



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

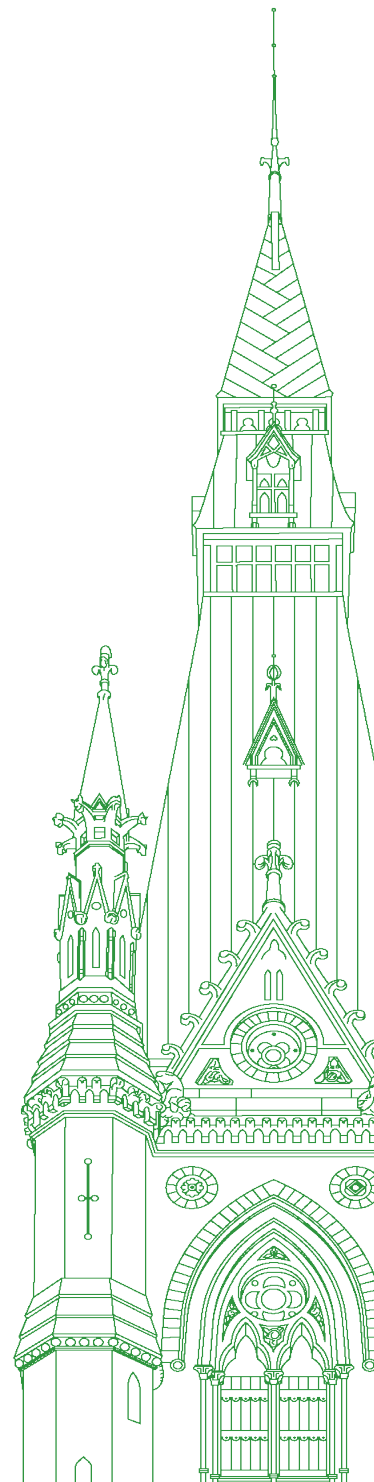
Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 032

Thursday, April 16, 2026

Chair: Robert Morrissey



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

Thursday, April 16, 2026

• (0820)

[English]

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

[Translation]

I call this meeting to order.

[English]

Welcome to meeting number 32 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Friday, March 13, 2026, the committee is meeting on Bill C-20, an act respecting the establishment of Build Canada Homes. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, meaning that members are participating in the room and that they and witnesses have the option of participating virtually. We have one witness appearing virtually. That witness has been sound-tested and has been approved.

I would remind all members to choose the official language you wish to participate in during the meeting and ensure that you're on the channel that gives you the proper interpretation. If there is an interruption in interpretation services, please get my attention and we'll suspend immediately until it's corrected. Those appearing virtually, click on the globe icon at the bottom of your Surface tablet and choose the official language of your choice. Again, if there's an interruption, get my attention and we'll suspend immediately while it's corrected.

For the protection of our interpreters, please ensure that your devices are on silent mode and refrain from tapping the booms. The technicians will turn the headset on when you speak. Those are the only points.

We have this morning....

Go ahead, Ms. Falk.

Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC): Chair, at the meeting on Monday, April 13, I had raised a matter of privilege. You indicated that you would return to the committee with a ruling. I'm wondering if you'll provide that ruling now.

The Chair: No, I said I would take it under advisement, Ms. Falk. The chair does not rule on matters of privilege in committee.

Rosemarie Falk: Are you saying that you're not going to have a ruling on the matter of privilege that I raised?

The Chair: Under the rules adopted by the House, chairs of committee do not rule on matters of privilege.

Rosemarie Falk: In chapter 3 of our handy green book, it states the following:

Any disregard of or attack on the rights, powers and immunities of the House and its members, either by an outside person or entity, or by a member of the House, is referred to as a breach of privilege.

I would say that it was a breach of privilege that you did not follow what the committee had agreed upon when it came to the events that happened on Monday regarding clause-by-clause.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Falk.

The rules of the House are adopted by the House and, on committees, chairs do not rule on matters of privilege. The chair has the responsibility of setting the meetings and the agenda for those meetings. With that, I—

Rosemarie Falk: Chair, I would like to challenge you on that because we believe it is your responsibility, as the chair of this committee, to provide a ruling when the chair of this committee has breached the privileges of the members who are on this committee and the business that we have decided. Being the chair, the one who creates the calendar and books the witnesses, you did not speak to opposition members—I'm not sure if you spoke to the government members—about needing to extend it. However, at the end of the day, we see this as a—

The Chair: There is a point of order.

Rosemarie Falk: What's the point of order?

Caroline Desrochers (Trois-Rivières, Lib.): Chair, the member is referring to something that was discussed in camera, and I don't think it should be discussed now that we are public.

Rosemarie Falk: The rules state that points of privilege need to be dealt with at the earliest convenience.

The Chair: I take it, Ms. Falk, that you raised this at an in camera session.

As the chair, I did not rule—

Rosemarie Falk: Are you ruling that this is not a point of privilege? Is that what you're ruling then?

The Chair: It is out of my scope as chair to rule on points of privilege, as I indicated to you before. That's clearly in the rules of the House that were adopted.

Rosemarie Falk: I understand that you would have to rule then if this is a point of privilege or not.

The Chair: No.

Rosemarie Falk: You can't abdicate from that role and responsibility of the chair: You would rule on whether it was a point of privilege or was not a point of privilege.

The Chair: No, I do neither. The chair does not entertain points of privilege.

Rosemarie Falk: I understand that you will not rule on the privilege itself, but you would say if it was or was not a point of privilege—

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Since the witnesses are already here, can we start the meeting? Everything we're discussing has already been discussed in camera. We invited witnesses, we should hear from them.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Falk.

To reiterate, the chair does not rule on points of privilege. The chair does make decisions on the setting of the agenda, which I did as chair of the committee. The committee as a whole can refer a matter of privilege.

Given that the item you raised was about me, as chair, setting the agenda for the meeting, that is in the scope of responsibility of the chair and, therefore, I do not see it as a violation of the privileges of members.

Rosemarie Falk: Is that your ruling, then?

The Chair: That would be my decision.

Rosemarie Falk: Then I will challenge your decision, Chair.

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Chair, can you briefly suspend the meeting?

[*English*]

The Chair: Sure. We'll suspend.

● (0820) _____ (Pause) _____

● (0830)

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

To clarify—

[*Translation*]

Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Chair, I'd like to speak, if I may.

Basically, the source of this frustration comes from you cancelling an hour of study on a long-awaited bill last Tuesday without consulting the vice-chairs, a major decision, even though there was consensus on this bill at committee. We did good work and wanted to move forward quickly, out of respect for bereaved parents.

Will you formally commit to consulting the vice-chairs before cancelling an hour of a meeting on the clause-by-clause consideration of a long-awaited bill?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for your intervention, Ms. Larouche.

Yes, I will as we go.

I want to clearly establish where we're at. There was a matter of privilege that was raised at the meeting on Monday. It was with regard to my changing the agenda of the meeting.

Let me read to you, for the committee—

Rosemarie Falk: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Falk, I have the floor.

Rosemarie Falk: I thought it was non-debatable.

I challenged what you ruled, and that's non-debatable. Now we're entering into debate and conversation, when it should go straight to a vote. This seems like almost another breach of privilege. We challenged your—

The Chair: Ms. Falk, bring yourself to order, please. Thank you.

I'm establishing this clearly so that everybody knows the administrative responsibilities of the chair under paragraph 20.33 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, fourth edition. The chair “decides on the agenda for the meeting while respecting the instructions of the committee; cancels scheduled meetings or modifies agendas if an unexpected development makes this necessary and there is no opportunity for the committee to consider the matter”.

It was in my scope as the chair. I rescheduled that part of the agenda to today when I found we would have the resources to do it. Bill C-222 will be at the committee in the last hour of this meeting.

You did challenge that, Ms. Falk, which is your prerogative, just as any committee member has the prerogative to do, as a matter of privilege. As I said, the chair does not rule on points of privilege. However, if the committee, by majority, feels that privilege was violated, then the committee would have to make a motion to refer the issue that was viewed as a violation of privilege to the Speaker of the House, and the Speaker would then make the ruling.

That's where we're at.

Now we're voting on it. To be clear, I'll get the clerk to read the dilatory motion that was moved by Ms. Falk.

● (0835)

The Clerk of the Committee (Alexandre Longpré): The chair made a decision that it was not a point of privilege. Ms. Falk has challenged that decision.

The motion that we are voting on is this: Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 5; nays 4)

The Chair: The decision of the chair has been upheld by the majority of the committee. Thank you. That will allow us to resume to the scheduled agenda item of today.

Before we begin with our witnesses, do we have agreement to adopt the budget for the Bill C-20 study, which we're undertaking now? It's \$23,450. It was circulated to all of the members in advance, with time for you to have consulted every line in the budget.

Do we have agreement on the budget?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you. That's good, because if we don't have a budget, the meeting will end. We'll follow the rules.

With regard to the witnesses appearing this morning, we have Alexi White, director of systems change, Maytree; Dr. Mike Mofatt, founding director, Missing Middle Initiative; and Suzanne Faiza, policy and research manager, Tapestry Community Capital.

Each witness has five minutes for their opening statement.

We'll begin with Mr. White.

Alexi White (Director, Systems Change, Maytree): Hello. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on this matter.

Maytree is a Toronto-based human rights organization dedicated to advancing systemic solutions to poverty. We believe the most enduring way to keep people out of poverty is to reimagine and rebuild our public systems to respect, protect and fulfill the economic and social rights of every person in Canada.

In 2019, the National Housing Strategy Act declared that housing policy in Canada will be guided by the "fundamental human right" to housing. My remarks today will argue that the establishment of Build Canada Homes will further this important project.

Canada's housing shortage is urgent and systemic and solving it will require more than incremental policy change. However, our history proves that we can act quickly and decisively at scale when there is political will. That's why Canada must treat the housing crisis as a nation-building project comparable to populating the Prairies or to the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Solving big problems requires bold ideas and coordinated large-scale federal leadership. The establishment of Build Canada Homes represents an opportunity to bring this same approach to addressing today's housing crisis.

The past decade of Canadian housing policy has been an attempt to build more housing through a series of subsidies to private and non-profit housing developers. While this has had positive effects at the margins, it has failed to create new housing on a scale commensurate with the magnitude of the crisis.

The reason the government is reluctant to do what is necessary to build at scale is that there are real limits on how much the treasury can afford to spend to incentivize others to build. That's why Maytree has recommended a different approach, based on the simple fact of government accounting. Giving away land and money for housing depletes the treasury. Investing in housing on government-owned land grows the treasury by creating an asset on the

government's books that offsets the upfront investment. Government itself does not have to build or operate the housing. This can be contracted to those with expertise.

Consider, for example, if Build Canada Homes were to contract with non-market developers to build on government land, with the resulting housing managed by a non-profit provider. The government would retain ownership of the built asset and depreciation costs would be offset by rental income remitted annually by the operator. Like a toll on a new bridge, those with homes would pay rent to cover the expenses booked by the government over the life of the asset.

By removing or reducing the typical land and financing costs, and by eliminating profit margins through partnerships with non-profit developers and operators, BCH could make these projects viable at rents well below market rates.

Other nations, such as Austria, Denmark, Finland and France, have used similar direct build policies to create a sustainable stock of non-market rental housing—

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

Caroline Desrochers: On a point of order, the witness is speaking really fast. It's hard to follow—

• (0840)

The Chair: To follow the interpretation...? Okay.

Can you continue, Mr. White?

Alexi White: Other nations, such as Austria, Denmark, Finland and France, have used similar direct build policies to create a sustainable stock of non-market rental housing. This same model could also be applied to acquisitions of market buildings or conversions of other buildings to residential use, provided the government remains the owner of the asset.

Military bases are an obvious place to start. Our military needs hundreds of thousands of new housing units, and these projects are a perfect way to demonstrate that we can deliver at scale through innovative techniques. Importantly, all expenditures would count toward Canada's NATO targets.

There's no need to stop at what the military needs for its own use. About a dozen bases in Canada are close to major urban centres, as are many more defunct bases and stations. BCH could build two or three times the needed housing and rent the surplus in the non-military market.

For these reasons, Maytree has for several years called for the creation of a government agency tasked with developing housing on public land. That's Build Canada Homes.

Already, \$3.1 billion of the first \$13 billion that will be invested through Build Canada Homes is earmarked for asset development. As the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer noted when examining BCH's spending plans, "Some cash expenditures do not affect the budgetary balance" and "BCH asset development expenditures increase the value of federal properties by acquiring new properties or building new residential structures on those properties."

This is an important start. It represents a new mechanism for building housing at scale without breaking the bank, but we need to be bolder. Rather than allocating \$3.1 billion over five years, Maytree-funded research suggests that we could increase this by a factor of 10 or more—delivering tens of thousands of new government-owned non-market rental units every year—and make no impact on Canada's deficit. We have the solutions. Build Canada Homes is the institution that can manage these bold new initiatives.

If there is a place where the legislation could be strengthened, it would be to make explicit that Build Canada Homes will advance the right to housing. The rights of the Crown, the rights of other agencies and the rights of BCH are all mentioned. Surely, there is space to recognize the rights of each of us as well.

I mentioned earlier that the National Housing Strategy Act declares that the right to adequate housing is to guide Canada's housing policy. For Canada to comply with its own legislation, we must apply a human rights lens to the daily work of managing housing policy and programs in Canada, including through BCH. Thus, we ask that the legislation be amended to include the progressive realization of the right to housing as an explicit and central component of the BCH mandate.

The practical implication of this change would be to make sure that BCH develops the capacity to apply human rights-based approaches to all aspects of its work—for example, through robust targets, metrics and reporting that drive measurable results for priority populations.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. White.

We'll now go to Dr. Moffatt for five minutes, please.

Mike Moffatt (Founding Director, Missing Middle Initiative): Thank you for having me here today.

