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

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Chair: Robert Morrissey





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

Thursday, April 23, 2026

● (0815)

[English]

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

[Translation]

I call this meeting to order.

[English]

Welcome to meeting number 34 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and 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. Witnesses are appearing in the room and virtually.

Before we begin, I would remind all members that you have the option of participating in today's meeting in the official language of your choice. If you're in the room, please select the correct channel in front of you so that you can fully participate. For those online, please click on the globe icon at the bottom of your screen, and you will see the official languages to choose from.

If there's an interruption in interpretation, please get my attention. We'll suspend while it is corrected.

The clerk has advised me that all those appearing virtually have had their sound tested and have been given the approval.

I'll remind members to silence their devices and refrain from tapping on the mic boom in front of you for the protection of our interpreters.

For this meeting on Bill C-20, an act respecting the establishment of Build Canada Homes, I would like to welcome the witnesses.

From CentreCourt, we have Mitch Gascoyne, partner and senior vice-president of development.

From UTILE, we have Laurent Levesque, chief executive officer, and Maxime Pelletier, director of public affairs. They are both joining us by video conference.

From Welcome Hall Mission, we have Samuel Watts, chief executive officer and executive director.

Each witness will have five minutes to give their opening statement.

Before I introduce the first speaker, I note that a member has her hand up.

I'll recognize Ms. Falk.

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

I understand that there have been conversations and that there's an agreement to invite the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure and the Minister of Jobs and Families to testify, in relation to main estimates, for no less than one hour individually and no later than the end of May.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Koutrakis.

**Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.):** I can confirm that, for Minister Hajdu, we've locked May 28 as the date for her.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Then we are in agreement. I'll read it again. I move:

That the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure and the Minister of Jobs and Families be invited to appear before the committee on the subject of Main Estimates 2026-27 for no less than one hour, individually, no later than the end of May 2026.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Yes.

**The Chair:** I see thumbs-ups, so there's agreement.

(Motion agreed to)

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

We will now go to the opening comment from Mr. Gascoyne.

Mr. Gascoyne, you have five minutes.

● (0820)

**Mitch Gascoyne (Partner and Senior Vice-President, Development, CentreCourt):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Mitch Gascoyne, and I'm a partner at CentreCourt, one of the largest high-rise developers in the city of Toronto, and by that measure, one of the largest in the country.

Since our founding in 2010, CentreCourt has delivered over 12,000 homes, representing more than \$6 billion in development value. My perspective today is grounded in the practical reality of what it takes to get a project built, what makes it work financially and what causes it to stall.

Before speaking to Build Canada Homes specifically, I want to put the current market into context, because the numbers are stark. My colleagues at BILD have noted that GTA new home sales in 2025 reached just over 5,000 units, which is the lowest since tracking began in 1991 and an 80% decline from the 10-year average. I can tell you from the front lines that the numbers reflect a stark reality.

CMHC's own data confirms what we are experiencing in Toronto specifically. In 2025, Toronto housing starts fell to their lowest level since 2009, falling below Calgary, Montreal and Vancouver for the first time. On a per capita basis, home building activity dropped to its lowest point since 1996, driven by a collapse in condominium starts. There hasn't even been a new condo launched so far in 2026 in the city of Toronto.

The root cause of this contraction is not a lack of demand for housing, and it is not a lack of willingness of developers to build; in many cases, projects are ready and sites are approved. The issue is that the all-in cost of delivering housing remains too high relative to what the market can absorb. Critically, it's not because construction and land costs are elevated, as both have come down materially from their peaks. Land values have fallen significantly, and construction costs have eased. What has not moved until very recently is the tax and fee burden.

There's a second dimension that is equally important. New housing, particularly purpose-built rental, is competing for capital against every other investment opportunity in the world. Investors and lenders looking at a rental project today are comparing it to alternatives globally. The returns need to reflect that reality. Right now, even with CMHC support, it is difficult to find rental projects that offer competitive, risk-adjusted return. We need to change that.

I want to acknowledge the massive steps the government has begun to take on this front. The elimination of HST and the reduction of development charges by the federal government and the Province of Ontario are meaningful and necessary steps. In our own projects, we have passed along those savings directly to our purchasers, and we have seen a real, if early, uptick in activity as a result.

The direction is right, and I want to be clear that the industry is genuinely appreciative of the pace of change. The task is now to make those measures permanent rather than temporary and extend them further as conditions allow.

Build Canada Homes fits directly into this broader approach, and I support the direction of Bill C-20. From where I sit, BCH's most important role is as a provider of catalytic capital for affordable projects. Even with meaningful improvements on the cost side, there remains a significant gap between what it costs to build and what affordable projects can support financially. The economics of affordable housing are simply not achievable without some form of government support. That is exactly where a flexible, low-cost and more patient capital provider can make the difference in getting projects into construction.

BCH's direction, as I understand it, is to work in genuine partnership with the private sector, and that is exactly what is needed, as 95% of housing in Canada is delivered by private developers and

builders. There's a real value in BCH's filling the gaps the market cannot fill on its own, particularly on affordable housing projects.

It is also worth being clear that BCH and tax and fee reform are not alternatives; they are complements. Reducing the cost burden on new housing, market housing and affordable housing for rental and ownership is important. BCH's capital goes to work on the affordable end, where market economics alone will not be sufficient. Together, these two levers cover the full spectrum of what Canada needs to get built.

I would emphasize that Build Canada Homes should be viewed as additive to CMHC and not a replacement for it. CMHC's role in the current market cannot be overstated. Almost every purpose-built rental project being built in Canada relies on CMHC products, whether it's construction financing or takeout financing. Without CMHC, the number of rental starts in this market would be substantially lower. BCH expands the federal tool kit through more flexible, project-level intervention. Both are needed, and both must be adequately resourced.

From my interactions with BCH, I am confident that the goal is clear: Build as much housing as possible, as fast as possible.

The case for action is straightforward: Canada is not building enough housing. Across our major cities, starts are falling and the pipeline is thinning, and projects that will deliver homes in 2030 and beyond need to begin today. The path forward requires two things working together.

First, we need to continue to cut tax on new housing so that the supply becomes viable market housing and affordable housing, including for both ownership and rental.

Second, we need BCH to strategically deploy capital into affordable projects that the market alone cannot deliver. These two levers used together are how we close the gap. Supply is the solution. Affordable supply, market supply—we need all of it. We need it to be financially viable. That is the test for this legislation and for the housing policy that follows.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

• (0825)

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

Who is doing the presentation for UTILE?

**Laurent Levesque (Chief Executive Officer, UTILE):** I will be starting.

**The Chair:** Okay. You can share your time, if you so choose.

[Translation]

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

**Laurent Levesque:** Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for the invitation.

I'm the CEO of UTILE, a social economy enterprise that builds and manages affordable student housing in Quebec. Today, we have over 750 units already built in the past five years. Our team of around 50 people is currently working on another 1,000 units. We're a major partner of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, which has helped fund almost all our projects. This makes us one of Canada's leading non-market housing developers.

I should note that we carried out one of the largest modular prefabrication projects in eastern Canada. Last year, we built 155 units in Rimouski using these modern methods. UTILE readily welcomes Bill C-20, given the urgent need to implement Build Canada Homes, especially now that the CMHC has less leverage in affordable housing owing to the end of the affordable housing fund.

In recent years, Canada's national housing strategy has really helped create significant momentum in the non-profit and affordable housing sector. We currently aren't alone in having a large stock of tens of thousands of units whose funding scenario remains uncertain given the end of the affordable housing fund.

The Build Canada Homes program is vital to maintaining the momentum and pace of affordable housing construction in Canada. If this program fails to hit its stride quickly, we risk losing some of these projects.

I would also like to point out the need, in recent years, to explicitly integrate student housing into federal government policies. This approach is a key solution to Canada's housing crisis. It helps to densify areas already served by public transit, to take action in urban areas and to increase supply at a lower cost, while freeing up for families rental units that would otherwise be occupied by student households.

During the implementation of Bill C-20 and Build Canada Homes, we believe that all policies must explicitly maintain the openness and integration of student housing, including off-campus student housing. This must remain part of the continuum of solutions for housing in Canada in the years to come.

I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. Pelletier.

**Maxime Pelletier (Director, Public Affairs, UTILE):** Thank you, Mr. Levesque.

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for having us here today.

In terms of what we expect from Build Canada Homes, we have three main messages for you today.

First, we really want Build Canada Homes to implement a true portfolio approach to funding. Both the industry and the government realize that we can't emerge from the crisis on a

project-by-project basis. Build Canada Homes has announced its intention to shift to a portfolio approach to funding. In our view, for this to work, Build Canada Homes must establish partnerships with housing developers in order to fund a number of projects at once. The accountability structure must shift from a system where a funding agreement is established for each project to a system where accountability is reported across all units.

This means that a housing developer would enter into a partnership with Build Canada Homes with unit targets across the entire portfolio. There could also be affordability targets and location targets. This would give us, the housing developers, both predictable funding and the flexibility to optimize public contributions. That way, if a project needs less funding than expected because things are going better than anticipated, we could transfer the money to another project to increase affordability in other areas. This might prevent a project from stalling owing to unforeseen circumstances and a shortfall of one or two million dollars. This would really mark a turning point for housing developers if Build Canada Homes were to implement a true portfolio approach to funding.

Second, there's an urgent need to align the CMHC's programs with Build Canada Homes' programs. As far as we know, Build Canada Homes has no intention of handling major mortgages. This means that all non-profit housing projects must still go through the CMHC, even with the implementation of Build Canada Homes.

The CMHC programs, such as the apartment construction loan program, weren't designed with non-profit housing developers in mind. As a result, certain challenges arise when it comes to implementing the loans. It's extremely important to tie them in with the Build Canada Homes programs to ensure the prompt implementation of the projects funded by Build Canada Homes.

Lastly, the final point concerns modern construction methods. We know that Build Canada Homes is geared towards modern construction methods. However, we currently lack a clear idea of the expectations. Needless to say, changing construction methods later in the project to comply with the Build Canada Homes requirements entails considerable costs. We want to say that we're ready to adopt modern construction methods. That said, please tell us quickly exactly what you want so that we can develop projects accordingly.

In short, we're keen to continue working with Build Canada Homes and our current federal partners, such as the CMHC. This will give us the opportunity to build more housing and above all to optimize the use of public funds.

Thank you.

• (0830)

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

[*English*]

We'll go on to Mr. Watts for five minutes.

**Samuel Watts (Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, Welcome Hall Mission):** Thank you very much.

I'll warn the interpreters that I will move between English and French.

**The Chair:** That's fine. Just speak slowly.

[*Translation*]

**Samuel Watts:** Mr. Chair and committee members, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak here today.

[*English*]

I'm Sam Watts. I'm the CEO of Welcome Hall Mission in Montreal. I also serve as an appointed member of the National Housing Council of Canada, and I chaired the working group that produced the council's March 25 report, "Scaling-up the non-market housing sector in Canada". In it, I argued very strongly for something that, today, looks like Build Canada Homes. The report that we issued forms a part of the evidence base for my remarks today.

[*Translation*]

I must say that I'm here before you as a strong supporter of Bill C-20.

Before talking about these matters, I would like to briefly discuss the other challenges and not just housing construction.

We aren't facing the challenge of a broken system. Rather, we're operating within a system designed to address the realities of people in need in the 1970s. It's now 2026. Successive governments have simply tried to do the same thing. However, these things worked 50 years ago. The Canadian safety net components that serve the most vulnerable people need an overhaul to reflect the realities of the 21st century.

[*English*]

Bill C-20 is a step in the right direction, but it addresses a downstream challenge—we desperately need more affordable housing—and BCH must be accompanied by parallel upstream efforts. These upstream efforts would reduce the inflow into core housing need that no building program can address on its own.

[*Translation*]

These upstream efforts include agreements across all levels of government to fund targeted rental support and support services. Four walls and a roof are important. That said, the support that helps people maintain residential stability remains the key part of the equation.

[*English*]

I say let's move ahead with Bill C-20, but let's also be very clear that BCH on its own is not the only piece of the puzzle.

I'm going to make one suggested amendment to Bill C-20, which I know the committee has touched upon already, and that's the defi-

inition of affordable housing. Dr. Whitzman, who was here, pointed out that there are many different definitions of affordable housing.

Build Canada Homes has put one on its website that I think all of us tend to agree with, at least those of us in the sector. My suggestion is this: Why not put it in the legislation and not just on a website? A website can be changed, but for legislation, it's a little more difficult.

[*Translation*]

I'm asking the Parliament of Canada to make these developments permanent.

[*English*]

Good intentions are good; let's make those intentions an act of law.

Beyond the act itself, I have four other asks for the Government of Canada. They are not amendments to the legislation, per se, but they are upstream conditions under which this legislation can be successful.

[*Translation*]

First, Build Canada Homes should establish permanent and dedicated funding for transitional and supportive housing.

[*English*]

This is important, because those are component parts to permanent housing—getting people in the process.

Second, the federal government must negotiate with provinces and territories to implement a targeted rental protection fund. Rental protection falls under provincial jurisdiction—it can't be done unilaterally—so the federal government needs to lead it, but with urgency. If you can protect rental housing, it helps people stay in housing and is much less costly than having to build housing for them.

• (0835)

[*Translation*]

Third, when public funds are created for affordable housing, the affordability must be maintained in perpetuity.

[*English*]

We have to avoid the possibility that affordable housing eventually becomes unaffordable.

My fourth ask should be an easy one. I think the CEO of Build Canada Homes should sit on the National Housing Council as an ex officio member. If BCH becomes the most significant federal housing instrument, its leadership should be accountable to the broader ecosystem that it's meant to serve.

I'll flag something else as well. There are many different players in the housing space in the Government of Canada: HICC, CMHC, BCH and Canada Lands Company. Without any formal coordination mechanisms—I've been around, peripheral to government agencies, for a while now, sitting on the council—there are going to be some mix-ups, and we need to fix that.

In conclusion, BCH is the right way to go; however, its credibility will eventually be measured not in units built but in lives changed.

Thank you very much.

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

We'll begin the first round of six-minute questioning with Mr. Aitchison.

**Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Watts, I'd like to start with you since you were the last one to speak.

I appreciated your comments about the need for coordination among what I think are too many federal housing agencies. I'm wondering if you could tell us specifically what tools Build Canada Homes has been granted that the Canada Lands Company or CMHC didn't have or couldn't be granted to achieve the same objective.

**Samuel Watts:** That's a really good question.

I don't know the specifics, but I'll tell you about one thing that struck me, in the role that I have on the National Housing Council. Very clearly, housing was one of those things that tended to ricochet around policy-wise, depending on the temperature of the water in Ottawa and which government was in power.

I would feel, personally—and I think a number of other people agree with me on this—that in order to address the housing crisis and the vulnerability crisis we see in Canada, we are going to need to have something that transcends what government does and what government programs or agencies do. We need something that is going to be for a much longer term. The sense of BCH that I am seeing is that it is taking a longer-term, broader approach that is not going to be subject to four-year policy initiatives.

**Scott Aitchison:** How? I'm sorry. I don't mean that glibly.

The Canada Lands Company has been around for a while. It's a Crown corporation. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation started out as the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation after the war. It is also a Crown corporation that has been around for a while. Its mandate, I guess, has been changed over time. When the national housing strategy came in, it was plopped in CMHC's lap and it had to learn fast how to deliver that.

What specifically about BCH leads you to believe it has some super, long-term vision and purpose that can't be affected by the political whims of the day?

**Samuel Watts:** Again, that is a really good question. I hope I'm right on this. It seems as though the mandate that's been given to BCH—and this is why I doubled down on the affordability question—is to focus on deeply affordable housing. This is not something any of these other agencies will do consistently. Where we need to go is probably toward making sure that the mandate is anchored very carefully and that it is understood and considered to be long-term—not something that's going to shift and change.

We did not get to where we are in Canada in a weekend, did we? It is not going to take us a year or two to get out of it. We can get out of it. I can see the way. I'm an optimist; that's why I do what I do. We need to make sure we have a long-term view and focus on the affordability sector.

If we can help Canadians who are struggling to get into housing, stay in the housing they have and maintain a certain sense of balance, it will free up dollars for all the other social services that we think of as part of the brand image of Canada. Right now, we are spending a lot of money solving problems that really need to be solved upstream. That is why BCH actually has a chance.

**Scott Aitchison:** Thank you. I would like to talk to you more, but we don't have time to do it here, so I am going to reach out to you.

I want to switch over to Mr. Gascoyne for a second because he is in the private sector.

I am wondering if you can speak specifically to the relationship that you see between market housing, the burdens on market housing and how that impacts social and supportive housing.

● (0840)

**Mitch Gascoyne:** When we talk about housing, there are various forms of affordability that need to be addressed. One of those is mid-range and moderate affordable housing, which is for the postman or the teacher who needs to find a place to live—to either own or rent.

The overall housing solution needs to be sensitive to the deeply affordable housing that others are addressing. Mixed-use, market and affordable housing types are things that I think can, are and should continue to be delivered in a way that creates supply and creates affordable supply at the same time. That's what the thrust is.

**Scott Aitchison:** Would I be putting words in your mouth if I said...would you agree that if all homes were more affordable, it would be like a rising tide that lifts all boats? Purposed investing into social and supportive housing, for sure, but if all homes were more affordable, would that be better for all Canadians?

**Mitch Gascoyne:** Yes, as long as they're buildable and affordable. The numbers need to work so that they can be affordable, constructable and economical to bring out of the ground. Absolutely, my view and, I think, the view of others in my industry is that supply should lead to lower-cost housing, and that's okay. That's what we want to do. We want to bring the supply online and make it more affordable for all.

**Scott Aitchison:** Okay. Thanks.

Quickly, for Mr. Pelletier, you spoke, sir, about predictability and versatility, a portfolio financing type of approach. Are you suggesting that this is something Build Canada Homes needs to do or will do? Is it your impression that it will do this or that you need it?

**Maxime Pelletier:** The investment document that was put out by Build Canada Homes says that it wants to do that, but in our experience, moving from a project-to-project logic to a portfolio logic has been difficult from the bureaucratic perspective, because you have to switch how you approach accountability.

It's both something that Build Canada Homes said it wants to do and something that we want to see, but our message is that if we want it to work, it's important that government accepts that accountability will not work on a project-by-project basis anymore. It would work by having targets on all the projects that will be built within one investment agreement.

[*Translation*]

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

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

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us this morning. I would also like to thank them for working with us over the past year as we developed this new agency, Build Canada Homes. It's actually already up and running.

Mr. Watts, you spoke a bit about Build Canada Homes' different approach. That's exactly what we want to do, with looser criteria. That's why it isn't a program, but an affordable housing investment agency where we work closely with the private sector.

My first question is for the UTILE representatives and Mr. Gascoyne. I'll then turn to Mr. Watts.

Mr. Levesque and Mr. Pelletier, I know that you have already dealt with Build Canada Homes. Mr. Gascoyne, I don't know whether you have already done so.

I would like to know whether this approach, in particular the investment policy that we implemented with its fairly loose criteria, has been demonstrated to date. Obviously, some accountability is still required. However, do you think that things are moving in the right direction?

**Laurent Levesque:** Thank you for the question.

I would say that we feel that things are moving in the right direction. In terms of the philosophy, the methods of operation and the current status of the implementation process, the new agency is already much more flexible than the CMHC. We must remember that

the CMHC also has a macroprudential mandate for the general housing market.

I think that the CMHC has found it challenging to focus on its affordable housing mandate. It also has the mortgage loan insurance program, which makes it responsible for most of the housing starts, as Mr. Gascoyne reminded us.

However, remember—

• (0845)

**Caroline Desrochers:** It's useful, no pun intended, to have both sides. We need an agency with more flexibility when it comes to affordable housing, as long as we have coordination, as Mr. Watts said.

**Laurent Levesque:** That's right. This part still needs fine-tuning.

As my colleague pointed out, the CMHC's remaining major mortgage or mortgage loan insurance programs don't always align properly with the reality of NPOs or with the various other levers for action available to Build Canada Homes or the provinces.

We've reached this point in our initial discussions with Build Canada Homes. We're trying to figure out how to ensure that everything remains consistent.

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you.

Mr. Gascoyne, would you like to add anything?

[*English*]

**Mitch Gascoyne:** Yes, absolutely. We have had conversations with BCH, and I think that's exactly it. CMHC is great. It has programs. It can roll out the programs. BCH is flexible. You talk to them about what you need to make the project work. They're open to providing patient capital and coinvestment. They really want to be the last piece that makes the project work.

In our case, we're dealing with a senior lender that is a big bank. It could mean that you already have CMHC financing lined up, but it's additive inasmuch as they're not constrained. They want to drive toward the housing being built and are interested and open to talking about how that can happen.

[*Translation*]

**Caroline Desrochers:** Thank you, Mr. Gascoyne.

Mr. Watts, I would like to briefly discuss the issues surrounding homelessness.

You spoke about transitional housing programs. Over the next 10 years, \$1 billion will be allocated to transitional and supportive housing.

We know that the homelessness crisis is often tied to housing affordability issues for 30% to 40% of homeless people across Canada. Moreover, we need to work closely with the provinces and municipalities. I gather that you agree that the federal government must play a role in providing support and leverage to get things moving in the right direction. Do you think that the federal government must play a role in addressing the issues surrounding homelessness?

**Samuel Watts:** Absolutely. In my opinion, the federal government must show leadership and help the provinces facing these issues across the country.

My role at the National Housing Council gives me the chance or the opportunity to look at things across the country. I must say that the realities are different in British Columbia, Alberta and Montreal.

This is really important. We need a continuum of services to address homelessness. First, we need upstream prevention. If we can turn off the tap, that will help. However, people will still often end up in difficult situations. At that point, we need to meet with them quickly and help them find programs or housing, which is often transitional.

My colleagues who are with us and my friends at UTILE—hello, Mr. Levesque—have a housing stock. As an organization, we always focus our efforts on programs that help people find permanent housing. That said, the continuum of services remains vital and the federal government must play a role.

**Caroline Desrochers:** My time is almost up.

I'll still ask you my question, Mr. Gascoyne, even if you don't have time to answer it. That said, feel free to send the committee your written response later.

You spoke about construction costs. The municipalities need support to update or modernize their infrastructure. This aspect is often factored into construction costs. Yet if the municipalities cut all taxes, how will they come up with the money to meet these infrastructure needs?

That's why we set up programs to help the municipalities. However, we need to find a way to tackle these challenges.

• (0850)

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

[*English*]

Mr. Gascoyne, you'll have to provide that in writing to the committee. You can reflect on the question and then provide it in writing.

[*Translation*]

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

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

Mr. Gascoyne, thank you for your work.

Mr. Levesque and Mr. Pelletier, I've been keeping up with UTILE's work, particularly on student housing in Rimouski, with my colleague, the local member of Parliament. It's great.

Mr. Watts, I'm impressed with your work at Welcome Hall Mission. You said that credibility isn't measured by the number of units but by the number of lives changed. I hope to have the opportunity to revisit a key issue for us. It's the much-discussed issue of how to define affordability. That's why we're talking more about social and community housing in Quebec.

I would like to commend the witnesses for joining us as we work on this bill, which will move forward and will play a key role.

Before we go any further, I have a technical issue to resolve. I moved a motion, which I believe you received by email. I'll read it to you:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities invite Cliff Groen, senior associate deputy minister of the Department of Employment and Social Development and chief operating officer for Service Canada, and John Ostrander, former technical head, benefits delivery modernization, for a period of two hours to answer parliamentarians' questions on the management of benefits delivery modernization and its impact.

I'll now let Ms. Koutrakis move her amendment so that we can resolve this issue.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

We would like to add the officials from the department to be at this meeting, and we would also like to remove the person who is now in the Privy Council who is mentioned in the motion.

**The Chair:** The motion is—

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Chair, Ms. Koutrakis proposed to remove the words “, and John Ostrander, former technical head, benefits delivery modernization” and to replace “two hours” with “one hour”. So the guests would be Cliff Groen and the deputy ministers. These are the only proposed changes.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Yes.

**Andréanne Larouche:** I agree with this amendment.

**Annie Koutrakis:** We're removing the gentleman who is currently with the Privy Council Office.

**Andréanne Larouche:** You want to remove John Ostrander. We'll remove him and replace “two hours” with “one hour”. That's all.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Yes.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Can we reach an agreement with our Conservative colleagues to adopt this motion?

[*English*]

**Rosemarie Falk:** If the clerk could read me the amendment...

**The Chair:** There seems to be unanimity, but I want the committee to be clear. I will ask the clerk to read the motion that the committee is being asked to adopt, with the amendment of Madame Koutrakis.

[Translation]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Alexandre Longpré):** Ms. Koutrakis, did you also propose to invite other officials from Employment and Social Development Canada to speak?

**Annie Koutrakis:** Yes. We could add more officials.

**The Clerk:** Here is the text of the amended motion:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities invite Cliff Groen, senior associate deputy minister of the Department of Employment and Social Development and chief operating officer for Service Canada, accompanied by government officials, for a period of one hour to answer parliamentarians' questions on the management of benefits delivery modernization and its impact.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm seeing nodding heads.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Okay, the motion you adopted is the one that was read into the record by the clerk—so we're clear.

With that, Madame Larouche, we'll go to you.

