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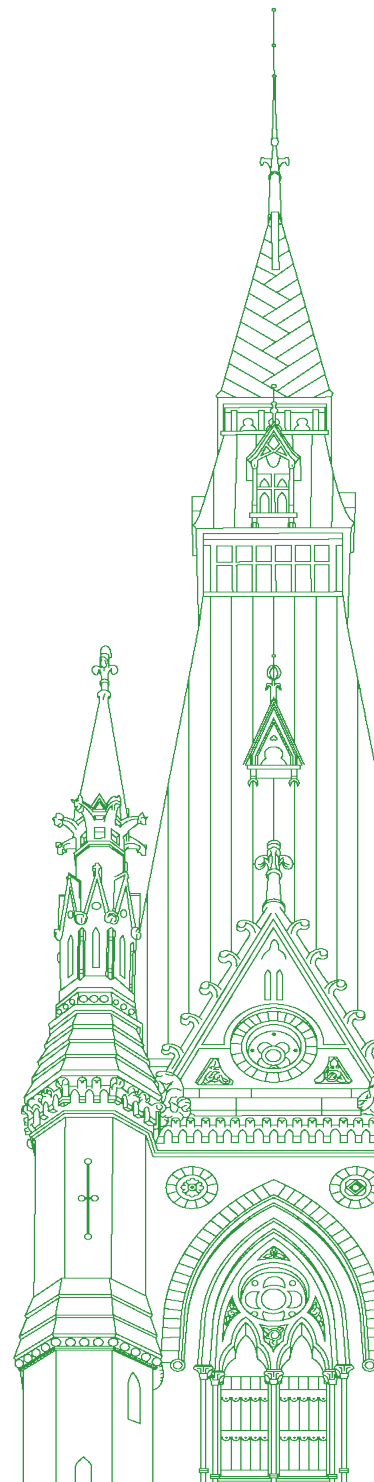
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Chair: Robert Morrissey

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• (0815)

[Translation]

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

[English]

Welcome to meeting number 38 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on Thursday, April 23, the committee is meeting on the main estimates 2026-27 for the first hour, and on homelessness in Canada for the second hour, pursuant to the motion adopted on Monday, May 4.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members or witnesses will be appearing on-line.

Before we begin, I remind all those in the room to please silence your devices and refrain from tapping the microphone boom, for the benefit of our interpreters.

You have the option of participating in the official language of your choice. Please select the correct channel to ensure that you are on the language you choose to participate in. If you're appearing virtually, click on the globe icon at the bottom of your Surface. Choose the official language of your choice. If there is an interruption in interpretation, please get my attention and we'll suspend while it's corrected.

Please direct all questions through me, the chair, and wait until I recognize you before proceeding.

Those who are appearing virtually have been sound-tested, and the sound quality meets requirements for interpretation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), I will now call vote 1 under the Department of Employment and Social Development and welcome Minister Hajdu this morning.

Welcome again, Minister. You appear here a lot. Thank you.

Also attending are Paul Thompson, deputy minister; Robert Wright, deputy minister of labour and associate deputy minister of employment and social development; Cliff Groen, associate deputy minister of employment and social development and chief operating officer for Service Canada; and Serena Francis, chief financial officer.

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

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

Good morning, colleagues. It's a pleasure to be here with you today on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

I am with people you know very well: Paul Thompson, deputy minister of ESDC; Cliff Groen, associate deputy minister of ESDC and chief operating officer for Service Canada; Rob Wright, deputy minister of labour and associate deputy minister of ESDC; and Serena Francis, chief financial officer.

This is obviously a pivotal moment for all of Canada and all Canadians. Our government has been working, as you know, to strengthen Canada's economic and social security, and to give all Canadians a fair chance to succeed at every stage of life. This includes helping Canadians build the skills they need in a rapidly changing labour market. Our goal at ESDC is to ensure that young Canadians are ready to seize the opportunities of the future.

[Translation]

This is the reality we need to acknowledge: Canada is facing a serious shortage of skilled workers.

[English]

Our spring economic update, "Canada Strong for All", is our clear commitment to meeting that challenge by strengthening today's workforce and preparing Canadians for the jobs that the economy and businesses urgently need across the country.