First, I would like to congratulate the federal government on the recent agreements with the Province of Ontario to provide a full HST rebate on homes under \$1 million and to cut development charges by up to half. The combined impact of these moves will cut the costs of new homes by 15% to 20%, and make new homes competitive with resale homes, which will increase housing starts. Since these are temporary measures, the Missing Middle Initiative encourages all governments to use this time to first extend these agreements to other provinces, but also to enact further reforms to drive down the costs of building new homes.

Earlier this year, the CMHC released projections showing that housing starts will fall in each of the next three years. The HST and DC reforms will help reverse that trend, but they are insufficient to reach the government's 500,000 annual housing start target. We would encourage the federal government to take further action, such as implementing the MURB reforms promised during the 2025 election. We would also encourage the government to develop a goal, and not just a target, to address the middle-class housing crisis.

I'm here to today to discuss Bill C-20 and Build Canada Homes, which can be important pieces in achieving the government's housing target. We believe that there is merit to BCH's approach of using federal land to build housing that the market otherwise would not, while simultaneously using government procurement as a tool to drive innovation.

Missing Middle, however, has significant concerns around implementation and transparency. BCH lacks a clear goal, lacks targets and lacks key performance indicators and accountability measures. The public has not been told how many homes the program will complete, what types of homes, what the rents or prices will be, and over what time frame. I can't tell you, five years from now, whether or not BCH has been working, as there are no benchmarks for success. That's a problem.

Our team is also concerned about the lack of transparency regarding the unit mix to be created, and that those homes will not meet the needs of larger families. In Canada in 2021, there were roughly 300,000 households with five or more persons who rented their homes. Over half of this group lived in unsuitably small housing, according to the federal government's national occupancy standard, and of those approximately 150,000 families living in unsuitable housing, to meet the government's standard, 78% needed a home with four or more bedrooms. Despite this, we do not know what proportion of homes built by BCH will be large enough to suit these families.

However, what we do know is concerning. In BCH's investment policy framework, project proponents are encouraged to, "leverage the [CMHC's] Housing Design Catalogue" in their proposals. However, in that design catalogue, for Ontario, only one of 21 units has four bedrooms, with 16 of the 21 having two bedrooms or fewer. This leaves us concerned that BCH will build few homes that are suitable for larger families. We encourage the government to provide greater transparency regarding the types and sizes of the units to be created, and to not forget that households come in all shapes and sizes, including multi-generational families.

Thank you for your time.

● (0845)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Moffatt.

We will now go to Ms. Faiza for five minutes, please.

Suzanne Faiza (Manager, Policy and Research, Tapestry Community Capital): Good morning. Thank you for having me here.

Tapestry is a national non-profit. Our job is to help other non-profits, charities and co-ops raise investment directly from their communities to finance affordable housing, renewable energy, art spaces and more. To date we have helped more than 60 organizations raise over \$135 million in community bonds from over 4,000 investors. Right now, we're working with 26 affordable housing providers across Canada, seeking to raise \$161 million to create or acquire more than 5,000 units of affordable housing. This is work that CMHC has recognized twice through its housing supply challenge.

What is a community bond? A community bond is a loan that everyday Canadians make directly to a local non-profit or co-op to, for example, build or buy affordable housing. This is paid back with interest over time. Instead of your money sitting in a bank, it's building homes in your community with a return to you.

Community bonds matter, because they fill financing gaps that government programs and conventional lenders leave unmet. They do it at a lower cost of capital, because the investors are mission- and impact-focused. This matters at scale. Canadians hold approximately \$3.49 trillion in retail savings and assets, so redirecting even 1% of that is roughly \$30 billion for community housing and infrastructure.

I can show you how this works. Indwell, a supportive housing provider in southern Ontario, raised \$6 million from 68 investors in five months to bridge pre-construction financing gaps for four projects and is now launching a subsequent \$15-million campaign. Places for People, a small rural housing provider in Ontario, raised \$850,000 in 10 weeks. It let them acquire eight more units in just two years, after spending 12 years acquiring their first 12.

Community bond raises are typically between \$1 million and \$15 million. To reach scale, these raises do need to be bundled. That's exactly why we built the Weave Community Capital Fund, a \$30-million fund that pools institutional capital across multiple community bond issuers. This fund improves housing providers' access to the larger financing they need to grow their impact.

We are pleased to see Build Canada Homes established through Bill C-20. It's the right institution for this moment, especially if it scales non-market housing. Here's the good news: Clause 20 already broadly gives BCH the power to invest in entities by acquiring their securities. Community bonds and intermediaries like Weave are exactly like that, but the bill gives BCH the power and not the direction. As community bonds and intermediaries like Weave are not explicitly named in clause 20, there is no guarantee that BCH will prioritize these tools. BCH's underwriting could choose to not treat community bonds as legitimate instruments.

This matters because intermediaries like Weave invest directly alongside housing providers who hold community bonds. That creates two key risks. First, BCH could impose deal structures that strip everyday Canadian investors of their rights. Second, BCH could prevent community bonds from stacking alongside its financing altogether. That's the gap we're here to close.

We have two simple asks. The first is an amendment to clause 20 to explicitly name community bonds and community finance intermediaries as eligible instruments and entities that BCH can invest in and lend alongside. The second is a commitment from relevant ministers to issue a directive to BCH on how to work with these tools in practice. This includes investing in intermediaries like Weave and allowing community bonds to stack cleanly alongside BCH loans and equity. Such a directive would allow BCH's capital and community capital to work alongside—together and better.

Canada has a housing crisis and \$3.49 trillion in savings looking for somewhere meaningful to go. Build Canada Homes, designed well, can connect the two not just by financing homes but also by giving everyday Canadians a proper stake in solving the crisis in their own communities. We're asking this committee to make sure that Bill C-20 gives BCH the direction it needs to get there.

Thank you.

● (0850)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Faiza.

We'll now go to member questioning.

The six-minute round will begin with Mr. Aitchison.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses. I know two of you. It's nice to see you. Thanks for being here.

My first question is actually for you, Mr. White. It's nice to meet you as well. You made a statement in your opening comments that investing in housing on government lands for building makes a lot of sense. Did you say that?

Alexi White: Yes, that's right.

Scott Aitchison: I have a very quick question.

What I'm wondering, sir, is why you think we needed to create Build Canada Homes to do that when the Canada Lands Company has been doing that for quite some time already. What tools will Build Canada Homes be given that Canada Lands Company needed?

Alexi White: It's a good question.

There is a world in which Canada Lands Company could have been reformed to do something similar to that. Maytree's position has been that we needed an agency that was tasked with building homes on government land. Build Canada Homes obviously has a much more homebuilding-focused agenda, as its name suggests. It shifts the use of government land much more from the kind of holding disposition mindset that we've had in Canada for a long time around the uses and underutilized assets: Let's offload it and maybe give it away to someone else.

That's been the way we've been doing this for a long time. What we're saying is that, no, we need to hold onto these assets. We need to think of them as an opportunity to build. Build Canada Homes is changing the mindset so that land is deeply linked to the goal of building homes.

Scott Aitchison: This is conjecture at this point, but do you think it would have been easier to slightly alter the mandate of Canada Lands Company than take a year to create a new agency to do that?

Alexi White: I don't know. The future will tell us more. If this results in significant at-scale development of land into housing in a way we were just not seeing through Canada Lands Company, then it will have been worth it. It is certainly hypothetical that you could imagine other worlds in which we achieve the same thing through other means.

Scott Aitchison: Okay. Thanks very much.

Before I move on to the next witness, I will just say that it feels like wasted time to me. The crisis has existed in our country for a while, and here we are creating a fourth federal housing bureaucracy. I agree with your statement that we need to get it done, but we should have been on it earlier.

My next question is for Ms. Faiza.

Welcome. Thank you for being here.

Everyone should know this is her first committee appearance, and she's very excited to be here.

Nobody will be mean to you, including me.

You made a comment about what BCH will be able to do as identified in clause 20 of Bill C-20. I would agree that it's exciting and that it should be able to invest in community bonds. As you know, I like the work that you do. I think it's really good stuff.

I'm wondering, though, if you read further and you get to clause 21, if you have any concerns about the fact that, notwithstanding anything in all the parts of clause 20, loan guarantees and things like that require the approval of the Minister of Finance.

Do you think that may limit this thing's ability to operate like a Crown corporation—quick and fast—to get things done?

Suzanne Faiza: I'm not entirely sure, if I'm being perfectly honest. That is not within my realm of expertise.

I would say that being able to move flexibly as an agency as things happen and develop, though, is generally quite important for non-market housing to be developed at scale. It's whatever helps things move flexibly. If that does need to go through Minister of Finance approval, and if that is considered flexible enough to meet the timelines of actually getting homes built or getting properties acquired, then sure. If not, then I would maybe suggest something else, but it would not be within my realm of expertise to fully answer that question.

● (0855)

Scott Aitchison: That's fair. Thank you.

You think it's important to be able to move fast. Is that correct?

Suzanne Faiza: Yes.

Scott Aitchison: That's great. Thank you so much. Thanks for being here.

Next, I have a quick question for Dr. Moffatt.

I really appreciated the points you made in your statement about the importance of targets, things by which we can measure the success, failure or progress of what the government is doing.

I'm wondering if you might speak to the notion that other agencies that already exist have set targets and have spoken about the number of homes that we need to get built. Do you have a sense that some of the tools we're giving BCH could have been given to the other two Crown corporations that already exist and we could have been moving faster already?

Mike Moffatt: Yes, I do have concerns about that, and not just about speed.

We can imagine a situation where we have a builder that is going to work with BCH to build some deeply affordable units and some affordable units using modern methods of construction. That builder and developer would be working with BCH, but they may also want to apply for ACLP or MLI select. Now they're having to deal with two different agencies.

If they are using modern methods of construction and need to scale up a factory, they would have to go to ISED or some of the regional development agencies to get that funding, and maybe they would be going to the finance department for SR and ED credits. I do worry that, because so many of these levers are spread across different departments, that's going to cause delay and confusion.

When I was a chief innovation fellow for the Government of Canada in 2017, one of the things I advocated for was a single-window approach, and I would certainly like to see that at BCH. I do worry that we're asking those builders and developers to have multiple points of contact in the system that they're not comfortable navigating.

Scott Aitchison: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aitchison.

[Translation]

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

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

Thank you, witnesses, for joining us.

We're here to talk about Build Canada Homes.

Mr. White, thank you very much for explaining what's being done elsewhere in the world. We certainly have to take that into consideration. I think Canada is a laggard in terms of the number of affordable housing units, with 4%.

One of the clear objectives of Build Canada Homes is to double unit construction in general. It won't be able to do that on its own. There needs to be incentives across the market.

Regarding affordable units, we want to go from 4% to at least 7%. I think that's a clear goal.

It goes back to what you said, Mr. Moffatt, about government agencies adopting a coordinated approach. We're trying to create that one-stop-shop with Build Canada Homes.

You also talked about loan programs in the construction sector. Obviously, we'll do that. To date, Build Canada Homes has received enough applications to build at least 10,000 housing units. Hundreds of applications have been received through the portal since it became available.

I'll be asking my questions soon. I just wanted to point these things out.

Build Canada Homes will definitely receive projects. It'll serve as a round table to help a company get what it needs to increase its production of prefabricated or modular housing, for example. We'll be able to get the necessary funds from regional development agencies or the Department of Industry. We'll be able to work with the Department of Industry on labour. We're currently working with the Department of National Defence. We're really implementing this one-stop-shop approach you talked about.

● (0900)

[English]

I thought that was worth mentioning here today.

Mr. White, in terms of the predictability and modern methods of construction, we do need to modernize our construction industry. It's not going to be one single approach. Traditional methods will continue to have their place, but we do have to modernize the industry.

To the point about needing homes for larger families, through what happened in Toronto, developers have seen what happens when we don't build what the market needs. I think we're in a different place now. Hopefully we're setting ourselves up for better in the future.

Mr. White, could you tell us your views on the approach of bundling projects into larger portfolios and how that could, in your opinion, provide the predictability that the market needs?

Thank you.

Alexi White: Theoretically, it is potentially a good way to generate a whole bunch of units with a lower per-unit administrative time. Obviously, when you're bundling a whole bunch or you're building at scale, you're going to get those kinds of efficiencies.

I think there are some real challenges with making sure that it doesn't exclude some players who might not be able to meet those kinds of expectations of Build Canada Homes. It's about finding that balance and making sure that, particularly, those non-profit developers and those people who are focused on building at the very low end of the housing market—those deeply affordable units that we so desperately need to address our homelessness crisis—are able to participate in this, and that it's not only people who are already building more at the market level at scale, who have typically benefited most from Canada's national housing strategy to date.

I think there are glimmers in the way that Build Canada Homes is talking about itself, as you said, with the focus on the low end and making sure that affordability is a bigger piece of the conversation than it has been previously. I think that's a good sign, but we won't know until we see exactly what the plans are moving forward.

To Mr. Moffatt's point, we don't have a great sense of what the goals are for Build Canada Homes in the longer term.

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you.

Ms. Faiza, thank you so much for being here today. I've had the chance to engage with so many community organizations over the last few months on Build Canada Homes and on the housing sector. The work that non-profits are doing to get projects off the ground is amazing.

[Translation]

I call it the obstacle course or the 12 labours of Hercules.

[English]

We're trying to address that with Build Canada Homes.

I'd like to hear how you're seeing that partnership shaping up, from the conversations you've had over the last few months.

Suzanne Faiza: Pardon me. Could you clarify the partnership? With whom do you mean?

Caroline Desrochers: Between Build Canada Homes and non-profits, and how the approach is translating for you.

On our side, we're really trying to make sure that we're creating that table and that space to hear from community organizations and understand what the barriers are to getting projects off the ground, and I'm curious to see if this is translating.

Suzanne Faiza: I think the best person to speak to this would, once again, be a non-market housing provider. We are more in the space of supporting non-market housing providers, but what I can share from the conversations we've had is that a lot of people are curious to see how Build Canada Homes unfolds.