[Translation]

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

Unfortunately, I need to resolve another technical issue. I need to follow up with you. On March 26, I requested a list of the contracts awarded as part of the program, including a detailed description of the requirements of each contract, the initial cost estimate for each contract, the actual cost of each contract, an indication of whether the contract is still in progress or complete and list of the contracts for each firm indicating the total cost for this program.

Mr. Chair, this request was made when the ministers came to discuss Cúram. At 8:52 a.m., you made a commitment on behalf of the committee to request these documents. We still haven't received these documents, so I want to know what will happen.

● (0855)

[English]

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

I'm going to suspend for a minute while we get this clarified.

● (0855)

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

● (0855)

**The Chair:** Committee members and witnesses, please take your chairs. We'll resume the meeting.

As I suspended, Madame Larouche had a question. I'm going to ask the clerk to speak to it, and it should address the issue.

[Translation]

**The Clerk:** I can confirm that, at the March 26 meeting, a number of requests for documents were submitted to the department for follow-up purposes, including the aforementioned request from Ms. Larouche. I received an email this week. I'm just waiting for the translation of the correspondence.

The department said that it was finalizing all the requests from this meeting. We should be able to receive responses to these requests by the end of the week.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Good. Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Chair, I hope that you will recommit to giving us this information as soon as you receive the documents from the departments. I can see that you agree. Good.

I have one last thing to bring up.

On March 26, I moved the following motion, for which notice was given:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities request that the Department of Employment and Social Development, the Department of Public Works and Government Services, the Privy Council Office, as well as the Prime Minister's Office, provide to the clerk of the committee, within 30 days of the adoption of this motion, all reports, correspondence, emails and documents related to the management of the benefits delivery modernization since January 1, 2017, and that the departments and offices responsible for producing the documents apply redactions in accordance with the legal obligations set out in the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act.

I'm bringing this up today because the 30-day deadline is approaching. Thank you.

● (0900)

[English]

**Caroline Desrochers:** May we suspend, please?

**The Chair:** It's a dilatory motion that Madame Larouche put forward, which would resume debate on the motion from the last time. This was in discussion, but I am going to suspend for a moment before I go to that to allow members to collect.... We'll suspend for a moment.

● (0900)

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

● (0905)

**The Chair:** Committee members, the committee is back in session. We have a dilatory motion on the floor that we will proceed to a vote on. The motion is to resume debate on the motion that has been circulated.

Clerk, can we have a recorded vote on the dilatory motion by Madame Larouche, which is a request to resume debate on the motion you have in front of you.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

**The Chair:** The motion has been carried, so we are resuming debate on the motion in front of you.

I have a speaking order of Ms. Desrochers, Ms. Falk and Ms. Fancy.

[Translation]

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

I think it's a real shame that this important study is being interrupted. We're almost done with the study on Bill C-20. Witnesses have come all the way here this morning to share their perspectives and opinions with us, and now this study is being interrupted. We had planned to begin clause-by-clause consideration of the bill soon.

So far, we've heard from witnesses on both sides who've talked about the importance of building more affordable housing. Some families can't find housing that meets their needs. There's a bill before us. There's a solution on the table, but people are once again deploying tactics to drag things out, to block proceedings, to prevent progress on a really important file. I wanted to say how regrettable that is.

Furthermore, the proposed motion calls for a huge number of documents from a department that is busy fulfilling its commitments on critical issues, including the Canada groceries and essentials benefit; Bill C-222, which we just voted on this week; the national school food program; and the recently announced Canada summer jobs 2026 program, which will create 100,000 summer jobs for young people so they can find work this summer.

The department is busy helping the most vulnerable Canadians, yet some people are trying to delay things by filibustering and demanding documents from very busy departmental employees.

Just last week, after speaking with departmental employees, an opposition member talked about how they work a lot, often late into the night. Now some people want them to give them even more work to do. I don't understand. Why are they doing this? What's the point? The Minister has already testified on the Cúram file. She was here with all her officials. We got all the details for each province. We got information about the case. People are being kept up to date. There's a working group.

I'm not sure why we're suspending debate on a very important issue at this point.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to move:

[*English*]

I move to adjourn debate on this so we can pursue the study we are here to do today.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Clerk, we'll have a recorded vote on the motion by Madame Desrochers to adjourn debate on the other motion.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 4)

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

It's Ms. Falk.

• (0910)

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

I know we heard a bit about Cúram. It was not a lot, but I know we heard that there are seniors who need their benefits to pay for their housing. I would argue that it is very important for us to get these documents.

I would like to propose an amendment to the motion on the floor right now to add “pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a)” after “That”, to delete everything after “the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities”, and to continue with this:

...order the production of documents related to the Benefits Delivery Modernization (BDM) initiative, including the Cúram platform, from the Department of Employment and Social Development, the Department of Public Works and Government Services, the Privy Council Office, and the Prime Minister's Office; That these departments and offices provide to the Clerk of the Committee, within 30 days of the adoption of this motion—

**The Chair:** Order, please.

**Rosemarie Falk:** The cackling from the Liberals, Chair, is next level.

**The Chair:** I called order.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you, Chair. I appreciate that.

The amendment continues:

- a. all internal audits, evaluations, and risk assessments related to BDM since January 1, 2017;
- b. all briefing notes, memoranda, and decision documents prepared for Ministers and senior officials concerning the BDM initiative or the Cúram platform;
- c. all emails and electronic communications that relate to:
  - i. system performance issues,
  - ii. delays or backlogs in benefit delivery,
  - iii. cost overruns or project risks, and
- iv. decisions regarding the Cúram platform and BDM implementation;
- d. all contracts related to the Cúram platform and associated systems—

**Caroline Desrochers:** Suspend.

**Rosemarie Falk:** The amendment continues:

- e. performance reports and data summaries tracking processing times, backlogs, error rates, system outages and instances of incorrect benefit payments, including overpayments and subsequent recovery actions or clawbacks.

Mr. Chair, we think this is an acceptable amendment, especially given the fact that the Liberals have tried to adjourn debate on this, for one. Something doesn't seem right in that the government doesn't seem forthcoming with these documents. I know that there has been filibustering at other times, including here at this moment, and then trying to adjourn the debate. It's imperative, especially with this power grab that Liberals seem to be taking to dodge all accountability and transparency. This is of the essence.

It's impacting our seniors, who helped build this country. Many we hear from at this committee have been struggling with food affordability, housing affordability and fuel affordability over the past several years.

It's imperative that we accept this amendment so that not only Parliament but Canadians can receive the information that the opposition is requesting.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Committee members, we now have an amendment to the motion moved by Ms. Falk. Debate will move to the amendment put forward by Ms. Falk.

I had a speaking order in the past. Now I have an amendment, and I'm going to start over.

**Rosemarie Falk:** It starts over again.

**Annie Koutrakis:** Can we suspend?

**The Chair:** We can suspend for a few moments.

• (0910) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (0920)

**The Chair:** Thank you, committee members. The committee is resuming.

We are proceeding with debate on the amendment by Ms. Falk.

I have three speakers on this new list to speak on the amendment by Ms. Falk. I'll begin with Madame Larouche and then go to Monsieur Joseph and Ms. Fancy.

Go ahead, Madame Larouche.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Chair, I'll be brief.

Anyway, Mrs. Falk did a good job of explaining things. I think there is indeed a connection, because we're talking about housing here this morning. I also spoke with Mr. Watts, who said that seniors' fixed incomes are a problem, particularly when it comes to paying for housing.

The goal is certainly not to block Bill C-20. The Bloc Québécois will support it, as the Liberals are well aware. I reminded Mr. Gascoyne about what's in Bill C-20 and I also reminded the folks from UTILE, who are still here. My colleague, Maxime Blanchette-Joncas, can back me up on that. It's a terrific bill. We're going to make sure that Bill C-20 progresses. We're aware of the issues around social housing and homelessness.

I support my colleague's amendments to obtain documents.

In conclusion, we have a situation this morning, but it's not because we want to block Bill C-20 and filibuster. I have to do this again this morning is because, yesterday, my colleague, Sébastien Lemire, tried to get this information at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I ran into him after his meeting, at an event, and he told me that he hadn't been able to get the information because the Liberals filibustered.

That's why we find ourselves in this situation this morning. I have no choice but to ask for this information again because it was requested last night, and that held up the work of another parliamentary committee.

I just want to remind the witnesses that we support them, that we want to find solutions to social housing and homelessness issues, and that we're here this morning trying to get information. This will not block or delay debate on Bill C-20, especially not if people work together.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

As chair, I will advise the witnesses that they can leave. We have multiple debates on amendments to the motion. I'm unsure as to when we'll return to the agenda.

At this stage, the witnesses can be released.

Monsieur Joseph, go ahead. This is on the amendment by Ms. Falk.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I don't want to be brief, but I may be.

This is the second time I've seen this kind of thing in committee. Surprisingly, it's because of the Bloc Québécois even though witnesses from Quebec came all the way here to talk about homelessness and affordable housing. You know, Quebec has tremendous expertise. It was a golden opportunity for them to share that expertise and for Canada to benefit from it.

I can hardly believe that the Bloc Québécois is preventing witnesses from Quebec from speaking in committee. Last time, I told Ms. Larouche that she missed a very good opportunity by voting against the 2025 budget. Here in committee, she applauds all of the programs and measures funded in this budget. I'm not going to use the word I have in mind because I'm in committee and I have a lot of respect for her.

Thanks to the Bloc Québécois, the witnesses from Quebec also missed a good opportunity this morning, a golden opportunity to speak on behalf of Quebeckers and to show them that the Bloc Québécois really stands up for their interests in Ottawa. That's not my own opinion. The Bloc Québécois has just proven to Quebeckers that it doesn't really stand up for their interests in Ottawa. Indeed, if I were from Quebec and a Bloc Québécois member was preventing me from speaking in committee, I would have questions.

I'm going to talk about Ms. Larouche's motion. This motion calls for the production of several thousand pages of documents from several departments. A similar motion was moved yesterday at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, where members are currently debating an amendment. It could cost millions of dollars, and it wouldn't be doable in the time frame proposed by the motion. It's not realistic to expect that many documents to be produced by the suggested deadline. Public servants would have to sift through millions of documents across several departments.

That would have consequences. Every dollar spent on compiling documents is a dollar not invested in services to Canadians and, above all, Quebecers. Canadians and Quebecers expect timely services, but this motion would take public servants' time away from processing applications.

Our priority should be improving service delivery, not creating an administrative burden for public servants.

The rules say that committees have the right to request information, but such requests must be focused and reasonable. If this motion were to pass, it would set a precedent for unlimited and overly broad applications. That's important. The work of gathering up documents from all over the government would be for nothing. It's not important.

Parliamentarians know we have to use committee resources wisely. I'm a Quebec MP who serves on a committee in Ottawa, but if I were a Quebecer currently in Quebec and I saw this kind of thing, I would have some questions and, when the next election rolls around, I would give the Bloc Québécois the boot, because people need to respect Quebecers.

● (0925)

The Bloc Québécois says that it's here in Ottawa to represent and fight for Quebec's interests. This isn't how you fight for Quebec's interests in committee. These witnesses are Quebecers. They're experts from Quebec who are here to talk about housing, homelessness, Build Canada Homes, Bill C-20 and the continuum concept that includes services and transition houses with services.

Make no mistake: I am stunned and shocked. If Quebecers knew how the Bloc Québécois is behaving in Ottawa and especially in committee—and they will know, because I'm here now—they would never vote for the Bloc Québécois.

I'll give someone else the floor.

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

[*English*]

Next on the speaking list is Ms. Fancy, and then I have Ms. Falk currently on the list.

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

I didn't think this is where we would be this morning. As my colleague just talked about, having expert witnesses with testimony in regard to Build Canada Homes and creating this new Crown corporation that's going to highlight all the good work, collate it together.... People travelled from all over the country to be witnesses here today, and we just dismissed them because of a motion that we've already been trying to work out.

I'd love to ground this discussion today in what's actually being proposed within this motion. As it stands, this is not a modest request. The motion itself has five different subsections, and each of those is for very complex sets of documents to be produced within 30 days. I'm looking at this and the hours that it's going to take; not that it's not an important thing, but this is not a modest request. It's going to require production of what could be millions of pages of documents across multiple federal departments. Think about that.

We are not going to talk about a discrete set of briefing notes or a defined dataset. We're going to be talking about an enormous volume of materials—potentially years' worth of internal communications, analyses and records—that would need to be identified, reviewed and redacted, because of necessary legal arrangements, and then translated and, finally, compiled.

To put it plainly, this is not a small administrative exercise. This is an enormous undertaking. We forget about how important this particular committee is. We have an umbrella of five or six different ministries, and we already have a very busy schedule. We are dealing with some of the most vulnerable people in our country within this committee, so when we have these little willy-nilly....

I shouldn't say willy-nilly.... Well, it is willy-nilly. When we have motions like this that come out, wanting us to produce all of these different documents, we could be better focusing a lot of time, money and energy into the vulnerable people we're trying to help serve. I did not come to Ottawa to worry about all of these different, unnecessary amounts of documents that the Bloc and the Conservatives are trying to get us to produce right now.

I feel like this is a last-ditch grab, because of our newly formed majority, as a way to get us to—

● (0930)

**Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Are you against producing documents?

**Jessica Fancy:** No, we're not against producing documents, but doing so in 30 days, under multiple different ministries and multiple different platforms, is way too much.

It's also worth noting that a very similar motion was introduced publicly in the public accounts committee yesterday. They're currently debating it to bring that request into a more workable and realistic scope. That's something we should be doing here. That context matters. It shows that even in another committee, one that routinely deals with larger volumes of documents, there is a recognition that requests of this magnitude are carefully collaborated in, with partnerships forming.

I'd also like to talk a bit about the feasibility of what this motion suggests. The timeline simply does not align with the reality of how government operates. Producing this volume of material requires public servants to comb through millions of documents in multiple departments. This is not a process that can be completed in a matter of days, or in this case, 30 days.

This brings me to the financial implications. I don't think we can ignore the fact that this kind of request could potentially cost millions of dollars to fulfill. Every hour spent on a public servant's trying to review these documents is an hour funded by the Canadian taxpayers. When you multiply that across teams—in this case, across departments and across weeks—the cost very quickly escalates.

It's not just financial. There's also a very real opportunity cost. The opportunity cost is what we saw today with the witnesses. We had almost a dozen people lined up to provide testimony on Build Canada Homes, the report we're studying right now. That's lost. For every dollar spent and every hour dedicated to compiling documents such as these, that's time, money and resources wasted when we could be working on some of the things we had previously, as a group, agreed to work on.

When Canadians are rightly expecting timely access to benefits, faster processing of applications and responsive government services, this motion counteracts everything you're trying to do. It redirects the public servants away from those core responsibilities. Let's think about that for a moment.

On top of that, during question period our minister diligently reported multiple times that they are working with the groups of people who might have been affected through this technology—people 60 years old, whom they are now trying to onboard and realign. They said that if any of us, the 343 members of Parliament, have constituents and seniors in our ridings who are affected by this, we should reach out.

We're also asking the same public servants who at this time process EI claims, who support seniors accessing benefits, who help newcomers navigate immigration systems and who ensure that programs are delivered efficiently to pause and do this work. Making them do this is not efficient. At the least, it's significantly slowing down other services in other areas in order to sift through millions of pages of records.

That's the trade-off. It's what they're asking for today. I don't think Canadians would support this trade-off right now. Our focus as parliamentarians, in this room and on the Hill, should be on improving service delivery, on ensuring that government works better for people and on holding the government to account in a way that is effective and proportionate. Our team went through the motion. In its current form, it does not achieve that balance. Instead, it creates an administrative burden that risks undermining the very services that Canadians rely on.

Let's be clear: Committees absolutely have the right to request information. This is a fundamental part of the role in ensuring transparency and accountability. However, with that right also comes responsibility, which I don't think they've taken into account today. In terms of making requests that are targeted, relevant and feasible, this motion does not meet any of those standards. It is not targeted. It does not clearly define the scope in a way that would allow departments to respond efficiently. Instead, it casts an extremely wide net, capturing vast amounts of material that may have only a tangible connection to the issue at hand. That lack of focus is not a practical problem. It's a procedural problem. That's a huge concern.

● (0935)

If we adopt such motions without careful consideration, we also risk setting a precedent for unlimited, unfocused document demands across government. Today it is this file; tomorrow it could be another. Over time, this approach overwhelms the system, making it harder, not easier, for committees to get information they ac-

tually need and to hear testimony from experts to develop and strengthen our programs that we need.

A well-crafted request that zeroes in on specific documents or a specific time frame, working with all committee members and our public servants, will provide information that a blanket demand for everything under the sun.... That's what this motion is. A well-crafted request allows departments to respond quickly and more accurately, and it enables committees to do their work more effectively.

That's the standard the people in this room. It's especially important to keep that standard in mind when we consider the work that we're doing and that's also been done on this file already, such as what our ministers talked about when the Bloc was broaching the subject of Cúram.

Multiple times since way back in October, our minister has said that, yes, we are onboarding a program that is old with new technology. I believe it's 30,000 or so people right now—of the millions of people who were being onboarded—who are affected. She said, to all 343 MPs and reaching out to our senior populations, that if there is anybody who is still affected by this, they can reach out to the minister directly. This is something she has said diligently, multiple times, during question period in public for everybody to hear and see.

There has already been quite a bit of transparency within this engagement. Minister Hajdu has appeared before committee. Minister Lightbound has also appeared. Officials from their offices and from relevant departments have already provided testimony and have answered questions. I'm wondering if my Bloc member was actually there before initiating this type of motion.

If they've already offered technical briefings to critics and have already offered to ensure that members have a detailed understanding of the issues, I don't see why producing millions, potentially, of documents and large amounts of paper is going to do anything except prove a point: that, at the will of whoever wants to, they can stall our public service.

At the request of the committee, officials have also been provided regional breakdowns and costing information into this program. That's not insignificant either. That is substantive. It is detailed information that helps inform our understanding and that supports our oversight role here as a government. The idea that there has been a lack of transparency simply doesn't hold firm.

There has been engagement. There has been disclosure. There has been a willingness to provide information and to answer questions.

● (0940)

**Kyle Seeback:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Be very specific.

**Kyle Seeback:** The member seems to be reading notes from her phone. It might just save the filibuster if she produced those notes for the committee members to read themselves.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Seeback. That's not a point of order.

The member has the floor and is debating the amendment to the motion.

You have the floor, Ms. Fancy.

**Jessica Fancy:** I'd really like to commend my colleague over there very quickly for realizing that I am a good reader and that I am also a really good note-taker. Thank you for that, colleague.

Would this be meaningful to enhancing our understanding of the actual problem at hand, or is it simply to create overwhelming volumes of material that is difficult to navigate, time-consuming to produce and costly to compile? In this motion, you want all of that done within 30 days of adoption.

I would argue the latter, and that's why I believe that we need to approach this a lot more thoroughly and work together as a team. Yesterday, our Prime Minister talked about how important it is to work as a team within government and create those partnerships and a lack of transparency barriers. Let's ask for the documents that are directly relevant to those concerns without a defined timeline or in a way that's feasible for departments to deliver.

I don't think this is working as a team. Just to let my colleague know, I did not read that off my page.

Let's talk about how we strike the right balance between accountability and practicality. At the end of the day, our goal is not to generate paper. It's to generate insight, and it's to ensure that we have the information we need to do our jobs effectively without imposing unnecessary burdens on that system or diverting resources away from Canadians, which is what we're doing right now.

We had all of these witnesses here today to talk to us about the implementation of Bill C-20 in the building of Build Canada Homes. We had them all here, specialists in their area, some of our top-notch people—only to say that they could come here, pay the money to come as a witness and then have to go home before our first round even got finished.

If you talk about people who are facing real challenges, they're also navigating affordability challenges, accessing services and relying on government programs. They expect us as parliamentarians to be responsible stewards of public resources and to prioritize outcomes that make a difference in daily lives. A motion that would cost millions of dollars of taxpayer money, that would take months and months to complete and that has to be done in 30 days.... I don't think this motion helps to prioritize outcomes or makes a difference in daily lives.

This makes us go to our constituents to say that, unfortunately, we are onboarding a brand new program that's been almost 60 years in the making of change and implementation, and if we have any vulnerable people in our constituencies who are affected by this, to help work with our constituents. It's our job to help our constituents. It's not to try to get tons of papers, when Minister Hajdu has already provided information and transparency about this, as has Minister Lightbound.

It might sound like some strong accountability but, in practice, this also risks being counterproductive. I would encourage colleagues to take a step back, consider a more balanced approach and recognize the work that's already been done. Let's acknowledge information that's already been provided, and let's focus on identifying any of the gaps that remain. This would allow us to address them effectively without creating undue burden. That could mean amending a motion to narrow scope or specifying particular documents or specific time periods. It could also be about setting a more realistic timeline that reflects the complexity of this task. There are options to this motion.

Maintaining the motion as it currently stands, in my view, is the right path forward. It's about how we as a committee choose to exercise this type of authority. It's about setting a standard for how we balance that transparency with practicality, with accountability and then with responsibility. We have the tools that we need to do our work effectively. This is a question, I believe, of whether we do this wisely.

● (0945)

In this case I would suggest a more targeted, realistic and proportionate approach that would serve both this committee and Canadians and that would help us deliver what's currently being proposed far better.

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

We'll now go to Ms. Falk.

**Rosemarie Falk:** I wanted to respond, through the chair, to some of the things I have heard. Mr. Joseph commented about how this would set a precedent. I don't think that's true. There have been production orders requested over many different Parliaments, whether in the House or in committees, and they have been produced. I don't think that is a factual argument. It isn't something that will set a precedent, because it's been done before.

As for Ms. Fancy's point about vulnerable people, I would argue seniors are a vulnerable population and many weren't receiving their OAS given this system changeover. I also see a contradiction in that. Our committee is responsible for a lot of different things. What we're responsible for is maybe a debate for another day, but at the end of the day I know that this has been brought up in other committees. It's interesting to me that the Liberals are filibustering at different committees.

We're hearing a lot about how we're not listening to the witnesses. If the Liberals would stop filibustering and stop talking, and stop doing whatever the PMO is wanting them to do, then we would pass this and move on. They can start, whoever it is in the department, getting the things that are being asked of this committee so that we can be here for those we represent, which is also our seniors, some of whom aren't receiving their OAS payments.

At the end of the day, it's Liberals who are obstructing, they're filibustering, they're delaying, and they're avoiding transparency. To say that the minister has done everything she can.... We never suggested it would be millions of pages or cost millions of dollars. If the Liberals are saying that, it makes me wonder what they are hiding. What is being hidden when it comes to the benefits delivery modernization? Cúram is just one aspect, and we're here wanting to know why. These are pretty simple questions.

The Liberals need to stop filibustering, stop delaying, stop obstructing and vote for this amendment so that we can be transparent with Canadians and effective for Canadians, and at the end of the day, serve them in the best of our capacity to do the work here.

Pass the amendment. Let's move on and let the bureaucracy do what they need to do, which is to produce these documents, and then we can get to the work that Ms. Fancy so urgently wants to do.

I would say that she should encourage her whip's office and the PMO to stop filibustering this at both committees in which this is happening and let this pass so that we can move on to finish our housing study and other studies that we have on the docket. I look forward to the Liberals' yes vote on this.

Thank you.

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

Madame Koutrakis, go ahead on the amendment.

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

It's quite interesting to hear how the Liberal government is being accused of not being transparent, when we all know the work that has been done to date. Both Minister Hajdu and Minister Lightbound, as well as their officials and offices, have appeared on the issue. The officials have provided a technical briefing to critics. Officials provided the committee with regional breakdowns and costing at the request of the committee. There has already been significant transparency and engagement on this file. For months and weeks, we've heard over and over questions in question period about the Cúram system from all the opposition parties. I don't know how anyone can think that's not being transparent.

As my colleagues have mentioned, this motion is requesting millions of pages across multiple departments. This could cost millions of dollars, and it would not be completed within the time frame suggested in the motion. A 30-day timeline is completely unrealistic, especially when we've already heard the opposition members say that our seniors are a vulnerable population and they need to receive their OAS payments on time. That's exactly what the department is trying to do, to make sure that they do serve the population not only for the OAS, but also for so many other programs that are being delivered through that department.

There are 40,000 employees working in ESDC. It's one of the largest ministries that we have in government. I always say that from the moment someone is born to their end of life, all the programs in between come through that department.

To think that 30 days is a reasonable amount of time to ask for all of this documentation is completely unrealistic. Everyone watching us today, Quebeckers and Canadians from coast to coast to coast, must be scratching their heads and thinking that if there really is a problem with this system and there are kinks or issues that need to be resolved, how is it helping by wasting the time of this committee, which is working on so many other important studies and legislative pieces that Canadians rely on? One of them is Bill C-20, on delivering affordable housing in a timely manner. I'm sure many Canadians who are watching are scratching their heads today.

This would require the public service to comb through millions of documents across multiple departments. Although we haven't seen the estimate of the costs, you can imagine if you've been in private business.... When you are using resources in the department in this way, work in other areas that needs to be done is not being done. It costs money. Resources cost money. They're not free.

Every dollar that we are using is to make sure that Canadians are delivered the services that they expect. Canadians expect timely service. This motion would redirect public servants away from the processing claims. I don't see how this motion deals with the concerns that are being raised.

