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

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Chair: Robert Morrissey





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

Thursday, March 26, 2026

• (0815)

[English]

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

[Translation]

I call this meeting to order.

[English]

Welcome to meeting number 30 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on Thursday, February 5, 2026, the committee is meeting for the first hour on Cúram Software and the processing of old age security. Pursuant to the order of reference of Friday, March 13, 2026, we will be meeting on Bill C-20 for the second hour.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. There will be those participating virtually and in the room.

Before we begin, I would like to review a few points, please.

For those in the room, make sure your devices are on silent. As well, for the benefit and health of our interpreters, please try to avoid tapping on the microphone boom.

You have the option of choosing to participate in the official language of your choice. Make sure you are on the proper channel in the room to participate in the language you choose. If you are appearing virtually, click on the globe icon at the bottom of your Surface and choose the language of your choice.

Direct all questions through me, the chair. Wait until I recognize you by name before you participate.

Beginning our first hour on the software for and the processing of old age security, we would like to welcome the Honourable Patty Hajdu.

Welcome back, Minister. You're a regular attendee.

We also welcome the Honourable Joël Lightbound, Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant.

We also have with us Paul Thompson, deputy minister, Department of Employment and Social Development, and Cliff Groen, associate deputy minister, and chief operating officer for Service Canada. From the Department of Public Works and Government

Services, we have Arianne Reza, deputy minister, and Joëlle Paquette, associate assistant deputy minister, procurement branch.

Ministers, you each have a five-minute opening statement.

Madam Hajdu, you have the floor.

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

Thank you, committee members, for having us here today.

I am pleased to be here to speak about the modernization of the benefits delivery program and specifically address program costs. As you know, many questions have been asked in the House. There have been briefings for MPs, but we wanted to have an opportunity to share with you how the new system is working and the timelines and accuracy of payments.

In order to understand where we are now, we have to go back 14 years. Independent oversight bodies, over the past 14 years, have raised serious concerns about the risks associated with aging IT systems. In 2010, the Auditor General warned that failing to modernize the old system placed the benefits of millions of Canadians at risk, including old age security, pensions and employment insurance. Quite frankly, that's an unacceptable risk to the many millions of people who rely on on-time delivery of benefits for their livelihoods.

The government chose to act in 2017. The benefits delivery modernization program is a responsible response to these long-standing warnings and is designed to safeguard benefit delivery and ensure systems are functional, reliable and fit for the future.

[Translation]

This committee's study of that report said, "it is essential that departments properly prepare for and manage the maintenance or upgrading of their aging IT systems."

• (0820)

[English]

When our government began this work in 2017, OAS benefits were still delivered on a 60-year-old legacy system that was practically the age of the clients being served. The systems delivering Canada's major benefit programs are outdated and increasingly difficult to maintain. Over the last 10 years, it has cost more than \$1 billion to keep them running, and with every passing year, maintenance becomes more expensive and more risky. This is simply not sustainable.

[Translation]

The benefits delivery modernization program is a massive undertaking of crucial importance. Any interruption could significantly affect recipients' ability to meet their daily needs, such as buying food—

[English]

**Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, but we have a point of order.

**Laila Goodridge:** We're not having interpretation come through, unfortunately.

**The Chair:** I will suspend for a moment while we check interpretation.

• (0820)

(Pause)

• (0820)

**The Chair:** I apologize, Minister. Continue.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you.

Doing the job correctly has required significant investment. At the same time, costs have remained stable and well managed.

Between 2017 and December 31, 2025, the government spent \$1.8 billion on this program. The recently completed old age security and benefits delivery modernization project was delivered as planned and under budget.

As with any project of this scale, estimates evolve as the work progresses. Our focus is on managing these costs carefully while continuing to deliver benefits to Canadians.

[Translation]

The program's long-term estimate of \$6.6 billion now covers the completion of four main projects by 2031—

[English]

**The Chair:** Minister, I'll have to suspend again, as we're not getting interpretation.

• (0820)

(Pause)

• (0825)

**The Chair:** I apologize. The technical issue has been corrected.

Madam Minister, you have a chance to conclude your opening comments.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Thank you.

[Translation]

The program's long-term estimate of \$6.6 billion now covers the completion of four main projects by 2031: the full transformation of benefits delivery for all of old age security, employment insurance, and the Canada pension plan, and modernizing all of Employment and Social Development Canada's 14 call centres.

[English]

The full scope of costs could not possibly have been known at the outset. Other jurisdictions that went through modernization programs, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, experienced higher costs than what was initially estimated at the outset—in some cases to the tune of 600% more.

This demonstrates the difficulty of modernizing legacy systems that are critical to the vulnerable people who rely on them. Of course, this point was reinforced in the 2023 Auditor General's report, which noted that early estimates were “well below” industry average and which recognized that estimates would be updated as the full scope of work became clearer.

Current estimates have been refined over time due to three main factors. One, we have a better understanding of the complexity of unravelling 60-year-old systems and the work required. Two, cybersecurity threats have significantly evolved since 2017, and we need to ensure that the solutions we're building today can address them. Three, the scope of the program has expanded. For example, in 2017, the migration of the 14 different call centres was not part of the original scope.

[Translation]

Regarding the new platform, Cúram is one of the most widely used systems for delivering social benefit programs globally.

[English]

The system we're implementing is designed specifically for complex benefits delivery and supports 970 social programs in 12 countries. Our procurement strategy is competitive and follows both Treasury Board and PSPC guidelines. Expertise in cybersecurity and data architecture is scarce, and no organization, public or private, can complete a program like this alone. It must be a partnership.

Every contract includes clear deliverables, financial caps and phased work. All contracts are competitively awarded and proactively disclosed in accordance with the rules in place.

[Translation]

We are fully transparent. We follow standard practices, and the BDM program is subject to rigorous oversight by central agencies and the Office of the Auditor General of Canada.

[English]

Finally, let me address the concerns that some people have noted about payment delays. I know that for seniors this is challenging, and it's not acceptable.

As of last month, the new system had issued 89.6 million payments to more than 7.7 million clients, with a value of \$84.7 billion in benefits. Some seniors who are applying for the first time to OAS have waited longer than they should, but these delays were not related to a system-wide issue. The new system is in fact reducing backlogs and new applications more efficiently than the legacy system. It's also improving our ability to prevent fraud and detect errors.

[Translation]

The new platform is working. This transformation has been undertaken in a responsible and transparent manner in a series of well-planned and prudent phases within the appropriated budget.

● (0830)

[English]

Thank you.

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

Minister Lightbound, you have five minutes.

**Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for having me for the first time here at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

[Translation]

I'm pleased to be here to talk about a subject that directly affects the lives of millions of Quebeckers and Canadians: the government's ability to reliably deliver the benefits our citizens depend on.

At the heart of this initiative lies a fundamental responsibility. Every month, seniors, workers and families depend on programs such as old age security, the Canada pension plan and employment insurance.

These programs deliver hundreds of billions of dollars every year. They are predicated on a clear expectation that the system works—and works flawlessly. However, the fact is that a large number of these programs still rely on systems designed over 50 years ago. These systems have been adapted, extended and stretched, but now they've hit their limits. The more complex they become, the more they cost to maintain and the greater the risk of errors and disruptions. As Minister Hajdu said, the Auditor General identified those risks back in 2010 and described them as monumental for Canadians who depend on these benefits.

In a world where Canadians expect fast and reliable digital services, maintaining the status quo is not a responsible option. That's why we're taking action. Public Services and Procurement Canada, together with the Treasury Board Secretariat and Shared Services Canada, is supporting Employment and Social Development Canada as it undergoes a major transformation: replacing aging systems with a modern, secure platform capable of evolving as needed.

Our approach is rigorous. The role of my department, Public Services and Procurement Canada, is clear: to conduct open, fair and transparent procurement processes and ensure strict contract management. In 2021, following a competitive bidding process, a \$120.5-million contract was awarded to IBM for the technological platform: the Cúram software. At the same time, four integrators were selected to maintain competition and avoid excessive reliance on a single supplier.

We're already starting to see results. Old age security has been running on the new platform since 2025, a major milestone that demonstrates the transformation is well under way. To be clear, however, this kind of modernization doesn't happen overnight. It is a complex undertaking that must be carried out gradually to avoid any disruption to benefits.

The other options—either rushing things or doing nothing—would have posed far too great a risk to Canadians. We had a choice to make: continue investing in increasingly fragile systems designed for a different era—as my colleague mentioned, old age security is a 60-year-old program—or make the necessary and responsible decisions to modernize public administration and service delivery. We chose to act with discipline, transparency and a clear goal: ensure that Canadians can count on their benefits now and for decades to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mrs. Falk, you have the floor.

[English]

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

I just want to note that, given the committee agreed to have both ministers here for two hours each and we are having them both for only one hour, and given the technical difficulties we've experienced, I expect the rounds you've been given will be respected and that members here will be able to engage in this meeting.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Falk. I was going to advise that I was prepared to adjust for the suspended time.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Perfect. Thank you very much, Chair.

**The Chair:** We'll begin the six-minute round with Ms. Roberts.

**Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to the ministers and the staff for joining us.

My first question is for Minister Hajdu.