Central to our government's plan is building major infrastructure, building more homes and creating strong communities. We're building homes that Canadians can afford so that a new industry can take on the world. We're also modernizing critical infrastructure and strengthening our national defence capacity.

Achieving all of those objectives requires a highly skilled workforce, which is why the spring economic update announced a \$6-billion nationwide effort to recruit, train and hire 100,000 new Red Seal trades workers in the next five years. That is ambitious. The strategy is focused on three pillars: recruitment, training and hiring.

Collectively, we need to restore honour to the skilled trades and promote them as the great-paying careers they are to young Canadians. That's why we're taking action. We are investing \$2 billion to support young Canadians to learn about and enter the skilled trades. This investment will build on provincial and territorial work and will provide paid entry-level work experience, opportunities to connect with employers and the support needed to pursue a career in the skilled trades.

We will help employers cover up to \$10,000 of an apprentice's first-year salary to ensure skilled trades workers have a place to practise their skills, learn and refine them. We will also modernize the Red Seal program. We will expand the union training and innovation program to support certifications in Red Seal trades, with \$331 million in funding over five years, starting in 2026-27.

As direct financial support, apprentices will also receive a \$400 weekly top-up while they attend their in-class training, in addition to the EI benefits for which they're eligible. We'll also support employees during periods of layoff in their training and make sure they have what they need to stay on the pathway of completing their Red Seal. I'm looking directly at Mr. Reynolds, because he has been through that journey and he knows how perilous it can be. We will also provide a one-time \$5,000 apprenticeship completion bonus to those who obtain certification in a Red Seal trade.

● (0820)

[Translation]

The proposed measures will help us mobilize youth.

But at the end of the day, it comes down to affordability.

[English]

We've extended the temporary 40% increase to Canada student grants and the temporary increase to the weekly Canada student loan limit of \$300 for the 2026-27 academic year. About 571,000 students are expected to benefit from the increase to non-repayable grants, and 422,000 students could benefit from the weekly loan limit increase. These measures will help ensure Canadians can access the education and training they need to participate fully in Canada's economy.

[Translation]

The workforce measures in budget 2025 were meant to tackle immediate challenges. With the spring economic update 2026, we have turned to proactive measures. That's where the Canada Strong Fund fits in.

[English]

As the Prime Minister has said, "Canada's next chapter of growth starts with investing at home." Since September 2025, the government has invested more than \$126 billion to advance major projects across energy, critical minerals and transportation infrastructure.

The spring economic update announced the government's intention to create the Canada strong fund. Through an initial federal contribution of \$25 billion, the fund will invest in strategic projects and companies that keep us competitive.

We won't do it alone. Canadian companies, alongside global investors, are helping build the energy, transportation and telecom-

munications infrastructure that will bring Canada into the next generation.

Building a strong workforce requires continued effort and investment, but we're well equipped to meet these challenges. This is how we build Canada strong for all.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

We will begin with Mr. Genuis for six minutes.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Good morning, Minister.

To justify sending airline workers back to work, you claimed that it was necessary to prevent disruption of shipments of organs and life-saving pharmaceuticals. Was that claim true?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It was. In fact, airlines not only transport people, but transport a tremendous amount of cargo, including critical medical equipment.

Garnett Genuis: So it was your view or position that the strike was going to cause a shortage in the supply of these materials. Is that true?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Airlines regularly transport more than humans. They transport critical ingredients, medication and, yes, even live human organs.

Garnett Genuis: I understand that, Minister, but you said there was a risk to the safety of Canadians, implying that there wasn't capacity available on other airlines.

Is it true that this strike posed a risk to the safety of Canadians in the way you described?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The question has been asked and answered.

I will reiterate that the briefings I received included the disruption not only to human travel, but certainly to the transportation of many critical ingredients, including medical ingredients.

Garnett Genuis: You're claiming that you were briefed to that effect.

Mr. Thompson, can you advise the committee as to whether you or other officials briefed Minister Hajdu that shortages of organs and critical pharmaceuticals would result from the continuation of the strike?