Our focus should be on improving service delivery and not creating an administrative burden. Having been in the private sector for many years, I can tell you this is not the correct way to use money, whether it's in the private sector or in the public sector. This is not what Canadians are expecting us to use their taxpayer dollars for: to produce more papers, to sift through more papers, and to take up committee time—not only our committee time, but the time of other committees that are looking at this very same issue.

I think our government, the ministries involved and the officials have provided more than adequate information. If there is any reason more technical briefings or explanations are required of the officials, I am sure they would be more than willing to meet with HUMA committee members to provide them with any additional information they have, to better understand how complicated it is to replace a 60-year-old system with a new modern system of delivering benefits. It's really not an easy feat. I'm sure everyone around this table agrees with that, but we are where we are.

● (0950)

It's not an easy time. I understand that opposition members may be frustrated. Perhaps things will change in the near future, and this is their way of showing how unhappy they are. I really do understand that.

If we're going to continue to work together and deliver for Canadians, we need to take a step back and ask ourselves if we are really using the time in this committee and other committees to do what Canadians expect of us. Isn't it a shame that we couldn't continue listening to the witnesses who were invited here to discuss Bill C-20? Here we are talking more about answers that we've already been given by officials and by the ministers.

As I said, for queries that are still unanswered, I am certain that any information that committee members need would be given within a time frame that is feasible.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (0955)

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

My speaking list moves next to Madame Acan.

**Sima Acan (Oakville West, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to tell Mr. Seeback, through you, Mr. Chair, that I'm going to be reading from notes. Those notes were prepared by me while listening to the debate—which is actually debate, not filibustering.

The motion presented by the opposition requires a technical and administrative undertaking that is functionally impossible within the mandated 30-day time frame. As a person with an electronics background married to a brilliant mathematician who is a successful IT person, and for whom IT is daily life in my house and at the family table, I argue that a request for all emails and electronic communications since January 1, 2017, across five major departments and the Prime Minister's Office, involves the retrieval and processing of massive volumes of unstructured data spanning nearly a decade.

From a technical perspective, fulfilling this would require the following.

First, for data retrieval and discovery, we'd be running keyword queries across the servers of six distinct entities to capture every communication regarding the current platform and the BDM's performance. For a project of this scale, a conservative estimate is that this could be 500,000 to one million individual records.

Second, the motion explicitly requires redactions in accordance with the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act. Based on standard industry benchmarks for legal document review—I am drawing from my general IT project management knowledge—a manual or even AI-assisted review for sensitive or personal identifiable information takes approximately two to three minutes per page.

Third, there are human-power requirements. If we process 500 pages at an average of two minutes per page, the task requires 16,666 man-hours. To complete this within a 30-day window, the

government would need to immediately divert approximately 104 full-time equivalent staff to work exclusively on this project for 40 hours a week, with zero margin of error or technical delays. In the technical world, we have margins of error and delays. Please do a simple calculation. Multiply these numbers by two or three if we are talking about one million pages of documents. Please do a further calculation if we are talking about 500,000 to one million individual records, where the number of pages could definitely double or triple.

Fourth, extracting data summaries and tracking processing times, backlogs and error rates in the current platform over a nine-year period involves querying legacy databases and normalizing data from different systems' iterations. Technically, this is not a simple export function. It is a very complex data forensics and semantics task that usually requires weeks of validation to ensure the accuracy requested by the committee.

Demanding this volume of audited, redacted and synthesized technical data in 30 days ignores the reality of IT architecture and data governance protocols. It is obvious that this motion and the Conservative amendment are without thought, in terms of technicalities, and without any calculation. Ultimately, the motion by the Bloc and the amendment by the Conservatives demonstrate a profound lack of technical literacy regarding the operational life cycle of a large-scale IT infrastructure project such as the BDM.

Demanding nine years' worth of granular system logs, performance summaries and unsiloed communications across six separate government bodies in a mere 30-day window is not a legitimate exercise in transparency. It is a deliberate attempt to reduce the administrative and technical capacity of the civil service. As a technical person, I see this for what it is: an impossible set of requirements designed to force a system crash—for it will definitely force a system crash—of the departments' work for political leverage. This is a transparently dirty game of procedural sabotage intended to paralyze the government's delivery of essential benefits before committee majorities can be established.

● (1000)

Canadians are smarter than the opposition thinks. They see that this isn't an oversight. It is a calculated effort to break the system from within, while ignoring every fundamental principle of data governance and system architecture.

Those are a few of my calculations and a few of my words to be considered. It is technically very difficult. It's impossible to do it within a 30-day time frame. Looking at all these documents is a risk for our system, so I would ask the opposition, both parties, to look at those words that they put outside.

Thank you.

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

Before I move to the speaking list, I'm going to advise the witnesses that they can leave. It is unlikely that we will return.

**Kyle Seeback:** Is there anyone on the list?

**The Chair:** Yes.

There was a motion moved, which was within the members' prerogative in their speaking time, that returned the committee to debate the motion. We're now in debate on the amendment to that motion, which is the prerogative of the members of this committee.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Order.

It is left to the witnesses. If they wish, they can leave.

The next speaker is Monsieur Joseph.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

If only you knew how it breaks my heart to see the witnesses waiting in a corner and then being asked to leave. They left their homes, their jobs, their families—

[*English*]

**Kyle Seeback:** Stop talking, then.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** How about a little respect, please.

[*English*]

**Kyle Seeback:** You're the only ones talking.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** How about a little respect, please.

[*English*]

**Kyle Seeback:** You're the only ones talking.

**The Chair:** Order.

**Kyle Seeback:** Apologize to the witnesses yourself.

**The Chair:** Order.

**Kyle Seeback:** You're the only ones talking. Apologize to the witnesses yourself.

**The Chair:** The meeting is suspended.

• (1000)

(Pause)

• (1005)

**The Chair:** The committee has resumed.

Mr. Joseph was speaking, but before I go on, I'm going to recognize Mr. Aitchison, as he has—

Is there no interpretation?

**An hon. member:** No.

**The Chair:** Yes, but it's remote interpretation.

Mr. Joseph has the floor.

I have a speaking order, but I am going to entertain Mr. Aitchison's motion as it relates to the witnesses. He has a motion. If there is no objection, I will let it proceed.

**Scott Aitchison:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. The motion is very simple. I move that the prepared opening statements of Kevin Lee, Pedro Barata and Gary Gladstone be taken as read and appended to the evidence of today's meeting.

**The Chair:** Do we have consent on that? It's the only way the witnesses can have their prepared statements submitted and considered in the testimony.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[*See appendix*—Remarks by Kevin Lee, Pedro Barata and Gary Gladstone]

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

**Scott Aitchison:** Thank you.

• (1010)

**The Chair:** The motion has been carried. We'll return to Mr. Joseph.

I have a speaking list of Ms. Fancy and then Ms. Falk.

[*Translation*]

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

I'm putting myself in my colleagues' shoes. I sympathize with their frustration and that of their leader.

With respect to the motion that would require public servants to shift gears—

**The Chair:** Just a moment, Mr. Joseph.

[*English*]

Is there a point of order?

**Rosemarie Falk:** Yes, Mr. Chair. I want to make note that we do not give implied consent for you to adjourn the meeting today.

We would move that, upon the expiration of resources, the committee will suspend until 3:30 on Monday.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I can consider that at the time. We have a hard stop at 10:40.

**Rosemarie Falk:** That's great. I'm just saying that we do not consent to adjournment. We consent to suspension.

**The Chair:** That will be the will of the committee when we hit the time.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Right. What time did you say?

**The Chair:** We have resources until 10:40.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Until 10:40. Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Continue, Mr. Joseph.

[Translation]

**Natilien Joseph:** Mr. Chair, I'll start over. I sympathize with the frustration my colleagues and their leader are feeling. Public servants are being asked to redirect their efforts and stop processing the backlog of files for seniors in Quebec, Atlantic Canada, Ontario, western Canada and the territories. Do you really expect them to stop doing the work on seniors' files that would give those people access to what they're entitled to, and to start gathering millions of pages of documents, which the opposition parties might chuck into a drawer without a glance? Why would anyone want that?

The opposition parties are obviously playing political games.

Witnesses were sitting in the corner, waiting for a chance to speak. Some took a day off work or gave up a day with their family. They drove for hours or took a four- or five-hour flight to get here. Does anyone think it's okay for witnesses to come to Ottawa, only to be told to leave and go home? If we aren't careful, one of these days, witnesses will decline invitations to appear before the committee. What would be the reason for that? The reason would be dilatory motions, motions that do absolutely nothing to meet the needs of seniors.

Is someone talking at the same time as me?

I understand my colleague's frustration.

[English]

**The Chair:** Committee members, I will suspend the meeting if it loses order and decorum in the House. Please respect each member as they're speaking. Believe me, I have to listen to all sides.

Mr. Joseph can continue.

[Translation]

**Natilien Joseph:** Honestly, Mr. Chair, I wonder why the Conservative Party and the Bloc Québécois want to redirect government resources instead of letting public servants work on things like the old age security pension arrears that seniors are waiting for. That's my question.

I'm going to respond to Mrs. Falk, who said that the Liberals are the ones filibustering. We are not filibustering. We just want to leave public servants be so they can work through the old age security files that are currently on hold, because that's very important. These people are not just in Quebec. There may be seniors in her riding who are affected. I don't know what province her riding is in. There may be some in Mr. Seebach's, Mr. Reynolds' or Ms. Larouche's ridings. When I visited seniors' residences, hardly anyone mentioned having this issue. However, that doesn't mean that it's not happening in Quebec. There are some 9,222 cases pending in Quebec.

Ms. Larouche, in the future, I would ask you to be careful with dilatory motions so as not to use committee and government resources for things that don't matter.

Mr. Chair, that's all I wanted to say. I don't want to speak just for the sake of speaking, as some of my colleagues do. I'll yield the floor to someone else.

• (1015)

[English]

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

We have Ms. Fancy.

**Jessica Fancy:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleague.

Through you, Chair, I'd like to talk first and then follow up on some of my earlier remarks, but in a slightly different tone because I don't think that this needs to be any type of adversarial conversation. I think it's a place for real collaboration. In fact, there's a real space here for working together, and that's how we always get the best outcome. At the core, I think that everybody around this table shares the same objective.

It's been really great getting to know all the people around this table, their context and what they bring. My colleague was a tradesperson. My other colleague across the way was a social worker. One colleague comes from a social financial background. I was an educator. We have a truck driver here. It's so neat to see everybody within HUMA.

We're the human committee. We look at social programs, and we look at helping all people throughout the whole spectrum, throughout vulnerabilities, throughout disabilities. I think that, because of everything we have and all the context that we bring, this is a real opportunity for us to try to work together. We all want transparency. We all want accountability. We all want to make sure that Canadians, especially those who rely most on our government programs or services, are being well-served.

Where we might differ is how we get there, the paths. It's really important to ground that discussion in this reality of this ministry we're dealing with. This is one of the only committees that deals with over five different ministries. For me, it's one of the most important, given the context of where I come from.

This department also serves the most vulnerable Canadians. These are the seniors, individuals with disabilities, low-income families, workers who depend on timely support to get by. For many of them, these programs are not just helpful; they're essential. When we ask this ministry or this committee to take on additional work, especially work of the scale within this motion, I think we have to think about the downstream impact here together because I think we know what the trade-off is.

This committee already has a very full agenda. We have a humongous list of motions, studies and reports that we're already actively working on. Officials are already spending significant amounts of time supporting that work, preparing materials, responding to some of these requests and appearing before us, which is what we were hoping to do today.

There's no question that information has been provided. There's no question that transparency has been provided. There's no question, through you, Mr. Chair, that I think we all want a common goal of helping to strengthen our programs and supports for everybody, which is what the Cúram system, at its core, mission and vision, is trying to do.

There is an opportunity in front of us, not to draw a hard line but to find a better path forward, one that respects the role of this committee and also recognizes the operational realities of the department. The motion, as it stands, is very broad. It will require a review and the production of millions of pages of documents across multiple departments. That's a significant undertaking, and it would inevitably pull resources away from service delivery. I think that, at the core of everything we do, it's the service delivery that we really rely on most. Not having that service delivery happen is not something that I think anyone here wants to achieve. I don't think that anyone else around this table wants to see delays for seniors waiting on benefits, for families waiting on support or for workers trying to access the programs that they rely on.

The question becomes, how do we get the information we need in a way that is effective, realistic and responsible? That's something that our minister, Minister Hajdu, has clearly represented in the House. I think that the answer also lies in how we now work together to redefine this approach. Maybe it means narrowing a scope or focusing on some specific time frames, Ms. Larouche.

• (1020)

We can look at specific types of documents, phasing the request by starting with a smaller, targeted set of materials and then building what's needed from there. It would mean adjusting timelines so that departments can respond without compromising service delivery.

To Ms. Larouche, my colleague across the way, I think everyone around this table wants the same thing at the end of the day, which is to help with service delivery. We all have recognized that some seniors have had their service delivery disrupted. The minister has clearly acknowledged that, provided information and reasoning in regard to how and why that happened and forged a plan on working in the future and helping those who did get caught up in this really large system.

I commend you on wanting to help all the vulnerable people who might not have received their OAS, but I also want to say that requiring hundreds of hours' worth of document production on a system that we knew was 60 years old and was clearly needing a technology reboot....

Sometimes there are ripples in the stream. There are also options here to keep the spirit of accountability intact while making progress more workable. At the end of the day, this isn't about asking for the largest amount of information possible; it's about asking for the right information. I think we're more likely to get meaningful insight if we take a more targeted approach in the way we go about seeing the system delivery model, rather than taking a sweeping approach and saying we want all the documents.

I also think it's worth acknowledging the work that's already been done here—the ministers who have already appeared, officials who have provided briefings and data that's been shared, including regional breakdowns and costing information. It gives us a strong foundation to build on. Instead of starting from scratch with a request of this magnitude, I think that if we could build from what we already have and identify what those gaps were, we could move on from here. That's more of a collaborative way forward.

Especially given the nature of this ministry, I also would like to say that we know that people really matter. In a department that serves some of the most vulnerable Canadians, capacity is directly tied to people's getting the support they need when they need it. If we can find a way to meet our accountability objectives while also protecting that capacity, I think it will be a win-win-win for everybody. It's a win for this committee, a win for the department and, most importantly, a win for Canadians.

I'd also like to encourage colleagues to see this as an opportunity to work together to redefine this motion, work out some of these requests and make sure that what we're asking for is both meaningful and achievable, because when we want the same end result, the question is, how do we get there?

I'd also like to mention what we're already asking for. This isn't a neutral type of department in the machinery of government; this is a ministry that serves some of the most vulnerable people in this country. These seniors are relying on timely benefits to cover some of their basic costs. They may be individuals with disabilities who are navigating very complex systems to access the supports that they need. Some of them are low-income families that are trying to stay afloat. Some of them are workers who are in seasonal or even precarious employment and depend on programs like employment insurance to bridge the gap when work is not available. For some of these Canadians, this ministry is not optional; it's essential.

I think reality has to guide how we think about this motion that's in front of us, because every additional demand that we place on this department has a rippling effect. It does not exist in a vacuum. When we ask public servants to redirect their time and attention towards compiling massive volumes of documents, millions of pages across multiple departments—we know we have about four or five different ministries within this committee alone—we're also asking them to step away from the work that directly supports Canadians.

• (1025)

It's a trade-off—whether we acknowledge that or not. To be honest, we need to think about that.

We're also talking today about excess capacity here. This department is already under pressure. It's already managing very high volumes of applications, inquiries and program delivery demands. It's already working to improve service standard times and responsiveness for Canadians who, quite frankly, can't afford those delays. That is why our minister very plainly said to all Canadians, during a lot of different question periods, that if you are experiencing a disruption in your OAS payments, to please reach out to your MP or to the minister directly.

Now, I'd also like to emphasize one other thing that was raised earlier, because it bears repeating in stronger terms. This committee already has a significant workload within its file. We have a very long list of motions from all the different parties represented here. We have studies and reports that we're trying to actively work through.

Officials have already dedicated considerable amounts of time to supporting this committee work, preparing materials, responding to some of these requests, appearing before us and providing detailed information when asked. This isn't small; quite frankly, it's humongous.

Committee work was one of the things that caught me off guard the most when I became a member of Parliament. I have five university degrees, and I don't think that I've ever read more in my life.

What are my degrees in? Well, I have a premedical biology degree. I have a post-secondary professional studies degree. I have two university fellowship degrees from Memorial University; one in curriculum and instruction, and the other in educational leadership, with a specification in rural policy and economic development. I also have a degree in international leadership and comparative education.

Thank you for that question from my colleague across the way, who asked, "What the heck are your degrees in?" There they are.

Every item on that list comes with its own set of expectations and timelines. When I talk about the amount of reading and preparation for a committee like this among all of these different ministries, it's really important that we do the time, do the due diligence and get the work done. It does not replace any of this existing work; it adds to it. It stacks up upon ongoing studies, reporting requirements and requests for information. All of that work is being supported by the same pool of public servants within that finite system.

In terms of the reporting and the number of documents for the motion at hand, it's about capacity. It's a capacity issue as well.

We continue to want to expand the scope of what we're asking without acknowledging that there are limits to what can be delivered, at least within any reasonable time frame. Thirty days is a very tight timeline in terms of what you're requesting.

I think that the principle of proportionality also becomes very important. Yes, committees have a right to request documents. All members have a right to request documents, but I think those requests need to be focused and grounded in an understanding of operational realities.

This motion is clearly not targeted. It casts an extremely wide net. It would require our officials to comb through millions of different types of documents and access different departments to identify anything that might fall within its scope.

It would then require these documents to be reviewed, redacted for privacy and legal considerations, translated into both official languages and then compiled for production. That's an enormous task in a good year, let alone in a 30-day motion.

When we pair that with some of the existing workload, and consider the humongous list of motions and reports that are already in progress, it becomes very clear that it's not just ambitious; it's unrealistic. It's unrealistic in terms of timeline and in terms of cost. When I say cost, I mean the cost to Canadians.

• (1030)

It's not realistic in terms of the impact on that service delivery. I also think that it's important to acknowledge the work that's already

been done within this file. That context really matters here. We've had our Minister Lightbound already testify to this. We've already had Minister Hajdu testify to this. Officials throughout multiple departments have provided other testimony. There have already been technical briefings. I believe that our minister offered multiple technical briefings to all party members, and I think even Miss Larouche actually attended.

It's not insignificant. That is a meaningful level of transparency and engagement. Again, I think that we have to ask what the incremental value is of requesting millions of additional pages of documents beyond what has already been provided. Will it genuinely enhance our understanding, or will it simply create a volume of information that is difficult to process, time-consuming to produce and costly to compile? More information is not always better information. That's what I always used to tell my students when I taught. In fact, overly broad requests sometimes obscure rather than clarify. They can bury key insights under mountains of paperwork, making it harder, not easier, for committees to do their work effectively.

A targeted approach, on the other hand, zeroes in on specific information that's actually needed. It can be delivered more quickly. It can be analyzed more effectively. It can be analyzed in a more timely fashion. It can achieve the goal of accountability while also not imposing unnecessary strain on a system that's already heavily burdened. That is the balance that I think that we're all trying to strive for here. I'd also like to say that Canadians expect us to be responsible not just in how we hold government to account, which I completely agree with, but in how we use public resources.

This motion would cost millions of dollars to implement. It is not speculative that the reality of this level of effort required to fulfill it goes beyond what I believe they're asking for. At a time when Canadians face affordability challenges and when they are expecting better and faster service from government, we now need to be mindful about how we allocate those resources. Every dollar spent on compiling documents is a dollar not spent on improving services. Every hour spent reviewing records is an hour not spent helping someone access a benefit, resolve an issue or get the support they need. That's what I feel is opportunity cost.

In a ministry that serves some of the most vulnerable people in our country, that opportunity costs even more. The margin of error can be even smaller; the consequences of delay can be greater, and the expectation that government will be here when needed is higher. I come back to that same point from the beginning, with even greater emphasis: We really need to be careful here in the way that we treat our timelines, our agenda and what we are hoping to accomplish with our motions, being thoughtful and being realistic.

We already have a significant body of work before this committee, a humongous list of motions, studies and reports that require attention. We already have ongoing engagement from our ministry, from our officials. I believe we have some ministers coming in a couple of weeks on another topic. We already have information that has been provided in good faith. We've already provided all party members and members of Parliament with transparency sessions that allowed the minister to break down those specific areas as to how some of the data didn't get pulled into this new system. It's saying that it's not a perfect system. They're in the process of updating something that's 60 years old, and there were going to be, unfortunately, some people falling through those cracks. Our minister very clearly and transparently said that, if there are some seniors that did not get their OAS payments, they can directly contact either their member Parliament or contact her directly, and they can get that money to you.

The questions right here are as follows: What's the right way to go about doing this? What's the right thing to do? I think that the ministry in this case has demonstrated that already. In my view, asking for millions of pages of documents across multiple departments with an already unrealistic time frame while the ministry is already under pressure serving some of the most vulnerable Canadians is not the right approach.

• (1035)

There are some specific gaps in the information we have. Let's identify those. If there are particular documents that would help clarify an issue, let's request them. If there are timelines that need to be adjusted to reflect operational realities, let's adjust them. Those are constructive steps.

Maintaining a motion of this scope without refinement risks doing more harm than good. It risks diverting resources away from service delivery. It risks overwhelming both the departments and this committee with volume rather than insight and action. It risks setting the precedent that a broad, unfocused approach to requests is the norm rather than the exception.

In this case, we don't want to create that norm and further burden departments. We want to create an exception that is exact. What about that program made it unable to onboard seniors in the correct fashion? What about that program did not allow some of those transfers to go through? Those should be in the motion as specific asks, not "Let's take every single bit of information about the department, throw it in a box, redact it, translate it and compile it for the committee." That doesn't really seem like a serious ask. It risks overwhelming the departments and this committee. It risks setting the precedent that broad, unfocused requests are the norm rather than the exception.

I think we can all do better than that, as a group. We can uphold accountability while also respecting the capacity of the system and the needs of Canadians. This ministry supports some of our most vulnerable constituents—some of the most vulnerable people. That balance is really important and essential.

On this matter, we can look at what some of those specific things are that didn't bridge gaps in the creation of this new onboarding and data system. What are the specific gaps that didn't allow that transfer in the information system? Those are the types of service

delivery models that need to be implemented in a motion such as this, not a swath of everything that might have "Cúram", "technology", "updating" or "data" in a document, which then gets pulled.

We also have to remember this: After getting all that information, you have to use the resources in your own offices to go through this and see for yourselves what some of those different service delivery models are. Capacity—

**The Chair:** Committee members—

**Jessica Fancy:** I'm sorry, Chair.

**The Chair:** —we're out of resources.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

**Rosemarie Falk:** No.

**Kyle Seeback:** Let's suspend.

**The Chair:** The committee will suspend to the call of the chair.

*[The meeting was suspended at 10:39 a.m., Thursday, April 23]*

*[The meeting resumed at 3:32 p.m., Monday, April 27]*

• (11130)

**The Chair:** Good afternoon, committee members. We are resuming meeting number 34 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members can attend in person and remotely using the Zoom application. Today all members are here in person.

I want to remind all members that when the meeting was suspended, Ms. Fancy had the floor. When we resume, we will start with Ms. Fancy.

I want to remind members to select the channel that gives them the official language in which they wish to participate. If there is an issue with interpretation, please get my attention and we will suspend while it is being corrected. Again, as you're aware, direct all questions through the chair.

As I indicated, when the meeting was suspended, we were debating the amendment by Ms. Falk to the motion from Madame Larouche. The debate was on the amendment.

With that, we will return to the speaker who had the floor.

Ms. Fancy, you have the floor.

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

Today, I'd like to start by grounding this discussion in something that's very simple but also very important: the work that we do here, and the responsibility that we carry when we sit around this table.

I know we're here initially regarding the motion by my colleague, Ms. Larouche:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities request that the Department of Employment and Social Development, the Department of Public Works and Government Services, the Privy Council Office, as well as the Prime Minister's Office, provide to the clerk of the committee, within 30 days of the adoption of this motion, all reports, correspondence, emails and documents related to the management of the Benefits Delivery Modernization since January 1, 2017, and that the departments and offices responsible for producing the documents apply redactions in accordance with the legal obligations set out in the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act.

That was the initial motion we received on Thursday, March 26. Later we moved on and had a motion for amendments. These are the amendments that our colleagues across the way have proposed:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities order the production of documents related to the Benefits Delivery Modernization (BDM) initiative, including the Cúram platform, from the Department of Employment and Social Development, the Department of Public Works and Government Services, the Privy Council Office, and the Prime Minister's Office;

First, I'd like to take a moment and say there are eight different offices or departments from which they want documents. It continues:

That these departments and offices provide to the clerk of the committee within 30 days of the adoption of the motion:

- a. all internal audits, evaluations, and risk assessments related to BDM since January 1, 2017;

That's similar to the original motion, but then it goes on to ask for:

- b. all briefing notes, memoranda, and decision documents prepared for Ministers and senior officials concerning the BDM initiative or the Cúram platform;
- c. all emails and electronic communications that relate to:
  - i. system performance issues,
  - ii. delays or backlogs in benefit delivery,
  - iii. cost overruns or project risks, and
  - iv. decisions regarding the Cúram platform and BDM implementation;
- d. all contracts related to the Cúram platform and associated systems;

Finally, the last part is:

- e. performance reports and data summaries tracking processing times, backlogs, error rates, system outages and instances of incorrect benefit payments, including overpayments and subsequent recovery actions or clawbacks.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the first seven minutes of this meeting, I've just read the motion and amendments to the motion that we're looking at. I believe it refers to six different ministries, with five paragraphs requesting many different types of briefing notes, etc., that they're requiring regarding the Cúram software.