Its design now seems to be critical to what people can expect. A lot of non-market housing providers, in my experience, have gotten very used to the CMHC and they know what to expect. I know some people are concerned about how current CMHC programs and Build Canada Homes programs might interface, and how that design.... You're still going to go to the CMHC to get your insurance, but how does that impact getting your financing from BCH, etc.?

Those are a lot of the technical questions. If this new agency is being created, how do we interface with this? I remember on one of the consultation calls for BCH, when the consultations were released last year, a lot of folks were talking, as Mike pointed out, about that single window and single entry point in that concierge system.

That would be my response to you.

● (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for joining us and helping us understand what the new Build Canada Homes agency, created by Bill C-20, will look like.

Yesterday, a mayor asked me about what's coming up. For now, all we can say is once the bill is passed, there'll be a single portal. We also know that, afterwards, Quebec would have the final say. That's what we want to clarify today.

I'll go to you first, Mr. White.

Can the right to housing be respected without fully recognizing Quebec's jurisdiction?

[English]

Alexi White: Yes, I believe it absolutely can. Canada acceded to the right to housing under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 50 years ago this year. The anniversary is actually coming up next month, I believe.

In that time, unfortunately, we have not seen a huge improvement in the realization of the right to housing across the population, even though it committed us to a process of the progressive realization of this right and it is binding on all subnational governments within Canada. That includes all of the provinces and territories. I would say Quebec is actually one of those that has, by far, accepted and celebrated it, and has in place processes to recognize the right to housing and other human rights, especially economic and social rights that, in many other parts of the country, are just not as talked about and as embedded in the way the government works.

I think Quebec has figured out a way, and it's championing a lot of these human rights, including the right to housing. I think there are other provinces that should be looking to its work on international human rights and the domestic implementation of those rights for guidance on how to expand these elsewhere in Canada.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Actually, when we say Quebec would have the last word, we're talking about the Société d'habitation du Québec, or SHQ.

Are the SHQ's existing programs, for example, at risk of being fragmented by Build Canada Homes?

[English]

Alexi White: I don't think it would, but I'm not an expert on the specifics of the programs within the province of Quebec.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Okay.

My next question is for Ms. Faiza, but also for Mr. White. I'd like to hear from both of you.

Would Quebec's right to opt out with full compensation be supported?

[English]

Suzanne Faiza: I'll go first, and then I'll let Alex go.

In all honesty, Madame, I don't think I have the expertise to tell you one way or the other.

Alexi White: Our focus with Build Canada Homes, as I've said, is the use of federal government-owned land. From the perspective of the use of federal land in the best possible way to build housing across the country, I think it makes sense to have a federal agency like BCH that can manage that from coast to coast.

It is important that BCH also work very closely with the provinces and territories, potentially to combine some of the land and work together with similar development of provincially owned lands or municipally owned lands. Any government land could be much better used through the model that would allow those governments to retain that land and to build housing on it. We're hopeful that there can be more partnerships with provinces and municipalities, but I don't see anything that would force the Government of Quebec to work with Build Canada Homes in that way if the government in Quebec wanted to do something else with its lands. I don't think there's anything here that would jeopardize its ability to do that.

• (0910)

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: We talk a lot about co-operation, but how can we avoid creating a pan-Canadian approach that may not fully reflect Quebec's realities?

[English]

Alexi White: I think it's going to reflect the realities that the federal government sees across the country in terms of the housing challenge that exists. That is one level of government that needs to do more to address our housing crisis, but all levels of government

need to do more to do that. I don't believe there's a fundamentally different challenge that would suggest there's a totally different solution needed for Quebec in this case.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Moffatt, what are your thoughts on funds transfers to Quebec?

[English]

Mike Moffatt: We have no opinion on the matter at the Missing Middle Initiative.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

For the benefit of committee members, we have resources go to 11:35 because of the suspension. We will conclude the first round after this next list of questioners, which begins with Mr. Reynolds for five minutes.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for coming here today. We really appreciate your taking the time to speak to the committee.

Dr. Moffatt, my first question is for you.

About 30 years ago, my wife and I were a young family. I've spent the last 30 years of my life as a middle-class, blue-collar worker. I was a construction electrician for the last 20 years. My last day in the field was two days before the election was called, so it's very fresh for me. My wife and I were a young family with one child, and we were able to buy a home 30 years ago. It was significantly different from it is today. I talk to young families now, and they're just a young family in the same situation that we were in, and that's not an opportunity for them anymore. I think that's very disheartening.

Your talk about the middle-class housing crisis really resonates with me because I understand it and I can really feel it.

What are the main reasons we have this middle-class housing crisis today that we didn't have then? How did we get here?

Mike Moffatt: Thank you for that question.

My parents bought their first home in 1970. My dad was an HVAC mechanic, and when they bought that home it cost about less than three times their income. When I bought our first home in 2004, it was the same story: It was about three times my wife's and my combined incomes, and we were in our late twenties at the time. Nowadays across Canada, depending on the community, we're close to six to 10 times.

There are a number of factors, two in particular, I would point to.

One is the massive rise in taxes, charges and fees. In the city of Toronto, for instance, development charges are up over 5,000% since the year 2000. If other prices in our economy had gone up that much, a cup of coffee would cost about \$66, and a small, family-sized sedan would be about \$1.3 million. That's a key point.

The next cost that has risen a lot is the cost of land. We've had a lot of restrictions on land use. Municipal governments have made it difficult to build up—particularly family-sized homes—but have also prevented building out. If you can't build up and you can't build out, that's going to make land very expensive.

Finally, we've had a lot of population growth over the last five to 10 years, which requires more use of land and more homes to be built. When we don't allow for that, it also raises the price.

There are many factors, but those are the three I would point out as having caused the price-to-income ratio of housing to rise so significantly in the last 20 years.

• (0915)

Colin Reynolds: Thank you.

What area of the housing sector has the biggest need and why?

Mike Moffatt: I would say it's family-sized homes, particularly entry-level, family-sized homes, your three- and four-bedroom homes. One thing that municipalities have allowed for is a lot of one-bedroom apartments. It's not that we don't necessarily have too many of those, but it's one area that we've done rather well in. However, those types of townhomes or semi-detached homes, you name it, where you can raise a child or two, have them play in the backyard—that kind of thing, the kind of thing our generation and my parents' generation took for granted—is where, on average across Canada, we see the largest shortages.

Colin Reynolds: Then based on your expertise, do you see anything that Build Canada Homes will do significantly differently from the previous three bureaucracies?

Mike Moffatt: I almost can't answer that question, and it's not a defence of BCH. Rather, I don't know what BCH is trying to accomplish. I know at a high level it's about creating homes that the market would not otherwise create—and there's a need for that too. Our focus is mostly on the middle class, but there is a real need for housing for families with lower incomes. I also recognize that it's designed to help with housing innovation.

Other than that, there is a real lack of goals or targets when it comes to BCH, so it's hard to tell how much differently this will operate from past initiatives.

Colin Reynolds: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reynolds, for those questions.

[Translation]

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

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for joining us.

I'm going to go to Mr. White to talk about Build Canada Homes.

There's very good news in Quebec, more specifically in Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, where 1,055 housing units will be built. A few weeks ago, the federal government signed an agreement with the Quebec government regarding Build Canada Homes for 18 projects and new affordable housing units. Quebecers are very happy. It's reassuring, but I won't go into the details.

My question is very simple: Can you explain how the Canada-Quebec housing agreement respects Quebec's jurisdiction while accelerating the construction of affordable housing for Quebecers?

[English]

Alexi White: I think Build Canada Homes has already been putting a lot of emphasis on reaching out to provinces and agreeing to these kinds of deals. We've seen that in Quebec, as you mentioned. We've seen it in British Columbia. We're hoping to see it in other provinces as well. This is because they have earmarked significant funds from their original five-year investment for transitional and supportive housing, which is desperately needed across the country.

I would say that deeply affordable and especially supportive housing, for sure, is the largest gap, from our perspective, in the housing landscape today. That's why we have tens of thousands of people who are homeless in Canada every night, which is shocking in this day and age.

The Build Canada Homes example in Quebec is a great one. It is an example of federal leadership and provincial co-operation that allows for the unlocking of a whole bunch of new units that otherwise couldn't be there if it wasn't for multiple levels of government coming to the table and saying, "We have to do something about this."

I think it's a great model. It's a great model for Quebec, and we hope to see all of the provinces and territories partner with Build Canada Homes to make use of the funding that's there.

At the same time, I believe they only set aside a billion dollars of their five-year \$13 billion for supportive and transitional housing. Again, transfers to other levels of government are important, but they are not what's going to solve Canada's housing crisis. The numbers of units that we're talking about here are just not anywhere near the size of the crisis when it comes to the need for deeply affordable and supportive units.

We need to find new ways of building at a much higher scale. That's really where I think we need to see the leadership from Build Canada Homes, even more than just continuing to sign agreements to transfer funds to provinces and municipalities.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Would you say the agreement between Build Canada Homes and Quebec on housing shows it's possible to get tangible results for Quebecers instead of just opposing everything without offering solutions?

• (0920)

[English]

Alexi White: I think Build Canada Homes is trying to find concrete solutions for all Canadians, including those in Quebec and in every province. I'll leave it at that.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. White.

Mr. Chair, do I have a few more seconds?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Natilien Joseph: Okay.

Ms. Faiza, why is the government right to focus on these measures, such as Build Canada Homes, the agreement with provinces, and building affordable homes for families?

[English]

Suzanne Faiza: I suppose in simple terms, ideally, we need cross-government collaboration in order to execute upon a highly complex problem. I'm speaking more from the perspective of a 32-year-old living in Montreal who has been functionally priced out of the housing market. I would personally love to see all levels of government collaborate and actually execute upon this much-needed piece.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: If I understand you correctly, the GST rebate for first-time homebuyers will also help Canadian families buy their first home. Is that right?

[English]

Suzanne Faiza: That's a good question for Mike. Tapestry has no opinion on the HST rebate, etc. I hear a multitude of opinions on whether or not tax breaks can, ultimately, be good or bad for Canadians.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

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

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll ask some more questions to try and better understand Build Canada Homes. There's a willingness to co-operate, and that's what I'm hearing from you as well, Ms. Faiza.

Is there still a risk financial decisions will be centralized with Build Canada Homes?

[English]

Suzanne Faiza: Just to clarify that, you are asking about financial decisions pertaining to what?

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: This organization, Build Canada Homes, will offer a single portal and be responsible for processing housing applications. Is there a risk financial decisions will be centralized?

[English]

Suzanne Faiza: Just knowing what I know from my friends and colleagues who are on the housing provider side, they're looking for simplicity and access, as well as clarity in understanding how to access the program. Roughly, as long as that is achieved, I think the risk of centralization, then, isn't as bad. I think the conversation is more about making things quicker, easier to understand and easier to access. That way, housing providers aren't trying to navigate, as Mike mentioned, multiple layers of government, funding departments, etc. I think that would be my answer.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: You talk about co-operation. I asked a question earlier about knowing the regions, the municipalities and the province. Ultimately, the Société d'habitation du Québec will have a say.

Given that context, does success in housing construction rest more on a federal structure, in this case Build Canada Homes, since that's how it's presented, or on local players?

We talk about co-operation, yes, but are we really going to find out what local stakeholders need?

[English]

Suzanne Faiza: Once again, my expertise on this would be limited. I think I will probably leave my answer there.

• (0925)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

This concludes the first round.

I want to thank the witnesses and members for this informative round. We'll suspend while we transition to the second hour.

• (0925)

(Pause)

• (0930)

The Chair: The committee is back in session.

I would like to welcome the witnesses for the second hour and remind you of a couple of points.

For those who are appearing in the room, please make sure you have your headset on. That allows you to participate in the meeting in the language of your choice. If there is an interruption in translation, I will suspend while it is being corrected.

Please ensure your devices are on mute. Please, for the benefit of our translators, refrain from tapping on the boom of the mic.

In this hour I would like to welcome as witnesses Dr. Carolyn Whitzman, senior housing researcher at the University of Toronto's School of Cities; from the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, Raymond Sullivan, executive director; and from Rental Housing Canada, Tony Irwin, president and chief executive officer.

We'll begin the five-minute open statements with Dr. Whitzman.

Welcome. You have the floor.

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman (Senior Housing Researcher, School of Cities, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you.

I'd like to begin with two suggested friendly amendments to Bill C-20.

The first is that Bill C-20 be adopted with the following amendment: "The purpose of the Corporation is to promote, support and develop the supply of affordable non-market housing in Canada." The added word would be "non-market".

As a second suggested recommendation, as part of the renewal of the national housing strategy this year, the following standard definition of "affordable housing" should be adopted. This would include adding some words to the Build Canada Homes website to say, "Affordable housing means spending less than 30% of a household's pre-tax income on housing"—this would be the addition—"and energy costs, with a focus on very low- to median-income households."

Furthermore, I recommend that the Build Canada Homes income bands be adjusted to be consistent with the federal government's recommended definitions in their municipal needs assessments.

I know these are very technical points. I'm happy to answer any big-picture questions.

I'm a senior housing researcher at University of Toronto's School of Cities. I'm also the author of *Home Truths: Fixing Canada's Housing Crisis*, which was published late in 2024. Among other recent work, I've written a number of reports for the federal housing advocate on a rights-based approach to calculating housing needs and evidence-based approaches to meeting those needs. I've been on the federal government's expert panel on Canada's homebuilding industry. I've written several other reports, including the report cited in the last hour by Maytree on finance, land and construction approaches. Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada consulted with me on the Build Canada Homes framework. However, all points expressed here are my own.

The establishment of Build Canada Homes reflects international evidence-based good practices, so Bill C-20 should be adopted. The use of government land to scale up non-market housing is a hallmark—as said in the earlier hour—of successful initiatives in Canada, from war-time homes in the 1940s to the heyday of public, co-operative and non-profit homebuilding in the 1970s and 1980s. It's been a successful land policy tool for affordable housing, along with long-term, low-rate financing and modern methods of construction, in the Netherlands, Sweden, France, Finland, Austria, Denmark, Singapore and many other countries.