Canadians are reporting significant delays and disruption in receiving their old age security and GIS benefits, and frontline staff are reportedly working long hours just to keep the system running. Can you tell us how many seniors have been affected so far, whether that number is expected to increase and how many employees are currently working overtime to fix these issues, along with the cost to taxpayers?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** As I've said in the House a number of times, well over 7.7 million seniors have now been migrated to the new system and are receiving their benefits on time and without any delay or any complication.

There are a number of new applicants, largely, who have submitted mainly by paper and have seen delays in receiving the commencement of their benefits. We have been working through that delay for those affected seniors, and we're seeing significant progress in reducing the number of people waiting.

● (0835)

**Anna Roberts:** The last number we received was that there were 69,000 cases still past due. Is that accurate?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** It's 63,000 now.

**Anna Roberts:** It's 63,000. Can you tell the seniors who are listening today how quickly they will be receiving their funds given the cost of living? One of the seniors brought to my attention that she had to go to her family to borrow some money because of this delay and was very embarrassed to do it, so she decided to go to the food bank. Can you explain to seniors why this system has not worked efficiently for them?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Actually, in many cases, for the people who are waiting on the waiting list, it's a case of missing information. I can't speak to that particular senior, but there are often cases, with paper applications in particular, where information is missing, information around time of residency in Canada, the number of years.... You need to have lived in Canada for 40 years to receive full OAS. If you've been absent for a period of time, the department has a responsibility to make sure it understands with evidence when you've lived in Canada. Sometimes those documents are difficult to get.

Each case is different, and of course I'm not implying that that's the case for this particular senior, but that's why we have the support line and the rapid access to support through ESDC for any urgent cases, because if someone is relying on OAS—not everybody does—they need to get that immediately.

**Anna Roberts:** I'm glad you brought that up, because with one of the delays—I'm sure a lot of seniors aren't comfortable with the modernization—she did call, and she ended up having to hang up after two and a half hours.

Let's go back one step. A lot of staff and employees of that department are concerned about their mental health because of the

overtime. How much more overtime is going to be required and at what cost to taxpayers?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I'm going to have to turn to our officials to speak about the administration of how the staff are applied.

**Cliff Groen (Associate Deputy Minister and Chief Operating Officer for Service Canada, Department of Employment and Social Development):** Someone waiting over an hour would be an extremely rare situation. Year to date, the average wait time for our pensions call centre is under 20 minutes. It does vary from week to week based on call volumes, but lately the average wait time has been between 25 and 35 minutes very consistently.

We are deploying our resources to make sure that we have the appropriate number of resources both answering calls and processing claims to make sure that people can get the pay as quickly as possible. That's why since the end of January.... It had been 85,000 clients who were beyond that first month of entitlement, and now we're down to 63,000, and we're going to continue to decrease.

**Anna Roberts:** I'm sorry to interrupt; I have very limited time.

The employees of that department are feeling stressed out because of the overtime required for them to work, which is interfering with their family life. How much more of a cost is that going to be, and how are we going to protect our employees so that their mental health is not impacted?

**Cliff Groen:** While we are maximizing the use of overtime and all employees who are supporting the delivery of OAS can work overtime, they are not required to do so. If someone chooses to only work their regular full-time hours, there is no obligation for them to work beyond the hours they're able to.

**Anna Roberts:** What do you anticipate the cost of overtime will be upon completion of this program? I'm assuming the \$6.6 billion does not incorporate the overtime that will be expected to be paid. What do we anticipate? How many more billions of dollars are we going to expect the taxpayers to pay because of overtime?

**Cliff Groen:** The \$6.6 billion reference is related to the total projected estimate for the benefits delivery modernization program and is for the overall project, as the minister highlighted, to deliver all those—

**Anna Roberts:** It won't exceed \$6.6 billion until 2030, which I believe is the completion date. We're going to stick to \$6.6 billion, and no more, until 2030.

**Cliff Groen:** Yes, the current estimate—and it is a rough, order-of-magnitude estimate—is up to \$6.6 billion for delivering old age security—

**Anna Roberts:** I'm sorry to interrupt, but that's an estimate.

If we continue to have these backlogs, we're going to continue to ask our team to help us out and correct these issues so seniors don't have to wait. How much more are we anticipating?

• (0840)

**Cliff Groen:** To deliver the old age security program, we came in 6% under the budget that had been forecasted. Therefore, we are confident that we will continue to remain under budget overall for the delivery. The delivery of benefits and the overtime—

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

[*Translation*]

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

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

I thank the minister and all the witnesses for being with us this morning.

[*English*]

My first question is for Minister Hajdu.

We've heard a lot of talk about seniors not receiving their OAS on time. We've heard that it's oftentimes as a result of information that is not readily available or because there are errors.

I want to give you the opportunity to inform us here and all Canadians listening this morning of how the department is supporting seniors to complete applications accurately and resolve errors quickly during this transition period.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The first thing I'll point out is that there are far fewer errors when people apply online, so we've been concurrently working to encourage new applicants to apply online. That way they're automatically entered into the system, their data is clean, for lack of a better word, and they have all the information necessary for the claim to immediately be processed automatically. However, as I said, it is largely with paper applications that each applicant who's missing information or has information gaps in, for example, residency or other information can receive support through ESDC to ensure they can provide that information as quickly as possible.

This presents a delay for individuals in some cases because the information they're looking for is difficult to access. Some of the descriptions I've heard from the department are that someone wants to demonstrate a period of residency in Canada, but they don't have any mail, they don't have any documents or they don't have anything to demonstrate that they resided in Canada for the missing period or gap. The department staff will work with that individual to determine what other alternative documents could be sufficient to demonstrate that gap.

Don't forget that if you start your OAS and have missing periods of time that you can't prove, it's going to reduce and drive down your monthly benefit forever. The department wants to make sure that OAS recipients can get their full allotment and their full entitlement based on their circumstance. That is a large portion of the cases that are on the waiting list.

**Annie Koutrakis:** I also want to speak a bit about the performance of the new system. I'm wondering if you can speak to the re-

sults testing to date, what that indicates and how the system is performing.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** The biggest result I would point to is that the migration of the legacy clients, for lack of a better word, was so successful that we saw 99% accuracy in the migration. That's quite extraordinary. We had a very smooth transition.

People who were already receiving their benefits did not see a delay. They have not seen any overpayments. They have not seen any underpayments. They have seen the stable delivery of their benefits as if nothing had changed in their lives, which is exactly what you want to see when you do a big transfer of data like that.

Obviously, as I said, new applicants are where we're seeing some of those challenges, and again, it's related to very specific situations.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you.

How much time do I have?

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** You have two and a half minutes.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister Lightbound, this morning we've heard things about the cost of the system. I'd like to give you an opportunity to clarify this for us. What is the total projected cost for the contract for the system at this point in time? What are the primary deliverables?

**Hon. Joël Lightbound:** Thank you very much, Ms. Koutrakis.

As Mr. Groen said, the cost for old age security, the topic of today's meeting, is 6% less than the estimated budget. It's \$633 million to serve 7.7 million Canadians, as Minister Hajdu said. The transition was largely seamless. Yes, some payments were delayed, as Minister Hajdu said. We're working on that and we've cleared a significant number of cases.

Here's a more specific example. In Quebec, over 1.8 million Quebecers receive old age security. At this point in time, the latest data I have indicate that fewer than 10,000 Quebecers are still having problems, which are being resolved. That number is dropping week by week, month by month. The system is working, for the most part. It absolutely had to be implemented in a secure and stable manner, and that's what we're seeing.

• (0845)

**Annie Koutrakis:** What reporting mechanisms are in place to ensure transparency for the public?

**Hon. Joël Lightbound:** There are several. Of course, for a program of this magnitude, Treasury Board oversight is critical at every step of the process. In this case, my department also helped ensure that all procurement was done competitively. I would ask Ms. Paquette or Ms. Reza to speak to that in more detail.

For the Cúram software alone, that was a \$120-million contract with IBM. To implement the system, we have four suppliers so we're not depending on a single supplier. In each case, the procurement process was competitive.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

**Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister Lightbound, ordinary people are now paying the price for Cúram screw-ups. More than 85,000 people have been affected. These are seniors who haven't received their benefits in months. They don't know what's going on, and they can't meet their basic needs.

On the other hand, during technical briefings, we were told that the cost overrun was acceptable even though it ballooned from \$1.75 billion to more than \$6 billion.

What do you have to say to the people who are being directly impacted by the system? Do you acknowledge that there were serious problems with the Cúram roll-out?

**Hon. Joël Lightbound:** I might let Minister Hajdu comment on the system as such later. I think she might have things to add.

What I can tell you is that the Government of Canada considered the cost of not taking action to be unacceptable. In 2010, the Auditor General said that our systems were so old they were jeopardizing thousands of Canadians and Quebecers who depend on their benefits. The responsible thing to do was modernize the system, which was vulnerable to cyber-attacks and in danger of total collapse. There was no choice but to take action.

Regarding the seniors who have been affected, the system as such is working. Applications submitted on paper take somewhat longer to process. I'll let Minister Hajdu speak to that. You referred to 85,000 people, but we're at 63,000. According to the latest information I've seen, it's about 9,000 seniors in Quebec, whereas 1.8 million seniors are getting their benefits accurately and on time. The archaic and outdated 60-year-old system put those people at risk. Sixty years is 22 years older than your humble servant. It would have been irresponsible to keep that system in place.