• (11135)

When we're around this table, we are entrusted with two things. The first thing is to conduct oversight in a responsible, measured and effective way. I think we can all agree on that. The second thing is to advance legislation that Canadians are watching, are waiting for and are expecting us to study with care.

We're struggling to do either one. This motion is almost two pages long, and in its current form, it's pulling us away from both of these responsibilities—conducting oversight and being responsible in an effective way—to advance this legislation.

I'll start with the impact we're seeing. Last Thursday, this committee was scheduled to hear from witnesses on Bill C-20, which is the implementation of the Build Canada Homes act through our housing and infrastructure ministry.

• (11140)

**Rosemarie Falk:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** State your point of order clearly.

**Rosemarie Falk:** I'm not hearing relevance. She's talking about housing. That's not what the amendment or the motion on the floor is about.

**The Chair:** I would ask Ms. Fancy to—

**Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.):** On that same point of order of relevance, Chair, I think that Ms. Fancy is getting to a point. I think we should allow her—

**The Chair:** Thank you—

**Iqra Khalid:** —to lay out where we need to go by making sure that the context is relevant.

**Rosemarie Falk:** On that, Chair, I would note the precedent you had on this. There has not been grace to allow the context, so I would ask that the same be applied in this situation.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Fancy, you have the floor. Stay relevant to the amendment to the motion being discussed.

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

I was discussing how we can further legislation. When we have witnesses come here, they fly in. They prepare their documents and briefing notes. Sometimes it's frustrating for committee members and for witnesses. We want people to be respectful. That's what I was referring to.

We cancelled last week due to this motion and the discussion regarding it. It wasn't an emergency, but it was due to a technical issue. We're consumed by a procedural debate on this motion. That matters for the credibility of this committee as a whole. It matters for the integrity of the process in the committee and for the message we're sending to Canadians about how seriously we take our work.

When those witnesses take time to appear—

[*Translation*]

**Bernard Généreux (Côte-du-Sud—Rivière-du-Loup—Kataskomiq—Témiscouata, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Clearly state your point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Bernard Généreux:** Mr. Chair, my colleague just implied that we aren't doing our job.

Frankly, we're not here to waste our time. We're here to study a proposal and amendments. I don't know why she's insinuating—

[English]

**Iqra Khalid:** I'm sorry, Chair, but that is a point of debate and not a point of order.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I have recognized a point of order from—

[Translation]

**Bernard G n reux:** I don't know why she's insinuating that we're here to waste our time. I don't understand.

In fact, Mr. Chair, I raised my hand because I want to speak, so I look forward to doing that.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you. For any further points of order, I will insist that you clearly reference the point of order. That was outside of that.

Ms. Fancy, you have the floor.

**Jessica Fancy:** I'm just furthering what my colleague had mentioned. That's not really how a committee should function. I'm agreeing with him on that point of order.

Let's turn to the motion itself, then. What this motion is actually looking for is the production of literally millions of pages of documents across multiple departments—millions of pages. It's not a really targeted request. It's not a really scoped request. It's a request of magnitude that is, quite frankly, pretty unprecedented within this committee.

When we're looking at some of these motions and trying to find out the actual scope of what they're looking for, you can't just say that you want every single click of a keyboard that's happened and want it all in a box so that we can peruse it.

Even though we heard, multiple times during question period, that our minister was asked this, and she gave a coherent and transparent answer saying that—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Jessica Fancy:** Oh, that's also up for debate, but if I didn't say that, then you'd "point of order" me for not saying that.

The minister has already said that we have a 60-year-old program that we're trying to onboard. We have a couple of million seniors here. I believe that all together a little under 30,000 hadn't been completely onboarded due to paper... The minister told us that if there are any MPs who have seniors right now who had missed payments to please contact their MP or their constituency office. Also, she's made note of saying that if there are any seniors out there who have not received payments to please contact her ministry.

When you have a system that is 60 years old, and they're trying to onboard it with technology, sometimes there are bumps along the way. She's been transparent with that within the department. We're saying that the number keeps going down as we go to try to get the seniors their cheques.

We don't need to speculate on that.

This past week, a similar motion was also introduced publicly to the public accounts committee. Members immediately raised concerns. I think they're still debating those motions as well. The scale of that request, once again, was also vast and cannot be implemented as written.

I think this should give us pause, because the same issues that are going on there are also applying here. Producing millions of pages of documents will cost millions of dollars. That's not an abstract estimate; that is an operational reality of what's being asked within this motion.

We have an almost two-page motion here with all of the different types of information platforms, electronic communications and risk assessments. If you're requiring all of these teams to comb through these enormous amounts of materials, Chair, like emails, briefing notes, technical reports, contract files and internal correspondence, that's just the beginning of what this could be.

Each document would need to then be reviewed line by line for privacy—because then there's the section about the redacted pieces for privacy—for legal compliance, confidentiality and national security considerations. Not only are we having literally millions of files, potentially, across six different departments, but there are five different types of documents within each of those departments, and then they have to all go through the line-by-line redaction for privacy, legal compliance and confidentiality before they could be turned over.

How long do you think that would take? Well, within this motion they're saying 30 days.

Then it needs to be processed. Then, on top of all of that, it needs to be translated, because we're a bilingual nation. Then it would be compiled, then delivered. You can see how many times I've said "then".

This is not a matter of taking the file or the box off the shelf. This is a months-long, potentially year-long undertaking involving significant human and financial resources.

● (11145)

However, the motion here poses this timeline of 30 days, which does not reflect the reality of what they're actually requiring. I feel as though this is simply not feasible for our current departments or fair for our public servants, who have other stuff they need to attend to, such as onboarding some of those seniors who did fall through the cracks as they were translating into that new system.

I think it's really important that we clearly say...because these expectations matter. When we set expectations that cannot be met, we're not strengthening accountability; we're actually undermining it.

Now I'd like to talk about the actual impact on the public service of a motion like this. Think about this: Every hour that's spent compiling documents is an hour spent not delivering services that Canadians are relying on. It's not really rhetorical. It's literal.

The public servants who would be tasked with fulfilling this massive request of documents and motions are the ones who process the claims. They are also the ones who are administering this program. They are also responding to inquiries and ensuring that the Canadians receive these services that they depend on. When we divert those resources, there are also direct consequences. The consequences are that processing speeds slow down, the backlogs grow and responses take longer. Canadians feel that.

I'd also like to mention that throughout the whole process of our minister's being asked about the Cúram software and the onboarding, she also provided two dates' worth of technical briefings for anybody who wanted further information. None of this is in the motion at hand.

Chair, at a time when Canadians expect efficiency, responsiveness and timely service, I believe this motion would redirect significant capacity away from the public servants' normal job description and away from priorities toward a more administrative exercise on an extraordinarily large scale.

Everybody, the question we need to ask ourselves around this is, do we think this is the best use of public resources? Do you think that this is the most effective way to achieve an oversight that's already been discussed—the problem and pathways for remedy, and opportunities for people to learn about how and why it happened—or are we starting to create a burden that outweighs the benefit?

Oversight is absolutely important. As a committee, we have the right to request information. That's a fundamental role. It happens, but that right also comes with responsibility. I always used to tell my students that you sometimes choose what you do and then you choose consequences. It's very similar. When we're requesting information, it also comes with that responsibility. It's a responsibility that should be targeted and should be reasonable.

When I'm looking at whether it's targeted, there's no target to this. It's six different departments with five different interjurisdictional types of platforms. I even see that the amendment in c has four other different types of those in electronic communications. It's not targeted.

There's a responsibility to be reasonable. For all of these untargeted asks for documents from a department to be all wrapped up within 30 days is completely unreasonable.

We have a responsibility, as well, to ensure that our requests are proportionate to the objective we're trying to achieve. In this case, this motion doesn't really have any objectives for what's trying to be achieved. This motion, as it's written, doesn't meet the type of standard we have in our organizational sense as a committee. Instead, what's happening right now is they're trying to set a precedent for unlimited, unfocused document demands across government. I don't really think that's—

• (11150)

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Go ahead on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** Mr. Chair, can my colleagues across the way please be respectful and patient? I can see that my colleague is very irritated.

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

**Eric Lefebvre (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

We're talking about respect. This computer system was supposed to cost \$1.6 billion and ended up costing \$6.6 billion. That's \$5 billion in cost overruns—

**Natilien Joseph:** Look, Mr. Chair.

**Eric Lefebvre:** —and that is taxpayers' money, Mr. Chair; it is Canadians' money.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Order.

We're debating an amendment to a motion, and Ms. Fancy has the floor.

That is not a point of order, Monsieur Lefebvre.

Ms. Fancy, continue.

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

Through you, Chair, in terms of a precedent being set... I can agree with my colleague that there is some seriousness happening here within this Cúram software. They're trying to onboard a program that was 60 years old, for which everything was on paper.

Unfortunately, as they were taking all of this paper information from millions of seniors and onboarding it to a more digital platform, yes, there were some people who fell through the cracks: under 30,000 people of the millions who had been onboarded. Our minister has very clearly stated that, yes, we understand that there are people who fell through the cracks with this. Yes, this is why it happened. This is what happens when you deal with millions of pages of paper. This is what happens when we're onboarding millions of people at a time.

They're saying to reach out to your MP if your OAS did not come through and if the onboarding didn't happen correctly for you, or to the MP's constituency office. Reach out to the department. Reach out to the minister. That has all been very transparent.

It's not a small thing, this type of precedent, because once this precedent becomes established, it does not exist in isolation. It shapes some of the expectations that we have going forward, not just within this committee but within standing committees as a whole. It creates a model that can be replicated across those committees, across departments and across different types of files. The cumulative effect of all of this, I would say, is quite significant. It would strain public service capacity.

We always say that our public servants right now are already at capacity or are working beyond capacity. Asks such as this...they take them, crossing that organizational boundary of what their actual job description is, to suffice something that we've already clearly been transparent about in trying to fix. Sometimes when you know that things went a little bit wrong, you become transparent, you clean it up and you let people know that "this is what happened" and "this is what we're doing".

It diverts the resources across all these six different departments. It would fundamentally alter how the departments operate: shifting focus from delivering results to managing document production. I don't feel that it is a reasonable or a responsible oversight, Mr. Chair. I also don't think it's sustainable. I don't really think that it's what Canadians expect from us.

I'd also like to address, Mr. Chair, something that's often overlooked in these types of conversations or discussions, and that's the question of whether information is already being provided. As I said before, when all of this happened, our minister had two days of technical briefings that members were allowed to go to, to discuss this and why it is happening. When we [*Inaudible—Editor*] a motion like this, it seems that there's also a lack of transparency. In this case, there has been no lack of transparency. That is not something that's borne out by facts. Minister Hajdu has appeared before this committee. Minister Lightbound has also appeared before this committee. Officials from both offices have also appeared through this committee. Officials have been provided, technical briefings—

• (11155)

**Rosemarie Falk:** I have a point of order, Chair. This is just repetitive. We're hearing the same things over and over again. There are no new points being made.

**The Chair:** Order.

**Jessica Fancy:** I haven't talked about Minister Lightbound yet.

**Rosemarie Falk:** You did that in the last meeting as well.

We're just not hearing new points to this debate. It's just a regurgitation of the same points. I would suggest that we move on with the speaking list, please.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Falk. I'm chairing the meeting.

Ms. Fancy, you have the floor. You're speaking to the amendment.

**Jessica Fancy:** I'd like to thank my colleague from across the way for allowing me to get a water break. Thank you.

In terms of all the ministers who have already been here and spoken to this committee, they've also provided costing information. They've also responded to requests from members, including detailed follow-ups on contracts and program implementation. There has been engagement. There has been responsiveness. There has been transparency. The issue before us is not whether information is being shared. There's no cover-up here. The issue is this: We are going to adopt a motion that goes far beyond any targeted oversight and is now into something that's so broad, costly and unrealistic as to what we're actually trying to do here that it disrupts both public service delivery and our own legislative work.

As we might remember, I think we have 12 different motions that are kind of on the docket within our agenda. We have an agenda that's already set, with people like the witnesses who'd come here after spending hours on their briefs. Over half of them didn't get to speak because we were talking about a production of papers that falls under a completely different purview, a completely different ministry. Testimony got delayed and our progress was paused.

Canadians expect us to be doing our jobs and furthering some of these reports, which had already been adopted when we were working very well together. They also expect us to ask questions. They expect us to have this legislation moved forward. Instead, right now, with this two-page motion document, I don't know about you—all, but I feel kind of stuck.

Colleagues, that is our choice right now. Our choice right now is about our priorities, things that have already been set. Our choice is about how we use our time as a committee. It's a choice about how we signal what matters.

**A voice:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

• (11200)

**Iqra Khalid:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I'll suspend.

• (11200)

(Pause)

• (1600)

**The Chair:** We're back in session.

Ms. Fancy, you have the floor.

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

I believe this motion in its current form would push us even further in the wrong direction from what we're trying to achieve. I'd like to be very clear that I don't believe this is even an argument about transparency or an argument in regard to accountability. I think this might be an argument for both, properly, and for doing both responsibly and in a way that actually serves Canadians.

The Canadians we're here to represent do not benefit from motions that cannot be implemented. There's no implementation here. It's a fact-and-find search mission for something that's already been transparent and been given a pathway where people are able to come in and find out what's going on with this new software. In this way, Canadians are not benefiting from any service delivery. We don't benefit, especially as a committee, with this type of stalled legislation. What would people benefit by in this committee if we were not focused, effective and grounded in the reality or scope of what this motion represents?

We're HUMA. We're the human committee, a committee that respects its witnesses when they're called. I believe we are a committee that respects public resources wisely, a committee that advances legislative mandates. I believe we are a committee that conducts oversight in a way that's targeted, proportionate and also meaningful. This is the standard we should all be aiming for. It's the standard that Canadians expect. This motion, as written, does not meet that standard.

It is for all these reasons—the cost, the unrealistic timeline, the strain on the public service capacity, the precedent that something like this sets, the transparency that's already been provided and the direction disruption to our work on Bill C-20—that I cannot support this motion in its current form. More importantly, I would urge colleagues to reflect on what we want from this committee. Do we want a committee that is consumed by motions of this scale, at the expense of legislative work, or do we want a committee that is focused, disciplined and effective in delivering for Canadians? I believe that's the choice before us right now.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I do have a lengthy speaking order.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. Through you, I would ask members to conduct themselves in a manner befitting their role as parliamentarians and to address one another respectfully.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Joseph, that is not a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

**Eric Lefebvre:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My colleagues are talking about respect. That has been the most important value I have held in my life for a long time. I give lectures to young dropouts, and I write the word “respect” on the board. I tell young people that if they respect people in life, people will respect them. I tell them that there's a mirroring effect.

Why are we here today? It's because we have the biggest financial scandal in the history of the country, a project that has gone from \$1.6 billion to \$6.6 billion. That means there's a cost overrun of \$5 billion. Our colleague was talking about respect.

The Liberal member Ms. Fancy was saying that this moves us away from our responsibility. What is our responsibility? Our primary role is to legislate. Our role is also to ensure sound management of the money that Canadians send to us, here in Ottawa. That's the respect we owe Canadians.

On top of that, the project we're discussing here, which has a \$5-billion overrun, doesn't work. Government employees themselves are telling us that it doesn't work. We're asking for thousands of pages of information, and Ms. Fancy is telling us that it's irresponsible, that it's going to cost a few million dollars. We're talking

about \$5 billion in cost overruns. What's irresponsible is to not shed light on the biggest financial scandal in the history of the country. That would be irresponsible: to not shed light on that.

What we need to do is get answers to our questions, as the motion calls for, because someone gave approval; someone said yes to a cost overrun of \$5 billion. Someone agreed that the software doesn't work, that it doesn't deliver the expected results and that we should keep going in that direction.

That's our role as legislators. We were elected by the people of Canada, and the people of Canada expect results. I always tell my constituents that it's a great privilege to be their eyes, their voices and their ears here in Ottawa. That should be what guides us all: being the eyes, voices and ears of our constituents.

When we're faced with a financial scandal like this one, namely, a cost overrun of \$5 billion, if we want to do our job, we have to be the eyes, voices and ears of our fellow Canadians and demand answers. That's our role as legislators.

We asked Minister Hajdu and Minister Lightbound to come and give us answers. How much time did we get? We were given one hour, that is, 30 minutes per minister. Did we have enough time to ask the questions and get the answers we expected? Of course not.

We're talking about a cost overrun of \$5 billion here, and I only have 30 minutes; not 30 minutes for me alone, but 30 minutes for all of my colleagues to ask the minister questions. It's completely ridiculous. To go back to the word “respect”, it's a lack of respect for us as legislators to give us only 30 minutes to ask questions about a \$5-billion cost overrun. That's the respect the Liberal government has for the legislators who were democratically elected in each of the ridings to represent their fellow Canadians.

People work hard to earn their pay, and they send us practically half of their pay here to Ottawa. We have a cost overrun of \$5 billion, and we shouldn't be asking questions because that will result in work for government employees. What would be irresponsible would be to not do so.

I wanted to be here because I'm a member of the Standing Committee on Finance and this is an unacceptable file for me. What's more, an article in the *Journal de Montréal* this morning talked about the fact that seniors are having trouble making ends meet. Once the rent is paid, they have a hard time paying for groceries. With the Cúram software, 86,000 seniors were unable to receive the benefits they were owed.

● (11205)

This is money that they're owed. They paid that money. It's our duty to be able to give it back to them. They have to wait eight to nine months to get their money. Some of our seniors are in distress. That's the reality for 86,000 seniors in the country. Would that mean our role is to not ask any questions, to accept that?

I will continue to fight for our seniors, and I will continue to fight for the Canadians who are working hard and place their trust in us by giving us a large portion of the pay they earn each week. They're asking us to provide services to Canadians in exchange for the money they send us every week, and we have a duty to manage it effectively and responsibly.

What we're currently seeing in this file isn't sound management. It isn't effective and responsible management. We owe it to ourselves to get answers, we expect answers, and I'm going to continue to fight so that we can get the answers, because someone, somewhere, approved those \$5 billion in cost overruns. Someone approved the fact that this software doesn't work.

I reached out to the minister to meet with employees on the ground who use the Cúram system. They're the ones who use it every day. I suggested to the minister that we go together. I don't use the computer system. The minister doesn't use it either. I suggested that we meet with the people who use it, to understand the challenges they face on a daily basis, so that we can find a way forward, find a possible solution. We owe it to ourselves to get answers.

For our part, we're going to continue the work. You'll understand that, when my colleague talked about respect, the disrespectful thing would be to not do the work we're doing right now. We owe it to ourselves to get the answers we expect. We have a duty to respect Canadians, who are also asking questions. Where are those \$5 billion in cost overruns? What happened in the decision-making chain?

A set of measures were requested in the motion. We're going to make sure we have the answers we need to shed light on this file. We're going to make sure we get the answers we expect.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (11210)

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

Mr. G n reux, you now have the floor.

**Bernard G n reux:** Mr. Chair, thank you for having us here today.

I'd just like to look back a bit. Tomorrow, I will have sat as a federal member of Parliament for 12 of the past 16 years, and I'd like to come back to what my colleague was saying, which is that it sets a precedent to have a motion with amendments that fill one and a quarter pages.

I'm sorry to remind him that when the Conservatives were in power from 2009 to 2011, as well as from 2011 to 2015—though I unfortunately wasn't a member of Parliament—there were motions like this one. This is far from being a precedent. This is the reality of being in the opposition and, as a government, dealing with serious analyses that have to be done in response to problems that arise from the implementation of software and new legislation, among other things.

In this case, I think the government is quite able to see that the \$1.7-billion estimate that was done for the system's implementation in 2017 was vastly underestimated. That means we're now at \$6.6 billion, and the system hasn't even been completely imple-

mented from A to Z. There are still other steps to carry out, which will possibly cost even more billions of dollars.

Asking for answers through a motion like this one, amended by the Conservatives, is perfectly normal. It's perfectly normal to do so when there are cost overruns like these. I don't know if ArriveCAN rings a bell or if the sponsorship scandal rings a bell. Those are things that have happened in the past and that have called for reflection, studies and analyses on how the money was spent.

As the responsible government that you are—or say you are—and as a transparent government, as you say you are, I don't see why you would have a problem with this motion. Obviously, it will definitely cost money to be able to assess what happened. However, we would not have needed to propose this motion if the costs had been met.

● (11215)

**Natilien Joseph:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, this is no longer about the amendment; this is about the motion.

**Bernard G n reux:** It can't be more about the amendment than that. I can't be more on topic than that.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** No, it's not a point of order, Mr. Joseph. Monsieur G n reux is speaking about the text of the amendment.

Monsieur G n reux, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Bernard G n reux:** Thank you.

Honestly, it's the duty of all members of this committee to assess what happened. Ms. Fancy was referring to the committee's role at the start. Its role is obviously to conduct analyses and hold the government to account. That's part of the work for all our colleagues, and, frankly, with a cost overrun of \$5 billion compared with the initial estimate, I think it goes without saying that an analysis is clearly necessary. There has to be a closer look at what happened during this system's implementation.

I fully understand what my colleagues are telling me, and I'm trying to be as open as possible to their arguments, which are that millions of Canadians were being processed on paper and that all that computerization can lead to cost overruns. We just experienced this in Quebec with the Soci t  de l'assurance automobile du Qu bec: it cost \$1.5 billion. It's the same thing: It had been estimated at much lower amounts than that. The important thing for all Canadians is to know what really happened to prevent it from happening again.

Mr. Chair, if I may, I 100% support the amendment that my colleagues proposed to shed light on this important scandal. Let us call it what it is; that's the real word. I don't like to use it, but it's a scandal to see that a project estimated at \$1.6 billion has ended up at \$6.6 billion, as we speak, and it isn't done yet. Obviously, I think we need to get to the bottom of this.

Thank you very much.

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

[*English*]

Madame McKelvie, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Jennifer McKelvie (Ajax, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today.

I'm replacing Caroline Desrochers, who is a parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, as am I.

[*English*]

I thought I was coming because we were going to talk about Build Canada Homes, so it's a little disappointing that we're stuck on a motion that calls for the production of millions of pages of documents across multiple departments. This isn't an exaggeration when you read through the motion: The scale of the request really is unprecedented.

**Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I feel very bad for Ms. McKelvie that she got the wrong impression about what was on the agenda. Could you clarify—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis. That is not a point of order, and you know that.

**Garnett Genuis:** —what was on the published agenda that was sent around this morning?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis. That is not a point of order, and you know that.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm just trying to be courteous to our guest here. She said she was under—

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

**Jennifer McKelvie:** I can clarify.

**Garnett Genuis:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, are we done?

**Jennifer McKelvie:** I can clarify. I was expecting you to come for quite some time. I had this in my agenda long before the agenda changed.

I was really surprised. You know, here we are, talking about a motion with an unprecedented scale of request. It mirrors a similar motion that was introduced at the public accounts committee last week. Members there are still debating amendments because of the sheer volume and complexity of what is involved.

When we have motions, I think we have to make sure that they're smart, that they are specific, that they are measurable, that they are achievable, that they are relevant and that they are time-bound.

Frankly, I feel like we dealt with similar motions on the science committee. There were enormous document requests, and once we really looked into things and saw the breadth of what was being asked for, how many pages of documents and, importantly, what the cost was to translate—because it's very important that all this information be available in both official languages—we ultimately changed our minds on that and had something very scoped instead, a motion that was much smarter, so to speak. It wasn't only that; in terms of time, the translation was going to literally take years.

Producing the material that's being requested in this motion will cost millions of dollars. It is simply not feasible to complete within the time frame proposed, just 30 days. Expecting public servants to comb through millions of documents across multiple departments in a matter of weeks is simply not realistic. These individuals are already working at full capacity to deliver services Canadians rely on every single day.

That brings me to the impact. Every hour that's spent compiling documents is an hour that's not spent processing claims by the department, answering inquiries or delivering timely services to Canadians. This is at a time when Canadians expect efficiency. We see that. They're asking for that and for responsiveness. This motion really diverts public servants from their core responsibilities, and it slows down service delivery at a moment when we can least afford to slow down.

While I do respect that committees have a right to request information, it's important that we look at the broader context of what those implications are. The requests have to be targeted, and they have to be reasonable. If adopted, this motion sets something that's really unprecedented. It's unfocused documents across government, likely needing many thousands of hours of translation, and it's just not a sustainable or responsive approach to oversight.

I'll come back to what I was getting to at the beginning. This is taking away from equally important work here on this committee as well. We should be working on Bill C-20, Build Canada Homes. Last Thursday, this committee was unable to hear from witnesses who had taken time out of their day—some of them rearranging schedules, some of them travelling here—to appear before us on the important Bill C-20 legislation. Two of those stakeholders wrote to me personally and said how disappointed they were that they were unable to answer questions and fully convey what was important to them in this important legislation, Bill C-20, Build Canada Homes. Their testimony matters; their perspectives matter. We had to cancel because this committee was consumed by procedural wrangling related to this motion.