It's a yes-or-no question. Did you brief the minister to that effect?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Wright was not there.

Robert Wright (Deputy Minister of Labour and Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development, Department of Employment and Social Development): It was not me, personally. This is the—

Garnett Genuis: Did officials brief the minister to that effect?

Robert Wright: We can certainly do some follow-up on that.

Garnett Genuis: You'll undertake to come back to the committee on that matter. Thank you very much.

Minister, three weeks ago, Conservatives announced a proposal for substantial reforms to parental leave in order to make the system more flexible, allowing parents to pause and resume their leave, to learn while on leave and to offer paid caregiving services to friends and family while on leave.

At the time, you said that you'd look at the proposal. Thank you for that. Three weeks on, I wonder if you can share whether this is a proposal you would be prepared to implement.

• (0825)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We have done a tremendous amount of work on parental leave, and we're constantly reviewing the measures that are available for parents. We will continue to look at those proposals.

Garnett Genuis: You said that you'd look at constructive proposals put forward by the opposition. I wonder if you have any feedback on these specific proposals. If you're not prepared to provide that feedback yet, I wonder if you could undertake to come back to the committee with that feedback, perhaps in writing.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Absolutely.

Garnett Genuis: What's a timeline that's fair to you and your department?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We'll get back to you on the timeline as well. I'll confer with the department.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you. We'll look forward to the feedback on this proposal. I can tell you that even traditional Liberal supporters online have shown great support for this proposal so far. I think it could be an area of consensus and common action that makes life easier for parents.

One of the recommendations in this committee's recent report on youth unemployment is to “apply strict penalties to companies hiring illegal workers.” Do you support this recommendation?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Yes. We have an enforcement branch, through the labour team, that specifically looks at undocumented illegal workers. Of course, we do this in partnership with IRCC.

In terms of our role, we are specifically there to enforce the Canada Labour Code for federally regulated workers and to make sure anyone using temporary foreign workers complies with the LMIA process.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. I think that's clear.

Do you think it's appropriate for the government to give public subsidies to companies that have been found guilty of hiring illegal workers?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm sure you're referring to a specific case. We're always interested in examining specific cases. I'd be happy to look at that if you provide the specific case.

Garnett Genuis: Your government is aware of this specific case because it was provided to me in an Order Paper question. It's the case of a company called Ichiboshi L.P.C. in New Brunswick. “L.P.C.” doesn't refer to the Liberal Party, I assume. It's a seafood processing company. They received subsidies from your government on multiple occasions after they fired Canadian workers and then illegally employed foreign nationals.

Is there any explanation for why a company that fired Canadian workers and then replaced them with illegally hired foreign nationals would receive multiple rounds of government subsidies?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I will look into the case and come back to you. It sounds concerning to me. It would depend on which department provided what funding, but I'm interested in knowing more about that.

Garnett Genuis: It was information provided to me through an Order Paper question, so I know the government is already aware of it and has been aware of it for some time.

I'll look forward to your follow-up on that.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'm saying that I am not aware of it, as a minister, but I'm happy to come back with more information after I—

Garnett Genuis: I understand. It wasn't your department that provided the subsidy. It was Fisheries and Oceans. Given the subject we're discussing—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That's why I have no awareness of it. Once we have the ability to dig in, we'll certainly come back to you. It sounds deeply concerning.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you. We'll look forward to that feedback as well.

Youth unemployment is now at 14.3%. It's gone up half a point in a single month.

I'd like to understand what, in the view of the government, success looks like. Do you have a goal or target in terms of where you'd like youth unemployment to be in the months ahead?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: First of all, I want to thank the committee for a very thorough report on youth unemployment and the actions—

Garnett Genuis: I have just 15 seconds left, so I want to get a sense of the answer to that question.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Obviously, we are working really closely with this committee and with members of Parliament across the aisle to reduce youth unemployment. One great way to reduce youth unemployment would have been to vote for the spring economic update, which had over two billion dollars' worth of investments to ensure that young people have access to the skilled trades. It's a great career path.