As to the cost, it was clear from the start that the 2017 estimates were the start-up costs. We had to assess cybersecurity and data entry needs, among other things. It was clear that it would be more than \$1.7 billion. If we compare what we're getting for \$6.6 billion to what other countries are doing, that's good value for money. That's very clear.

**Andréanne Larouche:** I have more questions. Ms. Hajdu, would you like 30 seconds to add to that? Mr. Lightbound wanted you to speak to part of that.

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I will give you a couple of case studies of what happens if you fail to modernize cases.

For example, the Royal Bank of Scotland and NatWest customers were unable to access their money for weeks. What happened was a routine software update, but the system was a huge 30-

year-old complex network, and the result was that 6.5 million customers were affected, 100 million payments were backlogged within days and people were unable to pay for their day-to-day lives and life-saving medical treatment or complete home purchases. The bank was fined 56 million pounds by regulators for failing to manage its poor legacy of IT resilience.

There was a similar study in New Jersey with their unemployment insurance system. A 40-year-old mainframe using COBOL, which was a programming language from the 1960s, crashed due to the onset of applications during COVID.

When we speak to the cost of doing nothing, I wanted to give you some examples of what it looks like to do nothing on a 60-year-old system and the risks it poses to individuals.

• (0850)

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** I'll stop you there, Ms. Hajdu. I'll see who wants to answer, but I have more questions.

According to the government officials who participated in the technical briefing, the \$1.7-billion estimate wasn't reliable, and the government knew there would be cost overruns.

Who approved the launch of this project based on an unreliable estimate? Is it the norm in your department to approve budgets based on unreliable assessments?

Who approved increasing funding for this program to \$6.6 billion? When was the funding approved?

Is the estimate reliable, or should we expect more surprises?

Lastly, who is monitoring expenditures? Who is approving cost overruns for contracts with private firms involved in the project?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I would say—and the Auditor General has noted this repeatedly—is that this program of transformation was largely unknown in terms of costs, although there were some international comparators. We're well in line, by the way, with international modernization programs.

The estimate grew as the complexity was unveiled—as essentially we got under the hood and understood exactly what would happen when we started to try to modernize a system. Many of these systems have bolted-on parts and a different kind of coding, and they are very complex systems. The original estimate grew as the complexity of the transformation was discovered.

The Auditor General said in her 2023 report that she thought we had underestimated it and that it wasn't surprising that it was going to cost more. In fact, she said that it was essential that we move forward with the modernization and had been calling for modernization since 2010 for the very risks that I outlined in terms of a collapsing system.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Within two weeks, please provide us with a list of contracts awarded as part of this program, including a detailed description of the requirements of each contract, the initial cost estimate for each contract, the actual cost of each contract, an indication of whether the contract is still in progress or complete and list of the contracts for each firm indicating the total cost for this program. I would like the ministers to provide these documents within two weeks.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

That will be provided in writing to the committee.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

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

**Eric Lefebvre (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, ministers and everyone here this morning.

First of all, let's keep in mind that this program affects our seniors.

Minister, during question period in the House, I told you about a citizen in my riding, Martial Lavoie, who called Service Canada almost every day. He got a recorded message telling him that, because of a problem with the system, information about the old age security payment wasn't available. The day before a journalist came to visit, the wait time had been one hour and 12 minutes.

My question is this: Do you have a dashboard of wait times for calls, and can you provide that information to me?

**Cliff Groen:** Yes, certainly. We look very closely at all the data from our call centres. We have that information.

**Eric Lefebvre:** Thank you for providing me with that information.

Minister, apparently 63,000 seniors are still waiting. Do you have a daily dashboard that shows whether the number of seniors waiting is increasing or decreasing? How are you keeping track of that?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** Yes, I get weekly updates.

I will turn to Cliff to talk about the details and how they're monitoring the number.

[*Translation*]

**Cliff Groen:** In other regions, we analyze service delivery results every day. That's why we're so confident that we'll continue to reduce the number of seniors waiting for their payments.

**Eric Lefebvre:** Thank you.

Minister, I would also like the committee to receive a copy of your weekly dashboards so we can stay up to date on this issue.

I received a letter from one of the officials who works with the Cúram system. He says it's virtually unusable, emphasis on “unusable”. How would you respond to your employee, who says that the system you're putting in place is unusable?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I can't speak to that person's experience. I've never spoken with that person. I'm always happy to speak with people if they want to tell me their story of how a system is unusable.

The data doesn't necessarily demonstrate that that's true. If 7.7 million Canadians are receiving their benefits on time and without delay, if the numbers are going down in terms of the delays and if we know that the majority of the delays are related to paper—

● (0855)

[*Translation*]

**Eric Lefebvre:** I'm sorry to cut you off, but I have very little time. I only get five minutes.

You're talking about seniors who are receiving their benefits, but I'm talking about those who aren't. There are 85,000 seniors who have not been receiving their benefits for eight or nine months, and you're talking about the ones who have been receiving benefits.

Out of respect for the seniors who are paying attention to our work, what do you have to say to those who have been waiting for months and who have had to pay bills in the meantime? They have to pay rent, buy groceries and pay the power bill. They can't just put grocery shopping on hold. What do you have to say to seniors who are waiting?

[*English*]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** What I would say to any senior who is in deep financial stress as a result of their OAS benefits beginning is to reach out to Service Canada immediately. We have special teams that can help on those urgent cases, and we can get a resolution within 24 to 48 hours.

There's no reason for a senior to suffer in silence. Please reach out to Service Canada. Certainly forward me the names of individuals, if you have them in your constituencies. There is a number for Service Canada to specifically deal with people who need urgent care with beginning their OAS benefits.

[Translation]

**Eric Lefebvre:** As I told you, some of your employees have written to tell me that it's not working.

I have a question for you. Would you go with me to meet the employees who are currently using the Cúram system and ask them questions so we can see what's not working? Would you accept my invitation to go with me to meet those workers?

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I will take it under advisement.

[Translation]

**Eric Lefebvre:** Why would you want to think it over? Don't you want to work with me? Can't you see that it's a complete disaster right now, a fiasco? People are working with this system on a daily basis, whereas you and I aren't. People are working with it, and they're having problems.

I'd like you to show some leadership. I'm inviting you to meet with employees and understand how the system works.

[English]

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I regularly meet with employees of Service Canada and ESDC. I'm always happy to meet with people on the front line. What I won't do is turn it into a partisan circus.

I will do that in my responsibilities as a minister and with the department.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Joseph, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask my colleagues to address the ministers with more respect.

Mr. Chair, I wanted to congratulate you for starting the meeting in French. I'm from Quebec, and in Quebec, the presence of French is non-negotiable, so thank you.

Minister Lightbound, I was in my riding last week. I was touring private seniors' residences. I met with all the seniors. They told me about challenges related to their tax slips. They didn't have any tax slips, but I ordered some and gave them to them.

It's clear that the Bloc members are not listening. Neither is our colleague Mr. Lefebvre, since he's talking about 85,000 seniors. However, it's no longer 85,000 seniors; it's 63,000 seniors, so let us stop extrapolating. Let us also stop playing petty politics, because we're here to solve problems that affect Quebecers and Canadians. At some point, we have to be serious.

Why is it important to modernize this decades-old system? What does that mean for long-term services for Quebecers and Canadians?

**Hon. Joël Lightbound:** Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Joseph.

We are very sensitive to the situation of seniors who are having difficulty getting their benefits. As a result, given the 63,000 cases in the backlog for processing old age security applications, Employment and Social Development Canada has deployed significant resources to ensure that every senior receives service very quickly, depending on the circumstances and when the situation requires it, and to ensure that the backlog is reduced. In fact, we have gone from 85,000 unprocessed applications to 63,000. We won't stop until we get to zero. Progress is constant, and I commend the work of my colleague and her team.

What we don't talk about enough is the risk that was posed by the old system. When I have heard certain questions about that, I have been a bit perplexed. In 2010, the Auditor General said that if we didn't modernize our systems, we'd be headed straight for a wall, and we'd be jeopardizing the benefits of millions of Quebecers and Canadians. I think that's a risk we couldn't take if we wanted to act responsibly for the Canadians we serve, and it was entirely appropriate to do what we did. It took a while. We came to power in 2015, and it's now 2026. However, I think measures should have been taken in 2010. It would have been completely irresponsible not to modernize the benefit delivery system. On that note, knowing that 7.7 million Canadians are receiving their correct benefit amounts on time thanks to a system that is no longer at risk, that no longer has any vulnerabilities and that will ultimately save money, I think it was the fair and responsible thing to do.

● (0900)

**Natilien Joseph:** I appreciate that. We're talking about old age security benefits and seniors. We know that seniors are really vulnerable, especially when it comes to fraud.

What would have been the consequences if we hadn't modernized these systems?

**Hon. Joël Lightbound:** There was a very real risk of a service disruption in the payment of benefits. The old age security system in question was 60 years old. The pensions system is 50 years old, and the employment insurance system is more than 20 years old. These are systems that are no longer up to date. We all know how quickly technology evolves. Cybersecurity risks are also evolving. Dependence on systems that require a huge volume of manual data entry was no longer the healthy way to manage this type of program, which pays out hundreds of billions of dollars in benefits every year. I think that, overall, taxpayers got their money's worth when it came to the transition from the old age security pension system that was 60 years old to a working system for \$633 million. In fact, in relation to other countries, the cost is certainly comparable.