We owe it to those witnesses. We owe it to Canadians to stay focused on legislative work before us and not to go down these rabbit holes. Bill C-20, Build Canada Homes, is significant, and the committee has a responsibility to give that the attention it deserves. Continuing down this path of broad, unfocused document demands only delays that work further. Other committees have realized this and have backed off from things like this.

I want to acknowledge that we already have seen a lot of transparency demonstrated on this file. Minister Hajdu, Minister Lightbound and officials from both offices have appeared.

• (11220)

Officials provided technical briefings to critics. They supplied regional breakdowns and costing at the committee's request. There has already been substantial engagement, substantial openness.

Given all of this and the important work we need to be doing on Bill C-20, Build Canada Homes, coupled with the fact that this is not a smart motion—because it's not specific, measurable, achievable or relevant, and the time that's been allotted to it is just simply not realistic—I really think this will have a tremendous impact on service delivery by our public servants, who are very busy working for Canadians.

I'm very worried about the precedent it sets, especially in terms of how this could be years' worth of translation for something that may not even achieve the outcome people think it will. It's also a huge disruption to the important work for Bill C-20, Build Canada Homes.

That's why I am not in support of this motion. I wish we were talking about Build Canada Homes today, but I think it's important that I speak to how it can really be an ineffective use of, frankly, taxpayers' dollars to go down the road of this motion. We could use our time to be responsible, to be targeted, and to really focus more on the work that Canadians expect us to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to be here. I hope I will be back one day on Build Canada Homes and those important matters of housing and infrastructure that I'm so privileged to work on for Canadians.

• (11225)

**The Chair:** Thank you—

**Garnett Genuis:** I have a point of order, Chair, just while we have a break here.

**The Chair:** Clearly state your point of order.

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, my understanding of the process is that we have a proposed calendar. We have agendas that are put out. I just want to encourage members, if they came here expecting one thing to be discussed, something that was never on the calendar or the agenda for today—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Garnett Genuis:** —and it never was, then—

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

**Garnett Genuis:** —maybe members should consult that in advance.

**The Chair:** That's not a point of order.

**Garnett Genuis:** I just think it's helpful, Chair, because Ms. McKelvie came here—

**The Chair:** Order.

**Garnett Genuis:** —with different expectations.

**The Chair:** If I get interrupted again, we'll suspend.

Madame Khalid has the floor.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm just being nice.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

**Iqra Khalid:** I appreciate that.

If that was nice, I wonder what the other part looks like.

**The Chair:** Order, members.

Let's get back to the relevant matter, which is the amendment that's currently being debated.

So far the debate has stayed to the text of the amendment, so I encourage both sides to stick with that.

Madame Khalid, you have the floor.

**Iqra Khalid:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I really appreciate how rigidly you run this committee. May I give you my biggest compliments?

Thank you very much, all members, for including me in this committee today.

I know that Mr. Genuis—and you, Chair—pointed out that we should stick to the topic at hand, which is the amendment that is before us today, but I too, with the indulgence of the committee, will take just 30 seconds to say that I wish we could talk about gig workers and how this committee can help support their employment insurance rights and support them better, as the nature of employment within our country is changing.

Those are my 30 seconds. I'll get to the amendment now.

I hope that members across this table can appreciate that many of us have been around here for a very long time. I've served on the public accounts committee. I currently serve on the government operations committee and also on the status of women committee. I see how we can use House procedure and committee procedure to stall. I don't think that's what Canadians are looking for.

When I look at the text of this motion, of these amendments—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Iqra Khalid:** Are we good? You guys have had your laughs? Okay. Great.

When I look at the text of this motion, what I'm seeing, based on the experience that I've had over these past 10 years as a parliamentarian, is not that any one of our opposition members is going to read these millions of documents, but they're willing to spend so many dollars to use our public service to obtain them and then to translate them and then just stall the amazing work that this committee does generally. I think we're beyond that. We should be beyond that, because what ultimately is the objective here? What are we trying to achieve?

Again, I sit on the government operations committee. We're going through the comprehensive expenditure review. We're looking to see how the public service spends their dollars and to see how we can find efficiencies and make sure that our democratic institution, our parliamentary institution, is well maintained and is well supported and that our Canadian taxpayer dollars are well respected while we're doing that.

For me, as I come in here and look at what is being proposed here, I'm quite aghast, to be honest. My understanding is that the committee has already received briefings and has been provided with the documentation that's been requested and that officials are actually coming through to speak with committee members as well. Also, committee members have the privilege to ask witnesses, as they come forward, for individual pieces of information or areas of interest that they have and to receive that information specifically. When I see a motion like this, I'm thinking, why do you need all of these documents? Also, why do you need them within 30 days?

Members across the way have been here just as long as I have, if not longer. They know exactly the limitations of the resources of the House. When we're putting a limitation on the time frame and expanding the breadth of the documents that we expect to receive, while also maintaining and respecting that all of these documents need to be translated into both of our official languages, it really calls it into question: Why?

● (11230)

Our committees are tools to promote democracy. They have the ability to not only provide government oversight but also bring up the new issues Canadians raise with us in the areas our committees are targeted towards—that we are mandated for. When I see us using committee resources...to what objective, I'm not sure. I'm sure we'll find out from the opposition in a couple of weeks or months. Why do we need to waste those couple of weeks and months? Why can we not talk about the issues of our generation right now, especially in this committee—human resources, skills and development? It is unreal, to be honest. As I said, I've been through production orders in the past. Some of them have been successful. We had our House resources spend thousands of hours on translating documents that nobody really read.

That is ultimately disrespectful to the resources we have available, as members of Parliament. For me, a motion that demands millions of pages with unrealistic timelines is an insult to our House resources. We, as parliamentarians, can do better, and we should do better. We are elected to lead by example. We are elected to put forth the issues our constituents raise and represent Canadians here in this place. What we're doing with the valuable time we have sitting at this table is debating whether or not millions of pages of documents can be produced within 30 days and translated, following all the House rules. We can definitely be better than that.

Demand on public servants is great, and not just now. I especially remember how, during COVID days, we had very limited resources. There were a lot of shenanigans going on around the House. The awesome people who support us in committees—who support us in the work we do as parliamentarians—were left scrambling. There were many instances in which they had to go into ther-

apy because of the toxicity of this place, due to the lack of resources and support for them.

Coming back to the motion, what is the objective here? Why do we not care about our public servants and the work they do? Why do we have to use them as a base to put forward our own political agenda, whatever that may be? It really doesn't make sense.

Here is the other piece of that: When we take away resources—

● (11235)

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

In terms of relevance, I'm hearing about COVID, but I'm not hearing about anything in the amendment to the motion.

**The Chair:** The speaker is covering the context of the workload that would be put on public servants, so it is relevant.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor.

**Iqra Khalid:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

That's exactly it. When I'm giving all of these examples, I'm talking about what I've seen in the past. I'm talking about where we are standing today in this committee. We have stood here many times in the past in various different committees to no purpose, from my point of view.

We're talking about trying to build an efficient and democratic place here. We're trying to talk about the respect for public servants and the work that they do. I'm merely providing examples as to how I've seen this happen and not happen in the past.

To my next point, I was talking about service delivery. When we're talking about millions of pages of documents that need to be translated, and we're given such a short time, potentially, as is written in this amendment, to do it, why are we taking away the resources from actual delivery of services to Canadians? These are resources, as we've established, and as members across the way have also established, that are very necessary in order to provide Canadians the support that they deserve and the support that they expect. Why are we taking away these resources from providing actual service delivery to them rather than actually sitting here and debating an amendment to a motion that is taking away those resources from that?

Mr. Chair, I am quite perplexed. I had come here—because I vice-chair two opposition-led committees—in the hopes that it would be a nice, substantive, good committee where we can talk about the genuine issues that Canadians are really championing, whether it's dealing with cost of living, providing reforms to our employment insurance or working with the provinces to make sure that gig workers are provided the supports that they need. Instead, I find myself sitting here debating an amendment to a motion as to why we should not be wasting government resources to provide millions of pages of documents, and use government resources to translate all of them, knowing that members across the way who are requesting them are actually not going to read those millions of pages, and then also knowing that we have—

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

**Iqra Khalid:** I'm not done.

**Rosemarie Falk:** There's been a lot of talk about respect, and to imply that we would or would not do something.... I just find it pretty disrespectful, because that's not the type of member of Parliament that I am. I try to put my best forward. I try to prepare. The documents we get, my office and I read them, so I take offence at that. I would just ask that respect be applied equally across the table, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That was not a point of order, but it's....

**Iqra Khalid:** It's a definite reminder, Chair, and 100% absolutely fair—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry; excuse me. I would ask both sides to respect each other.

You have the floor, Madame Khalid.

**Iqra Khalid:** Thank you very much, Chair, and you're absolutely right. I should not be so presumptuous as to assume that members across the way who are requesting millions of pages of documents within 30 days are not going to read those documents within 30 days also.

The point I was trying to make is that when a committee has the opportunity to bring in witnesses—and my understanding is that witnesses are coming in—and to be strategic, specific and more efficient about the types of documents that they're looking for from officials, then why would we want to do a blanket search and put our public service through such a hassle in order to...?

I'll just leave it at that, Mr. Chair, but I am hopeful that we can come to a resolution on this amendment. I'm happy to speak with members across the way as well, to see how we can find efficiencies and work together with the public service, with the committee members, all of them, and try to get to a collective objective that helps Canadians and that respects Canadian tax dollars as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (11240)

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Joseph, the floor is yours.

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

Before I start, I'd like to congratulate my colleagues Mr. Généreux, Ms. Larouche, Mr. Lefebvre, Mr. Genuis and Mrs. Falk, who have been here for a long time and have gained a great deal of experience. What surprises me is that they're falling into the Bloc Québécois's trap. When I hear Mr. Généreux say that he will support this motion, I can clearly see that he has fallen into the trap.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Are you going to tell seniors that, that it's a trap?

**Natilien Joseph:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, members have to speak directly to the chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Order, on both sides.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph, you have the floor.

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

I was congratulating my colleagues, because they're very experienced. Despite that, they're still falling into the trap.

Earlier, Mr. Généreux and Mr. Lefebvre talked about figures. There was some false information. I listened carefully. The next time they speak to Canadians, they should give Canadians real information, not false information. That's very dangerous. I'm going to help them out a little.

In terms of the figures for the region—

**Eric Lefebvre:** I have a point of order.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** There is a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Eric Lefebvre:** Mr. Chair, I can't let the member say that I misled Canadians. The figures I mentioned have been reported in a number of national media outlets. The member is saying that I misled Canadians.

I would ask him to withdraw his remarks, please.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

I hear the term “misled” used in the House of Commons on a regular basis, as well as in committees. Members should be judicious with their choice of words, but I'm not here to lecture any of you.

Go ahead, Monsieur Joseph.

[*Translation*]

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

I will even withdraw what I said and apologize to my colleague.

Let us talk about numbers. In the Atlantic region, on January 26, 2026, there was a backlog of 3,038 claims. On February 28, 2026, there were 1,364. Now that it's April, it's no longer 1,364 claims. In the Quebec region—this is very important, because it's near and dear to my heart—there were 11,535 outstanding claims on January 26, 2026. There were 9,222 on February 28, 2026. Now that it's April, there are fewer. In the Ontario region, there were 34,544 outstanding claims on January 26, 2026. There were 24,496 on February 28, 2026. In the western region and the territories, there were 35,112 outstanding claims on January 26, 2026. On February 28, 2026, there were 31,515.

I'm not going to go through all the figures. There are other regions, and some are waiting. I'm not going to make up numbers here so as not to distort the information. That isn't something I do. Despite the backlog, work has been done quickly. That much is clear. That work is phenomenal. We aren't going to divert resources.

This motion makes no sense. It's going to cost a great deal of money and resources. I don't know. I hear my colleagues talking about millions of pages; that's going to cost a great deal of resources and money.

Our officials, Mr. Chair, are not robots. We'll say it.

I'd like to remind my colleagues of something or get back to basics: the backlogs of old age security claims are the topic of today's discussion. Since the start of the year, the department's teams have been working tirelessly to process all the claims. The inventory and the work are going very well, even though it isn't finished. As an example, on January 26, there was a backlog of 3,038 outstanding claims for the Atlantic region. A month later, on February 28, there were 1,364 outstanding claims left.

Why am I telling you that? It's because, although the work is progressing, we won't stop until all the claims have been processed. I'd also like to point out that these claims are mainly paper-based, contain errors and ask our teams to assist Canadians through the process. Above all, it's important to know that an error could affect the benefits that a senior might receive for the rest of their life. I'm talking about a whole lifetime, Mr. Chair, the rest of their life. That makes precision even more important—

● (11245)

[English]

**Rosemarie Falk:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. It's about relevance.

What MP Joseph is saying is not what the amendment is. This isn't about claim numbers. We would like to see that information produced, but that has nothing to do with what the amendment is.

I will note, too, Mr. Chair, that I'm making a note of the latitude that you are giving members in this and the precedent that it's setting of going off of the topic at hand.

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

I'm listening very intently and closely to both sides of the debate, and I will call somebody to relevancy if they stray away from the amendment to the motion. Mr. Joseph's comments are specifically related to the statistics and the documents that led to the motion being introduced.

[Translation]

Mr. Joseph, you have the floor.

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

That was the case, because I was talking about the motion and our seniors, so I will continue.

This isn't the time to divert resources from the department, which is working on getting the situation back to normal. This isn't the time to ask it to produce millions and millions of pages of documents that may not even be reviewed and that will be put in a corner or thrown away somewhere. I know Mrs. Falk doesn't like it when members say this, but we're talking about millions of documents. Unless Mrs. Falk has 15 people working with her in her office, I'm not quite sure how she's going to examine millions and millions of documents to find solutions.

[English]

**Rosemarie Falk:** [Inaudible—Editor]. Just be respectful.

**The Chair:** Please make your comments to the amendment, without referencing committee members.

[Translation]

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

We're aware that millions of documents aren't going to be read right away. I say it again, with all due respect to my colleagues, especially since here, on the topic currently under discussion, the Bloc Québécois asks questions every day in the House, and our government gives an answer every time. To bridge the gap effectively or for the people at home who are following our work, I'll note that there's ample evidence: It still concerns the motion.

In my riding, I ran into a 76-year-old woman who told me that she watches me every day, that she sees what I do in committee, that she listens to the Bloc Québécois, the Conservatives and the Liberals, and that she thinks she's going to become a Liberal. That's a small detail.

To bridge the gap effectively, or for the people at home who are following our work, I'd like to come back to the context that has led us to debate Mrs. Falk's amendment and, at the same time, Ms. Larouche's motion today. I'm going to read the latter so that the people who follow our work can hear the content and judge whether it's important.

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities request that the Department of Employment and Social Development, the Department of Public Works and Government Services, the Privy Council Office, as well as the Prime Minister's Office, provide to the clerk of the committee, within 30 days of the adoption of this motion, all reports, correspondence, emails and documents related to the management of the benefits delivery modernization since January 1, 2017, and that the departments and offices responsible for producing the documents apply redactions in accordance with the legal obligations set out in the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act.

You know, what matters to the people who are currently waiting for their old age security payments is paying their rent and stocking up the fridge. It isn't diverting public servants from their work to provide thousands of pages to the opposition parties. I'll say it, even if they don't like it, but they might not read those pages. Anyway, that's okay.

Do you know how many Canadians have talked to me about what we're discussing right now? There has been only one lady in my riding. I don't know if my colleagues have people in their ridings who are dealing with this situation, but I have always witnessed that when opposition members raise the issue to our government, in the House, the minister or her lieutenant always asks whether there are people in ridings in this situation and, if so, to bring the files to them. To date, no files have been submitted. I don't know if they're meeting anyone in this situation, but no files have been submitted.

It's really unfortunate to see that the Bloc Québécois, aided by the Conservatives, is slowing down Parliament's work by proposing motions that are unrelated to the subjects being studied.

When Ms. Larouche proposed her motion, there were witnesses from Quebec, experts who talked to us about student housing and homelessness. Ms. Larouche proposed her motion, which silenced the witnesses, which annoyed me because, personally, under no circumstances will I accept disrespect for someone who has come from Quebec to Ottawa to speak to the government. That's something I have never condoned.

• (11250)

[English]

**The Chair:** That's not relevant. Monsieur Joseph, come back to the amendment. We're not on housing at the moment.

[Translation]

**Natilien Joseph:** Okay. I'll come back to it, Mr. Chair.

I would also say that I'm even more dismayed by the voices joining forces to slow down such an important bill. We can't discuss housing, so I'll move on, but bills are very important.

Minister Hadju, who is the Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario and member for Thunder Bay-Superior North, in Ontario, regularly says this during question period. While the Bloc Québécois systematically asks questions on the matter every day, the government invites opposition members to send it the files of Canadians affected by the situation. We have the resources and means to move the files forward, but, to date, there are zero files.

Once again, I want to take the opportunity given to me by the opposition parties to reiterate what the minister is hammering home: It's possible for my colleagues opposite to send us the files that are waiting to be processed.

Based on the Bloc Québécois's voting record, it would be nice if the party walked the walk. From what I understand, the Bloc Québécois has thrown its slogan in the garbage. For the sake of the discussion, I'd like to remind the party what it said: If it's good for Quebec, we vote for it.

Clearly, the frustration is continuing to spread among Conservatives as it no longer seems to be unique to the Leader of the Opposition. I would like to point out that the Leader of the Opposition was caught changing his tune recently—not to say that he was caught lying—given that he said he wanted to fire the Governor of the Bank of Canada during his party's leadership race, but he's now telling a journalist that that's false. I would invite those following our proceedings at home to go and see the social media posts of our chief government whip, the Honourable Mark Gerretsen, who clearly demonstrates those votes.

As I mentioned, and I'll take this opportunity to say it again, I held my first citizen forum on Sunday. Despite this great success, I have to admit that a conversation with a former Bloc supporter left an impression on me. This person admitted to me that she had voted for the Bloc Québécois her entire life, except in the last election, when she placed her trust in the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party of Canada. Do you know what that person said to me? She told me that the Bloc Québécois is now made up of watered-down Conservatives.

• (11255)

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Joseph, please come back to the amendment before us, or I will have to move on. Referencing the last election is not relevant.

[Translation]

**Natilien Joseph:** Mr. Chair, I'm speaking to the amendment.

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Natilien Joseph:** I was talking to the seniors in my riding. It's only right to listen to them. I'm the voice of seniors in my riding, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Please, there should be relevance to the amendment.

[Translation]

**Natilien Joseph:** Okay, Mr. Chair, I'll do that, no problem.

It's clear that this is an amendment that will delay resources and divert the work of public servants. I'm putting myself in the shoes of a retiree who is waiting for their old age security, waiting for the opposition parties, the Bloc or the Conservatives, who are delaying the work of public servants with an amendment that will prevent public servants from working on old age security for seniors.

We're raising the issue in the House, but we're prevented from dealing with the issue in committee. We're being asked for documents that are going to cost millions of dollars. Those millions of dollars will come out of the pockets of Canadians and Quebeckers. I'm putting myself in the shoes of every Quebecker who is following our work today. That isn't the way to use the money here in Ottawa. I wouldn't want to see our money used that way in Ottawa.

In this committee, we deal with very important issues, including people living with disabilities, people living in vulnerable situations and people experiencing homelessness. We want to use this committee's resources for important purposes.

Opposition members have the right to move motions in committee at some point, but we're talking about worthwhile motions, motions that put Canadians and Quebeckers at the centre of the discussion. At some point, I ask the opposition parties to put their egos aside. Genuinely think about Quebeckers and Canadians. That isn't what politics is about. Politics is sometimes about putting ourselves aside to think about our constituents, our voters, the people who sent us here.

I'll leave it there. Maybe there are other people who want to speak. I'm very nice; I won't speak anymore.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to be brief.

I'd like to point out that what we truly would have liked was simply for us to agree to obtain documents, for us to be able to settle the matter and move on to reports and the study.

We could have continued our study today. There was a report on the agenda. We had a report here on youth employment. We wanted to talk about Bill C-20. The Bloc announced that we wanted to work with the government.

I'll try not to needlessly lengthen the debate, as our Liberal colleagues are already doing, instead of simply responding to requests.

I'm also not going to get into personal attacks, as Mr. Joseph did, even though I have business people and people in his riding who come to me and say they deeply miss the former MP and are disappointed in the current MP. These are—

• (11300)

**Natilien Joseph:** On a point of order.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** —people who aren't even Liberal supporters, but I won't go there.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Order.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** I won't go there. I'll stop now, because I don't want to make personal attacks. I'll stop right there, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Order.

I suspend....

• (1700)

(Pause)

• (11305)

**The Chair:** We're back in session.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor.

**Andréanne Larouche:** As I said, Mr. Chair, in the end, I should have spoken up sooner. I was respectful, I let people have their say, I listened to them. I even put up with personal attacks. I should have spoken up, but I didn't feel like going there today.

Let's get back to the motion. If we are asking for figures and explanations, it is because this software is not just government computer code. It also serves people and has a tangible impact on their lives.

We are no strangers to IT scandals at the federal level. I'd like to remind you of a case I mentioned in a speech in the House and which made a deep impression on me. In 2019, when I'd just been elected, one of the first people to knock on my office door was a mother accompanied by her baby. I agreed to meet this woman in

my office, and she started crying. It deeply troubled me. She was a mother who worked for the federal government and hadn't received her benefits because of Phoenix. She now had a baby and, instead of enjoying her maternity leave, she had to fight because the money wasn't coming in. So, software has real-world consequences for people. I realized this very early on.

There are people who, until very recently, were still having problems with Phoenix. During the pandemic, there was ArriveCAN, which went over budget and failed to serve people properly. It had an impact on people's mental health, and even on their physical health. So, these are examples of federal computer programs that have had an impact on the lives of Quebecers.

I could also give you the history of the Cúram project. It is a very long story. Of course, the system for paying benefits to seniors needed to be modernized. However, there were orange and red flags a long time ago.

It was the Auditor General who first sounded the alarm two or three years ago, saying that there would be significant cost overruns with the Cúram project. It was my colleague Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné, then a member of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, who first alerted me, telling me that there would be problems for seniors because of Cúram, that the Auditor General had said so, but that no one was listening to her and no one seemed to care. We had discussions on this subject during the prorogation of Parliament in February 2025, but we were unable to bring it up in the House because Parliament had been prorogued prior to the election. This is extremely unfortunate, as we did not have the opportunity to highlight the Cúram issue earlier.

Last June, a public service union highlighted not only the cost overruns highlighted by the Auditor General, but also the fact that the program was not working and that there were problems with benefit payments. My Liberal colleagues opposite are trying to defend public servants by insisting that what we are asking of them makes no sense. Yet those very same public servants believe that what makes no sense is Cúram. In fact, they have given the project a score of one out of ten in the media. When you give a piece of software a score of one out of ten, you can't say it's a great success.

So, following all that, we were contacted. We tried at the end of last year to see what was happening with Cúram, but the government did not budge. It wasn't until the media began covering the Cúram issue in early 2026 that anything happened. So, years after the system was first rolled out, years after the Auditor General sounded the alarm, and months after public servants warned it wouldn't work and that there would be problems with benefit payments, it took the media—particularly in Quebec—to take an interest in this issue and highlight specific cases.

Of course, the Bloc Québécois has been at the forefront of this issue because it has listened to public servants, the Auditor General and the elderly people who were experiencing problems. However, we were not the only ones. It is said that the Conservatives are following this issue without understanding why. I think Mr. Lefebvre has once again shown that there were also cases in his constituency of senior citizens who had to wait for their benefits because of Cúram.

• (11310)

We questioned the minister in the House at the end of January, when we returned. Initially, the minister's response was that there were only a few cases. We continued to ask her questions. Her response shifted from a few cases to less than one per cent of cases. Once again, as for the clear answers from the minister that my colleagues are talking about, we'll have to wait and see.

We had to press the issue, because we hadn't received all the answers to our questions in the House. When the minister came to the committee—not even to discuss Cúram, but to discuss another bill—it took a question from a colleague on the other side for the minister to reply that there were 85,000 cases. So the cat was out of the bag. Although we had questioned the minister during several sittings in the House, it took a question from one of her own Liberal colleagues in committee for her to reply that there had been 85,000 cases.

We therefore asked questions regarding this figure. However, in the House, we were repeatedly told that 85,000 cases were no big deal. My Liberal colleagues told me that these people simply had to call them. Did they really want those 85,000 people to call them one by one, instead of trying to find a more comprehensive and effective solution? These 85,000 cases are not just a few cases that can be resolved by calling the department. It is more significant.

We would rather have sensed in the minister's responses a genuine willingness to devise an action plan, to seek answers to these questions and to find solutions. We would have liked to know what the game plan was, what the contingency plan was, and what we were going to do now that we had that figure.

Of course, the figure went down when we asked questions. Strangely, the following month, we went from 85,000 cases to, I think, 67,000 cases. However, even then, more effort was put into trying to sweep things under the carpet than into actually trying to shed light on what was happening with Cúram.

We also managed to get a motion passed here in the committee, because it hadn't worked at the time, I think. In the committee, we wanted the ministers to come. We proposed a motion for them to come for two hours each. That is the motion that was passed. However, instead of two hours for each minister, we were given one hour for both ministers. That is not respecting a motion voted on by this committee. In one hour, what questions can one really ask?

