned earlier. It also provides that the unit price should be indicated when there are multiple discounts. Sometimes, at the grocery store, you could buy three items for $5, but if you wanted to buy just one, the price for just one wasn't indicated. Also, the list price must be indicated when there is a discount so consumers can compare prices.

These could certainly be good standards for consumers across Canada.

Sébastien Lemire: Would a national framework provide real solutions to shrinkflation and skimpflation, particularly in Quebec, but also in other provinces?

Above all, could this bill be amended in a way to make it more beneficial for consumers?

Sara Eve Levac: Absolutely. Skimpflation involves replacing some ingredients in a product with less expensive ingredients. However, the list of ingredients indicated on products follows federal regulations. This means the change could be indicated on the packaging to inform people of a new recipe. The same thing could be done to inform people of the shrinkflation of a product, for example.

When it comes to food regulations, some rules on product packaging could be improved to better inform consumers. When the size of a product is reduced, consumers pay more. Sometimes, manufacturers focus on a new size by saying, for example, that it's easier to handle because a hole has been dug in the bottle. Well, if we can change the packaging to inform consumers of the new size, we could also inform them that the recipe has changed or that the size has been reduced. That, too, can be done through federal regulations.

● (1710)

Sébastien Lemire: It can be done without costing $8 million, for example.

Sara Eve Levac: I don't know about the price. I know that, when the size of a product is reduced, packaging often focuses on the change in size without saying it's smaller.

In recent years, with the tariff war, a lot of packaging has been changed to include the Canadian maple leaf or added value, so it is possible to change packaging to inform consumers.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to do a final round of five minutes, five minutes and two and a half minutes. We have a bit of business at the end that we need to work through, including a budget and some other stuff.

I'll turn to the Conservatives for five minutes.

Mr. Bonk, go ahead.

Steven Bonk (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In 2015, Canada had the richest middle class in the world. We heard earlier in the first round some astonishing statistics that in Toronto, the financial capital of Canada, one in 10 people is relying on food banks to get by.

Mr. Graydon, you represent an organization that does the bulk of the manufacturing and value-adds in this country, and I know your members are feeling this too. They're feeling the rise in the costs of production.

How did we get here?

Michael Graydon: It is a very long road. We have had geopolitical environments that have created significant cost pressures on us, and I think that has probably driven a portion of it. As the cycle of inflation starts to move forward, wages start to go up to try to keep pace. This drives inflation. This is a very cyclical component.

When you look at climate change and the challenges in regard to some commodities, it has just been a perfect storm of issues that have had a significant inflationary impact on the products we manufacture and sell. There's maybe a bit of light at the end of the tunnel when we're starting to see some softening of the inflation, but we're not seeing deflation.

The fact that it's starting to marry up a bit to overall inflation probably has more to do with the continued inflation of gas prices. It's all across the value chain. Farmers are experiencing it in the costs of fertilizer and diesel on the farm. There are the costs of manufacturing, the costs of inputs and the costs at retail to distribute products. Everywhere we look, there are inflationary impacts on the inputs, and they've continued to have a very dramatic impact on cost.

Steven Bonk: I have the good fortune of representing what I would say is one of the nicest regions of this country, southeast Saskatchewan. It's an agricultural powerhouse. It's full of great people whose handshake is their bond. You can trust their word. They feed the world. They're the breadbasket of Canada and the world.

I have farmers in my riding who are paying their bills, because that's what they do. They sell their commodities and pay their bills, and they're having to go to the food bank. There's something really wrong when you think about fertilizer, gasoline, chemicals, farm machinery and electricity inputs, and then there's an industrial carbon tax on top of all of this.

Do you think this is adding to the cost of production? If the government wanted to make an immediate reduction in food prices, is that something they could look at?

Michael Graydon: There are a lot of things the government can look at.

One of the proposals that we signed on to and sent a letter to the Prime Minister about today was to look for a 50¢-per-litre rebate on diesel on an interim basis because of the impact from the farm gate. We signed that along with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the Retail Council of Canada. All the way along, those components have had some very significant impacts.