**Natilien Joseph:** Around the table, especially on the Bloc side, we have to be aware that we're no longer talking about 85,000 pending applications but about 63,000.

Are those 63,000 cases solely from Quebeckers, or are they from Canadians across the country?

**Hon. Joël Lightbound:** They're Canadians across the country. In Quebec, according to the data I have as at the end of February, there are 9,222 cases left to process.

**Natilien Joseph:** Okay, there are 9,222 left.

Thank you very much.

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

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lightbound, quickly, beyond the initial cost overruns, there's a fundamental question that remains unanswered: How much does it actually cost to operate the system today?

During the technical briefing, officials were unable to provide us with the operating costs, the cost per transaction and the costs related to licences and maintaining the system. That's concerning, because we're talking about a public system that manages essential benefits for millions of Canadians. Without that data, it's impossible for Parliament to exercise its role of true oversight over the use of public funds.

Do you know what the current annual cost of the Cúram program is, and what the projected cost is?

**Hon. Joël Lightbound:** I will let Mr. Groen answer your question.

Right now, we're talking about \$633 million to implement the Cúram system for the old age security pension.

**Cliff Groen:** During the technical briefing we gave to MPs and the media, there was a question about the costs of continuing to operate the program after 2031. I answered that we didn't have the specific costs of the specific licences. We don't have any contracts yet, because that's in five or six years from now.

However, I can confirm that the costs associated with rolling out the program will certainly be lower than the current costs thanks to the automation and modern capabilities of this system. Obviously, the costs associated with rolling out the program will go down because of the modernization of the system.

**Andréanne Larouche:** To ensure that we have all the information, including the cost per transaction, the existence of any licences associated with the system, and the detailed and broken down operating costs, including the annual training cost, software licences, cloud hosting and maintenance costs, I move the following motion:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities request that the Department of Employment and Families, the Department of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement, the Privy Council Office, as well as the Prime Minister's Office, provide to the clerk of the committee, within 30 days of the adoption of this motion, all reports, correspondence, emails and documents related to the management of the Benefits Delivery Modernization since January 1, 2017, and that the departments and offices responsible for producing the documents

apply redactions in accordance with the legal obligations set out in the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act.

I hope that there will be a written response to this motion within the next two weeks, that is, April 10 at 11 a.m.

● (0905)

[*English*]

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

I have to suspend to consider the motion by Madame Larouche, because we do not have it in writing. The clerk does not have it.

We'll suspend for a couple of moments.

● (0905)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (0905)

**The Chair:** Committee members, the meeting is back in session.

I'm at the hands of the committee. There was a motion moved verbally, but the interpreters were not able to accurately deal with it.

Yes, Ms. Koutrakis.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Mr. Chair, given that we haven't seen the text, that it was rather quickly read into the record and that I'm pretty certain the interpreters did not have the opportunity to complete their translation as required, I would ask to adjourn debate on this motion.

**The Chair:** Okay, we have a motion to adjourn debate on the motion.

You're voting to adjourn the debate on the motion by Madame Larouche.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 0)

**The Chair:** We'll now return to the speaking order.

Thank you, Madame Larouche.

We'll go to Madame Goodridge for five minutes.

● (0910)

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

It's important to lay the groundwork here. We have 63,000 seniors stuck in a backlog and waiting a very long time to get money they've paid into. That's the equivalent of a community the size of Medicine Hat or North Bay. That's not an insignificant number of people, yet the minister celebrates this program as a success. To those 63,000 people waiting to get the money they've paid into their entire lives, I'd say that it's not a success.

Have you guys done any analysis as to how many files have received overpayment under this new system?

**Cliff Groen:** Yes. We do a regular payment accuracy review for all our major programs.

We have a target of 95% payment accuracy for the EI, OAS and CPP programs. The year-to-date result for OAS is 97.5% payment accuracy. Those results are reviewed by the Auditor General.

**Laila Goodridge:** I appreciate that.

We've heard about how many cases are in backlog in Quebec. How many cases are in backlog across all the provinces? Could you table that with the committee? It's absolutely incumbent on us to understand whether this is a regional issue impacting Quebec at a higher rate or an issue impacting any particular region at a higher rate. Frankly, as a committee, we need to understand this a lot better. Can you commit to tabling that by province?

**Cliff Groen:** Certainly. We have that information.

I would highlight that Quebec represents about 25% of our total OAS clients, but within the backlog of 63,000, it's about 13%. Quebec is under-represented.

We have the breakdown by region. We can certainly table that.

**Laila Goodridge:** I'm a rural member of Parliament. I have lots of people in my riding who have very limited, if any, access to the Internet. I'm assuming that there is probably a much larger rural-urban divide on this. What is the breakdown on urban versus rural for this backlog?

**Cliff Groen:** I didn't see if we had that type of information. I have not seen that specific information. However, we do have lots of ways that clients can apply for the program, including in our over 300 offices across the country, which are within 50 kilometres of over 95% of Canadians.

**Laila Goodridge:** In my riding, that's not really the case. If you're in Fort Chipewyan, you have to get on a prop plane to get to Fort McMurray if you want to apply in person at Service Canada. If you're in Cold Lake, even though it's a military base and even though this is a massive Government of Canada employer, you have to drive to St. Paul, which is an hour and a half away, to get service. There are lots of places in rural Canada that are very under-served by Service Canada, and those are the communities that have the least access to the Internet.

You guys should reconsider having a full-time Service Canada office in Cold Lake because of the F-35 project. I'm giving that plug as a local member of Parliament. Please reconsider this.

There is another piece on this. Have you done an analysis on how many people in the backlog are first nations and living on reserves?

**Cliff Groen:** We do not collect Indian status related to OAS applications. It's not part of eligibility, so that is not information we presently have.

**Laila Goodridge:** If they live on reserve, you probably have those postal codes. You should be able to pull those out to see if there is an overrepresentation of people from a variety of backgrounds and to see what the space is and where the problem is.

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I appreciate that question as the former minister of Indigenous Services.

Although we will try to get the data for you that we're able to get, I can tell you that, in general, what I have seen over my time is that indigenous and first nations people often are not receiving the benefits to which they're entitled—for example the Canada child benefit. If you don't claim taxes, if you don't file your tax return, you won't get the benefits you're entitled to. In the past, I know ESDC has partnered with Indigenous Services Canada to have clinics on first nations to make sure that people understand what their rights are and how to access those benefits.

In my own riding, it's always an exciting day when we're able to help a constituent with something. In one case, it was \$40,000 in back pay on the Canada child benefit. It changes lives.

● (0915)

**Laila Goodridge:** I appreciate that.

You guys mentioned that many people are stuck in this backlog because you're waiting for more information because they might have lived elsewhere. I know that Monsieur Martial Lavoie, whom my colleague Monsieur Lefebvre helped, is a Quebecker who has lived in Quebec his entire life, so that's not the case for him. Other people I've talked to, and whom my office has helped deal with these issues, were Albertans who had lived in Alberta their entire lives.

How many people in the backlog are you waiting on information for, and how many people in the backlog are stuck because you guys didn't staff up adequately when you did the transfer?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** There are a lot of assumptions in that question. Missing information and missing documentation are by and large the reason that people's benefit commencement is delayed.

In the case of this individual, it's hard to talk about his case without... I'm not even sure it's respectful to talk about his case in a committee like this, but if the individual is still having a hard time getting his benefits, he should connect with Service Canada, for sure. We can help him immediately.

**Laila Goodridge:** He did actually go to Service Canada. His member of Parliament got him help, and it was fixed quickly, but the problem is that he had to go to his member of Parliament to get help. That's part of the problem. People shouldn't have to go to their members of Parliament to get something they've paid into their entire lives.

**The Chair:** Madame Goodridge, thank you.

I appreciate it, as a member of Parliament, when they come to me looking for help, and I'm glad when we can do it.

We'll conclude with Madame Church.

[*Translation*]

You have five minutes.

[*English*]

**Leslie Church (Toronto—St. Paul's, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Following up on some of the questions of my colleagues from across the table, I would note—maybe the clerk has this—that a regional breakdown was provided on March 12 to the committee. Perhaps that could be recirculated to members so they have that breakdown.

Ministers, thank you for appearing today.

I wanted to follow up on a question and give you a chance to expand on it. We have heard from you about the dangers of the old system, a 60-year-old system that was far past its prime. We heard the warnings from the Auditor General about continuing with that system. What are the benefits of the new system to Canadians, and what accessibility does it offer?

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** From my perspective, the benefit is the reliability of the system. I gave you some really high-profile international examples of what happens when legacy systems aren't updated. In fact, that was the warning that the Auditor General gave the Harper Conservatives in 2010. Nothing was done. I'm glad they care about seniors now, but at that time, clearly there was less care about the regular stability of income payments to seniors. In 2017, the Liberal government at the time decided that we would do something about it, and we began this very difficult process.

Our experience is quite similar to other international experiences, by the way. It's hard to estimate how much it will cost to do this because of the different ways that systems have been shaped and transformed. Don't forget that in OAS's case, it was a 60-year-old system.

The benefit for me is that Canadians who are receiving benefits don't have to think about whether there's going to be a disruption. They don't have to panic when something happens, as in the case of New Jersey, where all of a sudden people weren't getting the benefits they needed in order to pay their rent or buy their food. That's not going to happen with a modernized system.