That is why I was forced to request documents and why I had to be very quick during my speaking slots. I had to table a motion to obtain additional documents.

If you do the math, you'll see that the ministers appeared for four times less time than they should have. It was supposed to be two

hours per minister. In the end, it wasn't even an hour per minister. It was one hour for both ministers.

I want to say this because, despite the committee's willingness, it was extremely frustrating not to have received the information we wanted. That is why we tabled a motion at that meeting to obtain additional documents and further information.

I would also like to point out that in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, a motion was proposed by the Bloc Québécois and adopted unanimously—even the Liberals supported it—to shed light on the matter and depoliticize it.

Now, the opposition is trying to accuse us of playing politics, whereas an independent public inquiry such as the one requested is exactly what the Bloc wants. We wanted to get out of this. We wanted people to be able to shed light on the situation as objectively as possible. We wanted to move away from the partisanship we are seeing.

There have been many attempts by the Liberals, both in the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities and in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, to try to block information, to withhold details and to water things down. The proof is that, despite the fact that the Liberals voted in favour of a motion in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts calling for a public and independent inquiry, there was a debate in the House and, when it came to the vote, all the Liberals, including those who had supported the motion in the parliamentary committee, voted against the motion in the House.

• (11315)

So, when people talk to me about democracy, I find it extremely worrying. Where are their convictions? When, in committee, MPs vote in favour of a motion, but then, in the House, they vote against the very same motion they supported in committee, I find that an affront to democracy. My colleague Sébastien Lemire, MP for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, had done an extraordinary job to ensure this motion was adopted unanimously in his committee. He was very proud that the debate was moving to the House.

During this debate in the House, concerns were raised regarding the welfare of the elderly. Despite everything that was said, and despite the concerns expressed, it was ultimately the Speaker of the House who made the decision. Naturally, as the Speaker is a Liberal, he voted against the motion to establish an independent public inquiry. There was therefore no public inquiry, despite the unanimous adoption of a motion to that effect by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

That is where we stand today. Following this democratic affront by the Liberals, who voted against the motion in the House, even though they had voted in favour of it in committee, my colleague tried to table the same motion in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that I had intended to table here, in order to obtain additional documents. There was then systematic obstruction in that committee. I found this out that very evening.

The next morning, there was a meeting of our committee. I had to request the necessary information to try again myself, because it hadn't worked in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

We were therefore forced to request the additional documents once more, this time from our committee, which was not the plan. If the Liberals had co-operated in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, if they had answered the questions, if they had adopted my colleague's motion, we would not be in this situation.

Essentially, the motion calls for what a public inquiry might have done: obtaining documents, examining all the information. As this could not be done in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, we were forced to table the motion here. Since then, there has been systematic obstruction. Yet this has real repercussions for older people.

It so happens that I currently also sit on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which is conducting a study on the situation of older women. I hear it said that no older people are concerned about this, that it is a waste of public money to take an interest in older people who are not receiving their benefits. Yet the implementation of a software system resulted in cost overruns of 277%, or \$5 billion.

I have often been told that this is a waste of time. Other Liberal colleagues have also accused me of wanting to squander taxpayers' money. Yet taxpayers' money has already been lost in this \$5 billion cost overrun, in this 277% cost overrun. Taxpayers' money has already been lost because senior citizens struggled for nine months to receive their pensions. This is a proven case. Of course, there is always a delay in the payment of the first benefit. Of course, when there are more complex cases, it always takes longer. Except that in this instance, nine months is starting to be a delay that goes beyond the norm.

We know that many older people live solely on their benefits, namely the guaranteed income supplement and the old age security pension. They have no other source of income. Moreover, these are fixed incomes that are already insufficient given the current inflation.

This is what is currently being discussed at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, as part of the study on older women. Moreover, the former president of FADOQ, who is now the president of the National Association of Federal Retirees, appeared before the committee last week to say that delays in benefit payments were having major consequences. She said that older people were living on fixed incomes and that, for months, they were relying solely on that to pay, not for a holiday down south, but for their housing, their medicines and their groceries. She said it herself: This has major and significant consequences. She even said that, in some cases, it could be dramatic. We were discussing the situation of senior citizens and we returned to the Cúram software.

It was not pensioners, it was not a Bloc Québécois MP, it was not a Conservative MP who came to say this in committee; it was someone who represents senior citizens.

● (11320)

For all these reasons, this has consequences for senior citizens.

The Bloc Québécois has tabled our bill because the financial situation of senior citizens is already precarious. It is unacceptable that senior citizens aged 65 to 74 still do not have their income. Furthermore, these people are waiting for their old age security pension due to problems with the Cúram system. They are facing dire circumstances.

At food banks and in homeless shelters, I have heard that there is an increase in the number of seniors applying for food aid and ending up on the streets as homeless people.

Furthermore, the news over the weekend was not very good. Indeed, we are also seeing that older people are worried and are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet on their fixed income, and this puts them in extremely precarious financial situations. Imagine that, on top of not being able to make ends meet, these people do not receive benefits for months on end.

This is not a waste of time; what we are asking for is a search for information. I will stop there for now.

As I said, we are not the ones engaging in systematic obstruction at the moment. We in the Bloc Québécois would have liked to find a solution. If you want us to talk about democracy again, I will come back to that later.

I want to be clear: All we were asking for was information, which is simply legitimate in a democracy. What is not legitimate are all the Liberal moves at the moment, which are anti-democratic.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

Ms. Fancy, you have the floor.

[English]

**Jessica Fancy:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair—

**Garnett Genuis:** Excuse me. I have on a point of order.

I hope this is not controversial. I'm looking at the time, and it seems as though maybe we need to have some off-line conversations. I wonder if there would be a willingness of the committee to suspend at this point.

**The Chair:** Ms. Fancy has the floor, but I will suspend for a moment.

**Garnett Genuis:** I meant for the night.

**The Chair:** That's a great idea. We are suspending to the call of the chair.

The meeting is suspended.

[The meeting was suspended at 5:25 p.m., Monday, April 27]

[The meeting resumed at 8:15 a.m., Thursday, April 30]

● (17615)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Good morning, everyone.

I now call the meeting to order.

[English]

We are resuming meeting number 34 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders of the House. Members are appearing in the room and remotely using Zoom.

Before we begin, we will review a few technical items.

Please ensure that your devices are on silent mode. Also, for the protection of our interpreters, please refrain from tapping the mic boom.

To participate in today's meeting, you can select the channel for the official language of your choice. If you're appearing virtually, please click the globe icon at the bottom of your screen, and you will have the choice of an official language. If there is an interruption in the interpretation, please get my attention, and we will suspend.

Those who are appearing virtually have had their sound tested and have been approved.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before participating and direct all questions through the chair.

I would like to welcome three new members to the committee.

Mr. Wade Chang, Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith and Ms. Emma Harrison, welcome to the committee.

Those are the only changes.

The committee suspended on Monday, and the floor was with Madame Fancy. We will resume the meeting where we left off.

Ms. Fancy, you have the floor.

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

Good morning, through you, Chair.

We've had a couple of days, and there has been ample discussion of the previous motion during committee time. It seems that we haven't been able to find a resolution, so I don't want to take any more time. I suggest that we continue having these discussions amongst colleagues off-line.

Mr. Chair, I would like to move that the committee now proceed to our clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-20.

Thank you.

**Garnett Genuis:** I have a point of order, Chair.

**The Chair:** It's a dilatory motion.

**Garnett Genuis:** It's regarding the motion that was moved, Chair.

The government is proposing to dispense with the current item on Cúram and move to something that was not even on the agenda for this meeting, which is clause-by-clause. There's a certain level of preparation expected for clause-by-clause. I think it's more appropriate, if clause-by-clause is going to happen, that it be on the

schedule, not introduced in the middle of another item by the government to try to dispense with a motion on accountability and proceed straight to something that was never on the meeting notice.

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

This is going to debate. We have a dilatory motion, and I'll ask the clerk—

**Garnett Genuis:** The motion is not in order, Chair.

**The Chair:** The motion is in order. It's a dilatory motion—

**Garnett Genuis:** I challenge your ruling, then.

**The Chair:** —and I'm asking the clerk to call a recorded vote.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm challenging your ruling that it's in order.

**The Chair:** We have a dilatory motion on the floor, Mr. Genuis.

**Garnett Genuis:** I raised a point of order saying that it's not allowed. I'm challenging your ruling that it is.

**The Chair:** You cannot challenge my ruling at this time.

**Garnett Genuis:** Yes, I can.

**The Chair:** Mr. Clerk, call a recorded vote on the dilatory motion by Ms. Fancy.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** The committee will suspend for a few minutes while we prepare for clause-by-clause.

We're suspended.

● (17620) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (17625)

**The Chair:** Thank you, committee members. The committee has returned and is now in session.

I would like to provide members of the committee with a few comments on how committees proceed with the clause-by-clause consideration of a bill, which most of you are familiar with.

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 is an amendment to the clause in question, I will recognize the member proposing it, who may explain it. Amendments will be considered in the order in which they appear in the package each member received from the clerk. During debate on an amendment, members are permitted to move subamendments.

Once every clause has been voted on, the committee will vote on the title and the bill itself, and 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. I thank the members for their attention and wish everyone a productive clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-20.

Before we get to it, I would like to recognize who's appearing here. From the Department of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, we have Lindsay Boldt, director general, housing policy branch, as well as Jean-Sébastien Langelier, executive director, strategic policy and integration sector. From the Department of Justice we have Linda Cinanni, acting senior counsel and team leader, transport and infrastructure legal services.

Pursuant to Standing Order 75(1), consideration of clause 1, the short title, is postponed until we get to the conclusion.

(On clause 2)

**The Chair:** We'll begin with clause 2.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead.

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

I would like to ask some questions and make some comments about clause 2, as well as to make some comments about the debate we're having on the clause-by-clause of this bill.

I want to encourage members by saying that respect for other members and other parties remains important, even in the context of a majority situation. In previous sessions of this committee, we haven't always agreed, but I think we've been able to work together fairly effectively. We've been productive over the last year.

I'm a bit disappointed by how this meeting is proceeding so far. I don't think it's in accordance with the rules. I think the government could have gotten where it wanted to anyway, but it still hasn't proceeded in accordance with the rules.

Just to go back in terms of the context, the committee had agreed to a study of four meetings on Bill C-20. That is four meetings, eight hours of hearings, to hear from different witnesses, which arguably is not that long in the context of a bill that seeks to create a fourth housing agency and that is quite long in terms of its text. We spent about the same amount of time on a private member's bill that was certainly important but much shorter.

We were quite reasonable in terms of the number of meetings we agreed to. We have not completed the number of meetings that was previously agreed to. Formally, in a sense, we had four meeting starts that were on the subject, but because of a decision of government members to filibuster, we did not have a chance to complete the fourth hearing.

In spite of the previous agreement's not being honoured, in spite of not having a meeting notice indicating that there was clause-by-clause, the government has used its majority to try to proceed directly, and it has proceeded directly to this item. This is not how committees are supposed to operate. It's certainly not a collaborative way to get this work done.

There are a lot of important discussions to have about housing. We had also agreed to have a further study on housing to commence following the clause-by-clause on this bill. Our message is that the government has to respect agreements and commitments that were made in the context of this committee. Thinking that you can just blow over that and push these things forward ignores the realities of how committees work and what is necessary for them to be productive.

As the official opposition, we're committed to continuing to do our job in asserting that principle as being important for the work of this committee.

I also want to say, Mr. Chair, that the chair is entitled to make rulings, and I may disagree with those rulings. Those rulings can be challenged. It's not difficult for someone to observe what the likely vote would be on a challenge to the chair anyway in the context of this committee, but it is established procedurally that you can raise points of order if you think the rules aren't being followed and that you can challenge decisions of the chair. For the chair to say we can't challenge them defies logic and normal process.

I'm disappointed that we're here because, formally, this particular committee meeting started two meetings ago. At that time, we heard from experts who were testifying before the committee regarding housing. At that meeting, our colleague from the Bloc put forward a motion that we supported, which was about seeking documents from the government related to accountability on another study. It was a motion that was on notice. We didn't put forward that motion, but we very much supported the pursuit of accountability from the government.

● (17630)

The government did not want to hand over those documents, so they proceeded to filibuster over the course of three meetings. In that context, ironically, the government House leader is making arguments that committees would be more productive if the Liberals get their way when they actively filibuster—not just at this committee but also at multiple committees—regarding requests for documents. These requests for documents are important for committees' being able to do their work. Part of what motivated that Liberal filibuster was their feeling that a majority was coming, under which conditions they would never have to hand over documents they don't want to hand over.

Their goal in stacking the deck at these committees is not more collaboration. We were collaborating effectively before, and we were getting things done. The conditions of a minority Parliament forced collaboration. It forced that on all of us. Nobody could get their way exactly. Now the government seems to think they don't have to collaborate with others and don't have to work with them. Most importantly, the outcomes for Canadians will be worse because, when all members of Parliament are working together... While that collaboration can happen in the context of a majority, I hope we might consider going back to it.

We're here debating the clause-by-clause now because—instead of making counter-proposals and amendments, or trying to work out a compromise on the request for information regarding Cúram software—the government dug in their heels, filibustered over the course of three meetings and has now, promptly, used their majority to shut down those requests for accountability. Canadians will be worse off because they won't have access to information about this software. Our deliberations on Bill C-20 have also been undermined by the government's decision to filibuster in a way that blocked the testimony of witnesses. We've ended up in a situation in which we're already seeing the government ignoring normal conventions and rules to try to drive over the concerns of the opposition.

This is the context that brings us here in terms of the clause-by-clause, and—

• (17635)

**The Chair:** There's a point of order.

Go ahead, Ms. Desrochers.

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

I think we should be getting back to Bill C-20's clause-by-clause, which is what this meeting is about.

Right now, the member is filibustering. I don't know. He could do a town hall for his constituency if he wants to have that kind of messaging. Out of respect for the officials here and for everyone who has prepared—including Ms. Kwan, who is here—

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

**Caroline Desrochers:** —to present her amendment—

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

I would remind all members...

Madame Larouche, do you have a point of order?

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** I simply wanted to add my voice to what has just been said. I would remind you that if we have asked for information here, in this committee, it is because the Liberals did not want to provide information to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. So, we are obliged to ask for it here.

With the government just days away from securing a majority, we have seen this attempt to simply run down the clock in numerous committees. I just wanted to add my voice to that and say that we, too, are disappointed. We were asking for information, but I—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Larouche, I gave you the floor on the understanding that you had a point of order.

If not, I have to return to Mr. Genuis.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** I just wanted to add my voice to what's been said, but I'll wait.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Genuis, I'll remind you that the meeting is in consideration of Bill C-20's clause-by-clause.

**Garnett Genuis:** Yes, that's clearly the item. I was providing some context for how we got here. If you look at the meeting notice, there's no reference to clause-by-clause. There's also no reference to the officials.

I want to pick up on something Ms. Desrochers said and ask it of the officials, because they are here. Somebody clearly told them to be here, even though they weren't officially invited through the meeting notice. I wonder if I could ask the officials if they could each share.... It's curious. Normally, when a witness comes to committee, they are invited and on the meeting notice.

I appreciate your work, and I know you're responsible for working under the direction of ministers, regardless of party. I appreciate your commitment and professionalism. I would like to know who told you to come here today and when you were told, because there's no meeting notice that would have.... I assume there was no invitation from the chair. Normally, the chair invites and schedules witnesses, and those names appear on the meeting notice.

I wonder if our officials could share how that came about.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Boldt, do you want to comment briefly? Then I'll come to it.

**Lindsay Boldt (Director General, Housing Policy Branch, Department of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities):** We are definitely closely following the review of this committee, and we want to make sure that we are ready to be available and to appear as needed.

**Garnett Genuis:** I appreciate that. That wasn't quite my question, though. Were you—

**The Chair:** As chair of the committee, it's my responsibility to set the agenda on meetings and to call those.

When I was looking at the schedule today, I could not predetermine how long resumption of debate would go on, so I instructed the clerk to have witnesses for Bill C-20 on standby who are here in Ottawa and prepared for Bill C-20. It was under my instructions to the clerk to have the witnesses who would be required to discuss clause-by-clause for Bill C-20, should we get to Bill C-20, and this is where we are.

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

I appreciate your providing some context for that just for information. I do understand that part of the process is that I can ask officials questions. I also have a few other questions related to aspects of these definitions, if Ms. Boldt or others want to clarify.

It sounds like what the chair is saying is that you received an invitation from the chair to be here—or from the clerk on behalf of the chair—and I'd like to know when that invitation was issued and when you were told that the clause-by-clause was going to be happening today. I know that there are a lot of other people—not just officials, but people in civil society and elsewhere—who are very concerned about the issues around Bill C-20. They did not have the courtesy of any heads-up that this was happening. Obviously, officials get information that the general public doesn't, but I would like to know when that invitation was issued.

You keep glancing at the chair. It's a simple question.

• (17640)

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, you direct questions through the chair.

**Garnett Genuis:** Through the chair, I'd like to ask the witnesses.

**The Chair:** Ms. Boldt...?

**Lindsay Boldt:** Through the chair, we followed the sequencing of the review that the committee was looking to undertake. We made note of the dates and wanted to ensure that if you got to a clause-by-clause and there was a desire to have departmental officials available to respond, we would be ready. Should there be a need to get into the clause-by-clause and have us participate, we are here if that is the desire of the committee and if that is where you get to today.

**Garnett Genuis:** I appreciate that, and I'm not trying to put you on the spot. I'm just asking for simple information.

I'm especially curious now, because what you're saying is different from what the chair said. What the chair shared with us is that he had, through the clerk, asked certain witnesses to be on standby. I don't know if he asked the witnesses from whom we didn't get to hear at the last meeting—because of the government filibuster—to be on standby. I don't know if he wants to weigh in on that, on whether there were others he had on standby related to other things the committee had been doing, especially since this is formally the continuation of a previous meeting. It's not a new meeting. It's a new day, but according to the rules, this is the same meeting that we started a week ago.

The explanation of the chair is that your presence here is the result of an invitation to be on standby. It sounds as though, through the chair, Ms. Boldt is saying that officials were following proceedings and making decisions on their own to be present based on guesses about how the committee might hypothetically unfold.

I wonder if you can clarify whether you were invited to be on standby, or whether you, in following these things, came to this conclusion on your own. I think the public will want to know this, because we're supposed to be accountable and transparent about the work we're doing, and there was no meeting notice about the fact that clause-by-clause was happening today. The government knew something. You guys maybe knew something, or maybe you were

here based on a guess about a hypothetical. Through the chair, I wonder if Ms. Boldt could clarify that for us.

**Lindsay Boldt:** Absolutely. There definitely was, through parliamentary affairs channels. We understood that we should be on standby. It aligned with our understanding of the review schedule. Yes, that was also through the clerk. We did receive notice that today may be the timing for the committee to go through the clause-by-clause.

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

My—

**The Chair:** As I told you, Mr. Genuis, you direct the questions through me and wait until I address you.

For the clarification of the committee, at the March 26 meeting it was agreed that the committee would commence clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-20, an act respecting the establishment of Build Canada Homes, on Thursday, April 30, 2026. That was a decision of the committee back then. I would expect that witnesses would be there.

As I indicated, in my review with the clerk, in ensuring that the calendar is used appropriately, I said in my discussion that we would prepare for whether the debate continued from where it was suspended for the full hours, and if not, what the option was. The option I chose was to proceed with clause-by-clause of Bill C-20. The witnesses required for that are here in Ottawa, and if we didn't get there, it would not be....

The witnesses before you are the ones who are here for clause-by-clause. That's what the meeting is on at the moment.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

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

I will say, very respectfully, just in response to your comments, that it is April 30 in the wider world, but it is April 23 in this room. This is the continuation of a meeting that began on April 23. It was agreed that there would be four meetings dealing with the substance in terms of hearing from witnesses with respect to the bill. That fourth meeting, which we are in the middle of now, the meeting of April 23, is still going on.

The committee did not adjourn. There was a Liberal filibuster to prevent documents from being released. I think the fact that government members have unilaterally pursued moving to clause-by-clause without a meeting notice, without information to the public and without a heads-up to the many, many people across the spectrum of interest who are concerned about this issue—

• (17645)

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Chair, I've lost the interpretation.

[*English*]

**Garnett Genuis:** Am I not speaking into the mic properly?

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Is it working now, Ms. Larouche?

Great.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

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

[*Translation*]

Is it working now?

[*English*]

Okay. Good.

[*Translation*]

I can continue in French, if you like.

[*English*]

That would be my response to the argument of the chair in this regard.

Through you, Chair, I'll go back to the witnesses.

Thank you for clarifying that there was an invitation from the chair and the clerk through parliamentary affairs. Just to follow up on that, I'll go back to my initial question: When was that invitation received?

**Lindsay Boldt:** We confirmed in the department earlier this week that there was a possibility that the committee was going to be meeting, that they needed to complete the previous meeting, that it had yet not ended and that there was the potential for clause-by-clause to be covered. That's when we ensured that we were available this morning if it was where you went.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm not trying to be difficult here, but you understand that "earlier this week" provides a pretty broad range. Let me re-ask my question: When precisely was that invitation received?

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, I can answer that. I directed the clerk, at our meeting on Wednesday, to advise the witnesses who would be required from the department on Bill C-20. I would assume that it went sometime yesterday afternoon.

**Garnett Genuis:** The chair is providing a lot of support to the witnesses on fairly simple questions. They're not trick questions.

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Genuis.

The order is important, and the chair has the responsibility of scheduling meetings and ensuring that the time is used. There was, as you pointed out, an extensive discussion at the committee. The committee suspended and was scheduled to resume today at the point where it left off, which it did.

You are skilled in parliamentary procedure. You knew that the floor would go back to the speaker, and the speaker had the floor at that stage. The speaker moved a dilatory motion, which you understand as well. That motion was adopted by the majority of this committee—obviously, you did not support that—so we're pursuing Bill C-20, which, if the witnesses were not here, then I will not speculate....

When I review the timing with the clerk, it is to set an agenda that utilizes committee time. Does every committee follow the agenda that's set out? No, but it's why we're here, and the witnesses who are here were invited by the clerk on my instructions.

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, thank you for providing that context. I understand what your view is in this regard. I'm not questioning that this is your view, nor that you are sincere in holding it.

My view is that it is pretty fundamental, as a matter of public accountability, that when you're doing something as important as clause-by-clause consideration of a bill that is relevant to many people.... A lot of people are following the debates on this, whether they agree or disagree, because of the pressing challenge that housing is in this country, but frankly, that's not the point. It could be any bill. If the committee were to proceed to committee business to discuss some item that was in private or to hear from witnesses who had already been scheduled....

We had an agreement as a committee that four meetings would occur, and then, in what is the middle of the meeting of April 23, the committee proceeded to clause-by-clause study. I'm trying to understand how that decision came about and why there wasn't any public communication around it.

It is not an appropriate way for committees to function, and more fundamentally, I don't think it's fair to the public in the context of the input that members of the public would like to have, and have a right to have, as it relates to housing issues.

I also haven't received a simple answer from the witnesses on a simple question.

Chair, you told the committee—

• (17650)

**The Chair:** On a clarification point, Mr. Genuis, you have the right as a committee member to ask a question. You do not have the right to dictate what the answer from the witness would be. The witness answered the questions.

If we could keep relevance to what the committee agreed to proceed with, which is clause-by-clause study of Bill C-20, it would be helpful.

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, what you just said is sort of true and sort of not true. I don't have a right to dictate a particular answer, but the established rules of committees are that witnesses have to provide an answer to the questions that are asked.

I don't want to go here, but it is the right of committee members to ask questions of those who are here as witnesses, and they have to provide an answer. This is a matter that has been considered and affirmed by various Speakers.

That's an important caveat around the rules. I don't think we're going to get all the way there, but I want to clarify in terms of the principle of questions and answers, because sometimes things get said that.... I don't want to create a precedent that when something is said, it could be correct and could be not, depending on how the statement is interpreted.

Through the chair, my question for the witnesses is this: When did you receive the invitation through parliamentary affairs to be here this morning?

**Lindsay Boldt:** It was confirmed yesterday afternoon that we should be prepared, should the meeting go into clause-by-clause study, to attend this morning.

**Garnett Genuis:** You said it was confirmed. To me, that would seem to imply that a provisional invitation was sent earlier.

When were you initially invited or initially told that there was a possibility or a likelihood of being needed here to testify?

**Lindsay Boldt:** Definitely, on the departmental side, we have been looking at the sequencing of the review that was set out. That's the sequencing the committee initially set with proposed potential dates. It was confirmed yesterday afternoon, through messages with parliamentary affairs and the clerk, that departmental officials should be ready as witnesses if today was indeed when clause-by-clause was meant to take place.

**Garnett Genuis:** Very respectfully, do you understand that's not an answer to my question?

My question wasn't when it was confirmed. My question was, when were you invited?

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Genuis.

**Garnett Genuis:** Through the chair, my question for the witness—

**The Chair:** You're becoming repetitive now.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'm not getting an answer, Chair.

**The Chair:** You're getting an answer. You may not be happy with the answer, but you're getting an answer.

**Garnett Genuis:** No, I'm not getting an answer.

**The Chair:** We're here on Bill C-20.

**Garnett Genuis:** That's right.

**The Chair:** Would you bring your comments to the clause-by-clause of Bill C-20?

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, we are on the item of clause-by-clause on Bill C-20.