Garnett Genuis: Do you have a target, Minister, for youth unemployment? It's a simple question, and I'm running out of time. Do you have a response to my question? Do you have a target?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: My response is that every time we propose action for youth unemployment, your party votes against it. To me, the question would be, why is it that you're so opposed to supports for young people?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

I would just ask members to please respect the interpreters. One person speaking at a time would be most beneficial.

[Translation]

Mr. Villeneuve, you have the floor for six minutes.

Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Minister. I'm very pleased to see you here this morning.

I met a number of people during my two-week visit in our ridings, in Brome—Missisquoi. I held “coffee with the MP” type of events, and many people came. Obviously, I heard a lot about affordability. I think it's like that pretty much everywhere. I also heard about job opportunities for our youth. There were parents there who shared their concerns with us.

Our government has a lot of ambitious projects. I'd like you to take the time this morning to explain how the Team Canada Strong initiative will help Canada recruit, train and, above all, retain the skilled workers needed for housing and other projects we're starting.

• (0830)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you for the question.

This is an opportunity not only for young people, but for everyone across the country. These are very good jobs, because they pay very well. They also offer a lot of benefits and, often, a very good pension plan.

[English]

It's a really important component not only for building up the opportunity for young people, but for making sure that we have the skilled trades in this country to meet the ambition of the time. In fact, I'm glad to hear you're speaking with your constituents, because I am as well with mine.

I was visiting northern Ontario. As a matter of fact, last week I visited a small area called Marathon, Ontario, which is experiencing a mining boom. One of the things employers were telling me is that they're having a hard time finding skilled trades workers that can work in specific areas of the mining industry, both in building

the mines in some cases and, later on, in servicing the mines and servicing the equipment that goes into the mines.

I will note that there are over 50 Red Seal trades, and the variety among the Red Seals is quite large. This program will provide an opportunity to build on some of the work that some provinces and territories are doing to introduce people to the trades to ensure people have an opportunity to feel what it's like to work. These will be paid experiences. It's also meant to support people who are already in the pipeline of skilled trades training. My son is an operating engineer, and I've had the opportunity to see how challenging it can be for someone to get from the first days of their training to a Red Seal certification. We're very excited about the supports in place that will help people through that journey.

Finally, there are many employers who would possibly consider hiring a Red Seal. Small businesses often feel it's unaffordable. There is such an advantage to training your own talent, though, and we'll be recruiting more employers—hopefully particularly small employers, but all sizes of employers—to hire first-year apprentices to make sure that apprentices completing their training have a place to get their hours so that the process of certification is steady and there's hands-on learning with a Red Seal journey person. We have to plug these holes, if you will, in the gaps of the journey so that we make sure we graduate more Red Seal professionals.

The numbers are not the greatest. Overall, about 32% of Red Seal workers complete the training and get their Red Seal certification. You can imagine the frustration of young people—or people of any age—who enter the skilled trades and then find that their pathway to certification, which is when you really start to make the money and when you are really able to use your skills in a wide variety of ways.... You can imagine the frustration people feel when they're not able to complete that after making significant investments in their pathways.

We've been holding round tables around the country with unions, employers, technical institutions and training institutions to talk about the plan, and it is landing very well. People feel that we have in fact identified some of the significant gaps. We also have a plan to work with provinces and territories, in particular in the recruiting area, because some provinces are starting co-op credits with colleges, for example, and with high schools to reintroduce trades into high schools, which those of us my age know is part of the challenge we've had.

Over the last two decades or more, there's been a diminishment of the value of a skilled trades job, a skilled trades career. In fact, one tradesperson said—and it's in my notes—that we must work together to restore honour to the skilled trades. These are highly technical and highly science-based trades, with lots of math. Lots of intelligence goes into being a tradesperson, and somehow over the last several decades, society has undermined the value of these workers and their skills. Part of restoring honour is having a prominent program that says, “These are worthy valuable jobs, and you are worthy valuable trainers as Red Seal journeypeople.” These careers are needed by the country. We actually cannot build Canada strong without talented skilled tradespeople.

Thank you for the question.

• (0835)

[Translation]

Louis Villeneuve: Thank you.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You still have time.