There is a significant magnitude in the things this government can do. The regulatory environment is way over-engineered, and it is adding significant cost. There is great momentum happening in regard to regulatory modernization and red tape reduction, but it's not happening fast enough. It's not happening at business speed. It's happening at government speed. Government needs to get to business speed, because that's the speed at which decisions are being made in regard to capital investment that will create more jobs in this country.

We're on the right track—we really are—but we're not moving at the pace and with the momentum that we really need to in order to make real effective change in the short term.

● (1715)

Steven Bonk: I'm curious about that answer.

Could you highlight some of the areas in which you think we could make noticeable change quickly?

Michael Graydon: One is tax policy. When you look at the accelerated depreciation, that had a very significant impact on capital investment in a very short period of time. I have a number of members who, in a nine-month period, have invested close to $4 billion in expansion because of those initiatives that were put in place. Our tax regime has to change.

Another is to change the regulatory component to make it less expensive to produce and put things on shelves so that we are in a position to reduce those sorts of costs.

A third area is to find mechanisms to reduce the cost of fuel. I know that the excise tax on diesel has been removed, but it's not enough to compensate for the significant implications that we're experiencing.

There are myriad things that could be done. Interprovincial trade is another issue in regard to opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm going to have to stop you there, sir.

Next, we'll go to the Liberals for five minutes.

Mr. Connors, go ahead.

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to go back to Ms. Coates.

First of all, I want to thank you for all the work that you do for the vulnerable people in our society.

You never got to answer the last question on the benefits of the Canada groceries and essentials benefit. I'm going to give you the opportunity to finish what you wanted to say.

Barbara Coates: Thank you very much.

As I was mentioning, the young people we serve are uniquely compromised. They have very little capacity to live independently. They need a significant amount of support, whether it's in accessing income assistance or any other form of support.

I'm thinking about the dental plan as well. Our team of social workers and outreach workers literally take them by the hand and help them go to the registration offices to fill out the forms and submit them.

Having these programs is an excellent idea. The question is how accessible they are. The kids we help don't have computers. They don't have Wi-Fi. There are so many barriers to accessing these wonderful programs. This needs to be a consideration. You may create something, but how many people can access it, especially the people who need it the most?

Did that answer your question?

Paul Connors: It certainly did.

It's great to see that they're benefiting from that program.

My next question is on what you said in your opening remarks about working with a lot of young people who are financially challenged. You talked about navigating systems. How important is it for them, particularly when they're living alone, going through your program and getting out on their own, to have access to clear and easily understandable pricing information when doing their shopping?

Barbara Coates: I think it would be very important to them. A lot of the young people we work with have an interrupted education. They may have, at best, a grade 8 education. They haven't completed high school, so mathematical skills, perhaps, are compromised as well.

If there were a clear indication on the items people were purchasing in a grocery store as to what they cost per unit, people would be able to see at a glance the value of one product over another. Something might look bigger but is actually.... Even if it's a dollar more expensive, they're getting more, let's say, of that particular product.

They're not able to calculate quickly and easily on their own. It could even cause anxiety and stress—being in the grocery store alone or around people. Therefore, the easier and the clearer you can make it for them, the better it will be for this stakeholder group.

Paul Connors: Could you use unit pricing as an educational tool to help these people advance?

Barbara Coates: Sometimes we've had workshops on things like budgeting and how to use their funds, because they've never been trained on that either. Absolutely, yes, workshops would be helpful.

● (1720)

Paul Connors: Do you think greater transparency in pricing and everything like that would help the people you work with—based on their income levels, financial literacy and so on—and who go through your system?

Barbara Coates: Yes, it would help a lot of them, especially if we showed them how it worked.

Paul Connors: I'm getting down to my last couple of questions.

Mr. Graydon, we've had a lot of talk. You mentioned a practical program. You talked about a harmonized program approval process. You talked about how all the provinces would have to be included. Do you see a transition that could happen, and would your organization be...? I think you would be supportive of it, but would you help move it along?

Michael Graydon: Yes, absolutely, I would. Although I can't speak for the Retail Council of Canada, I think they'd be very supportive as well, since they've already taken the initiative as retailers to move this forward.

It makes sense. This isn't something that's smacking up against bad logic. It's good logic to provide better information for consumers to make informed choices. That is the essence of our industry. Therefore, this is not a challenge. It is just a matter of making sure that we do it the same way across the country.