I am asking the witnesses who are here when they were invited to appear on the clause-by-clause of Bill C-20. That is not only relevant; it is, in a way, the most relevant thing. It is precisely on the point of how we are here and how we got to an item that was not on the agenda.

You're right. I have asked the same question over and over. It's not a matter of not liking the answer. If someone said "Tuesday" and I would have preferred to get an answer of "Wednesday", that's not the issue here. The issue is that I haven't been told when the invitation was issued.

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**Garnett Genuis:** I can't really hear what you're saying, Ms. Desrochers. You don't have the floor, but if you want to raise a point of order, you're entitled to do that. I can't hear what you're saying.

I will ask one more time and I won't repeat it again, but I want to underline that we have witnesses here. Maybe there wasn't time to brief them on the process, but the process is that they're supposed to answer the questions. It's a matter of parliamentary privilege that they're supposed to answer the questions that are put to them.

It's a simple, factual question—

• (17655)

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, you are starting to cross a line.

**Garnett Genuis:** Oh, come on.

**The Chair:** When it gets into harassing the witnesses—

**Garnett Genuis:** Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** Do not interrupt me when I have the floor, Mr. Genuis.

**Garnett Genuis:** You are making a very serious allegation, Chair.

**The Chair:** Please respect the rules—

**Garnett Genuis:** You are accusing me of harassment for asking a very simple question that has not been answered. You are throwing around words with serious meaning, Chair. "Harassment" means something.

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, please come back to order.

You have the floor.

**Garnett Genuis:** My question through the chair for the witness is this: When was the invitation to be at this committee issued?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Boldt.

**Lindsay Boldt:** I'm happy to respond.

Maybe where the disconnect is happening is on the format of the invitation.

On this one, it was an email confirmation that the committee would be meeting today. We understood that it was a continuation of the previous meeting. We were asked to be ready should there be a desire for witnesses to be invited and called forward. We appeared today to ensure that if you go into the clause-by-clause, we would be available to support that.

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

I'm going now to Ms. Goodridge.

**Garnett Genuis:** I still have the floor, Chair.

**The Chair:** You asked a question. She answered the question.

**Garnett Genuis:** No, the procedure in clause-by-clause is that you can ask questions of witnesses—

**The Chair:** Okay, you have the floor.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Chair. I appreciate your understanding.

At this point, I'd like to bring to your attention, Chair, a question of privilege with respect to the responses to questions.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** I have a point of order.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Do you have a point of order, Mr. Joseph?

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** In this committee, let's stay relevant and move forward. I would like to ask the witnesses if they feel comfortable with my colleague's behaviour.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Joseph, that's not a point of order.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead.

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

I'd like to bring to your attention, Chair, a question of privilege with respect to the responses of witnesses. I don't have the precedents in front of me. I don't have them memorized, but the precedents are obvious and well established. There have been many cases at committees, as well as in the House, in which the failure of witnesses to provide documents or to answer questions has been considered a violation of the privilege of members.

Committees are not just spaces for conversation. They have specific powers as creatures of Parliament. The committees have the right to ask for information, and that is what I have done in this case.

I understand the limitations of public servants. I understand that, especially when they come to committee, they are operating very much under the direction that they've been given by ministers, so they want to stick to constraints that align with their political direction, but that doesn't change the expectation of responses.

In the context of privilege, I also think that this is not just a question. It's an important question in the context of the work and operations that this committee is supposed to be doing. What I'm trying to understand with this question is how we got to a point of the government not announcing and not publicizing their intended schedule and then surprising the committee with a decision to go to a clause-by-clause consideration that was not announced and was not on any meeting notice.

The committee has a right to know, and the public has a right to know, how we got here and what the government is planning to do; they have a right to an explanation as to the lack of accountability that got us here. This is why I have asked the questions of the witnesses, and the record will show very clearly that they have not

been answered. I've simply asked when the initial invitation was sent. It was not a question about when confirmation was sent. It was about when the initial invitation was sent.

I understand that public servants are following the business of this committee as it relates to their files, but it's clear to me that public servants don't just show up at committees thinking they might be asked to appear. Those appearances are the result of invitations that come through the chair and parliamentary channels. That has clearly happened, and the witness, for whatever reason, has missed multiple opportunities to answer a simple question of when that invitation was initially issued. This is pretty clearly a matter that touches on privilege.

In the context of privilege, I reviewed some of the committee meetings when I was away. Just to clarify, as the chair has pointed out previously, it is not the chair who rules on matters of privilege. The speaker determines *prima facie* questions of privilege. The role of the chair is to rule on whether it is a matter touching on privilege.

Following the ruling of the chair, if the chair rules that it is a matter touching on privilege, then a privilege motion proceeds, and the committee can undertake, through that privilege motion, any number of things. The initial step is the question of privilege being raised, as I have done, and then it's up to the chair to rule on whether it is a matter touching on privilege. Clearly, it is.

I look forward to the chair's ruling.

• (17700)

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

After listening intently, I rule that the matter you raise does not touch on privilege.

**Garnett Genuis:** I have more things to say on the main subject. Before I do that, I want to challenge your ruling with respect to the question of privilege.

**The Chair:** Thank you. It's a dilatory motion.

**Garnett Genuis:** Thank you for letting me challenge this time.

**The Chair:** I ruled that the matter raised by Mr. Genuis was not touching on privilege, and Mr. Genuis challenged my ruling.

We're in a vote, Madame Larouche. We're in a recorded vote on a challenge to the Chair. The committee votes on the ruling.

**Caroline Desrochers:** Can you clarify the question?

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis challenged that the point he was raising was touching on privilege and that I should rule on it. My ruling was that, as chair, I did not view that the matter raised was touching on privilege. He then challenged that decision of mine, which is dilatory and goes immediately to a vote. The committee can uphold my ruling that the matter he raised was not touching on privilege or overturn it. We're in a recorded vote now. I am going immediately to a recorded vote.

Do you uphold my ruling?

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** The ruling of the chair has been upheld. At this moment, I'm going to suspend for a couple of minutes.

We are suspended.

● (17705) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (17720)

**The Chair:** Welcome back, committee members. The committee is back in session. We are on Bill C-20 and Mr. Genuis had the floor.

● (17725)

**Garnett Genuis:** I did have the floor, but there might also be a point of order on the floor.

**The Chair:** If there's a point of order, you can raise it.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'll cede the floor then. Put me on the bottom of the list, but I'll cede the floor.

**The Chair:** Good. You'll stay on the bottom then.

**Garnett Genuis:** Love you, too.

**An hon. member:** He'll eventually come back to the top.

**The Chair:** The bottom comes to the top.

Here are the hands I see: I have Ms. Goodridge from a good while ago, Ms. Falk, Ms. Desrochers and Madame Larouche.

Ms. Goodridge, go ahead on Bill C-20.

**Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** I appreciate that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's worth pointing out, after all the kerfuffle this morning, that we're here to talk about Bill C-20 and go to clause-by-clause. I understand the Liberals, effectively, played the cards they had. They knew they would have their majority and they were going to have full control of committees, so rather than letting us go to a vote on a production order that was very reasonable, brought forward by our Bloc colleague, they ran the clock, filibustered and did everything they could so that those documents would never see the light of day. That's fair. It was a card that they had to play, and they decided to play it.

The minute they had their full majority and the committees were reshuffled, they decided to break that filibuster and immediately move to this. Clearly a whole bunch of people knew, so they were prepared to go to clause-by-clause. It's within the rules as they were put out. I've been on committees before in which the chair or the clerk understands that perhaps things are going to change or the meeting subject is going to be different from what we thought the meeting subject was going to be, which was the case today. We didn't have a notice of meeting because it was a resumption, as the Liberals had been filibustering for multiple meetings.

It would have been nice to receive an email from the clerk stating that we would not be getting a meeting notice for this meeting and that it was suspected that, if the filibuster were to end on this, we would be moving to clause-by-clause. It's happened in other com-

mittees, and I think it would be a reasonable thing to do. I would ask, Mr. Chair, that it's something we consider going forward.

In one of our previous meetings in the last few weeks, we had a conversation about how if the meetings were going to change and the subject was going to change, you were going to consult with the vice-chairs. I don't believe that happened for this meeting. There is a lot of preparation that goes into doing clause-by-clause. It's not something for which, as members, we can just show up. It requires a whole bunch of work, and yesterday, when we started to think that this might be happening, some of the staff ended up working really hard.

I want to commend some of our staff from our team who prepared and stayed up quite late getting amazing work done so that we would be as well prepared as we possibly could be, but it didn't have to happen this way. It happened this way because the Liberals decided filibustering until they had their majority was what they were going to do, so the documents in question would never see the light of day and they would go on to skip whatever witnesses we were supposed to see and go straight to clause-by-clause. They have their majority, so they can do these things, but it's not the right thing to do. I would ask that we consider not doing things just because we can, but keep in mind doing the right thing for the right reasons.

With that, I will cede the floor. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Goodridge. I have Ms. Falk, Madame Desrochers and then Madame Larouche.

**Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you very much, Chair. I don't think I have much to add at this point in time. I believe Ms. Desrochers is next on the list, so I'm happy to cede the floor.

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Desrochers, you have the floor.

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

I believe that, if you seek it, you'll find unanimous consent from the parties for the following motion:

That the committee organize its work in the following order of priority:

1. That the committee prioritize the appearance of the ministers and secretaries of state;
2. That the committee adopt the second draft report on Youth Employment in Canada; and
3. That the committee undertake its study of housing starts in relation to federal programs for four meetings and that this undertaking be done concurrently with a study of no less than four meetings on homelessness in Canada.

● (17730)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We have a motion put forward by Madame Desrochers. I'm going to give the clerk a moment to circulate it.

We need unanimous consent from the committee to—

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Chair, may I ask a question?

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Andréanne Larouche:** I had the floor. I'd like to ask a question about something from the other day.

Before I put my question to Ms. Desrochers, I want to say that, once again, we're seeing the same thing we saw on April 16. I didn't have a chance to speak to it at the time, so I want to reiterate what some have already said.

Mr. Chair, we're in this situation this morning because, once again, you didn't consult the vice-chairs. That said, I gave you the benefit of the doubt. I raised this on April 16 because, without consulting the vice-chairs, you decided to change the agenda and postpone the study of Bill C-222. I asked whether you would commit going forward to consulting the vice-chairs before making changes to the agenda. It's in the blues. You made a formal commitment to consult the vice-chairs before changing the agenda of a meeting. That's where a lot of the frustration comes from. It's in the blues from the April 16 committee meeting. I think what we're experiencing this morning is a repetition of the lack of consultation with the vice-chairs. As Conservative colleagues who would have liked to prepare have said, a clause-by-clause study isn't done like this, without notice and without consultation with the vice-chairs. People need to be ready. That's why we're in this situation.

Now that I've finished my remarks on that point, I have a question about what you circulated, Ms. Desrochers: Which minister and which secretary of state are we talking about? I just want to be clear. That's my question.

Also, why do you want to complete the study on the youth unemployment report before the study on housing starts?

I'm asking these questions to get an explanation.

**Caroline Desrochers:** We're talking about ministers and secretaries of state related to the file, so Minister Robertson and Minister Hajdu.

Mr. Chair, do we have unanimous consent to continue and move forward on what we want to study?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We need unanimous consent to continue with the motion by Madame Desrochers.

**Garnett Genuis:** Can you read it again, in English?

**The Chair:** I'll ask Madame Desrochers to read it in English.

**Caroline Desrochers:** It is:

That the committee organize its work in the following order of priority:

1. That the committee prioritize the appearance of Ministers and Secretaries of State;
2. That the committee adopt the second draft report on Youth Employment in Canada; and
3. That the committee undertake its study of housing starts in relation to federal programs for four meetings and that this undertaking be done concurrently with a study of no less than four meetings on homelessness in Canada.

**The Chair:** Do we have unanimous consent?

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** The motion as adopted clearly outlines where we're going, by unanimous consent. We'll return to the order of the day, which is consideration of clause-by-clause.

I exhausted the speaking list. Before we got to this, I still had two. I had Madame Larouche on clause-by-clause and Mr. Genuis.

● (17735)

**Rosemarie Falk:** Can the clerk send us an updated working calendar as soon as possible that reflects the changes unanimously agreed to by the committee members?

**The Chair:** Yes. That's no problem. It's clear that we don't have to spend any time in committee business next week. It's clear.

Yes, Madame Larouche, do you want to speak to clause-by-clause? From my notes, you had your hand up from that period.

[*Translation*]

**Andréanne Larouche:** I've made my point, Mr. Chair. However, I repeat that, as stated in the blues, you said that you were committed to consulting the vice-chairs, which you did not do. I said what I had to say, and it's on the record.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there anybody else? We're on clause 2 of Bill C-20.

We have Mr. Genuis and Madame Desrochers.

**Garnett Genuis:** I'll briefly say, Chair, that I've been on a lot of different kinds of committees in different situations, and I know that committees do their best work when we can operate on a consensus basis, so I'm very happy that we got there. If this establishes a precedent going forward, I'm more hopeful than I was about what we'll do. I'm cautiously optimistic.

I'll leave my comments there and look forward to seeing what happens.

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

Go ahead, Madame Desrochers.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you very much to my colleagues for their co-operation this morning.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, I want to begin by thanking colleagues from all parties for the collaborative approach that we've had on this important legislation, Bill C-20, Build Canada Homes. We may disagree on the how, but we've had important, substantive discussions over the last few weeks, and I know that we all share the goal of addressing the housing crisis.

I want to thank the officials from Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada for being here and assisting us with this clause-by-clause reading and for all the work over the last few months as you have moved this forward.

We've been clear about the work we're doing. There is no single solution to the housing crisis. We've heard from witnesses over the last three meetings that we need to think outside the box and take bold action, and this is what we're doing. We're talking about a broad, multipronged approach to reaching the goal of building good neighbourhoods with homes that people can afford. We're empowering the private sector to build by addressing red tape, taxes and costs. We're supporting provinces and communities in building housing-enabling infrastructure.

We're also tackling homelessness and supporting the most vulnerable. We're working to increase the stock of affordable housing. I know this is important to all of us in each of our neighbourhoods and each of our communities.

Just this week, in the spring economic update, and in line with things that we discussed a lot at the committee, we proposed important new measures to ensure that Canada has the skilled workers to build all the homes that we need to build. We're making a major, \$6-billion investment in skilled trades, and we're helping to create the workforce that our ambitious housing and infrastructure plan is going to require. We're bringing more tools into our tool box.

This new Crown corporation, Build Canada Homes, is going to help deliver on the government's plans to build more homes faster for Canadians who need them the most, and that's going to help all market and non-market housing as well. The new Crown corporation is going to help restore affordability, drastically increase housing supply of all types to get people off the street and build houses for the missing middle-income earners.

The legislation grants Build Canada Homes the ability to provide partners with a flexible mix of financial tools, including grants, low-interest loans, loan guarantees and equity investments. It will also give Build Canada Homes the ability to acquire and develop property and build housing on public lands. The new approach will allow us to accelerate construction timelines, improve productivity and support a more innovative home-building sector.

As a Crown corporation, it will have oversight, powers, functions and the tools it needs to deliver on its mandate as an affordable housing builder. It is designed to act as a developer/financier/convenor to accelerate the construction of affordable housing. It will have operational independence and needs to get shovels in the ground and to crowd in private capital while remaining accountable to Parliament.

• (17740)

[*Translation*]

Build Canada Homes is already working with municipalities and provinces. A number of important agreements have been announced in recent weeks and months. These include projects like the 750 housing units being built in Nunavut to address the urgent housing needs in northern Canada, new housing in Saint-Calixte and Joliette, as well as units built in partnership with La Maison

d'Ariane to support women and children who are victims of violence. Most recently, eight affordable housing projects were announced that will result in the construction of more than 1,100 new rental units here in Ottawa.

Dialogue between municipalities and provinces continues to evolve. We know that we will all have to work together, hand in hand, to address the crisis. Partners are getting to work to find solutions to issues related to zoning, permitting delays and everything that slows down the construction of more housing.

The ministers suggested that many women's shelters are eligible for funding from Build Canada Homes. In fact, \$1 billion has been set aside for supportive and transitional housing. This is an important clarification, because while the term "shelter" is often used broadly, the reality is that most women's shelters operate as supportive and transitional housing. It's now clear that if a women's shelter provides this type of service, it meets the eligibility criteria for that funding. We also heard that the government is working closely with the women's shelter sector to clarify these criteria.

So Build Canada Homes will really be there to build more housing across the continuum, whether it's transitional housing, social housing co-operatives, deeply affordable housing or affordable housing.

If we want to tackle the housing crisis, it's important to pass this bill and move this legislation forward.

I want to thank everyone around the table for working hard so that we can move forward.

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

[*English*]

I have Mr. Aitchison on my speaking list.

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

I want to thank the dedicated staff for being here.

I have a few questions about the bill.

I would start with clause 2 and the definitions.

I don't know if you've been following the testimony of witnesses, but Dr. Carolyn Whitzman was here. She pointed out that one of the challenges we have in this country is that there are a lot of definitions of affordable housing. I would note that there isn't one in Bill C-20, yet the purpose of the corporation is, in fact, to get more affordable housing built.

Can you comment on that? How will it operate in the absence of its own definition, or what definition will it use? How will it measure that?

It's a bit of an open question, but I'm curious to hear your thoughts on that.

**Lindsay Boldt:** As you note, within the definitions of Bill C-20, there is not a definition of affordability. The idea here was to maintain flexibility.

As we look out, thinking about the statute in perpetuity, as market conditions change, as funding changes and as partnerships change, we want to make sure that, as we think about affordability and about definitions, we're maintaining definitions that can be adjusted. The idea is that, operationally, Build Canada Homes will establish—and has established, as part of its investment policy framework, which was published online—an indication of how it will be defining affordability for the purposes of its investments. In this case, housing is considered affordable when it is less than 30% of before-tax household income. The idea is that this needs to be considered from a regional perspective. Across Canada, affordability is going to look different. It will look different, as well, depending on different income bands. Build Canada Homes has operationally been using that definition of affordability as part of its investment decision-making.

• (17745)

**Scott Aitchison:** Build Canada Homes will receive applications for funding, loan guarantees or whatever it might be for different projects. On an operating principle, it will use this 30% of income as a general rule for adjudicating those applications. I'm sure there will be more applications than it has money to spend on. Is that generally how it will work?

**Lindsay Boldt:** Generally, when the application comes in, they're looking at the depth of affordability and the type of affordable units that a proposal may be outlining. They would then be looking to apply this definition.

They have a tool on the website that is helping proponents to align with this when they're submitting so that when the proposal comes in, they've already gone through the process of identifying the affordability of the units that they're putting forward in their proposal.

**Scott Aitchison:** Thanks for that.

I have another very specific question. It may be my not understanding how the language of this place works. It's on clause 20.

Clause 20 speaks about the powers. There are lots of powers. You can buy shares in a company. It can be a loan guarantee. It can do all kinds of pretty cool things, I think.

When you go to clause 21, it says, despite everything that was said in clause 20:

the Corporation may provide a loan guarantee only with the Minister of Finance's approval.

I think everyone wants to make it a Crown corporation for the purposes of, I'm assuming, speed and ability to get things done without the painfully slow process that this place has. What I need to understand about that is if we're making it a Crown corporation,

how will it do that if it has to get approval from the Minister of Finance?

He's a pretty busy guy, I would assume. Does he have time to be checking the boxes of everything that any bylaw brings him?

**Lindsay Boldt:** First and foremost, I would say that, yes, the FAA does require that the Minister of Finance, when it comes to loan guarantees, approve them in all cases.

There are different processes that Build Canada Homes may use to seek this. There is statutory funding that is identified within this legislation. As the organization moves forward to draw down that funding, those are opportunities and touchpoints with the Minister of Finance. Build Canada Homes will need to operationally set up the most efficient process.

This clause in particular points to the fact that, in order to issue a loan guarantee, they will need to seek approval from the Minister of Finance.

**Scott Aitchison:** I want to continue with this, to understand how the place works.

I see that's a standard clause. I was looking back through the enabling legislation for the Canada Infrastructure Bank. That's another example. They had very similar language in it.

I asked Mr. Halucha what that was. He assured me it was very standard language.

Is that standard language an indication that it's the office of the minister? Does François have to sit down and read these notes and sign off...? Is it the office, the ministry, or the actual minister? How does that work exactly?

**Lindsay Boldt:** It is an FAA requirement that the Minister of Finance approve it.

As I understand it, the Minister of Finance will be the one who ultimately is accountable for that decision.

**Scott Aitchison:** I get that it's standard in these things.

What specific tools do you see in Bill C-20 in creating a Crown corporation out of Build Canada Homes? What specific tools will this agency have that couldn't have been given to one of the other Crown corporations?

I think about the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. It's been around for a long time. It was created to solve our first big housing crisis in this country, and by all accounts, it did one hell of a job. Its purpose has changed over time, depending on the needs of what's going on.

What tools will Build Canada Homes be given with this legislation that Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation didn't have?

**Lindsay Boldt:** Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has a number of powers already. As you said, in many cases we're pointing to similar tools to those CMHC may have available to them.

That said, the idea with Build Canada Homes is to really distinguish between the mandates and have a focus on affordable housing development, whereby they would focus on using the tools in that space. CMHC, likewise, could then focus their efforts and tools on the commercial side of their business, including mortgage loan insurance and the programs that have to support, in large part, the market housing sector. That was the focus moving forward as we delineated between those two organizations.

• (17750)

**Scott Aitchison:** That's interesting. Thank you for that.

I would note that when the previous government, or the earlier version of the government, came up with the national housing strategy, the primary vehicle for delivering on those programs—with the exception of a couple of things that went to your department—was the CMHC.

As the discussion continues on what the next iteration of the strategy may be—and maybe you don't know—is it the vision of the government to take those programs away from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation because they were overloaded and to have them focus on their insurance business again, with Build Canada Homes being the new thing?

**Lindsay Boldt:** In thinking about some of the national housing strategy programs that relate to the affordable housing space, yes, CMHC delivered the affordable housing fund and the community housing development program.

For some of the programs, moving forward, as that current funding has been committed and as those programs wind down, Build Canada Homes will be standing up in that space.

**Scott Aitchison:** Will there be some clarification for community groups and builders?

One of the concerns I've heard—and I think this has been part of the problem—is that groups have said they've tried to apply to CMHC for a program to get something built and they're told, “Well, you need to go to Build Canada Homes.” Then Build Canada Homes says, “You should probably go talk to the CMHC.”

Will there be anything coming forward from the government that very clearly delineates what types of projects are dealt with at CMHC and what types of projects are dealt with at Build Canada Homes?

I also have a question about the Canada Lands Company and what happens to it next, but I'll start with this one, if you don't mind.

**Lindsay Boldt:** Build Canada Homes is ramping up its capacity and its operations. It is working very closely with CMHC to ensure there is the hand-off with CMHC in the programs that I previously mentioned. It wants to ensure that there is a connection taking place and, moving forward—as you pointed out—that operations are figured out between Build Canada Homes and CMHC, along with how best to communicate this to the sector so that the sector has clarity.

That said, connections will be happening internally as well. There is a desire to ensure that if a proposal comes forward to Build Canada Homes and there are opportunities to leverage and ensure

that co-operation is happening with CMHC, it's not simply a matter of batting the ball back out. This is a piece that, as Build Canada Homes ramps up, I know is a preoccupation—to ensure that there is clarity on this and that there is a system by which they are working with and having that channel with CMHC.

**Scott Aitchison:** Okay. Thank you for that.

If I can just reiterate, I think it's very important, as that is worked out, that this kind of clarity is shared with everybody so that they understand. Time is of the essence on these issues, and being bounced back and forth is probably frustrating and counterproductive.

If you don't mind, I'd like to jump into the Canada Lands Company, because there seems to be some uncertainty about that Crown corporation and how it will now relate to Build Canada Homes.

When we initially talked about Build Canada Homes, it was an agency that would take federal lands and turn them into housing. I pointed out that we have one that does that already, so what will happen to the Canada Lands Company? Is it some kind of subsidiary of Build Canada Homes? Is it still a stand-alone corporation, but Build Canada Homes can just take the projects it likes from it? How will that work?

• (17755)

**Lindsay Boldt:** That's a great question.

In the legislation, we talk about the transfer and the reorganization and wanting to ensure that there are sufficient powers, not only for Build Canada Homes to acquire the real estate and development function that currently resides in CLCL, but also for CLCL to have the ability to organize itself. This will make sure that, in whatever manner the machinery decision transfers over, there will be sufficient flexibility for a number of scenarios. In that way, moving over the real estate and development functions can be done in as seamless a way as possible.

It also provides the powers so that CLCL considers their mandate, their more attractions-focused mandate, and how they need to reorganize themselves as an organization once the real estate and development function has transitioned over to Build Canada Homes. Really, this is in the desire to maximize moving it from one organization, to maximize it with the financing arm and, it is hoped, to have the biggest impact when building affordable housing at scale.

**Scott Aitchison:** Can I ask, then, if Build Canada Homes will have the power to adopt and take over projects from Canada Lands Company?

**Lindsay Boldt:** If those projects—the properties, the assets, the liabilities, the obligations—that CLCL has in the space of the mandate that Build Canada Homes is taking on in that development of affordable housing on public lands.... It's any of those obligations and assets. That's the piece that needs to be worked out. In the legislation, we have the authorities to ensure that it's organized in such a way. Yes, Build Canada Homes would take on and would take over for those projects, for those properties, for those assets and for obligations that CLCL may have on certain properties in those spaces.