Louis Villeneuve: Minister, I just want to quickly go back to Canada summer jobs. This program is offering many job opportunities in my riding. It offers up to 100,000 job opportunities across the country.

How will the program help young Canadians gain meaningful work experience—and I insist on the word “meaningful”, because that's what I'm interested in here—and establish real employment relationships with employers?

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: How many minutes do I have?

The Chair: None.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It's a great program. Everybody has Canada summer jobs in their riding.

[Translation]

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

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Minister.

I have a lot of topics to discuss with you. Listening to my colleagues, things are obviously moving very quickly.

I, too, have done a lot of field work over the past few weeks.

We know there's been a significant increase in spending for elderly benefits. Despite the budget increase, seniors between the ages of 65 and 74 are still excluded from the full increase in the old age security pension. Why maintain this inequity?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you for the question.

The cost of living is higher for the older seniors. That's why the government is taking this approach regarding pension.

[English]

I have supported many people who are aging. I know that the older you get, the more requirements there are to stay at home.

This benefit was introduced during COVID, you may remember. It was very specifically about trying to support older adults to age at home. People need assistive devices. They often need specialized care, and they may need meal delivery and transportation support. This increase was meant to address the very specific costs that older people face as they age and to help support them to stay in place.

If you'll recall, one of the features of COVID was that the deaths were extremely high in long-term care—

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I let you speak, but you didn't answer my question.

I've been out there. There are seniors living in co-ops that cost them 75% of their budget. They can't make ends meet. For the first time, seniors are late paying their rent. People brought up the rising cost of groceries.

Given the rising cost of living, it simply makes no sense not to acknowledge that there has been no increase in the old age security pension for seniors between the ages of 65 and 74.

How does the government plan to protect the purchasing power of vulnerable seniors and families in the coming years? What you've put in place isn't working. More and more people are becoming homeless. Demand for food baskets is on the rise. That's what I've heard over the last couple of weeks.

How are you going to increase supports? What are you going to do?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It's not true there hasn't been any increase in the rate for seniors.

[English]

All of the benefits are indexed to inflation and in fact go up each year. There is an indexation of all of the benefits that seniors receive, regardless of what age category they're in.

Also, low-income Canadians, on June 5, are going to receive the groceries and essentials benefit, which will double, essentially, the GST. That will benefit older people who are facing high costs of living.

Look, every step of the way, we are focused on making sure that Canadians have what they need during this extraordinary time.

It's important not to provide misinformation to Canadians. In fact, all benefits are indexed to inflation, and each year they are increased based on the inflationary rate.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I'll let you answer; I'm trying to keep to the speaking time, but I have a lot of questions for you.

In terms of the indexing method you're talking about, some seniors were insulted, because the increase on their cheques was barely \$2 or \$3. That isn't even enough to buy a cup of coffee. If that's the indexing method and the increase you're talking about, that doesn't work either. The indexing method will have to be revisited.

I know the government brags about the New Horizons for Seniors program, which is meant to be another way to help seniors. This year, projects are capped at \$50,000. Has the total budget been increased, and, if so, by how much? Can you confirm the budget allocation for the New Horizons for Seniors program, which will be opening soon?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'd have to look to my officials for that.

Robert Wright: Thanks very much for the question.

● (0840)

[Translation]

We're in the process of raising the cap for projects, as you have already said. However, in terms of the total budget, we can get back to you in writing.

Andréanne Larouche: How much is the total envelope? This year, the cap is no longer \$25,000; it's \$50,000. Has the envelope been doubled?

Robert Wright: We can provide you with a written response to make sure that it's accurate.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much. I would appreciate that.

Another thing I have heard mentioned in the last two weeks is business numbers. It is becoming more and more demanding to apply for the New Horizons for Seniors program.

For example, in recent years, Cercles de fermières du Québec, which provides incredible knowledge transfer in Quebec, was among the organizations with the most projects under the New Horizons for Seniors program. However, the organization has been excluded from the program this year, because only the organization's national club has a registration number, whereas the local clubs don't. This is getting a strong reaction in the regions, since the clubs help keep senior women socially active and give them the opportunity to meet up.