Sweden, for example, was able to build a million low-cost homes from 1965 to 1974, in what was then a country of eight million people, using these mechanisms.

Canadian government leadership within a large public land portfolio, with the explicit promotion of non-market family housing, allowed 4,000 homes to be developed in the St. Lawrence neighbourhood in Toronto in the 1970s. Equally important was the explicit promotion of non-market housing. One-third was public housing, one-third was non-market co-operative and the remaining third was for two- and three-bedroom family-sized condominiums.

Vienna's Aspern Seestadt has a target of 25,000 homes and 20,000 jobs in a former airfield 10 kilometres from the city core, with 60% non-market housing. That's public housing, but it's also limited-dividend housing associations serving low- to median-income households. The project broke ground in 2009 and now has 11,000 homes and 10,000 jobs.

To address Canada's affordable housing crisis, Build Canada Homes must explicitly prioritize non-market housing for three reasons.

First, non-market development is one of the easiest ways to cut construction costs. There are non-market developers across Canada—from Habitat for Humanity to B.C.'s Community Land Trust—with strong track records of delivering large-scale, mixed-income projects on government land.

Second, evidence clearly shows that non-market housing is more likely to remain affordable over time than private development.

Third, non-market housing was a significant enabler of supply during Canada's building heyday in the early 1970s, when there were more home completions than there are today despite Canada's population having doubled in the last 50 years. Unlike private development, which slows down when profit margins dip—as we're seeing now—non-market, mission-oriented developers have an almost unlimited demand for their homes.

● (0935)

It's vital that Canada use consistent income bands for defining and addressing affordability. In 2023, I counted six separate definitions of affordable housing in federal housing programs that were part of the national housing strategy. Build Canada Homes provides a seventh definition, with its income bands differing from an eighth definition used by the City of Ottawa in its recent Build Canada Homes agreement.

The housing assessment resource tools project, which I've been affiliated with, uses a methodology based on proportion of area median household income, which reflects differences between Gander and Victoria—

The Chair: Can you bring it to a conclusion?

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman: —and has been used in the U.S. for 40 years.

Build Canada Homes will require much more capacity to take out long-term, fixed-rate mortgages guaranteed by the CMHC in order to significantly reduce homelessness and housing need across Canada. While this housing commitment doesn't need to be in the bill, it does need to be explicit. The emphasis on non-market development in Bill C-20 and a review of the definition of affordability need to be undertaken as part of the development of a renewed national housing strategy.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Whitzman.

We'll now move to Mr. Sullivan for five minutes.

I would ask the witness to stick closely to the five minutes.

● (0940)

Raymond Sullivan (Executive Director, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association): I'll do my best.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you committee members for the opportunity to appear this morning.

My name is Raymond Sullivan, and I am the executive director of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, or CHRA.

[English]

CHRA, the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, represents the non-market community housing sector. Our members are the non-profit developers and housing providers working with Build Canada Homes—and before that, with CMHC, and before that, with anyone they needed to work with to get the job done.

I think all of us in this room agree that we need more affordable housing. While the government is working to shift the Canadian economy to improve productivity and increase economic security, this will not work while the lack of affordable housing drags our economy down and drags individual households down.

We all agree that we need more affordable housing, but the real question is, affordable to whom? This is where Build Canada Homes can play an important role. It's important that you set its long-term course now, through this legislation, to make sure we see that positive impact in decades to come.

Every home is affordable to someone, but for some households, particularly those with modest and lower incomes, the market is simply not able to supply them with the homes they can afford. Even while housing prices and rents are levelling off, as they currently are in many jurisdictions—even showing some small declines—housing remains unaffordable for the 50% of Canadian households with incomes below the median.

Build Canada Homes, as Dr. Whitzman has pointed out, has adopted an income-based measure of affordability, creating four in-

come groups: median, moderate, low and very low. This is good, but what is BCH's mandate on affordability? It needs to publish clear housing targets based on those income groups. How many homes will it create for moderate-income households? How many homes will it create for households with very low incomes? The minister has set aside \$1 billion for transitional and supportive housing. That's fantastic. How many supportive housing units will Build Canada Homes create?

It's also important because “affordable”, which is a very general term, is not enough. The right question is, affordable to whom? If, one year from now, BCH proudly reports having created 20,000 new homes, will that be a success? It will only if a majority of those homes are affordable to low- and moderate-income households that otherwise can't be served by the private market.

When the Prime Minister launched Build Canada Homes, he said it would “focus primarily on non-market housing”. Non-market housing is housing that operates outside the private market. It's housing owned by co-operatives, public housing agencies, indigenous governments and indigenous non-profits, and the non-profit community housing providers that are our members.

Non-market housing can be available at modest market rents, at below market rents and at substantially subsidized rents affordable to the lowest-income households. The important distinction is that it is non-market housing outside of the private marketplace, but that's not reflected in the Build Canada Homes legislation.

We've seen many government housing programs in the present—and in the past—that provide loan subsidies and grants to private for-profit companies in exchange for affordability. In fact, the single biggest spending envelope currently under the national housing strategy does exactly that. Those companies diligently meet the minimum definition of affordability for the minimum amount of time, and when the government agreement is over, that housing reverts to full market rents. That is not the case with non-market housing. Non-market housing is mission-driven and motivated exclusively by affordability—permanently.

Following the Prime Minister's launch of BCH, I was very pleased to see its mandate clearly stated on its new website: “Grow the proportion of housing that is non-market, mission driven and that produces housing that is affordable for low- and middle-income households”.

When I saw Bill C-20, I was disappointed not to see that mandate reflected in the legislation. This is not a five-year government program. This is a new Crown corporation, something that should be built to last to help our housing system and to help our economy. Where is that long-term mandate in the legislation? Where are the Prime Minister's and minister's directions to future leadership?

Bill C-20 should specifically include BCH's mandate to focus on non-market community housing. The legislation should also require BCH to publish targets and results on what levels of affordability it will achieve, to whom it will be affordable and how many homes.

Finally, as an important note, BCH has to exist within an updated national housing strategy. Build Canada Homes is only part of the solution and, in fact, maintaining a national housing strategy, with targets, is also a legislated requirement. These two things have to fit together for the right systems-level impact. I hope the committee will also soon turn its attention to updating and renewing Canada's national housing strategy.

Thank you.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sullivan.

Go ahead, Mr. Irwin, for five minutes, please.

Tony Irwin (President and Chief Executive Officer, Rental Housing Canada): Good morning, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee.

Thank you for the invitation to speak today on Bill C-20, an act respecting the establishment of Build Canada Homes. I'm honoured to be speaking alongside highly respected housing advocates, both those here now and those on the previous panel.

My name is Tony Irwin. I'm the president and CEO of Rental Housing Canada, which is the leading voice of Canada's private market housing sector. Our members build, own and manage purpose-built rentals across the country—the very homes that millions of Canadians call “home”.

It is fair to say that the question before us is no longer whether we need more homes, but how we deliver more diverse housing. That's why Rental Housing Canada sees the creation of Build Canada Homes as a significant opportunity for the federal government to lead, particularly in the delivery of affordable and non-market housing.

There is a clear and urgent need for deeply affordable, community-led housing. These projects often struggle to find traditional financing. Build Canada Homes has the potential to bridge that gap and move more projects from concept to construction, particularly if it operates with a clear and focused mandate as a single, dedicated window for the non-market housing sector.

Rental Housing Canada members have had encouraging conversations with Build Canada Homes regarding its priorities and investment policy framework with the goal of identifying and advancing projects that are ready to build, utilize modern construction methods, meet affordability and sustainability targets, and are scalable.

Strong policy design must be matched with effective implementation. In that regard, I'm confident in the leadership of Ana Bailão. She's been a long-time friend of the housing sector and has a deep, practical understanding of what it takes to get homes built.

There are several announced elements that we find especially encouraging. Incorporating the Canada lands bank into Build Canada Homes will help ensure that underused federal land can be brought forward more quickly. This approach can reduce barriers and support the delivery of more affordable homes.

We are already seeing how partnerships can accelerate progress. The recent collaboration here in Ottawa between the city and the federal government is a strong example. With federal land contributions and municipal fee relief, more project capital can go directly into construction, which helps get homes built sooner.

While Build Canada Homes can play a leading role on the affordability side, the government is also taking steps to support the private sector through its recent agreement with Ontario on development charges. We see this as a positive development that reinforces the importance of partnership.

The private sector must continue to be enabled to do what it does best, which is deliver market rental housing at scale. To support this, the role of CMHC should be clarified and better aligned to focus on enabling private rental supply, while Build Canada Homes focuses on social and community housing. This includes modernizing existing CMHC programs, particularly MLI select, so that they are designed to support financial viability and timely delivery. A more responsive and commercially focused CMHC can play a critical role in accelerating new supply.

Ultimately, all parts of the housing continuum need the right tools to succeed. Rental Housing Canada is ready to be a partner in this work. This is not a choice between public or private approaches. Both are essential. With Build Canada Homes leading on affordable housing and a strengthened CMHC supporting the private sector, we can create a more coordinated system that delivers the scale of housing Canadians need.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Irwin.

We'll now begin the six-minute round of questioning by members, beginning with Mr. Aitchison for six minutes.

Scott Aitchison: Thank you to all the witnesses who are here. It's great to have you all. You are indeed all experts in your field. I appreciate the work you've done.

I quickly want to start with Mr. Irwin.

You mentioned MLI select, but you didn't mention the ACLP program, for example. I'm surmising that your members might be more interested in expansions of programs like the ACLP and MLI select versus something like Build Canada Homes, which is really not related to your members.

• (0950)

Tony Irwin: I think it's fair to say that we're not the primary stakeholder group for Build Canada Homes, but we're certainly supportive of what it is trying to achieve.

To your point, we certainly have lots of discussions with CMHC about its programs, which are good, but we think they can always be better.

Scott Aitchison: It's safe to say, like you said in your statement, that your members recognize the importance of non-market housing as well, the need for more social and supportive housing, and that both need to be lifted up at the same time.

Tony Irwin: Absolutely.

Scott Aitchison: Fair enough.

Dr. Whitzman, thank you for being here.

I wanted to talk to you a little bit, if you wouldn't mind, about the points you made about the ridiculous number of definitions that we have in this country for what affordable housing is. I wonder if you could elaborate on that a little bit more in terms of the number of definitions, what you would propose as a definition and how that complicates everything we're doing.

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman: I think you've just answered the question as you asked it.

Obviously, we need a clear and consistent understanding—as we've all said, I think, all of the deputants so far—of who needs what housing where and at what cost. In order to do that, in order to make intergovernmental agreements with provinces and territories and municipalities and regions, we need to be talking the same language. A lot of definitions of affordability, including definitions used in the NHS-CMHC programs, have used a proportion of market rent, but unfortunately market rent has very little to do with what people can afford to pay. The definition of affordable housing that has been in place in Canada for four, five or six decades has to do with the 30% rule: no more than 30% of before-tax household income on housing costs, including energy, so that's rent, mortgage and energy costs.

It's not a perfect definition, but it's a solid definition. It's a definition used internationally. It should be a definition that's used, and it's mentioned in Bill C-20. The problem with Bill-20, as my colleague Mr. Sullivan has said, is that it isn't explicit about affordable to whom. All housing is affordable to someone. The definitions we've been talking about at the housing assessment resource tools

project focus on the majority of Canada—the bottom three income bands: low, moderate and median. We include, as Build Canada Homes does, an unfortunate category, which is very low income. At the moment, those who are on fixed incomes, like pensions and social assistance, quite often don't have enough money to rent a room, let alone a self-contained home, and that's a problem.

We need to look at those four income bands in terms of, I would argue, any form of government subsidy. We don't right now. We give a lot of money to programs that deliver...and I'm sorry but ACLP is one of them. In terms of the vast majority of housing, we don't know, actually, because CMHC doesn't keep track of it, whether those are apartment units that can be afforded only by the top two income quintiles or not, so that is a problem. It's a problem in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of government subsidies.

Scott Aitchison: Thanks very much for that. There's lots to dig into there and a lot more work to be done, clearly. I thank you for making that statement here.

I would like to move on to Mr. Sullivan. I'm wondering if you could speak to this.

Obviously, in many ways your members are on the front lines of the social and supportive housing crisis in this country. There's a huge need. What are the biggest barriers your members have to getting units built? I'm sure financing is a big one. They face a lot of the same problems, I'm sure, that Mr. Irwin's members face. Can you speak to the barriers they're facing?

Raymond Sullivan: They face a lot of the same barriers that our private market colleagues do, plus a layer of additional barriers, and a lot of that is raising capital. We're raising capital from multiple sources and often multiple government sources, so being able to co-ordinate those in a much better fashion becomes very important.

It's also important for the Government of Canada to solve this problem not by focusing on units, but by focusing on the pipeline of units. This is why it's encouraging that Build Canada Homes is willing to take a portfolio-based approach, but this also means we need stability, predictability, long timelines and long commitments from those timelines. That was very important in the first version of the national housing strategy—that it was a 10-year commitment and a 10-year timeline, which provided some stability. I think we need to see that renewed again for the next decade.

● (0955)

Scott Aitchison: We only have 10 seconds. There's a lot more to talk about, but I'll talk to you later.

Thanks.

[Translation]

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

Thank you, witnesses, for joining us.

I can confirm we're working on renewing the national housing strategy. We're about to launch the consultations, and everything you just mentioned helps us get ready. It'll be a good opportunity to delve deeper into the definition of affordability and the issue of standardization, for example. We talked with the previous panel about setting clear objectives and indicators to know where we're going and what we need to build.

[English]

Thank you very much for being here today and for being part of this conversation over the last few years. I know you've made a great and significant contribution, and BCH is the response to what we've heard from you over the last few years. It is one piece of the puzzle. It is not meant to work alone. It's definitely meant to work in conjunction with current CMHC programs and will continue to do so in the future.