**Scott Aitchison:** The six projects that were announced already, and were presented as some speeding up of things, were taken from Canada Lands Company. They'd been working on those sites for some time. How were those structured? Did Build Canada Homes say they're taking those over now and are going to finish them? Are they doing some kind of partnership with Canada Lands Company? Are they out or are they still involved? Is the balance of the lands still there? How did that all come to pass?

**Lindsay Boldt:** Right now, in the special operating agency model that Build Canada Homes is currently operating in, they do have a partnership with CLCL. CLCL is managing and responsible for those Build Canada Homes direct-build projects in the six locations across Canada.

**Scott Aitchison:** I want to be very clear. Do they have a partnership arrangement, those six?

**Lindsay Boldt:** Yes, exactly. In the September announcement that launched Build Canada Homes, there was also a reference to the fact that CLCL would be under the Build Canada Homes portfolio to support the construction on federal lands, in particular as we talk about these six direct-build sites.

**Scott Aitchison:** If CLC is going to be under Build Canada Homes, is this then one Crown corporation reporting through another Crown corporation to the government?

**Lindsay Boldt:** Right now it's a collaboration. In the legislation itself, you'll see that there are provisions that would allow for that to shift under Build Canada Homes. Build Canada Homes would be the parent corporation.

**Scott Aitchison:** I see. Canada Lands Company will report to Build Canada Homes.

**Lindsay Boldt:** It could be a subsidiary under it.

**Scott Aitchison:** Okay. I'm struggling a bit with that structure. I would suggest that Canadians might struggle with it too. It seems really complex. I guess that's what I'm struggling with.

Canada Lands Company has been developing on federal lands for some time. I've pointed out that one of their greatest challenges in doing that was, number one, getting the lands. The process to dispose of federal lands is arcane and slow and often very difficult. Of course, once they get through that process, they have to go through the municipal approvals process, which, as we know, is not always the most efficient operation. Projects in the national capital region might then have to go through the same arcane process with the National Capital Commission, which is very secretive. They wouldn't talk to me and tell me how it works.

You have a Crown corporation that has developed some experience with developing and building beautiful residential communities, with a mix of affordable and deeply affordable units in vibrant communities with some retail and restaurants and that kind of stuff, some of them right here in the national capital region. They have the expertise. They're pretty good at it. They've been working on some of these projects for decades, mostly not because of themselves but because of the other agencies they have to deal with.

This is what I'm wondering now: What will Build Canada Homes do that Canada Lands Company couldn't do to accelerate that process and get units built faster?

• (17800)

**Lindsay Boldt:** By bringing it under Build Canada Homes, in which you would have the financing aspect as well, you would have the partnerships that Build Canada Homes is bringing in. The idea is to really leverage the great work that had already been started on many of these properties. CLC has a bit of a different operating model, so in this case you're bringing it more directly....

Build Canada Homes may make a decision as it relates to the management of their lands. They may make a decision similar to those six direct-build sites, and it would be very actively involved in the construction of affordable housing on those lands. However, Build Canada Homes would also have the ability to enter into partnerships and to pull partners forward in maybe a joint venture or a partnership on some of those lands. Likewise, it might just be in offering the expertise they have. They have developer expertise. There's a whole spectrum of ways in which Build Canada Homes may lean in on the developer role.

**Scott Aitchison:** Thank you.

Can you give me an example of a partnership that Build Canada Homes may bring to bear on a project that CLC had started but wouldn't be able to manifest?

**Lindsay Boldt:** In the conversations that Build Canada Homes will be having, whether they're in those broader conversations that they're having with communities, this can bring things forward in a bigger way in trying to get at that scale of affordable housing development and in understanding whether it is the right tool for the job. The City of Ottawa is one recent example in which they brought forward portfolios of properties and talked about bringing land forward and, likewise, bringing the financing to bear.

If the bigger goal is asking how we can work toward more affordable housing development in a certain area, is the actual piece to bring forward land, or is there, in some of those aspects, a desire to talk about financing? It's bringing in the tools to that same conversation, but it's a broader tool kit than what CLC has available today.

**Scott Aitchison:** This is my final question on this one, I promise. I realize I'm monopolizing this, but I am genuinely curious.

**The Chair:** They are informative questions.

**Scott Aitchison:** Okay. I'm glad everyone's enjoying it.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Scott Aitchison:** I keep coming back to my point about CLC, which I think is a pretty neat organization. I'm asking a political question to some degree here. What I don't understand is why, with some changes to the enabling legislation for the Canada Lands Company—or the CMHC, but I'll focus on the Canada Lands Company—the government didn't choose to make changes to its mandate and give it more tools and a broader scope instead of taking a year to create, literally, a fourth federal housing agency, a third federal Crown corporation for housing. Would it not have been easier to just beef up CLC and give them more teeth or something?

**Lindsay Boldt:** I could talk about this for hours because you can get to the point of complexity of some of the machinery. I would say that, again, the Build Canada Homes mandate does have more than just.... The work that the CLC has been doing can be put into the developer function within the legislation. You can see it as part of the mandate for what Build Canada Homes will do in building affordable housing on land. However, given that the direction for the mandate is meant to have that financing piece as well, this is where it comes in: CLCL does not have this. This is not an authority that it has. It does not have that financing aspect, and so that's where CLCL would—

**Scott Aitchison:** The financing piece is new, I guess.

CMHC is not just an insurance company; it does financing as well. Can you tell me what the disconnect was between the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and their financing arm versus the CLC and their development arm? Why couldn't they have worked better together? Why do we need Build Canada Homes to create the financing piece?

• (17805)

**Lindsay Boldt:** The mandate of Build Canada Homes was meant to really home in on bringing together those similar tools that the Crown corporations, CMHC and CLC, have in different ways, and on trying to focus in on that affordable housing space by using those tools and pulling in tools from both—the land, the flexible financing tools, the partnerships ability and the idea that you can really lean in on the modern methods of construction, or MMC. I think that, in trying to pull that together, the desire was to have that within one entity that could really focus their efforts. Likewise, it then allows CMHC to home in on that market housing part of the housing segment, which is when we look at the housing crisis writ large, a very large segment and a piece of the puzzle.

**Scott Aitchison:** Thank you for all that. I'll leave you alone now.

I will say, for the purpose of my own understanding, that I still struggle—despite your incredibly capable attempt to explain it all, which I appreciate—with the creation of another corporation.

Obviously, it was a simpler time after the war, when it came to dealing with getting homes built. We created one corporation, and it did a truly phenomenal job. What the CMHC did is amazing. I've done a speech in the House of Commons on the scope and scale of the problem back then and on how the government of the day—a Liberal government, no less—recognized the challenge and created the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, as it was then called. It created partnerships, worked with builders and built entire communities. We solved the housing crisis in roughly a decade or a

bit less. Its mandate has evolved over time, for sure. It's become more of an insurance agency and a research business.

One of the primary challenges to getting homes built and making them all affordable.... Of course, we run into the problem of the definition of “affordability”. I fundamentally believe all homes should be more affordable, not just the ones below market. We desperately need more investment in social and supportive housing in this country, but I struggle with why we are using up scarce public resources to create a fourth agency or third corporation at the federal level, when bureaucratic delays are a major part of the problem in getting homes built and making them all more affordable.

The ambition and hope behind this thing are completely laudable and admirable, but I don't get it. I think it's safe to say that a lot of Canadians don't get it either. We solved this problem before, and it didn't take three corporations to do it. It was one. They cut through the noise and got the job done. Fundamentally, that's the problem today. We've spent a year on this now, and it's still getting up and going. I still don't really understand why we need a third Crown corporation when we have two that might need more tools or more power. I think it would have been faster to give them those tools. We would be one year closer to solving the massive housing crisis in this country, which is demonstrably worse than it was after the war.

I'll say it again: I applaud the ambition, but I struggle with the time we've spent building more bureaucracy when one of the primary challenges to getting homes built is, in fact, bureaucracy.

I'll leave it at that.

Thank you very much for being here.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Aitchison, for your passion on this particular subject, which you follow very closely.

I have more speakers: Ms. Goodridge, then Madame Larouche.

• (17810)

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

I will follow up on some of the questions that were raised by my colleague Mr. Aitchison.

If the Canada Lands Company is now going to exist as a subsidiary of Build Canada Homes, does this mean it is only allowed to build affordable homes, or is it still allowed to build market homes? How does that structure change?

I'm the member of Parliament for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake. I was born and raised in Fort McMurray, Alberta. We've had some unique challenges when it comes to building, having gone through booms, busts and everything in between. I'm quite familiar with Calgary's Currie Barracks, which is a Canada Lands Company space. It's on the old military base near downtown Calgary. It is very centrally located. It is walking distance to Mount Royal and a 15-minute drive to downtown Calgary, which makes it a very desirable neighbourhood. There are \$1-million homes in that neighbourhood because that is the kind of clientele it has. There's also affordable housing being built in that area to help with some of those challenges.

Does this mean that, going forward, the Canada Lands Company is allowed to build only affordable homes?

**Lindsay Boldt:** In the scenario in which you have this direct-build model and it's being built on federal land, there is a need to have a sustainable model. In the direct-build model, a certain percentage of the units are affordable, but that's offset by having other units that may need to be at market rent. That is a formula to ensure that into the long term—into perpetuity—you have a model that will allow for the affordability of those non-market units to continue versus needing to have market-rent units to operationally have that model work.

**Laila Goodridge:** Forgive my ignorance. Is this not for home ownership? Is this simply building for rental properties and rental spaces?

**Lindsay Boldt:** In the direct-build model of the six sites that are out there, that is the approach they have taken with those six.

**Laila Goodridge:** None of the units being built are for people to own. This is all for rent. Is that correct?

**Lindsay Boldt:** Build Canada Homes is open to proposals. It's not rental-only, but that would depend on the proposals that come forward.

**Laila Goodridge:** Is it structured in such a way that those projects that are for rental, whether they are at market or below market, are the ones prioritized to receive the funding?

**Lindsay Boldt:** They would expect to see, if someone comes in with a proposal.... Again, if you have a non-market community housing provider coming in, they would have structured the rents of the units they are looking to be supporting and operating in such a way that they would likely need to have a certain percentage that are market rate in order to offset the depth of affordability they can achieve on those other units.

**Laila Goodridge:** From talking to a lot of young people across my riding and across Alberta, I know that their dream is still to own a home, an apartment, a condo or a townhouse. They don't want to be in a state of perpetual renting. It sounds as though the plan is to make it so that all of these homes being built will put them in a state of perpetual renting. The affordable space is only going to be for people who aren't able to own. Is that correct?

**Lindsay Boldt:** This is a space where you have the different complementary federal tools that would be leaning in on trying to support. You have homeowners who are looking to enter the market. We want to make sure that we're leaning in on other federal

tools that may help those homeowners afford a home and enter into the market in that way as well.

**Laila Goodridge:** You've clarified it a little. I really appreciate how passionate and knowledgeable you are on this subject. It's been very useful.

Often times, when we're studying a bill, we get the legalese of the documentation and then we get a briefing, as we're going through clause-by-clause, that gives us the answers that, had we had this before we had entered into the study of witnesses, we would have had a better opportunity to put forward amendments and understand exactly where the different pieces are.

It really would have been nice to have heard some of this before we were at this stage, because you're clearly very knowledgeable and very passionate about what you're doing. I want to thank you and commend you for that.

I'm a bit frustrated that the process happened the way it did. We're in a space in which we have a limited option to create amendments at this point, even though you're now bringing up some really important things that might have warranted amendments, had we had the time to do it beforehand.

● (17815)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have resources to go beyond 10:15, so I'll continue, unless there's dissent on that.

**Laila Goodridge:** When do we have resources until?

**The Chair:** We have until 10:45.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor.

**Andréanne Larouche:** Mr. Chair, at this point, based on what I've heard, I'd like to hear Ms. Boldt's comments on the fact that housing falls under Quebec's jurisdiction.

Ms. Boldt, the information we're getting is that, once the bill is passed, there will be an online application portal, so there will be a single place to submit applications. We're also hearing that Quebec would have the final say on these projects.

I'm trying to understand how the bill will work in practice and how you see that. We've been talking for some time now about the creation of this new agency, approval from the Minister of Finance and the Build Canada Homes process.

Given that, in Quebec, the province will have the final say on projects, how do you see that working? This remains under Quebec's jurisdiction, and the province is best placed to understand its needs. That's why we're saying this. Under the circumstances, how do you see the portal working, given that Quebec will have the final say?

**Lindsay Boldt:** Thank you for the question. I will turn the floor over to my colleague Mr. Langelier.

**Jean-Sébastien Langelier (Executive Director, Strategic Policy and Integration Sector, Department of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities):** Thank you for the question.

There's nothing in the bill that spells out exactly how the portal will work. We know that there is currently a memorandum of understanding with the Quebec government. The bill gives Build Canada Homes the flexibility it needs to enter into partnership agreements with the provinces and to recognize the specific nature of affordable housing investments in Quebec.

**Andréanne Larouche:** So I understand that the bill doesn't specify how the portal will work.

However, if there's a specific element of the bill that you'd point to regarding that flexibility, something that confirms that Quebec will have the final say, what would it be? Can you point to one part of the bill that actually shows that flexibility?

**Jean-Sébastien Langelier:** The bill authorizes Build Canada Homes to enter into agreements with the provinces. There are provisions that focus specifically on that. In addition, we already have examples of collaboration involving Build Canada Homes.

[English]

**The Chair:** We've had a very good discussion on the various clauses. There are no amendments proposed for clauses 2 to 33. Is there unanimous consent to group them for the vote?

**Garnett Genuis:** Chair, I think our shadow minister is going to be returning imminently, so I wonder if, out of respect, we could not make that decision until we have some clarity on that.

**The Chair:** The shadow has appeared.

**Garnett Genuis:** If you give us a two-minute suspension, he can confirm what his....

**The Chair:** We'll suspend for a few minutes.

• (17815) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (17820)

**The Chair:** Committee members, we are back in session. I believe Mr. Reynolds has questions.

Mr. Reynolds, you have the floor.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for coming today.

You had mentioned that there's a developer piece in this. I'm curious about what that looks like. I know when governments build things, having been in construction myself for many years, cost overruns can get out of control. Private developers always have a budget and a financial backstop, but government organizations tend not to have those backstops.

Could you explain the developer piece? Does it mean the government is going to take on a project, hire subtrades and manage the project? What does that look like?

**Lindsay Boldt:** To clarify the three functions of Build Canada Homes, there's the financing aspect; there's the developer function, thinking about building on and pulling in public lands; and then

there's bringing forward modern methods of construction and trying to drive towards that more innovative and productive homebuilding industry.

That second element, the developer, in my mind, is a spectrum. There is a way with these direct-build sites that Build Canada Homes is leaning into that aspect you described, in which it's the federal government managing the development and managing the partnerships that will take place on that federal land. There is more of a light-touch aspect to that, and it may come to opportunities to bring forward partnerships on federal land. There may be opportunities in which bringing in the federal land is the key to unlocking affordable development for some proponents.

Then, there are the elements—recognizing the question that came up previously in this committee—around rural communities, for example, and we can think about their capacity to lean into affordable housing development.

Build Canada Homes has that expertise to offer advice if a community is trying to determine if one of its parcels of land is appropriate for housing, and it is leaning into trying to provide some of that advice to help its partners figure out how they may develop affordable housing on public land.

**Colin Reynolds:** Does this mean it's going to take on the role of a general contractor? I don't exactly understand how that works.

**Lindsay Boldt:** In the cases of the six direct-build sites that are currently in play, there have been RFPs, or requests for proposals, issued to bring forward the right general contractors and whatnot to help manage and deliver on those properties. There is an emphasis, in the case of those six, on pulling in as much factory-built housing as possible.

Build Canada Homes has the initial capitalization of \$13 billion. As part of that, it will contemplate how much of that funding goes to some of the aspects and developer functions that may be more active in these direct-build pieces versus those proposals that come in through the portal, which we spoke about a little bit, and request construction financing.

Build Canada Homes will need to balance the different parts of its function and how that relates back to its capital funding.

**Colin Reynolds:** When a private developer gets a piece of land and says it's going to build a 20-storey apartment building for \$35 million.... I've worked on a lot of government projects. A private builder will say its project is going to be \$35 million, and ultimately, that's a hard stop in private industry. There are always contingencies for cost overruns built into the project. In my experience on government projects, it's just writing cheques because this and that are going to be extra. I've seen projects nearly double in cost.

What does Build Canada Homes have for built-in checks and balances so that the government isn't taken advantage of? I have seen that in certain situations with builders and developers. Also, how will it protect the taxpayers' money and keep those projects within the specified budget?

• (17825)

**Lindsay Boldt:** This comes back to the transparency and reporting Build Canada Homes will be required to do on how it is spending that money, that initial capitalization. It will need to report.

Right now, it is operating as a special operating agency under the Department of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, similar to how the department reports to Parliament on the activities and the expenditures. That provides an opportunity for Build Canada Homes to explain what the costs have looked like for its various activities.

This legislation proposes that Build Canada Homes would transition to a Crown corporation model; there is a reporting requirement or framework that aligns with the Crown corporation model, and I'm happy to get into some of those details. It would also ensure that there's transparency and there is an opportunity, from an audit and reporting perspective, for transparency to parliamentarians and Canadians on the activities that Build Canada Homes undertakes and that the associated financial statements and expenditures are also shared.

**Colin Reynolds:** Is that a hard stop, though? You can say that a project started at \$35 million, and now it's \$40 million or \$45 million. Even though it's being reported, it isn't really a hard stop, and I think that's fairly significant.

As I mentioned, when you're dealing with a private builder and the project is getting near that point, the private builder will usually say, "We're going to buy cheaper flooring," or make adjustments to stay within that particular project's budget. On government projects, they don't do that. They keep writing cheques.

I understand the piece about the reporting and accountability, but a lot of times what happens is they're accountable to the cost over-run, but there aren't any checks and balances. Is there anything in there to prevent that from happening, other than reporting and accountability, and to say there is a hard stop?

**Lindsay Boldt:** I'll start, and I think J.-S. may have more to add.

In this case, Build Canada Homes will need to make a trade-off when it thinks about that \$13-billion capital allocation. If it starts to lean in on the developer side, that will pull from what is a limited resource and would then need to be offset by decisions about construction financing that is being offered.

Build Canada Homes will need to closely monitor the extent to which the different functions and each of those buckets come into play with its operations and its forecast expenditures.

**Jean-Sébastien Langelier:** In terms of incentives, it will need to manage the envelope it has with the capitalization that will be provided by the bill or by acts of Parliament. It will need to look at the risks and potential benefits of projects and manage a portfolio of projects. It may need to make its choices and investment decisions based on that; this is how the model would work.

**Colin Reynolds:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm good; I'll cede the floor.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Reynolds, for the line of questioning, which was informative.

There was no unanimous consent on grouping them, so I'm going to begin clause-by-clause consideration with clauses 2 to 33, as there were no amendments to any of these.

(Clauses 2 to 33 agreed to on division)

**The Chair:** Ms. Kwan, go ahead.

• (17830)

**Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

On clause 33, the NDP is proposing some amendments. Noting that, while Bill C-20 includes a statutory reporting requirement to Parliament, the NDP amendment proposes an annual report to Parliament concerning the Build Canada Homes' tangible progress and success towards its statutory purposes. The proposed reporting would require that Parliament receive yearly targets for the upcoming year, as well as progress outcomes measured against the previous year's targets.

The metrics for these targets and progress reports would include the number of new units built with Build Canada Homes financing, the municipality and province in which they are built, their affordability level—meaning, the dollar amount the federal government's contributing—the number of units created leveraging federal lands and their affordability level.

The amendment proposes that the report to Parliament define affordable housing as "housing is considered to be affordable if a household's total housing costs do not exceed 30% of its gross income", without prescribing what it should be in the legislation itself.

Part 2(a) of the amendment would require reporting on the type of housing created by population served, i.e., transitional, single-family, seniors, students, etc. Part 2(b) would add reporting on the use of the federal lands. Part 2(c) would require that the report use and establish baselines and criteria to measure the outcomes. Part 2(d) would require that the report indicate the proportion of public and non-market housing in Canada's total housing supply, broken down by province, territory and municipality.

Part 3 requires that the report include national aggregate point-in-time homelessness counts, including regional breakdowns of point-in-time counts, including northern and remote communities; an appendix benchmarking current data against the prior 10 years; an appendix using all the longitudinal data on the point-in-time counts to establish a forecast of counts five years into the future; and disaggregated data on the point-in-time counts, insofar as possible, by age, gender identity, indigenous identity, veteran status and disability status.

It would also determine the national demographics of need, based on a definition of core housing need that includes considering affordability, adequacy and suitability, including overcrowding and security of tenure.

Lastly, the report would provide a housing insecurity index that tracks overcrowded housing in the territories, using a defined threshold and appropriate metrics, broken down by territory and including remote communities.

Mr. Chair, I will simply say that I think it's really important as this new entity is established that there's transparency and for the Canadian public to know what the targets are and how it is reaching those targets, under those various different metrics that I've outlined. It's also important that they have a baseline of measurement.

I note, also, that this amendment was crafted in collaboration with the member for Nunavut before she crossed over to the Liberals. Presumably she would have brought this up with the Liberal caucus, and I hope to see support on this amendment.

• (17835)

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

The amendment moved by Ms. Kwan is NDP-1. It is in order.

Madame Desrochers, on the amendment.

**Caroline Desrochers:** On the amendment, Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

I really want to thank my colleague, Ms. Kwan, for bringing forward this amendment. I know of all of her work on transparency and accountability. Transparency and accountability to Parliament, and to Canadians, are fundamental principles that we support.

However, I want to say that Build Canada Homes, like all Crown corporations, will be subject to strict annual reporting, audit and transparency requirements under existing law. Under part X of the Financial Administration Act, Crown corporations are required to table corporate plans, which are multi-year plans, outlining business activities, investments, mandates, strategic objectives, key initiatives, risk management approaches and expected financial results. Those are very comprehensive documents that are required by law to be provided every year.

Summaries of the plans are tabled annually in Parliament, providing forward-looking information on priorities, performance, targets and resource allocation for parliamentarians and Canadians.

[Translation]

Annual operating and capital budgets are also tabled. They detail activities, investments, revenues, expenses, major capital projects

and projected borrowings. This is how we will ensure transparency to Parliament regarding the use of public funds. That is already part of existing legislation.

Finally, the annual financial statements and reports are submitted to the responsible ministers and tabled in Parliament. That is already part of the legislative framework and responsibilities. These financial statements are audited by the Auditor General of Canada to ensure accountability and transparency regarding financial results and performance.

Therefore, the objectives of this amendment are already achieved within the existing legislative framework. From the outset, as a Crown agency, Build Canada Homes will be fully accountable to Parliament, must be transparent about its activities and results, and will be subject to oversight by our committees. That's what Canadians expect, and that's what the law already provides for.

So, when we vote, we will oppose this amendment.

[English]

**The Chair:** Is there any further discussion?

I have Ms. Kwan and then Ms. Goodridge.

**Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If the committee could indulge me for a minute to respond to the government's proposal, I understand that there would be annual reports. However, this specific amendment is very deliberate in the information being sought in terms of accountability. In the overall annual reports, sometimes some of the information is incorporated; oftentimes, it isn't.

We haven't seen one, so I can't predict, but for certainty in terms of legislation for the creation of this new entity, I think it would be important for this amendment to be adopted as part of parliamentary reporting to parliamentarians.

• (17840)

**The Chair:** I need to suspend for a few moments for a health break.

The meeting is suspended.

• (17840)

(Pause)

• (17845)

**The Chair:** Okay, we were on the amendment by Ms. Kwan, which is NDP-1.

I'm seeing no further discussion. Shall NDP-1 carry?

(Amendment negated [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**The Chair:** Since NDP-1 is not carried, there's no new clause 33.1.

We'll continue on, then, with clause-by-clause.

(Clauses 34 to 51 agreed to on division)

**The Chair:** Shall the short title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**An hon. member:** On division.

**The Chair:** Shall the title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**An hon. member:** On division.

**The Chair:** Shall the bill carry?

**Some hon. members:** Let's have a recorded division.

(Bill C-20 agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

**The Chair:** Shall the chair report the bill to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**An hon. member:** On division.

**The Chair:** That, committee members, concludes today's meeting.

Our next meeting will be on Monday, May 4. Nothing has changed. We'll resume our study on the temporary foreign worker program.

**Garnett Genuis:** No, we just agreed on changing—

**The Chair:** That's right. I'm sorry.

We will resume, based on the agreement to the motion by Madame Desrochers.

**Garnett Genuis:** Mr. Chair, with regard to that motion, do you have everything you need in terms of the youth report? Do we need to choose a title or something? I don't think we have to, but that was....

**The Chair:** No, version two is ready to be adopted by the committee.

**Garnett Genuis:** Okay. I mean, it was adopted, so we're—

**The Chair:** No, version two was not.

Was it part...? Okay.

My analysts are not here. I'm getting a thumbs-up. Okay, we're good.

With that, is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.

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Remarks by Gary Gladstone-e

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Remarks by Pedro Barata-e

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