We have contacted your department. Will something be done to enable these groups to apply to benefit from the program, which starts on June 2?

Robert Wright: That's an important question. We're in the process of ensuring that the Government of Canada's programs are robust and that we can fight against fraud. The fraud rate is—

Andréanne Larouche: Are you going to show some flexibility for Les Cercles de fermières du Québec?

July 14, the deadline for tabling budgets, is in the middle of a summer holiday. Tabling a budget just before Christmas or in the middle of the summer is not easy for organizations.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: May I answer, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You can give a short answer.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Why don't you forward the specific case to my office, and we'll take a look at that specific case?

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

Mrs. Goodridge, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[English]

Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Both of my parents were Red Seal tradespeople. Some of the most brilliant people I've ever met in my entire life—hard-working people—have been tradespeople.

For more than 10 years, your government vilified energy workers and made all kinds of heinous statements against oil sands workers and the energy industry in general. I fully agree that we need to have more tradespeople. That is clear. Conservatives have been saying that the entire time. I'm glad to see you have finally come on board with regard to this.

However, do you not think that the actions of your government and the cabinet you've sat in for the last 10 years have something to do with the fact that people aren't going into the trades? You were saying that the gendered impact of the construction industry was having impacts on communities and noted all of the other stuff that was keeping young people from going into the trades because they didn't see a future in those industries.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: That is completely false, Ms. Goodridge. In fact, we have been supporting workers ever since I've been in this place.

We've had a great relationship with Canada's Building Trades Unions. We've had a great relationship with energy workers. We've had a great relationship with tradespeople. In fact, this is not the first time we've funded unions' training, because we believe unions do a fantastic job of training, and institutions do as well. Polytechnic institutions do a fantastic job of training in trades, and we've supported them as well.

This is in addition to the work we've done. We've promoted trades. We've offered completion grants, and we've had committees for impacted workers. We've supported impacted workers with a number of different measures, including retraining opportunities.

Ms. Goodridge, I would think it would be you who is actually talking down—

Laila Goodridge: The just transition and telling people in my community and across the energy industry that their jobs shouldn't exist and that you're going to transition them out are not—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: You are, again—

Laila Goodridge: That did not do anything to get more people into the trades. I'm just being quite frank with you.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: You are actually presenting your opinion, Ms. Goodridge, which is different from evidence. When we speak about matters, it is important that we are clear when it is an opinion versus evidence, and you're absolutely wrong. In fact, the sustainable jobs committee—

Laila Goodridge: I would invite you to come to Fort McMurray and talk to some people.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: —has a number of tradespeople, including retired tradespeople and leaders of unions and organizations, who know there is an imperative to support workers when industry changes, and industry does change.

Laila Goodridge: All right. Thank you.

Do you believe that the government should slow the growth of for-profit child care?

• (0845)

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I believe that public funds should primarily go to public institutions. I believe that we've worked flexibly with a number of different provinces on privatization when there aren't other solutions. The agreements with provinces and territories are carefully crafted to make sure that we keep quality and equity in these programs.

Laila Goodridge: Does the government think that female small-business owners operating child care centres are the problem in creating solutions for child care? I ask because that's the reality.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In Alberta, for example, there is a 45% ratio of privatization for the funds the federal government supports the province with, so we have a healthy balance in that province, as well as in other provinces.

Laila Goodridge: Why not in every province? Why just in provinces like Alberta?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Well, some provinces, like Saskatchewan, have always had a public system, and they're not interested in privatization. They have a public system and—

Laila Goodridge: They're not interested. That's interesting. That's not what I've heard.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What I'm saying is that their system was built on a public framework, so they have worked largely within their public framework. Different provinces have different approaches.

Laila Goodridge: Minister, we have a crisis. There are more families—

Leslie Church (Toronto—St. Paul's, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Could we please allow the minister to finish responding to the questions that are being raised?

Laila Goodridge: That's not how this works.

Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC): That's not how this place works.

Garnett Genuis: Read the book.

The Chair: Order, members.

It's the member's time, and the member has the right to question the witness as the member chooses, as long as it doesn't get into harassment, which is not occurring.