Member Aitchison, thanks for bringing up the fact that market and non-market housing do need to work together, and both need to be lifted up. We need to build everything: rental, home ownership and all of that. We also need to increase the stock of housing and affordable housing, that's for sure.

I'm just wondering, can you, in your view.... I guess this question is for everyone. Yes, we're trying to work with community organizations and not-for-profits to make sure that we build more affordable housing but also mixed-income projects, where market and non-market housing could be together in a project. We want to ensure long-term affordability.

Previously with CMHC, it was 10 years. We're raising the bar quite significantly on that with Build Canada Homes. I'd like to hear from you on whether or not you think this is the right way to go. What should we be mindful of as we're moving in that space?

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman: Thank you, Ms. Desrochers.

[English]

One of the common misunderstandings about non-market housing is that it's assumed to be only for low-income people. It's true that some.... It depends on which program, but there are many successful non-market housing providers ranging from B.C. Community Land Trust to Ottawa Community Housing, and I could go on, that are building a combination of housing for low-, moderate- and even some middle-income people. I wouldn't want to conflate mixed income with mixed tenure.

Having said that, it is possible that Build Canada Homes could be a place where there is some innovation in terms of the mixed tenure that we need. I'll give one example. Limited dividend companies, which are private housing companies, are included in the National Housing Act. Those are companies whose profit is limited to less than 5% per year. They're a big part of development on government land. For instance, I mentioned the large development, Aspern Seestadt in Austria. That's one possibility. Another possibility is scaling up the amount of co-living. Equity co-operatives are 5% of the housing stock in Germany.

We don't have to see things just in terms of poor people living in non-market housing and rich people living in market housing. There's a lot more complexity out there, and that's why it's particularly important to have, first, a clear sense of what income bands we're talking about, and second, a little more accountability on what the rents or house costs are of the homes that are being developed through government-subsidized programs, whether it's the rapid housing initiative, the apartment construction loan program or the affordable housing program.

● (1000)

[Translation]

Raymond Sullivan: Thank you very much for the question, Ms. Desrochers.

[English]

For 20 years before my current position, I managed a non-profit housing company that was mixed-income housing. In fact, before I was on staff there, I was a tenant there. It's where my oldest child was born. I was paying market rent alongside folks who paid different levels of rent.

I would encourage the Government of Canada to think in terms of a national housing strategy that targets different income bands. Build Canada Homes has provided us with a convenient framework of moderate, median, low, very low and above-median incomes. We need a healthy housing system that works for all of those income bands.

We need a healthy market housing system and, for people who are not served by the market, we need a healthy non-market housing system. That includes rents at different levels. You can almost imagine coming up with strategies, initiatives and interventions for each of those income bands to ensure that there is housing that is adequate and affordable for all people in Canada.

Caroline Desrochers: Mr. Irwin—

[Translation]

The Chair: You still have 10 seconds, Ms. Desrochers.

Caroline Desrochers: Okay.

[English]

Tony Irwin: I'll get it, maybe, in the next round.

Caroline Desrochers: Okay. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Desrochers.

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

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, witnesses, for joining us to discuss the important issue of housing. This issue is a concern for many municipalities in the Shefford riding.

I want to acknowledge the will of the municipality of Granby, which had one of the lowest vacancy rates. The city had to tackle the housing issue head-on and is still fighting to increase the number of housing units available.

Mr. Sullivan, Mr. Irwin, Ms. Whitzman, thank you for joining us. You're shedding some light on this bill that creates Build Canada Homes, a new structure.

Elected officials in my riding still have a lot of questions about this. There are 20 municipalities in my riding, and they all have very different realities. Granby is one of the 20 largest cities in Quebec. The other cities in the riding are more rural, but they also have housing needs.

We need to see how Build Canada Homes meets both the needs of larger municipalities, such as Granby, and those of smaller municipalities, such as Racine, whose mayor contacted me yesterday. He's eager to see how this will roll out and how we'll be able to use this new structure. He still has a lot of questions.

Before I go any further on Build Canada Homes, I have a question for Ms. Whitzman.

You raised an issue we've been raising for a long time at the Bloc Québécois. What does affordability actually mean? We've always said the expression "affordable housing" comes from English Canada. The Bloc Québécois keeps insisting on the importance of having a definition of social housing, community housing and co-operative housing for Quebec that better represents the housing needs of the various clientele.

Ms. Whitzman, what does the vague expression "affordable housing" mean? What impact does it have on citizens and their difficulty in finding housing?

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

I'm going to answer your question a little bit indirectly and go back to a question in the earlier hour.

I think it's really important that in the next national housing strategy there be a reprioritization of provincial leadership in some programs. For instance, Quebec is clearly doing some things right, because it has had the lowest rates of core housing need and of homelessness until recently, when it started to catch up, unfortunately, with the rest of Canada.

However, it is the responsibility of the federal government to show leadership on human rights, with the involvement of every other government. If the federal government were to say that its goal is to end homelessness in Canada—which is eminently pre-

ventable and eminently addressable with the right political will—by a certain date and then leave it up to the governments with which it has agreements, including Quebec, that would allow a distinctive Quebec approach that builds on distinctive Quebec strengths.

I'll give one example from Quebec that I've been very impressed by. Mission Unitaines has replicable seniors buildings in small to mid-sized cities in Quebec such as Mascouche, where it doubled the amount of affordable housing.

It's possible that Build Canada Homes doesn't just have to promote portfolios that are about geographic areas. It could be promoting replicable seniors buildings and replicable buildings for other specific groups. I'd like to see a lot more flexibility around program delivery and a lot more consistency around definitions like affordability and shared goals that are human rights-directed.

I'm sorry if that doesn't directly answer your question, but it gives a sense of the approach that I think might work.

• (1005)

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Whatever you say, it's music to my ears, Ms. Whitzman.

I'm an MP from the Eastern Townships, and I want to point out that co-operative housing buildings in the Eastern Townships are recognized and serve as models. In fact, I'd like to acknowledge the executive director of their federation, Mr. Guillaume Brien.

I talked about Racine earlier and said the mayor would like to have more information about Build Canada Homes. There's a wonderful seniors' home in Racine, a housing co-operative called La Brunante. It even went to the World Health Organization to show how this co-operative housing model for seniors can have a significant impact on seniors' health, both mental or physical. Thank you for allowing me to tip my hat to them.

Speaking of seniors, something else you said is music to my ears. You said seniors' fixed incomes is such they can't afford adequate housing. I know this goes beyond the bill, but it's a reality. Housing for seniors and food are the two things that were hit the hardest by inflation in recent years. Meanwhile, fixed incomes and pensions haven't kept up. That's why we talk about fixed incomes. We talk about housing, but I'd like to hear your thoughts on reviewing the income model for seniors, and ensuring pensions are better adapted to the current reality of the housing market.

For example, the old age security pension of those between 65 years of age and 74 years of age who need housing hasn't increased. It was only increased for those 75 or older. I thought one could find housing at 65 and not have to wait until they were 75 years old.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

Now we'll go to the five-minute round, beginning with Ms. Falk for five minutes, please.

Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to thank each of the witnesses for taking the time to be here today and sharing their experiences and expertise on this file.

I would like to start with Mr. Sullivan.

In the brief you submitted to this committee, you emphasized the importance of clear, measurable, outcome-based targets for Build Canada Homes. You identify their absence as a significant gap in Bill C-20. You touched on this in your opening remarks. I want to give you the opportunity to expand on that.

What types of specific targets did you and the organization expect to see in this legislation?

Raymond Sullivan: While it might not be appropriate to put the specific targets in the legislation, it is appropriate to put a mandate to create and publish targets and renew them on a regular basis for any Crown corporation with a specific mandate. Build Canada Homes was created to be nimble, to be flexible and to respond to the needs across the country, in every region of the country.

If you're going to be nimble and act quickly and be flexible, you need to know where you're heading. To know where you're heading, you need to know where that north star is. You need to know where your goals and targets are, and the Government of Canada needs to know what its goals and targets are. That's why I think it's an important omission from the legislation that Build Canada Homes should be required to publish targets.

Rosemarie Falk: During my tenure at the House of Commons and working on legislation, I've often heard a government say that they'll do the details in regulations. When we look at the accessibility act, for example, we brought forward a lot of things that weren't included. Then, when we did the review, we saw that it was brought up at that time but wasn't included.

I think it is important to hear those aspects of, I would say, the details. Maybe it's not appropriate for it to be in the legislation, but I think it's absolutely appropriate to have the conversations so that regulations are created to the benefit of Canadians. At the end of the day, that's what we're here to do—serve Canadians and hopefully make life easier and more affordable for them.

From your perspective, what challenges arise when a program of this scale is established without publicly stating those benchmarks? I used the example of the accessibility act, but regarding this bill, what could be some of the challenges of not being public when having these conversations?

• (1010)

Raymond Sullivan: A lot of our members, who have been doing fantastic work across the country building new non-market and community housing, are trying to understand where they fit in what Build Canada Homes is offering. Some do mixed-income housing. Some do near-market housing. Some do deeply affordable and sup-

portive housing. However, without knowing how many units of each type for each income band Build Canada Homes is targeting, they're trying to figure out where they fit. Having that predictability, knowing that partner is there for you at the table, becomes very important when elaborating on a program of development.

Rosemarie Falk: I guess the absence of clear targets affects the planning. Is that...?

Raymond Sullivan: I would add the timeline to that as well. Projects that Build Canada Homes is funding right now were projects in the non-market sector that were conceived of under CMHC programs, so they were oriented toward those programs. New opportunities that are presenting themselves today are projects that will be in the ground four and five years from now, but we don't know how to orient ourselves toward those opportunities because we don't know what funding and financing will be available from Build Canada Homes, or other sources, four and five years from now. That long timeline and that predictability—knowing where to attach our targets and those north stars—are very important at the earliest stages of a development project.

Rosemarie Falk: I could see too how, for Canadians.... I actually just spoke with a young woman in her early thirties, who said, "I guess we're just never going to have a house. We're just never going to have one." When you say, "four or five years", that's a drop in the bucket in this place, but for that young couple who's in their twenties or thirties, those four or five years are very important—and for lots of reasons. Is that not right? When you're younger, technically or historically, that's when you're able to make the most money to live, invest in your future, have children and grow a family, so that matters. I could see the importance of making sure that we have those clear timelines, but also, at this stage at the committee, identifying those gaps and making sure they're filled.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Falk.

We will now move to Mr. Joseph for five minutes.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since we're talking about affordable homes for seniors, I'd like to point out I recently inaugurated 100 seniors housing units in Longueuil, in connection with Mission Unitaines. Soon, it may be my colleague Ms. Larouche's turn to inaugurate housing units on Robitaille Street, in Granby. That's what co-operation with the federal government looks like; it takes work.

Mr. Sullivan, what main opportunity do you think Bill C-20 creates to deal with the country's housing crisis?

Raymond Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

[English]

One important thing about Build Canada Homes is that it's built specifically to target non-market community housing. This is why I think it's important that the legislation also reflects that mandate.

One superpower of the federal government in this space is the ability to do direct lending. No other order of government has the same power to provide the same below-market rates. That was a very important shift eight years ago with the national housing strategy. I hope it will be improved with Build Canada Homes, with new flexibilities that were not available to CMHC. I think the greatest opportunity with Build Canada Homes is low-cost finance.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Mr. Sullivan, do you think that, by making Build Canada Homes a Crown corporation, Bill C-20 promotes a more stable and predictable framework?

• (1015)

[English]

Raymond Sullivan: I think the legislation would be strengthened by making the mandate for non-market housing more clear and by requiring Build Canada Homes to publish targets for different bands of affordability. I think that would be a strong improvement to know that Build Canada Homes will succeed in its mandate.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Sullivan.

I will now go to Ms. Whitzman. Welcome to the committee.

Everyone at this table knows housing is a right in Canada. Our role as a government is to take measures to ensure those rights are respected.

My question is simple: Isn't Build Canada Homes proof our government is taking action to make housing a true right?

[English]

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman: In what we've been talking about—and it's really important whether you're talking about non-market or market housing—there needs to be a certain amount of predictability and consistency.

I was personally disappointed when the head of the CMHC, at the beginning of the national housing strategy, said that we can have an adequate, affordable home for all Canadians by 2030. I would have loved to see the evidence that this was possible. I still look forward to some sort of “plan” that shows what the timeline is.

The timeline can't be the next decade. There was a whole generation from 1992 to 2017 where the federal government was out of housing policy, and it showed. Those were also the three decades when homelessness started to increase and affordability became much more of an issue.

To me, the gold standard of a CMHC program is MLI select, because it provides a low rate for a long period of time. That was what it took in the 1970s and the 1980s to scale up non-market housing to 14% of completions—not the 2% to 3% it's been under the national housing strategy.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Ms. Whitzman.

[English]

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman: I'm sorry. I tend to babble on.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Since I have only 30 seconds left, I'll go to Mr. Sullivan.

How is Build Canada Homes' mandate transforming Canada's approach to housing affordability?

[English]

Raymond Sullivan: I think one of the early signs of that transformation is Build Canada Homes announcing portfolio deals with provinces and municipalities. That intergovernmental coordination is very important for any kind of housing development, and especially for non-market community housing.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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.

Thank you, witnesses, for joining us. You're helping us see what's hiding under the rocks.

We can see Build Canada Homes' mandate will have to be clarified and that there may be a lack of predictability.

We're told that, in Quebec, the Société d'habitation du Québec, or SHQ, will have the final say on projects, because it knows the needs on the ground better than Build Canada Homes.

After that, how will the SHQ's final say apply to housing in Quebec? How will all that work with a single organization managed by the federal government? Apparently, Quebec will have its say, but that remains to be seen.

Ms. Whitzman, you gave a lot of international examples, mainly in Austria and Germany, where there are very interesting models.