A modernized system will also reduce the amount of time it takes to process systems, because it's digital. Before, on the old system, everything was hand-entered. There were lots of opportunities for errors. People can type and misplace one letter. It can change a person's name, which can deeply impact their ability to cash their cheque.

These are, overall, the kinds of things that Canadians expect. They expect to be able to trust the systems that are there to serve them.

**Leslie Church:** Minister, in your opening statement, you mentioned that it is normal and expected that estimates of projects of

this magnitude “evolve as the work progresses”. Can you speak to the factors that influenced the evolution of those estimates? Maybe Mr. Groen can as well.

• (0920)

**Hon. Patty Hajdu:** I had the department draw some international comparatives from the U.K., Australia and the United States. Oftentimes they began with estimates that were much lower than the final price tag. They had very similar reasons, because the systems were very old. They were, in some cases, not on any kind of programming that people even had knowledge of anymore and knew how to unpack and figure out how to change.

We took a very conservative approach at the beginning. In fact, the Auditor General noted that. She thought we had underestimated things. She also said that this was reasonable, because we didn't really know what we were getting into. As we unpacked the legacy systems and understood what it was going to take to transform these systems, the estimate approvals went up based on a regular flow of information among ESDC, Procurement and other partners.

Do you want to add to that?

**Cliff Groen:** There are three main reasons for the evolution of costs.

One is cybersecurity. The cybersecurity reality of 2017 was not the same as it is in 2026. These are crown jewels of the Government of Canada. We pay out billions and billions of dollars. We are constantly under cyber-attack. We've had to up our game related to protections for cybersecurity, to reflect the reality of 2026.

Second, the system is 60 years old. Coding for many pieces of the system was done in the 1960s and 1970s. When you open the hood, you find things that you had no idea about, because they weren't documented properly back in 1971. As you're looking at them, that's fully expected, and that was part of the original plan.

The third element is that the scope has changed. Right now, part of the scope of BDM is the migration of 14 different contact centres that answer more than millions of calls every year. That is now part of this program, which it was not, back in 2017.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you, Minister.

[*English*]

Thank you, Ministers and officials, for being in this morning.

This concludes the first round.

We'll suspend for a couple of moments while we transition to the second hour.

• (0920)

(Pause)

• (0925)

**The Chair:** Welcome back, committee members. It's the second hour of the committee meeting.

Everybody is the same, so I will not go through the technical items, except to say that you have the option of participating in the official language of your choice. Please familiarize yourself with the earpiece and ensure you're on the right channel to participate in the language you wish.

With that, I would like to welcome the Honourable Gregor Robertson, Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, from the Department of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities. We also have Paul Halucha, deputy minister, and Lindsay Boldt, director general, Build Canada Homes transition office.

Before we begin with the minister, I believe I have a motion from Ms. Falk.

● (0930)

**Rosemarie Falk:** Yes. Thank you, Chair.

I move:

That, regarding the committee's consideration of Bill C-20, An Act respecting the establishment of Build Canada Homes:

a) Following the appearance of the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure on March 26, 2026, the committee hold three additional meetings on April 16, April 20 and April 23, 2026, before proceeding to clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill;

b) Parties be invited to submit witness lists to the clerk of the committee by Tuesday, April 7, 2026, at 12 p.m. ET.

I believe you will have unanimous consent for this, so we shouldn't even need to go to a vote.

**The Chair:** You've heard the motion. I see a thumbs-up from everybody.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Before I go to the minister, I would like to welcome you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

[English]

Mr. Minister, you have up to five minutes for your opening statement.

**Hon. Gregor Robertson (Minister of Housing and Infrastructure):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

It's good to be back with you to talk about the Build Canada Homes act. With the invitation to appear today, I'm welcoming the opportunity to speak to Bill C-20. I'm pleased to be joined by our deputy minister, Paul Halucha, and Lindsay Boldt of the Build Canada Homes transition team.

This new Crown corporation would be a key tool in our tool box to tackle the affordable housing crisis and deliver on the government's plan to build more homes faster for Canadians who need it the most.

[Translation]

With the creation of Build Canada Homes as a permanent builder of affordable housing, the bill introduced today marks the next step in addressing Canada's housing crisis.

[English]

The work already under way at Build Canada Homes is helping to initiate a new phase of transformative growth in Canada's homebuilding sector. The legislation being discussed today will provide BCH—Build Canada Homes—with the flexibility and authority to continue the work to build more affordable housing for Canadians and to spur a more innovative and productive homebuilding industry.

[Translation]

By empowering Build Canada Homes to build affordable housing, our government is taking concrete action against the housing crisis while preparing for the future.

[English]

To restore affordability, we need to drastically increase our housing supply of all types, from supportive housing that gets people off the streets and out of encampments to missing middle-income housing that can meet the needs of young Canadians and growing families.

While the housing crisis has been several decades in the making, with a chronic underfunding of non-market and affordable housing and of purpose-built rentals and with a lack of scaled innovation from the industry, housing continues to be one of the primary concerns when it comes to affordability.

Federal efforts have been spread across multiple departments, agencies and programs on affordable housing. While we've seen some positive results through programs like the housing accelerator fund, the affordable housing fund and the apartment construction loan program, this program-by-program approach has not fully maximized the impact.

This legislation fully grants Build Canada Homes—as a lean, purpose-built organization—the ability to provide partners with a flexible mix of financial tools, including grants, low-interest loans, loan guarantees and equity investments. It will also give Build Canada Homes the ability to acquire and develop property and build housing on public land. This new approach will allow us to accelerate construction timelines, improve productivity in the industry and support a more innovative homebuilding sector.

With the initial investment of \$13 billion, Build Canada Homes is a key part of the federal government's commitment to accelerate housing construction, restore housing affordability and reduce homelessness. Build Canada Homes will have the operational independence that it needs to get shovels in the ground and to crowd in private capital while remaining accountable to Parliament.

As a Crown corporation, it will have the oversight, powers and functions it needs to deliver on its mandate as an affordable housing builder. It is also designed to act as a developer, financier and convenor to accelerate the construction of affordable housing.

Build Canada Homes will be equipped with the tools and authorities to take a leading role in the planning, development and construction of housing on public lands. The act enables the transfer of land holdings and other key elements of the Canada Lands Company Limited to Build Canada Homes to streamline and consolidate federal efforts to develop housing on public lands all under one roof.

Recognizing that Canada's housing crisis cannot be solved by any one player alone, as a Crown corporation, Build Canada Homes will have the autonomy and authority to bring all partners to the table, including all levels of government, first nations, indigenous communities, industry, private and non-profit actors, and organizations, to accelerate the delivery of safe, affordable homes.

The work is not just about housing people. This work also drives the larger economy. Build Canada Homes will be a champion and driver of the buy Canadian policy, prioritizing projects that use Canadian materials, strengthening domestic industries and creating good jobs all along the homebuilding supply chain.

• (0935)

[Translation]

Build Canada Homes is investing in the technologies needed to build more quickly, more sustainably and more affordably. We are also creating good, well-paying jobs across the country.

[English]

Our government is committed to building a future that Canadians deserve. Let's give ourselves the tools we need to succeed, and let's build.

I look forward to your questions.

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

We will begin with Mr. Aitchison for six minutes.

**Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Minister, I have a couple of very quick questions.

Would you agree that the majority of housing in this country is built by the private sector, so 80% to 85% is actually market housing?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** Those in the private sector are instrumental in building housing, and that's why they are critical partners in the Build Canada Homes approach. They will be building, effectively, the majority of the housing.

**Scott Aitchison:** That's not what I asked. I asked if you would agree that 80% to 85% of the market is market housing, not that Build Canada Homes would be involved.

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** It's actually higher than that. In Canada, we have about 4% non-market housing, which is down from about 10% 30 years ago.

**Scott Aitchison:** That's great. Thank you.

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** It's much lower than in peer countries.

**Scott Aitchison:** You would also probably agree, then, that non-market housing, like co-ops, supportive housing and deeply affordable units, requires some more direct and probably sustained investment by public entities like this government, provincial governments, etc.

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** By nature, deeply affordable housing needs to be supported by all levels of government, including the federal government. The challenge we're in regarding homelessness and the lack of affordable housing is because of decades of underinvestment in non-market housing.

In these times, we do a mix of housing. On many projects, there will be a mix of affordability in the same project. That's how we leverage both below-market and middle-market housing.

**Scott Aitchison:** Would you say, then, of market housing—which is more than 85% of the housing stock in this country—that the biggest barrier to getting more of those homes built is a lack of government agencies, or would you say that it's zoning, regulatory approvals and local charges and fees?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** The housing market is complex in Canada. We see lots of different markets, depending on the city and province.

The federal and provincial governments have critical roles to play in ensuring that non-market housing is available and affordable. Canada has underinvested in that for many years.

**Scott Aitchison:** That's great, but I specifically asked you about the delays at the local level. You said that it's complex. Let's just leave it at that. We agree that it's complex to get permission to build a home in this country.

I'm going to ask you specifically what your government's plan is to reduce the complexity of getting permission to build homes in this country for the market, which, as we have established, are the vast majority of homes on the housing continuum.

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** There are existing approaches to ensure that we are getting more housing permitted and approved, which is typically done at the local level. In some cases, it's at the provincial or territorial level.