The Chair: Mr. Lemire, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Levac, food origin is important. As you said, we are seeing more and more food packaging indicating it was proudly produced in Canada or Quebec. However, we see that vegetables from Asia packaged in Canada are listed as a Canadian product. We even saw a Coke product showing that it had been proudly made in Quebec.

Does this framework answer that question, or is it something it lets go?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. We have to stop. The interpretation is not coming through.

We'll start from the beginning. You have two and a half minutes. It's up to you how you use it.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Levac, products are sometimes mislabelled as being from Canada or Quebec. Vegetables from Asia, for example, may carry a logo indicating that they come from here. Does the bill address this somewhat misleading practice by certain brands?

Sara Eve Levac: In our opinion, no. One of the recommendations in our brief is to add an amendment to paragraph 3(2)(a) regarding what the national framework should contain. In a third subparagraph, the origin of food could be added to ensure it is included.

Ideally, we recommend that specific standards be set out in the bill itself. The provenance of products is already federally regulated, so federal regulations could be amended to expand those obligations. Alternatively, we recommend adding it to the provision of the bill that sets out the content of the national framework.

Sébastien Lemire: A survey on consumer perceptions of food conducted by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada indicates that over 90% of people rely on labelling to assess products. Shouldn't it be mandatory to state whether a product is genetically modified, whether it's organic, or its actual origin? Wouldn't that be something worth including in the bill?

Sara Eve Levac: We certainly advocate greater transparency for consumers. Having all the information at hand to make informed choices is, in our view, a positive thing for consumers.

Our main recommendation concerns the issue of food origin labelling. It could be a simple, easily recognizable logo for consumers—as seen in Australia, where products feature a logo with a kangaroo. There's even a scale indicating the percentage of Australian ingredients in the product. The information is clear and easy for consumers to recognize. These are ideas from which Canada could draw inspiration to make information clearer.

Sébastien Lemire: Lastly, I'd like to hear your views on dynamic pricing. We often get the impression that gas prices rise just before the construction holiday, or on Fridays, when people tend to fill up to go to the cottage or elsewhere.

Might the same practice be applied in a supermarket? Could this bill change things? If a family does most of their shopping on Sundays, could they see prices rise due to dynamic pricing?

● (1725)

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Levac, you have 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Sara Eve Levac: It is indeed possible that dynamic pricing is used in supermarkets. We recommend, once again, that this be disclosed to consumers so they can make informed choices. Ultimately, I believe there is a need to analyze the use of dynamic pricing in supermarkets for staple goods, given the possibility that algorithms may set higher prices for consumers.

Sébastien Lemire: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank our witnesses.

This concludes our discussion, but I would like to ask members to now go through three things.

First, I'd like to ask members for their consent to adopt the budget on Bill C-226. Everyone should have a copy. It was distributed earlier. Are there any questions?

Do we have agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We all agree. That's great.

I will remind you that the deadline for the submission of any amendments in regard to Bill C-226 is noon, Monday, October 26. That's just a reminder to folks.

The last piece is around future business. At the next meeting, I suggest that we do one hour to consider the BRM report and one hour to focus on committee business. We don't have an agenda after that date, and I want to use that opportunity for us to set the course for the next six weeks, I would say, of the House sitting. Is that fine with folks?

Mr. Barlow, go ahead.

John Barlow: Yes, that's fine with us.

I know that we have a change in the parliamentary secretary, but I believe that we do have an agenda moving forward from the subcommittee meeting we held when we resumed this fall sitting. I believe that my Bloc colleague would agree that we would start the Alto study in November. We initially wanted to start that in October.

Due to concerns on the Liberal side that we weren't in a position to make that ready for October, we all agreed as a subcommittee—I don't want to put words in anybody's mouth—to start that in November. Next Tuesday is October 27, and I believe we can start that at the meeting on November 3, all in good faith with the agreement we had as a subcommittee.

The Chair: In order for us to agree on it, it has to be adopted by this committee. There has to be a motion put on the floor. We have to agree to it to formalize that process. It's my understanding that this has not happened. We know that the direction of the committee is based on the will of the committee, and that would be up to the committee to decide which direction to go in.

At this point, as far as I'm concerned, on paper, there's nothing there.