Could you summarize the key components of projects carried out elsewhere, in Germany or in Austria? That could help us when establishing Build Canada Homes. What should we keep in mind?

[English]

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman: When we look at countries that have achieved certain outcomes, like Finland or France, they are countries that have set goals so that whomever gets elected—and keep in mind there are always multiple levels of government with multiple political perspectives—those goals don't change.

Finland said it was going to eradicate homelessness, and it has come pretty darn close. It has certainly reduced homelessness successfully through funding deeply affordable housing with supports, and that's been true financially since 1987 and in their approach since 2008.

In 2000, France set targets for all municipalities to achieve 20% non-market housing. That was only increased in 2016 to 25%, and Paris has now taken on a voluntary goal of reaching 30% non-market housing. Again, France has had quite a bit of political change, but those goals have remained consistent. It's really important to be serious about the long-term nature of finance and the long-term nature of housing policy, and develop a certain consensus around what the approach is going to be. As Mr. Sullivan said earlier, this isn't a four- or five-year program; this is setting up a Crown agency. It's serious.

• (1020)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

We'll conclude this hour with three minutes for the official opposition and three minutes for the governing party.

Mr. Reynolds, you have three minutes.

Colin Reynolds: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses today for taking the time to come here to offer your opinions.

I've been in construction for 20 years. I'm a construction electrician. I've worked on many projects. There's been a lot of talk in the committee about modernizing construction. This is something that's very interesting to me because, in construction, the prices are bid and it's a fixed price. Time is money. If there's one industry where time is money, it's construction.

There are a lot of things in place and certain formats of construction, such as a design assist, where the developer or building owner will work with the construction trades to increase efficiency and use cost-reduction strategies as the project is progressing. In Canada, we have certain parameters that construction projects fall under. We have things like climate, geography, the availability of building materials and the building code. We can't build a 17-storey building out of bamboo.

With all this discussion about modernizing construction and given that the construction industry is already self-regulating and modernizes itself, what do you think Build Canada Homes will do to modernize construction? I'd like to pose that question first to Dr. Whitzman, and then I'd like to hear from each of you.

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman: I'll try to respond briefly.

When I was on the expert task force on construction, what we heard again and again from builders—and keep in mind that whether you're a non-market or market developer, you're using private construction people—is the need for consistency and guaranteed demand.

I completely agree with you, by the way, about how time is money and that we need to get things going as quickly as possible. The closer we can get to saying, “We know we need this number of seniors' buildings and here's a design that seems to work, so how can we enable that to happen in as many places as possible?” the better off we're going to be as a society. I'll leave it there.

Tony Irwin: Knowing that there's not a lot of time here, I would just say that, certainly, the building code, for example, is something we could spend a lot of time talking about. We don't have time for that now, perhaps.

In looking at all the complexities and trying to harmonize different jurisdictions, I hope that Build Canada Homes will unlock some funding for some of my members who are looking at trying to get into modular housing or at other more modern construction techniques. A lot of investment, as you know, is needed to scale that up, whether in factories or new processes.

We have members who are speaking with Build Canada Homes about projects they're looking to undertake, and they're hoping that some of the investment dollars will be there to help them be able to move forward on some of those projects that really are embracing more modern construction techniques.

The Chair: We'll now conclude with Ms. Fancy for three minutes.

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

Through you, Chair, thank you to the witnesses.

I'm playing cleanup here as the last person of the day, and I'd like to ask one overarching question today. As we know, only about 4% of the housing stock in Canada is classified as affordable. That's about half of the OECD percentage.

With that in mind—and we only have three minutes—I'm wondering if each of you could talk about how important you think Build Canada Homes will be in focusing on affordable housing and helping close that gap. Do you see Build Canada Homes as having the right mandate to do that?

Thank you. You have three minutes.

• (1025)

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman: There was a report mentioned in the last hour by the Maytree foundation. I was a co-writer of that report. It was a proposal around a Build Canada Homes approach. I think we were working with some very experienced market developers, and we showed that it's possible to have homes that are affordable for those with very low to median incomes if certain preconditions are in place. I think Build Canada Homes could definitely be an enabler towards that approach.

Jessica Fancy: Go ahead, Mr. Irwin.

Tony Irwin: I just think back to the last CMHC conference here in Ottawa a couple of years ago. Sean Fraser, who was the federal minister of housing at the time, remarked on stage that market housing providers don't build non-market housing.

We get involved in partnerships. We engage with non-profits and with governments to do that, but it's not, at our core, what we do. The mandate of Build Canada Homes to actually support the building of affordable housing is critical. To me, it's the most critical part of the mandate.

Jessica Fancy: Wonderful.

Bring us home, Mr. Sullivan.

Raymond Sullivan: In the 1990s, just over 5% of all homes in Canada were non-market community housing. Despite the investments of a national housing strategy over the past seven years, we've actually fallen behind. It's closer to 4.5% now. We have not kept pace with population growth and the growth in the number of household formations.

This is why setting those kinds of targets in legislation, or requiring the agency or Crown corporation to publish those targets, is important for knowing that we are able to reverse that trend and get to where we should be among our OECD and G7 peers.

Jessica Fancy: I have 30 seconds left.

I'd really like to ask Ms. Whitzman this question, because I have read some of her book, *Home Truths*.

In your work—including *Home Truths*—you talk about non-scale housing. How can you see those approaches being adapted to rural and coastal communities? I ask because today we talked a lot about urban centres, and my riding is a rural one in Nova Scotia.

I am wondering how you could see our adapting that.

Dr. Carolyn Whitzman: I could start with a whole proposal I have about Canada Post land. I'm going to leave that aside for the moment.

Again, a portfolio approach is really important, because, individually, towns of 5,000 people—or 50,000, for that matter—can't do it alone. Taking a regional portfolio approach makes a lot of sense.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

With that, thank you witnesses for appearing this hour with your informative testimony.

To the members of the committee, we will now suspend before we move to the next hour.

We are suspended.

• (1025) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1035)

The Chair: Committee members, the committee is back in session for the last hour. It's a very important hour of this committee's deliberations today: the consideration of clause-by-clause for Bill C-222.

I would like to welcome the sponsor of the bill, Honourable Terry Beech, MP. From the Department of Employment and Social Development, for any technical questions, we have Deanne Field, acting director general, workers and employers, Service Canada; Soojin Yu, senior director, labour program; Benoit Cadieux, executive director, employment insurance policy directorate; Magalie Brochu,

manager, employment insurance policy directorate; and Sébastien St-Arnaud, manager, labour program.

Before starting clause-by-clause, I would like to make comments to the committee members as a whole.

As the name indicates, this is an examination of all the clauses in the order in which they appear in the bill. I will call each clause successively, and each clause is subject to debate and a vote. If there are amendments to the clause in question, I will recognize the member proposing it, who may explain it. The amendment will then be open for debate. When no further members wish to intervene, the amendment will be voted on. Amendments will be considered in the order in which they appear in the package each member received from the clerk.

In addition to having to be properly drafted in a legal sense, amendments must also be procedurally admissible. The chair may be called upon to rule amendments inadmissible if they go against the principle of the bill or beyond the scope of the bill—both of which were adopted by the House when it agreed to the bill at second reading—or if they offend the financial prerogative of the Crown.

During debate on an amendment, members are permitted to move subamendments. Only one subamendment may be considered at a time, and subamendments cannot be amended.

Once every clause has been voted on, the committee will vote on the title and the bill itself. An order to reprint the bill may be required if amendments are adopted so that the House has a proper copy for use at report stage.

Additionally, in preparation for today's clause-by-clause study of Bill C-222, I, the chair, have taken the opportunity to review the bill and the amendments that were submitted in advance of today's meeting. To help the committee decide how it wishes to proceed, I would like to share a few observations about the amendments.

Amendments G-1, G-2, G-3, G-5, G-6 and G-7 appear, in the chair's view, to require a royal recommendation. Paragraph 18.11 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, fourth edition, states that such amendments are inadmissible in committee. Amendments requiring a royal recommendation should be placed on notice at report stage, together with the necessary royal recommendation.

Furthermore, amendments G-4 and G-8 do not, in the chair's view, appear to require a royal recommendation, but they do appear to be dependent upon the series of motions that do require a royal recommendation and should also be put on notice at report stage when the bill is reported to the House, following the review of the committee.

Amendments G-9, G-10 and G-11 do not, in the chair's view, require a royal recommendation and should be moved at committee.

With that, I will now begin.

Pursuant to Standing Order 75(1), consideration of the clause's short title is postponed.

• (1040)

We're on new clause 1.1, amendment G-1.

Ms. Koutrakis, do you wish to move new clause 1.1, G-1?

Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): I move G-1. I hope the members will vote in favour.

The Chair: G-1 references paragraph 23(2.1)(a), which is created—

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

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can you clarify which amendments you've deemed in order and out of order, please? I'm a little confused at this point.

Annie Koutrakis: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Do you wish to withdraw?

Annie Koutrakis: I would like to withdraw, please.

(Amendment withdrawn)

The Chair: Thank you.

Does that address your valid question?

Laila Goodridge: Yes.

The Chair: Okay.

Laila Goodridge: Mr. Chair, I would still appreciate it if you could clarify which ones you've determined are in order and which amendments are out of order. That would be helpful.

• (1045)

The Chair: You're correct.

Annie Koutrakis: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, can I ask for suspension of a couple of minutes, please?

The Chair: Yes. We'll suspend for two minutes. We need to get this right.

• (1045)

_____(Pause)_____

• (1045)

The Chair: Thank you, committee members.

We'll take our time going through this to get it right.

Since there are amendments, I will give the opportunity to the mover to move or decline them. On new clause G-1, the mover declined to move and withdrew that.

We'll now move to new clause 1.2, amendment G-2.

Does the member wish to decline?

Annie Koutrakis: We decline.

The Chair: G-2 has not been moved.

(On clause 2)

The Chair: We're on clause 2 and amendment G-3.

Does the mover wish to decline?

Annie Koutrakis: We decline.

The Chair: Amendment G-3, on clause 2, has been declined, so clause 2 must carry as it's currently presented.

(Clause 2 agreed to)

The Chair: If anybody has a question, please ask. We're going to take our time to get it right.

[Translation]

Ms. Larouche, do you have a question?

Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Chair, I would just like some clarification, because I'm having a bit of trouble following.

Are you referring to clause 2 or the G-2 amendment, which was withdrawn?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Larouche.

For the amendment numbers that I referenced in my opening statement, the mover, Ms. Koutrakis, had the option to move those or to indicate to the committee that she declined to move them. That's where we're at. We've dealt with amendments G-1, G-2 and G-3, and the mover declined to move them. That means, then, that clause 2 carried as it was.

Madame Larouche, go ahead.

• (1050)

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If we're talking about clause 2, I just want to remind everyone of an element of the bill we introduced, but that isn't taken up here. We'd previously proposed a bill to increase to 50 the number of weeks of EI sickness benefits, the Émilie Sansfaçon bill. We feel it's important to remember that, when it comes to an illness or the loss of a child, you can't predict how long it'll take to heal.

So we're going to adopt it, but I just want to remind everyone that it's important to think about the 50 weeks, because no one knows how long it can take to heal after cancer or the loss of a child. The witnesses we heard from did say it varies a great deal.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

It's a valid point and it is noted.

We'll go to new clause 2.1. We have amendment G-4, which is in order. Do you wish to move amendment G-4?

Ms. Koutrakis, I'll ask if you wish to withdraw it.

Annie Koutrakis: I wish to withdraw it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Blake Richards (Airdrie—Cochrane, CPC): Although these amendments aren't being moved, are we still able to ask the officials questions about them?

The Chair: If they're not moved on the floor, no, there won't be debate, but if you have a general question....

Blake Richards: I'm not looking to debate, but I would certainly like some clarity to try to help me understand the impact the amendments would have.

The Chair: Yes, I will entertain that, but in general, because we are on the clause and not the amendment.

Blake Richards: This might apply to a number of the amendments, but for this one in particular, would it require new paperwork? Would there be forms that have to be filled out? Would applications have to be made by the parents in these cases? Is there a possibility claims could be denied under—

Caroline Desrochers: On a point of order, my colleague has withdrawn this and we've asked for a suspension. I don't know why we're debating something that's been withdrawn.

The Chair: I allowed a general comment on the clause, not the amendment.

Rosemarie Falk: We're just trying to understand all of these amendments that were provided at the eleventh hour. That's all.

Blake Richards: We have the officials here. It's simply an effort to try to understand the amendments. This is an opportunity for us to ask them questions. That's all it is. I want to be clear about that.

The Chair: Right, and I'm prepared to entertain that, Mr. Richards, if it sticks generally to the clause and not the amendment.

Blake Richards: Is the question clear? I'm not sure who should be responding, but do you understand the question I'm asking?

Would this require new paperwork? Would it require application forms to be filled out on the part of the parents in these cases? Is it possible that claims can be denied? Is it an approval process?

I think what all of these parents are looking for in this situation is the ability to have the bereavement leave continue and to not need to deal with bureaucracy with forms and the paperwork. You can appreciate that when they've just lost a child.... This is something that many witnesses told us during this study and during the previous study on M-110 years ago. One of the biggest things was the idea that they had to go and deal with all of this stuff when they're trying to grieve and they haven't had a chance to even bury their child.

The question is, does this create a need...? Whether it's in the clause itself or the amendment that was not moved, would it require paperwork? Would it require those forms? Would it be an application process, where the claim could actually potentially be denied?

Are those things that someone could answer for us?

• (1055)

Benoit Cadieux (Executive Director, Employment Insurance Policy Directorate, Department of Employment and Social Development): Would it be possible to clarify exactly which amendment you are referring to? We don't have them in front of us.

Blake Richards: What we're talking about right now is new clause 2.1. I think that's related to amendment G-4.

I would actually ask that question about the other three amendments, which haven't been moved either. Particularly in this section, I identified an area that certainly reads.... I'm curious to know whether that's what would be required.