The housing accelerator fund has enabled a significant number of homes to be approved at those levels. As an example, last year, in 2025, we saw over 300,000 homes permitted. We saw roughly 260,000 building starts. There are many more units permitted or in the pipeline—approved at the local level—but the market is not building those homes.

We have to stay ahead of that curve and make sure there is always a supply of approved...that can be acted upon and built. Certainly, all levels of government have a role to play in helping to support the market.

• (0940)

**Scott Aitchison:** The CMHC said that we need to build about 500,000 units a year for a sustained period in order to restore affordability. Clearly, the vast majority of those need to be market homes, if that's the biggest chunk of our market. You said that Build Canada Homes is still focused specifically on non-market, which is fair.

If we're only investing in non-market housing and not reducing the barriers to market housing, how can we ever hope to achieve affordability in market housing?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** We need to do all of the above. Build Canada Homes is about focusing on affordable housing, starting with non-market housing and the deep affordability needed for supportive and transitional housing, in order to tackle the challenge we have with homelessness.

However, we need to be building across the continuum of housing and into affordable market rentals, which takes all levels of government co-operating, collaborating, working with industry and working with community housing proponents to get that type of housing. We lack housing that is more affordable than market—not necessarily deeply affordable. That missing middle housing is going to be critical to deliver in the years ahead.

**Scott Aitchison:** Minister, about five months ago, you were on the Herle Burly podcast. You were asked directly about reducing or eliminating the GST on all new homes under \$1.3 million, which was our proposal. At the time, you said that it was a big, large sweeping change to make that was kind of risky. You wanted to see if the other things you were doing would work first. Now I see that the government has decided to waive the GST on all new homes under \$1 million for a year in Ontario only.

That begs two questions, one of which is this: Are the other things not working? You wanted to see how they would work before you did this. If they aren't working and you made this move, why did you do it for Ontario only? The average cost of a new home in Vancouver is about \$1.2 million. That's \$62,500 in GST. Why don't the people in Vancouver get that break?

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

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** As all members around this table will know, there is legislation on notice right now, and we cannot speak to legislation that's on notice. I expect to hear more and be able to speak more to this later today when the legislation is tabled with respect to that opportunity.

As I said months ago on that broadcast, we have to make sure we are being very strategic and careful with taxpayer dollars when we make these investments so we have maximum impact on improving affordability and making sure Canadians can access good housing.

[Translation]

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

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

**Caroline Desrochers (Trois-Rivières, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you very much for being here at the committee meeting this morning. I would also like to thank the officials who are joining you.

It's really a privilege to work on housing challenges, because these are challenges that affect Canadians every day. I'm going to continue on the topic that my colleague Mr. Aitchison talked about, which is the importance of the private sector.

[English]

I know that in the last few months on this file, there's been a lot of interest from the private sector, which is typically engaging on market housing to see how it can come to the table, how it can contribute to the issue and how it can build mixed projects.

I'm wondering if you could talk about some of that engagement with the private sector and how it really wants to be part of the solution. It's not a black and white 85% or 4%, so why are we just focusing on 4%?

• (0945)

[Translation]

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** Thank you for your question.

[English]

We've had extraordinary interest from the private sector in the start-up phase of Build Canada Homes. We have great numbers already committed, with over 10,000 homes in the works right now. The private sector plays a critical role, as said earlier, and it's essential in the building piece in particular. We need to make sure that private sector actors are right in the centre of these partnerships where they can build fast and effectively.

The market is slower, particularly in Ontario and B.C., and there are real opportunities to build more affordable housing in those markets. When we can bring some support alongside provinces, territories and cities, we have an opportunity to make this collaboration very successful. It delivers a combination of housing, from middle-market rental to deeper affordability depending on the financials of the project.

We're seeing lots of very creative proposals come forward. We're also seeing a real willingness on the private sector side with manufacturing components. For Build Canada Homes, we're driving the pace of modern methods of construction and making sure we're using Canadian materials as much as possible, but innovation and building technologies are needed to make this industry more productive, more efficient and more innovative and to be able to build more affordably. We're seeing lots of uptake on that front too.

There are very interesting collaborations by private sector developers with community builders and with manufacturers in building technologies that will ultimately bring down the cost of building as we go forward.

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

[Translation]

I'd like us to briefly talk about working with municipalities and provinces. Some interesting agreements have been announced in recent weeks and months.

I'd like you to talk about how the conversation between municipalities and provinces is evolving. How are they conducting themselves to find solutions to zoning issues or delays in issuing permits?

How can the programs we're putting forward, particularly the build communities strong fund, serve as incentives for municipalities and provinces to make us commitments and come to the negotiation table with concrete commitments to reduce barriers to construction?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

Some amazing partnerships have already been announced in the first phase of Build Canada Homes' work with provinces, territories and cities, including the one we're in here, Ottawa. This was the first city to come forward with a comprehensive approach to accelerating approvals and permitting and increasing density so we can build more homes on strategic sites that are adjacent to public transit here in Ottawa.

We have a memorandum of understanding with the City of Ottawa that says they will accelerate projects. With their co-operation and collaboration, we will see a significant number of homes built in Ottawa. Some of those are on federal lands, so we can move faster and go deeper in terms of affordability, given that we have the benefit of public lands to work with.

We're seeing collaborations. Last week, I was with the premier in New Brunswick to announce a partnership with the Province of New Brunswick for 1,200 affordable homes that will be built right across New Brunswick. The province will work with cities and communities in New Brunswick to make sure they're expediting their work to get homes built. That's the kind of partnership we're seeing now from coast to coast to coast.

In B.C., we have 1,100 homes in the first phase of work, and 700 of those are supportive and transitional for people who are challenged with homelessness. In Nunavut, in the north, there are 750 homes with the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik corporation, which is an affordable housing agency.

Those are really significant first steps. I anticipate a multiple of those with those provinces and cities and the many other provinces, territories and cities coming to the table.

**Caroline Desrochers:** That's super. Thank you.

I would love to hear you talk about rural communities and how we have to build in rural communities as well. I know we don't have time, but maybe when we come back, we can talk about this.

Thank you.

• (0950)

[*Translation*]

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

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

**Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you have created this new federal structure that cost billions of dollars. How many social housing units will actually be built in Quebec over the coming years?

[*English*]

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** We do have an agreement with Quebec to collaborate together on Build Canada Homes, which is very exciting. There's a real willingness to partner together to build projects that Quebec brings forward to a collaboration table.

We also have \$1 billion dedicated to housing-enabling infrastructure with Quebec so that we can contribute on the water and wastewater infrastructure that unlocks housing development, while Quebec will bring forward housing projects across the province that we will cofund. Both federal and Quebec dollars will be invested, with a focus on deeper affordability in that initial phase.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** The issue of housing is very much a priority for the municipalities in the riding of Shefford. I'd actually like to recognize the city of Granby, which has been a champion for housing creation.

That's why I'm asking questions about how it will work afterward, specifically in Quebec. Why did you create this new structure instead of directly funding programs that already exist and work in Quebec?

[*English*]

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** It's a very good question.

The new structure is all about speed—being able to fund projects faster—with more collaboration with different private sector and community builders, and making sure that we're working both with communities and with the provinces and territories collaboratively.

We're seeing very strong signs of that right now with Quebec in the agreement that we've reached. There's definitely a strong signal around building in communities of all shapes and sizes. In rural communities in Quebec, we anticipate seeing, just as in New Brunswick... In New Brunswick, over 30% of the initial 1,200 units will be in rural communities. We want to make sure we're getting the housing where it's needed to communities of all sizes.

The new model is more nimble. It is very focused on delivering affordability, so this is not just straight-up market housing. CMHC continues to have programs for market housing, the apartment construction loan program and MLI select being their two centrepiece programs that really catalyze more rental and market housing.

This is focused on delivering affordable housing. That's at the core of our work. The way we do that is by being more nimble with proposals. Rather than a prescription, we're giving flexibility to Quebec, to communities that bring projects forward and to private sector and community builders that come forward with different projects that the Build Canada Homes team can review, vet and act on much faster than a federal government has typically moved before.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** You're giving Build Canada Homes the power to invest, lend and even build. Does that mean that the federal government is going to directly interfere in Quebec's jurisdiction over housing? I understand that you want something flexible, that there's a desire for flexibility, but what guarantees are there that Quebec will receive its fair share, without any conditions imposed by Ottawa?

[*English*]

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** We have had a very strong start in working with Quebec on the initial agreement. I was very thankful to deliver an agreement alongside Minister Proulx. In other cases, it can take longer to come to that sort of agreement. The combination of both housing and the infrastructure to build housing—the water, waste-water and stormwater infrastructure, which is essential—is a really positive development, and we had both of those running together in order to catalyze the housing that will get built.

In steady contact with the ministers, I have no doubt that Quebec will bring lots of opportunities to that collaboration table. That's the new approach we're taking of bringing together both parties, sitting down and working through the best projects and how fast we can process those and get them built.

● (0955)

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Minister, beyond housing, you also have responsibilities regarding homelessness. However, we feel that the federal government is withdrawing from the issue of homelessness. Some cities are asking to be recognized as designated communities so that they can receive direct funding. That's the case in Granby, which, because it isn't designated, receives only 20% of funds, whereas the need on the ground would justify much greater funding, comparable to what the designated communities receive, namely up to 80%.