Go ahead, Mr. Barlow.

John Barlow: I had put a motion forward, Chair, and the debate on that motion was adjourned. I will put the motion forward again that we start the study on Alto on November 3.

The Chair: A motion is being put on the floor to....

Go ahead, Monsieur Lemire.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Chair, I think there is, in fact, a fair degree of consensus here. That's in keeping with the spirit of this committee's discussions over the past several months. I think that, for those following our work, this is increasingly a matter of trust in the Liberal government. We are, of course, talking about an issue that concerns transparency and touches on essential matters that are a major source of anxiety for people who may be affected by the Alto route. It's been months—

[*English*]

Tim Louis: I have a point of order.

Procedurally, what are we doing here?

I'm new to the committee, so I'm not sure, but my understanding is that the debate happened.

Do we vote to resume debate, or are we starting debate? Can you help me out procedurally?

The Chair: On the floor, a motion was made by Mr. Barlow to bring forward his motion. The last time it was brought forward, there was a motion to adjourn debate, I believe. He's brought it forward again, which he has the right to do.

We currently have a motion on the floor, and Mr. Lemire has the floor.

● (1730)

Tim Louis: On that point of order, I'm looking for clarity. Is this a motion to resume debate?

It sounds as though that's what it is. If it's dilatory, we shouldn't be debating it.

The Chair: He's bringing forward his motion, which resumes the debate that took place the last time.

Because this motion was dealt with before, we will have to vote to resume. The implication is that he moved a motion to resume debate, so we're going to have to vote on that. There's no debate, so we'll go straight to a vote on this.

The motion is to resume debate on the original motion Mr. Barlow put forward. It was distributed on June 16.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. Is this on a point of order? I don't want to open up debate. I want to go straight to the vote.

Daniel Gobeil: Is it possible to have the motion? I don't [*Inaudible—Editor*] to have a motion.

The Chair: You want to see the motion. I think that's fair.

We're going to pause. We'll get copies of that sent to you in one minute.

● (1730)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1735)

The Chair: Let's come back to order.

So that folks know what we're talking about, I'll note that you all have copies of the motion by Mr. Barlow from June 16. We're going right to a vote.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Can you inform the committee that one of the key elements put forward by the Liberal Party was that the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities also be able to undertake this study?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm not going to entertain debate on this.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: I am not debating, sir. It's just a question.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Sébastien. Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: Could you inform the members of the committee that the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is still engaging in systematic obstruction on this issue, which is the subject of negotiation, and that the committee is filibustering as we speak?

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. We'll go to the vote. We're going to follow proper procedure here.

The motion—

Dave Epp: Just read the motion.

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead.

Tim Louis: We don't have to read the motion.

The Chair: If he wants to, though, he can.

Mr. Barlow, go ahead.

John Barlow: Thank you, Chair.

I want to read my motion. Pursuant to the motion that was submitted earlier this year, I move: "That, pursuant to section 108(2) of the Standing Orders, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food undertake a study of the impacts of the proposed Alto High-Speed Rail project on Canadian farmland, agricultural businesses, and food security;

"That this study specifically examine:

"1. The permanent loss and fragmentation of prime agricultural land;

"2. Direct disruptions to active farm operations, focusing on severed farm access routes, compromised drainage systems, and safety considerations; and

"3. The overall adequacy of federal landowner consultations and compensation for multi-generational agricultural businesses;

"That the committee allocate a minimum of eight meetings to this study, and that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Minister of Transport, and representatives from Alto, agricultural stakeholders including the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, l'Union des producteurs agricoles, as well as impacted farmers, businesses and municipalities be invited to appear."

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1740)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to the vote now.

All those in favour? You want a recorded vote. Okay. Let's go ahead.

Paul Connors: I have a point of order.

The Chair: No. We're in the middle of a vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

[*Translation*]

Sébastien Lemire: I want all dairy producers affected by this motion to know that I'm voting in favour of it.

[*English*]

The Chair: With regard to future business, for the next meeting, I'd like to take one hour for the BRM report and one hour for committee business in camera to discuss the planning of the committee's future business. Is that fine with folks?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Can I have a motion to adjourn?

An hon. member: I so move.

The Chair: Thank you.

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