There's definitely some lack of clarity there, and I think it's an important thing for parents who are in this situation to know they wouldn't be facing a situation where they have to make an application and fill out a bunch of paperwork. Obviously, the provision of the benefit is important. Regardless of that, it would be a good thing to see, but it would be even better if parents can see that this is automatic and not have it be that situation.

That's what I'm trying to clarify here, if that gives you better clarity.

Benoit Cadieux: My understanding is that the proposed amendment would have extended or allowed parental benefits to continue for eight weeks. Is that correct? In that case, parents would have had to notify, in some shape or form, Service Canada to let them know the child had passed away.

Obviously, we completely agree that we want to find a compassionate way for that to happen and not create any unnecessary burden on the parents in a time that's very difficult for them. That is why one of the amendments proposed a regulatory authority to put in place a process that is extremely compassionate and minimizes the amount of communication that needs to happen. It's so that the parent can inform Service Canada in as minimal a way as possible that the child has passed away.

Blake Richards: Can I follow up on that? It's appreciated that there's an effort being made to try to minimize it. Obviously, we'd greatly prefer to avoid any process that's required on the part of the parents, because it's a very difficult time. Many parents have said one of the biggest stressors they face is having to deal with that paperwork and the bureaucracy.

I have a couple of follow-up questions.

First of all, can you give us a sense of what that process would actually look like for those parents at this point?

Second of all, could the idea be explored, at least, of some kind of agreement with provincial health systems so that they could be the notifying body, rather than requiring the parents to do that? Obviously there's a record, a death certificate and all of these things that are produced provincially. Could that not somehow be transferred through agreements with the provinces?

Those are the two follow-up questions.

Benoit Cadieux: Those are great questions.

That's why that regulatory authority would be there. It would allow us to find the best way possible to minimize that reporting burden on parents in this very difficult situation. We would explore, obviously with our partners at Service Canada, a very humane and compassionate way to allow for those benefits to continue while minimizing that need to report.

The Chair: Thank you.

Blake Richards: If I can finish, I would really, strongly encourage—and this is just advice, I suppose—that every effort be made to ensure that some kind of agreement can be come to with the provinces and territories that wouldn't require that notification to come from the parents. I think that's an incredibly important part if we want to be compassionate about this.

I'll just put that out there.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Richards, for that good intervention.

Go ahead, Ms. Goodridge, and then I want to get back to clause-by-clause.

Laila Goodridge: Thank you.

To reiterate a bit what my colleague Mr. Richards said, it was clear from a lot of the testimony that it was a very challenging part for a lot of these families. If there is any way of working with funeral homes so that the death certificates the funeral homes already produce, which are legal documents, could be transmitted directly to Service Canada and it becomes a process that way, I think that could be the most seamless process. Funeral homes have to provide those certificates of death. They are legal documents. This could happen relatively quickly and take a lot of burden off families.

When someone dies, you have a lot on your plate to begin with. You don't need an extra step, an extra phone call, an extra email or just another conversation oftentimes. Anything that could be done, I think, would absolutely be in the best interests of the families.

• (1100)

The Chair: Thank you for those thoughtful interventions.

(On clause 3)

The Chair: We're now moving to G-5.

Annie Koutrakis: It's declined.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Larouche, go ahead.

Andréanne Larouche: Since we've finally decided to ask questions, I have just one, on the amendments that were withdrawn. I know we're moving on to G-5, but I think we're realizing that we can take the time to ask a few questions to make sure we understand everything properly.

I want to go back to G-2 and one of the paragraphs it would've added, paragraph (4.011). It's the part that starts, "If benefits are payable for deemed care". I'd like Ms. Koutrakis to perhaps explain that a bit more or the officials to provide their assessment.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. I am inclined to give some latitude here, and I will expect the members to please take it into consideration.

Could we have a brief explanation on the question put forward by Madame Larouche?

[Translation]

Magalie Brochu (Manager, Employment Insurance Policy Directorate, Department of Employment and Social Development): As we understand the amendment, the maximum number of weeks for which benefits may be paid could be increased. What this

provision does is very complicated. Parental benefits can be shared between parents. When applying for parental benefits, the first parent has to choose between two options: standard parental benefits, in which case they receive 55% of their earnings, and extended parental benefits, in which case they receive 33%. The other parent has to choose the same option. That is the rule when parents are sharing benefits.

Benefits can also be shared between insured persons, who are covered by part I of the Employment Insurance Act, and self-employed persons, who are covered by part VII.1 of the act. The provision is necessary so that, if one parent is an employee and the other is self-employed, the first parent who chooses the parental benefit option can also receive additional weeks if they're sharing benefits with a self-employed person, and so that their standard or extended parental benefit choice is respected.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, members.

That amendment was withdrawn.

Shall clause 3 carry?

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Are we still on clause 3, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I'd like—

[English]

The Chair: I was asking and I recognized that.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I just have a question about clause 3, before we go any further. It's missing flexibility, because parents could lose weeks depending on when the death occurs. I'd like to hear what the witnesses have to say.

Would it be possible to split it up or to have more flexibility?

• (1105)

Magalie Brochu: You're referring to clause 3 of the bill. Is that right?

Andréanne Larouche: Yes.

Magalie Brochu: Clause 3 of the bill would have to be amended or other amendments would be necessary to increase the number of benefit weeks. Clause 3 provides that the parental benefits will continue until the end of the period.

[English]

The Chair: I have Ms. Goodridge on clause 3.

Laila Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think it's probably important. I would assume that we have some families following along at home. We have a number of amendments that were put forward in a package and haven't been moved, but could potentially be moved at some later point in time. What we're trying to figure out is.... They're very technical and we're trying to make sure that whatever changes could potentially be made—not necessarily just the ones that are going to be made—are going to actually serve the families we are setting out to serve. Mr. Beech has worked on the legacy that was built and started by Mr. Richards. This is about making sure that these families are brought to the least bad place that they can possibly be. This is very commendable work.

The amendments that were brought forward, that we got at the very last minute, are exceptionally technical and exceptionally complex. They are longer than the legislation itself. I do think it is incumbent on us.... We're not trying to slow this down in any capacity. Having an explanation as to what each of these amendments is trying to set out should not be difficult, but it is difficult. We're wondering if we could have a bit of an explanation as to what these amendments are seeking to try to fix, just so we have a better understanding of how this is going to help make this bill better.

I think everyone paying attention would benefit from this, and all parliamentarians, as they're making their decisions, would benefit.

If that could be done, if Mr. Beech, perhaps, is the person who could explain it, or if one of the analysts could explain what each proposed change in each of these proposed amendments that were not moved meant, that would be really helpful for me, at the very minimum.

Annie Koutrakis: I thank my colleague for that explanation. Typically, I would be 100% on board with her, but given that these amendments were not moved, they remain confidential. I don't think we can go into a discussion at this stage here.

The Chair: That's correct, but I would allow Mr. Beech to opine on the comments of Ms. Goodridge and the importance of how we're proceeding to allow Bill C-222 to achieve what the intent is.

Hon. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): I appreciate the ability to comment at a high level. I appreciate the work of everyone at the committee, from all sides and all party members, and I appreciate the complexity that has been brought upon all of us because of the unprecedented way that this is going through, as described by the chair when we started.

At a high level, the way that I think about these amendments is that they fall into three categories: technical, timing and money.

Technical are things.... Despite the wonderful drafting abilities of our wonderful Library of Parliament, it is impossible when you first start into this process—before the department has had its ability and the justice department has had its ability to look deeply into it—to understand exactly what it will affect and what unintended consequences there might be. Those are the technical amendments. Hence, we get a situation where the amendments can be larger than a one-page, double-sided bill.

The second is to do with timing. We wanted to make sure that the department was given a specified time to be able to execute this as it goes through. This ensures that it's going to be within a six-month

timing. I'm hoping that it's going to be faster, but if we do this today, we get it done before Christmas.

The third is specifically to do with money and the requirements of the royal recommendation and to make sure that what is financially encapsulated in this bill falls inside what was already proposed in the annex of budget 2025. That gets us the royal recommendation. That gets this passed. That gets it to the Senate and, hopefully, gets it done before Christmas.

From a high level, that's what we're doing today.

The Chair: Okay.

I'll entertain one more, but it's the will of the committee. Either we get through it or we do not.

Laila Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I really appreciate that.

My question is perhaps for the clerk or perhaps one of the analysts. Will there be an opportunity for any of these amendments that are not moved now to have a technical answer as to what each amendment actually means should those amendments happen to be moved at some later point in some later space?

Maybe the legislative clerk could answer or maybe the clerk. It's just so we have some understanding as to whether, if we have questions specific to these amendments that have not currently been moved, there is a space.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Goodridge. That is a good question. Yes, it would be at the report stage in the House.

Laila Goodridge: Will there be all of the same people to explain? I'm curious.

The Chair: I'll ask the legal counsel to speak to it.

Laila Goodridge: Perhaps the legislative clerk could answer.

Michelle Legault (Legislative Clerk): There is a debate at report stage. However, it's not the same forum as a committee. I'll leave it at that.

Laila Goodridge: What we're hearing is that we have to trust that every single one of these amendments is going to achieve what it's trying to achieve. We have no ability to ask any of the experts who drafted these and worked so hard on these very technical amendments exactly what those changes will be in any of these amendments that don't get moved.

I think the families deserve a bit more clarity. I'm a little disappointed by this, but I don't want to hold this up. I'm going to move on, but I wanted to state my displeasure. Families have been waiting for this for over a decade. We're trying to make sure that any proposed change that happens now, or at some later point, is going to get them to that goalpost.

The Chair: We'll get a brief response from the department.

Benoit Cadieux: We'd be happy to offer a technical briefing before this goes to report stage, if needed.

Rosemarie Falk: In terms of timing, from what I understand, that time would be now. Once this leaves committee, it then goes to report stage. I guess that's our frustration here—trying to understand before it gets locked into the next stage. We're in somewhat of a predicament. We're trying to understand what all of these amendments are and what repercussions or side effects they could have.

The Chair: If it's the wish of the committee, the committee could go in camera now and receive that technical briefing. Then we can move forward.

Is it the wish of the committee to go in camera to have a technical briefing, or does the committee wish to continue reviewing clause-by-clause so that the bill may get passed?

Laila Goodridge: Mr. Chair, I have a proposal. Could we go through this? We will pass as much of this as possible and will seek, at the earliest available opportunity, to have an in camera briefing on these amendments so that we can make sure we understand this.

I don't want to hold this up in any capacity. The families have been waiting long enough.

The Chair: I agree.

Laila Goodridge: They do not deserve to have to wait for this.

We are very disappointed by the lack of clarity on how this came forward. I hope this can get better. We do support this, and we do support the intent of this.

Rosemarie Falk: I would support that proposal, with the caveat that it is scheduled before this comes—

The Chair: Before it reaches report stage in the House...?

Rosemarie Falk: Yes, it would be within a respectful time, not the night before this bill is up for debate at report stage. I expect that we wouldn't have a repeat of what we've had already with these proposed amendments.

Annie Koutrakis: We are in complete agreement with what was just said.

The Chair: Yes, we do control when it gets to the House. That was a good observation, Ms. Goodridge and Ms. Falk.

With the goodwill of the committee members, we'll get through the bill so that we can get to the technical briefing and get the bill to the floor of the House for second reading. Then we will get it changed within the timeline that everybody wants.

We are under time constraints. As chair, I must live within the direction that comes from the legislative counsel and ensure that when the bill does get there for second reading, the Speaker allows it to get there. That requires considerable nuance.

Shall clause 3 carry?

Laila Goodridge: We already did that.

The Chair: It wasn't agreed to. That's why I allowed you to debate it, Ms. Goodridge. Let's stay within the rules.

(Clause 3 agreed to)

The Chair: Where are we now? There are a lot of numbers.

We will move to G-6.

Is it your wish to withdraw it?

• (1115)

Annie Koutrakis: I decline to move the amendment.

The Chair: We're now at new clause 3.2, with amendment G-7.

Is it your wish to decline?

Annie Koutrakis: I decline to move the amendment.

The Chair: We are on new clause 3.3. This is G-8.

Do you wish to decline?

Annie Koutrakis: I decline to move the amendment.

(On clause 4)

The Chair: Now, so that we're all clear, we're on clause 4 of the bill. It's not an amendment.

Shall clause 4 carry? Clause 4 should carry.

Now we're on the clauses. It's not—

Annie Koutrakis: Can we suspend, please?

The Chair: Yes. I'll suspend for a couple of moments, because we've moved from amendments to clauses.

We've carried clause 4. I'll suspend for two moments.

• (1115)

(Pause)

• (1120)

The Chair: The committee is back in session.

We were dealing with clause 4, and it was carried.

Hon. Terry Beech: No, it was not.

Laila Goodridge: No, clause 4 did not carry.

The Chair: Okay. Shall clause 4 carry?

I'm going to ask the legislative clerk to speak again to the relevancy of clause 4.

The Clerk: Clause 4 is what's in the bill. It does not refer to any amendments that were moved or not moved. It's up to the committee, but clause 4 refers to what's in the bill.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: We vote in favour of the clause.

Let's hurry up. There are only 10 minutes left.

[English]

Annie Koutrakis: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I need clarification, because I'm getting conflicting advice.

The Chair: We'll suspend for two moments to get clarification on the necessity of clause 4.

• (1120) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1120)

The Chair: The committee is back in session.

I'm going to ask the promoter to speak to clause 4.

Hon. Terry Beech: Thank you for the opportunity.

I'm going to take this opportunity to speak to clauses 4 and 5. I've had conversations with all sides, and I understand the frustration experienced by all sides based on the lateness of the emergence of the amendments and the clauses thus affected. I would also defer to any of the professionals sitting next to me, who are all technical people, if they want to get into more details.

In my understanding, both clauses 4 and 5 are redundant, and an additional flag was raised that, because death of a child would be incorporated into the definition and stillbirth is not affected by what we're doing here today, by incorporating that into the specific definition, you would actually be putting those rights at risk.