What do you have to say to the city of Granby, which has these homelessness problems and would like to intervene?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** That's a very important question.

[*English*]

The homelessness initiative doing most of the work from the federal government side is Reaching Home, which has been a very large initiative over many years now. Nearly 112,000 Canadians have found stable housing through the Reaching Home process. Prevention services have been provided to over 200,000. Build Canada Homes has \$1 billion available for supportive and transitional housing in this first phase.

We will certainly work with Quebec, and I thank you for flagging the needs in Granby. That's something we can keep in mind to make sure we are reaching people where they are to provide those services and supports.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister and Ms. Larouche.

Mrs. Falk, you have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

**Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for taking the time to be here at our committee.

We know that Canadians are facing a housing crisis. Something that has been said in the House, not just in this Parliament but also in previous Parliaments, is that a major driver of high costs is slow construction due to government itself. This is through red tape. This is through taxes. This is slow approvals. Builders have constantly told our committee—again, not just this Parliament but also the Parliament previous—that less government involvement, not more, is what would allow them to build homes faster and more affordably.

A few minutes ago, you commented to my colleague that government needs to be careful with taxpayer dollars, that it's something the government should be cognizant of. My question for you is, why couldn't two other Crown corporations, CMHC and Canada Lands, receive these funds to do the work, as opposed to creating a whole new bureaucracy and a whole new Crown corporation?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** I'd say the Build Canada Homes launch is all about streamlining the federal government's engagement with affordable housing.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Could those departments not streamline and be nimble?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** As I mentioned in my initial comments, the Canada Lands Company folds into Build Canada Homes as part of this work, so Build Canada Homes—

**Rosemarie Falk:** Isn't that the problem, though? Isn't it part of the problem with bureaucracy that we're just creating different levels of red tape and different streams and regulations instead of mandating what's already been created?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** In this case, we need a government agency to manage the federal government's investment in affordable housing. There needs to be a team focused on that. Canada has spread that over a number of agencies. Build Canada Homes is about streamlining and consolidating, having a one-stop shop for affordable housing in the Government of Canada, which has not existed.

**Rosemarie Falk:** I just don't understand why we're creating a whole new hierarchy of rules and red tape to do that, when we could be doing that through departments that are already created.

Thank you, Minister.

Chair, I'm going to pass the remainder of my time to MP Reynolds.

**The Chair:** Mr. Reynolds.

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

Thank you to my colleague for sharing time with me today.

Thank you, Minister, for coming.

It's kind of funny that we get accused of slogans all the time, and the bureaucracy has been named a slogan. I find that amusing. I just wanted to say that.

How many homes have been built within the last year, since election time and since the government has committed to building more homes?

• (1000)

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** The housing completions last year in Canada were 260,000, which is a good year for Canada—I think top five in terms of housing starts and housing completions. In the Build Canada Homes pipeline now, we have over 10,000 homes in the works.

**Colin Reynolds:** Are those from the Build Canada Homes initiative?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** The 10,000—

**Colin Reynolds:** I mean the completions from last year.

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** You asked about how much housing we're building in Canada right now. Last year, there were 260,000 completed homes. Build Canada Homes is in start-up mode. As of now, we have over 10,000 homes in the pipeline through the new agency.

**Colin Reynolds:** When do you anticipate those will be completed?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** It varies. The focus is on modern methods of construction—modular, panel-based manufactured products, which speed up homebuilding. For example, I was in Nunavut a few weeks ago. Nunavut homes, through Build Canada Homes, are already in place now. People are moving into those homes, as we speak, in Nunavut. Those are modular homes. They're shipped to Nunavut by sealift and finished on site. In some cases, the build can happen very quickly. In other cases, it takes time.

**Colin Reynolds:** I'm running out of time, but I have another quick question.

We had a witness here a while back from the building trades speaking on a different study. They mentioned that there's a lot of under-the-table labour in the construction industry. I'm wondering if Build Canada Homes has put anything in place to ensure that this massive amount of money is not going to contractors who are paying under the table. Ultimately, we want to see our people working

and paying their taxes, and some of this money coming back to the government through taxes. Are there any guardrails in place to ensure that this doesn't happen?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** Certainly, Build Canada Homes will be accountable to Parliament and will be a transparent Crown corporation. With this act being approved, we will be having regular updates through the minister to Parliament on the organization and its activities.

**Colin Reynolds:** Was there any money allocated for enforcement?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** At this point, Build Canada Homes is just putting together these initial agreements for development that will take place. Obviously, the laws of the land apply to all the agreements we are making.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Reynolds. It was a good question, though, a very good question.

[Translation]

Mrs. Church, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

**Leslie Church:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister and Deputy Minister.

I want to start off by saying that I have personally noticed how quickly Build Canada Homes has been moving. Whether it is the investment in the Arbo site at Downsview and the waste-water infrastructure that goes along with that, which will help unlock literally tens of thousands of new homes very close to my constituency, or it's a really innovative project in my own community, which will be breaking ground on 500 new rental units, 150 of which will be affordable, and unlocking municipal land in the process, these are examples of the type of housing stock we need right now in Canada. That's what I wanted to start with: I'm noticing how quickly some of these projects are moving, in a short amount of time, very directly for my community in Toronto—St. Paul's.

Minister, maybe I can ask you to help explain and clarify for all of us what it means to transition Build Canada Homes into a Crown corporation and how that transition will help deliver results for Canadians and help Build Canada Homes achieve the mandate you've set out for it.

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** On the collaborations we're already seeing, proposals are coming forward from provinces, territories and cities, first and foremost. We have a number of those already announced and public, with building commencing. That's in combination with taking action on federal land, wherever we have federal land available that we can build housing on, some of which has been in the works with the Canada Lands Company. It now becomes part of the Build Canada Homes portfolio, and we can expedite.

To speak to an earlier question on this, a number of us have served at local levels or provincial levels of government. It has always been challenging to get all levels of government at the table and focused on delivering faster. We are in a housing crisis. The design of Build Canada Homes, and the purposeful addition of the tools in the Build Canada Homes act—having more financial tools available to move faster, having federal land as part of the strategy—will speed things up.

I know that it can be frustrating at the local level, for those of us who've served there, when the federal government tends to move historically a lot slower, not recognizing local challenges. We can flip that around here, with me sitting in my current role, making sure that the local level is also delivering their piece around approvals and permitting. We need everyone to work together on this.

What I'm excited about here is Build Canada Homes having the tools to really push the pace with this team Canada approach, getting everyone on the same page to deliver affordable housing. We need a mix of housing. Our country is complex, with different markets. We need to deliver all different types of housing. We're seeing very innovative proposals coming forward that bring lots of partners in. I think there are some fantastic housing opportunities, because we will now have the tools available to support that.

• (1005)

**Leslie Church:** My colleague across the way mentioned labour issues. I want to submit that I had a great discussion yesterday with Unifor. Representatives were here in Ottawa. They were talking about their members who actually work with and have a lot of expertise in modular construction. They were very excited about that.

How will Build Canada Homes support new and innovative building methods? What are these methods? How will we be supporting the workforce needs that will go along with building this quickly?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** That's a great question.

It's an industry that is much smaller in Canada than we'd like it to be. In Europe and Asia, the modular or off-site manufacturing industry is much larger. In Sweden, we hear that over 50% of homes are now manufactured in factories. It's less than 5% in Canada, and that's in comparable climates.

There's a huge advantage to manufacturing parts or entire homes, but in many cases it's panel-based construction that happens in factories, and then those panels are put together like Lego on site. Those factories can run 24-7, year-round, regardless of the weather, in the winter in particular. They have much more flexibility in terms of job sites, so they are great opportunities for jobs and partnerships with labour.

We've had real excitement around that and making sure we're building faster and more affordably. When you get scale and when you get three shifts in a factory, you can deliver more affordability faster.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor for two minutes and 30 seconds.

**Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to say hello to my colleagues and the entire committee team.

Thank you very much for being here, Minister, Ms. Boldt and Mr. Haloucha. I find that these are some very interesting discussions on the bill.

We in the Bloc Québécois have been burned by the former programs of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Since projects in Quebec are, on average, smaller than those in Ontario and the rest of Canada, Quebec systematically doesn't receive its fair share. When we look at the housing market, the price has started to fall in a number of places in Canada, but not in Quebec, where the market is still overheating.

Minister, since Quebec accounts for more than its share of the population in terms of needs, do you plan to ensure that our share of funding reflects that reality?

[English]

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** Certainly, I think Quebec will be a real driver in partnerships with Build Canada Homes. We've seen an unprecedented willingness to form a partnership and work on this combination of housing and the related infrastructure together. I'm really optimistic that we're going to see significant delivery.

The Quebec government is showing all the signs of strong collaboration and scale, like building larger projects. We were able to move the biggest project, probably, in Quebec at the hippodrome in Montreal. We made an investment in the infrastructure on that site to get that. That's 20,000 homes in the middle of the island, in Montreal.

As said earlier, we also have to focus on smaller communities across Quebec, and I know the province has flagged that in our dialogue. I think we're going to see a real willingness to go fast and go as big as possible in terms of the delivery.

• (1010)

[Translation]

**Gabriel Ste-Marie:** Thank you very much, Minister. I have one last question.

Tenant protection organizations, such as FRAPRU, are concerned that Build Canada Homes is primarily being used to fund private, for-profit housing projects, in which only a small portion of the units are dedicated to affordable housing—not social housing—rather than primarily supporting social housing. What do you have to say to them?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** Thank you for the question.

[English]

It's very important that we deliver on the affordability piece.

At its core, Build Canada Homes is about ensuring that the federal government is working with the provinces and territories to deliver non-market housing. We have to get our non-market housing percentage up significantly. As I said, in 30 years, it's dropped from 10% to 4%, and many countries have between 10% and 20% of non-market housing. That will leverage a lot of middle-market housing in the process.

You need a mix of housing and projects, but we have to make sure that these projects come forward with deeply affordable housing in the mix as well. We must be able to cross-subsidize within projects, but we want to be building that deeper affordability at every opportunity.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mrs. Goodridge, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

[English]

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

On March 12, you said, “it is no surprise that Canadians are challenged with buying a home right now, when there is a war in the Middle East.” I’m a bit confused. I’ve never built a house. I’ve never been involved in the house construction business. How does a relatively new conflict impact house building in Canada or house purchases in Canada?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** As often happens in question period, I was cut off in the middle of my response. I should probably know better than to try to give a comprehensive answer in the 30 seconds allotted with all the interruptions.

We have a very challenging housing market now. There’s a lot of uncertainty caused by the U.S. tariffs and by wars that have been impacting economies around the world. Canada is no exception.

Generally, we’ve seen softness in the housing market. In particular in Vancouver and Toronto, it’s very acute. Other markets are actually fairly robust. It’s a mix. It’s complex across Canada. Certainly, people are reserved right now in terms of making big home purchases. That’s something we need to address.

**Laila Goodridge:** You’ve been doing press conferences. In your opening statement, you made all kinds of comments about how this is about a team Canada and a buy Canadian approach. Again, if we’re trying to prioritize Canadian labour and Canadian materials, how exactly does a war in the Middle East make that not happen?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** I’m not sure what the question is there. I was speaking to overall market uncertainty and challenges that we have across our markets that are caused by factors beyond our control, whether it’s the U.S. tariffs or the wars overseas that have been impacting economies, including Canada’s.

We have to focus on what we can control here in Canada. We can build more housing. We can use Canadian materials. We can invest in the industry to make it more productive and innovative. The important thing is moving with speed right now, given the threats to our economy and the instability.

**Laila Goodridge:** I agree. We have lots of trees. We have softwood lumber supplies here. We have amazing labour that is capable of building houses here in Canada.

Your government promised to deliver half a million new homes every year, but according to the CMHC, you haven’t even gotten to half of that. We have a building issue here. I know that members opposite were making comments about how interest rates were impacting prices, but interest rates haven’t changed in the last little while, so I don’t necessarily think that is to blame.

You said there’s softening of markets in places like Vancouver and Toronto. Is that because we haven’t gone after the IRGC members who are living in those communities?

• (1015)

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** The critical thing right now with Build Canada Homes is building affordable housing. People need affordable housing in Canada. That’s what we have a shortage of.

In the overall market, we know we have a housing gap, which CMHC has identified. We need to scale up the overall industry to deliver more housing across the whole spectrum of needs. In particular, we need to deliver more affordability for Canadians. That’s what Build Canada Homes is all about.

**Laila Goodridge:** If we’re not building the houses, then we’re not going to get to the affordability, because it effectively is a supply and demand kind of a situation.

If your goal is to build half a million houses—you’ve identified that’s how many need to be built every single year—and we’re only getting to half of that target, then there is half of that supply. That’s a quarter of a million homes that people could be living in that they aren’t living in. This means the problem just gets worse every single year.

I appreciate the conversations around modular housing and some of that as a solution in Nunavut, but that doesn’t really deal with a majority of the people who are currently dealing with homelessness. This isn’t dealing with the majority of people who can’t afford to buy their starter home.

It also really doesn’t do anything to address one of the biggest issues in housing, which is the amount of time it takes to get permitting. In most of our major centres, it’s \$90,000 or \$110,000 per housing unit just to get the permitting all the way through when building a house. If we could reduce that, we could make houses more affordable without having to skip any important steps. Why isn’t Build Canada Homes focusing on something like that?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** Build Canada Homes is focused on getting affordable housing built. It’s focusing on non-market housing right up to the middle market, which is affordable rental housing. There may be a component of attainable or affordable home ownership coming into the mix. There are proposals for that coming forward.

The national housing strategy and the work that CMHC does are more focused on the market side. The national housing strategy is dealing with Reaching Home and the many challenges that we have with homelessness.

Build Canada Homes is focusing on building affordable housing, from supportive and transitional, which will make a huge difference in solving homelessness, right up to the missing middle housing we need to leverage and get built—in partnership. It takes the partnership and support of local governments to get this done. We're seeing good signs of that right now. We're certainly seeing more approvals than what's being built right now at the local level.

[Translation]

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

Ms. Koutrakis, you have the floor for five minutes. It will then be over.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you, Minister, for being here today, together with the officials. It's much appreciated. I, for one, as a parliamentarian, truly appreciate your comprehensive and full responses, because receiving those types of answers makes me feel that I'm a bit smarter when I walk away. Thank you for taking the time and for your thoughtful responses.

One issue we didn't talk about is women's shelters. I know that all of us would agree that we need to provide safe spaces for one of the most vulnerable groups of Canadians.

I was at an announcement in Vimy recently, where a transitional home benefited from the programs the government is offering. It appears, however, that there's a bit of confusion out there as to whether women's shelters can receive support through Build Canada Homes. I wonder whether you can clarify that for us.

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** Thank you for that question. I'd love to do that.

Many women's shelters are indeed eligible for funding within the \$1 billion that Build Canada Homes has for supportive and transitional housing. Many use the term “shelter” more broadly, particularly in Quebec. In practice, most women's shelters operate as supportive and transitional housing.

If a women's shelter operates as transitional or supportive housing, it meets the eligibility criteria for this funding. We are working very closely with the women's shelter community, particularly in Quebec, to ensure that this eligibility is clear. There are significant needs there. We have to make sure they are addressed.

The national housing strategy has delivered, I think, over 15,000 shelter spaces, and shelters and transitional homes have been created through it in recent years. We need to continue that work, and Build Canada Homes will have an important role to play. It's critical that those women's shelters know that they're eligible if they're operating as transitional or supportive housing providers.

• (1020)

**Annie Koutrakis:** I will do my very best to make sure that I deliver that message.

I also want to give you the opportunity to speak to us a bit about how Build Canada Homes is going to help minimize and avoid duplication of efforts when we're dealing with so many different partners and jurisdictions. How can this new agency help to make sure we don't duplicate our efforts?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** That's an important concern. Certainly, I know it's something that Lindsay and the CEO of Build Canada Homes, Ana Bailão, are working through with the many proposals that are coming in.

We've seen an incredible volume of proposals, and we are encouraging our partners to pull together. Whether it's a combination of provincial, municipal, private and community sector partnerships...the more they can pull their projects together.... We've seen this pooling of projects in New Brunswick and B.C. We've seen it in Nova Scotia as well, and in Nunavut, where they are bundling projects into a proposal and are helping manage those partnerships. We need to make this as lean and efficient as possible, so we're encouraging that in the proposals that come forward.

The ones we can move the fastest on are the well-constructed partnerships that will deliver affordable housing as soon as possible and that are as deeply affordable as possible. Those are the combinations we're looking for. Of course, if we're leveraging modern methods of construction in the process with Canadian materials, that's a key piece of the puzzle as well. We are sending that message, and we're getting very significant interest in terms of proposals coming forward.

**Annie Koutrakis:** I want to give you the opportunity to perhaps touch on rural regions. My colleague asked a question on that, but she ran out of time, so for the remainder of my time, could you tell us what's happening within rural regions?

**Hon. Gregor Robertson:** It's a really important piece of this.

To my last point, we're counting on provinces and territories to bundle rural projects, in delivering for rural communities, into their provincial and territorial proposals. We've already seen some of that. In New Brunswick, 30% of their units are in rural communities, which is fantastic. We want to see that trend continue. They're definitely showing a good example for the other provinces and territories to bring forward.

In general, Build Canada Homes is working on the capacity to process projects of all different sizes. We know the needs are great in rural communities as well. We want to focus on where we can get efficiencies of scale, with big projects in big cities, but we need to do all of the above. That's how we're building this from the start. Certainly, being able to operate as a Crown corporation gives more tools and more opportunities to deliver on all of that comprehensively.

**The Chair:** Ms. Koutrakis, thank you for raising the issue on women's homelessness and shelters. It's one of the projects I've been most proud of working with women's groups in my riding on. I would encourage every member to advocate on that side.

Thank you, Minister. That concludes this hour of the meeting. We thank you and your officials for coming.

Members, before we close, there are a couple of administrative items that I need to get your direction on.

Do we want to issue a press release soliciting briefs? Generally we do.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I've had some discussion on the deadline for briefs. It's been suggested as April 17 at 4 p.m.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** The deadline for amendments to the bill will be April 24 at 4 p.m.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Clause-by-clause will begin at the meeting on Thursday, April 30. Do we have agreement on that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Our next meeting will be Monday, April 13, and we'll begin clause-by-clause on Bill C-222. That's very important.

With that, members, thank you for your time.

Is it your will to adjourn?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

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