Because it's unnecessary and would have an unintended consequence, I'm hoping both clause 4 and clause 5 will be removed.

The Chair: Are we clear? Has everybody heard Mr. Beech's explanation? Are we good?

I'll return to clause 4.

Is it the wish of the committee to defeat clause 4 and remove it?

Blake Richards: On division.

(Clause 4 negated on division)

(On clause 5)

• (1125)

The Chair: For clause 5, the question is the same, as is the explanation the promoter has given.

Shall clause 5 be removed?

Laila Goodridge: On division.

(Clause 5 negated on division)

The Chair: Thank you, committee members.

We're now on new clause 6. Please focus on the bill we have going. We're now on new clause 6, and we have an amendment called G-9.

Do you wish to move G-9? It is in scope.

Annie Koutrakis: Yes, I would like to move G-9, which would add a new clause 6, regarding extending the length of bereavement leave.

I don't know, Chair, if I read it into the record or whether the clerk does or you do.

The Chair: Ms. Koutrakis, you should read it.

Annie Koutrakis: I move that Bill C-222 be amended by adding after line 31 on page 2 the following:

6 (1) Subsection 210(1.01) of the Canada Labour Code is replaced by the following:

This is regarding the death of a child.

(1.01) Subject to subsection (1.011), every employee is entitled to and shall be granted, in the event of the death of a child of the employee or the death of a child of their spouse or common-law partner, a leave of absence from employment of up to 10 weeks that may be taken during the period that begins on the day on which the death occurs and ends 12 weeks after the latest of the days on which any funeral, burial or memorial service of the child occurs.

The next proposed new subsection of the code relates to leave for the death of a child under section 206:

(1.011) Every employee is entitled to and shall be granted, in the event of the death of a child of the employee that occurs while the employee is on, or is entitled to be on, leave under section 206 in respect of that child, a leave of absence from employment of up to 10 weeks that may be taken during the period that begins on the day on which the death occurs and ends on the later of

(a) 12 weeks after the latest of the days on which any funeral, burial or memorial service of the child occurs; and

(b) 12 weeks after the end of the leave under section 206.

(2) The portion of subsection 210(1.02) of the Act before paragraph (a) is replaced by the following:

(1.02) In subsections (1.01) and (1.011), "child" means

That would be followed by a definition.

The rationale for that is that clause 6 adds subclause 6(1) to Bill C-222 to amend subsection 210(1.01) of the Canada Labour Code to provide that bereavement leave for the death of a child is extended from eight to 10 weeks. This will ensure that employees in the federally regulated private sector have job-protected leave while receiving the additional eight weeks of employment insurance parental benefits following the death of a child. The additional two weeks of leave will cover employees who have not yet served the one-week waiting period, for example, if they were not already receiving maternity or parental benefits and where their benefit period is postponed by one week due to a delay in the interruption of their earnings.

Subclause 6(1) also adds a new subsection 210(1.011) to the code to provide that bereavement leave for the death of a child may be taken up to 12 weeks after the end of the employee's maternity leave, if applicable. This change ensures that an employee who loses their child during the maternity leave period can wait until that leave ends before taking the full 10 weeks of bereavement leave.

Finally, currently, bereavement leave for the death of a child may be taken during the period that begins the day on which the death occurs and ends 12 weeks after the latest of the days on which any funeral, burial or memorial service occurs. This means that an employee who loses their child at the beginning of their 17-week maternity leave may not be eligible to take bereavement leave if they wish to complete their full maternity leave entitlement.

• (1130)

The Chair: You all have the amendment that would add the new clause 6, which is G-9.

Is amendment G-9 carried?

The Chair: Madam Larouche, go ahead.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: We set a number of weeks, but keep in mind that we'll have to think about increasing it to 50, just as we have to think about cases involving serious illness. The Bloc Québécois wishes to reiterate its desire to establish a proper number of weeks.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Larouche.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: We will now go to amendment G-10, which would add new clause 7. G-10 references clause 6, which was created by G-9 as G-9 was accepted.

Do you wish to move G-10?

Annie Koutrakis: Yes, we are moving G-10.

New clause 7 would add a transitional provision.

I move that Bill C-222 be amended by adding after line 31 on page 2 the following:

Transitional Provision

7 (1) Section 210 of the Canada Labour Code, as amended by section 6, applies to an employee if, on the day on which section 6 comes into force,

(a) the period during which the employee is entitled to take leave under subsection 210(1.01) of that Act, as it read immediately before section 6 comes into force, has not ended; or

(b) the employee is on, or entitled to be on, leave under section 206 of that Act.

The next subclause deals with periods of leave.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), an employee who has taken two periods of leave under subsection 210(1.2) of the Canada Labour Code before the day on which section 6 comes into force may, despite that subsection, take one additional period of leave.

The new clause 7 would add a transitional provision to Bill C-222 to ensure that any employee who is within the eligibility period for bereavement leave or for maternity leave on the day the changes to the code come into force is entitled to take the additional two weeks of bereavement leave. It would also ensure that an employee who is on maternity leave when the changes come into force may complete their maternity leave before taking the full 10 weeks of bereavement leave.

In addition, if an employee has taken a maximum number of periods of bereavement leave—that is, two—before the coming into force of these changes, they may take a third period to avail themselves of the additional weeks of leave, provided that they are still within the eligibility period.

The Chair: Shall amendment G-10 carry?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: We now move to new clause 8, which would be added by amendment G-11, which can be moved.

Do you wish to move G-11?

Annie Koutrakis: Yes, I do.

The Chair: Does anybody wish to have G-11 read into the record, or do you have it?

Laila Goodridge: It should be read into the record.

The Chair: I'll ask Ms. Koutrakis to read amendment G-11.

Annie Koutrakis: Amendment G-11 would introduce a new clause adding a coming into force provision.

I move that Bill C-222 be amended by adding after line 31 on page 2 the following:

Coming into Force

8 This Act, other than section 3.3, comes into force on the first Sunday after the day that is six months after the day on which this Act receives royal assent or on an earlier day to be fixed by order of the Governor in Council.

The rationale for this is that a coming into force six months following royal assent ensures that the benefit can be implemented on time for parents who wish to access it.

The Chair: You've heard amendment G-11. Shall it carry?

Do you have a question, Mr. Richards?

Blake Richards: It's more of a comment.

When I see an extra six months being asked for that these families and these parents would have to wait.... They've waited a decade already. These changes could have been made a decade ago. Now they're being asked to wait another six months. We don't want to hold this bill up from passing, but I can tell you I have serious concerns about parents being asked to wait another six months.

I can't support this. We won't hold the bill up. We'll abstain in order to see the bill get through committee, but I cannot support this idea of six months.

• (1135)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Koutrakis.

Annie Koutrakis: I think this would be a good opportunity to ask the officials here today why it cannot be done immediately after royal assent. It would help the committee members understand the rationale.

[Translation]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cadieux.

[English]

Benoit Cadieux: I am happy to do that. Thank you.

Why is it six months? The first reason is that, as you may know, new parents in Quebec are covered under the Quebec parental insurance plan, so we need some time to negotiate and have discussions with Quebec. They may need time to make potential adjustments on their end in order to make sure there's alignment between their plan and what's proposed in this bill.

The second reason is that some employers offer supplementary unemployment benefit plans that top up EI benefits. They need time to be notified and to make potential adjustments to their plans in order to account for the extra time being provided under this bill.

Finally, the third reason is that we need time to update guidance materials and communications materials. Deanne can talk more about that, if needed.

Thank you.

The Chair: Do you have your hand up, Ms. Falk?

Rosemarie Falk: I think Ms. Goodridge had hers up before mine, though.

Go ahead, Laila.

Laila Goodridge: Thank you.

The other piece of this amendment that scares me is that it will receive royal assent after.... There are bills that pass and linger for years without receiving royal assent. That is not necessarily uncommon in the world of private members' bills.

I am wondering if there is any kind of assurance we can have. I know that no one sitting around this table controls whether a bill receives royal assent or not, but we need to urge the government to use every tool possible to get this bill's royal assent as fast as humanly possible and make sure that those six months.... There is a space in there where it could be faster. I would urge every person sitting here, and everyone working on this project, to start doing the work right now so that it can be done as fast as humanly possible. Frankly, there are families relying on this. They've been waiting for a decade and want to see this cross the finish line.

Like my colleague said, we're not happy about this extra delay, but we want to make sure there are no further delays. This is some strongly worded mom guilt for everybody listening to make sure this actually happens. Don't hold up the royal assent, because that would be really silly—I'm not allowed to use the other S-word.

The Chair: That, Ms. Goodridge, was well said.

I'm going to let Mr. Beech respond. Then I have Ms. Falk and Madame Larouche.

Hon. Terry Beech: I super appreciate all levels of mom guilt, and I want to assure you that this is a feature and not a bug. There were discussions about this potentially taking longer, and I want to constrain that to a maximum of six months. I hope it can be completed much faster than that.

I would also like to assure you that I've already approached a sponsor in the Senate. They were previously a pediatrician and are very invested in this. We've gone to all the different parties. I'm hoping we can get this through very quickly.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll go to Ms. Falk and then Madame Larouche.

Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, Chair.

On this conversation about a bill's coming into force, I will note that I had a PMB for adoption leave. It was for adoptive parents to be able to receive the same type of leave as those who don't adopt

children but rather have children naturally, including surrogate parents. The government at the time, the Liberals, voted against it. They then stole that bill and put it in their 2023 fall economic statement. We're now in 2026, and it still has not been enacted.

I'm glad to see that there's something in here. I don't think it's enough. It's shameful that the Liberal government stole that bill and has not enacted it. We still have adoptive parents and intended parents at a disadvantage. It's not equitable for those who have children via surrogacy or adoption.

I appreciate, MP Beech, that you've taken it upon yourself to ensure that it's there. Any other advocating you can do with the department officials beside you.... I would urge them to ensure that adoptive parents and parents through surrogacy can have the same access to leave as other parents.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Falk.

Madame Larouche, you want the floor.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I'll be quick. I know we're short on time and we want to make sure we adopt the bill.

I just want to reiterate that the Conservative members and I were extremely frustrated when we found out, at the beginning of the week, that an hour of meeting time had been cancelled without our being consulted. It worried us. We so want to see this bill passed that, for us, any delay is a worrying indication of the government's genuine desire to move the bill forward.

Yes, we are getting to the end of something today, but I do want to say that, like the Conservatives, the Bloc is going to do everything it can to remind the government that we are the ones calling for a comprehensive EI reform. That includes increasing the number of benefit weeks to 50. We are committed to bringing forward another bill on that, as we wait for any legislation that brings a bit of humanity into this world, like this bill. The passage of this bill can't wait any longer. Like the Conservatives, the Bloc will be there to underscore that the bill needs to be passed quickly, that it needs to be given royal assent, and that it must not come into force any more than six months later.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

Shall G-11 carry?

(Amendment agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall the short title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill as amended carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the chair report the bill as amended to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill as amended for the use of the House at report stage?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: One thing I want to be clear on is that before it gets to that stage, I will advise the clerk to set up the briefing meeting. That was discussed. That was agreed to, as requested by Ms. Goodridge. As chair, I will give you my commitment that the bill will not get to report stage—

Rosemarie Falk: Do you have to present it the next time the House—

The Chair: No.

Rosemarie Falk: Oh, that's interesting.

The Chair: Until I as chair present it, it doesn't get there, but it's a valid point and a good process. We will do a technical briefing in camera on the technical parts.

With that, thank you so much, committee members.

Thank you, Mr. Beech.

Mr. Richards, I understand you had pursued this issue some time ago. Thank you for that.

Thank you to all the staff of committee members. This was a committee process.

We also heard from witnesses. I want to thank them for appearing before this committee and for being so candid with the really heart-wrenching testimony they gave to this committee.

To everybody, yes, it's time that the government gets this done.

Ms. Koutrakis.

Annie Koutrakis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll try to get through this without getting emotional. I'm incredibly proud of the work we all did here. I know it was very frustrating. It was frustrating to me as well. I just wanted to make sure we didn't stumble inadvertently. This was a difficult challenge.

I want to reach across the way and thank all my colleagues. Thank you to our colleague the Honourable Mr. Beech for all the hard work. Thank you to the officials who work behind the scenes to make sure we get this right. I'm very grateful for the work.

Thank you, Mr. Richards, for being a strong advocate for this bill. We need to get this right, and we need to get it to the parents who need it.

On behalf of the government, I just want to say thank you. I'm really happy we're going forward with this.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Larouche, for your hard work and the conversations we've had. It is a privilege to work with everyone here to do the right thing.

● (1145)

[English]

The Chair: Again, thank you for this, everyone.

I'll leave the final comments to Mr. Richards, if he wants to make some, and then Mr. Beech as the promoter.

Blake Richards: I'll simply say that parents have waited for this for a long time. It's the right thing to do. It's the compassionate thing to do. We've heard during this study and in past studies why it's so critically important that this happen. I think this is an example of something where everyone has the right goal in mind. Despite some of the challenges it took over the years to get to the point where we could all work together on this, I'm thrilled that it's happening. It's an example of what we can do when that happens. I hope it's something we see more of as we move forward. I know that the parents and the families certainly will be better off.

I'll just remind everyone that the work's not quite done yet. We have to keep committed and we have to move as quickly as we can, because parents have waited too long already.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Richards.

We'll give the final word to Mr. Beech.

Hon. Terry Beech: I'd just like to give a big thank you to everyone, including my colleague Mr. Richards. To everyone, this would not proceed in this very unprecedented way without a certain level of trust. I think that trust is here because of how important the issue is that we're discussing. You know, we're facing a lot of difficult things in this country. We all go back during the election and represent our relative parties, but at the end of the day, we're all on team Canada, and this was a team Canada thing.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn? Please say yes.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

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

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

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

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

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