Ms. Goodridge.

Laila Goodridge: The policies your government has put in place are putting female-owned small businesses out of business because you are preventing them from accessing government funds in so many cases. This is having a major impact. Families are stuck on wait-lists. They cannot access care. Does that concern you?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Of course, we are working with all the provinces and territories to both reduce fees and increase spots. I would say that we are seeing great progress, including in Alberta, where the average daily price for child care is \$15 a day, saving families up to \$13,700 per family.

This is quite—

Laila Goodridge: Has the government met its target—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: —an accomplishment for a government, and for an opposition party that talks—

An. hon. member: It's the member's time.

The Chair: Minister, it is the member's time.

Laila Goodridge: Has the government met its target for space creation?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Some provinces have done better—

Laila Goodridge: It's a yes or no.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: —than others in terms of space creation.

Laila Goodridge: The answer is no.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In fact, we are working on the next round of plans with provinces and territories to make sure they reach those commitments.

Laila Goodridge: So far, the answer is no. Is that correct?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: What I would say is we're seeing different accomplishments across the country, and some provinces have met space targets.

Laila Goodridge: Which provinces have met their space targets?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Nova Scotia is very close to its space target. Quebec has increased and actually exceeded its space target.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Goodridge.

Mr. Saini, you have five minutes.

Gurbux Saini (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Good morning, Minister and members of the team. It's great to have you here.

Minister, the spring economic update included measures to modernize the disability tax credit. How will these changes make it easier for Canadians with disabilities to access the benefits they are entitled to?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: One of the concerns we heard was about the cost of filling out the forms and getting medical support for doing so, so we've both broadened the eligibility of who can help fill out the forms and provided a credit to people who are applying for the disability tax credit so that the average fee of \$150 will be reimbursed.

Gurbux Saini: Minister, we know that you have been working very hard to find solutions for workers who have been impacted by tariffs. What has your department done to make sure workers are supported in these challenging times?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think it's such an important question.

Although I know that across the aisle we hear a lot of mocking whenever we speak about EI, if you've ever lost your job, as I have, you'll know that EI is actually a very important component of recovery when a person experiences job loss, so we've done a couple of things.

We've increased something called the LMDAs, which are transfers to provinces and territories that are closest to the ground. We've worked in partnership with the provinces and territories to make sure that if a person's job is threatened, they are immediately supported with wraparound supports, with access to employment insurance and, broader than that, with the opportunity to retrain and the opportunity to get support for updating their résumé and updating their ability to do a job search.

We've also extended EI for long-tenured workers. The older you are and the longer you've been in a place, the harder it can be to find a job, so we've extended EI for long-tenured workers.

We've made it easier for people to get EI. We've waived the one-week waiting period, and we've allowed people to keep monies on separation, which means anything that's coming to you for vacation, sick time or other kinds of benefits is not held back from your EI. This is to make sure people aren't feeling the financial crisis immediately.

Finally, we've offered work sharing to workplaces that believe that even though they're facing a downturn, they see a light at the end of the tunnel, have new customers or are pivoting to a new approach. We've allowed companies to train workers and keep them on EI and a partial salary to retain them in that workforce.

What employers will say is that if they have to close their doors completely and then resume business, it can be very difficult to get those workers back. The real focus is trying to keep everybody attached to the workforce first, but if they're threatened, then it's about making sure they have the support financially and practically to find their next job.

• (0850)

Gurbux Saini: Minister, the government has taken action to strengthen workers' rights, including with anti-scab legislation and support for union training. How do these measures support a fair workplace and strong labour relations?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We've actually done more than that over the last 10 years. In fact, we started by repealing some very harmful Conservative legislation that had just passed under the Harper Conservatives—reviled legislation that made it harder for unions to organize, made it harder for unions to bargain and made it harder for unions to collectively work with their members. We repealed that. In fact, the first act of the Trudeau government in 2015 was to restore the right of unions to bargain and organize.

The second thing we did was introduce pay equity legislation for federally regulated workers. That was, again, very early. It was about making sure workers had opportunities to receive equal pay for work of equal value.

We also introduced harassment and violence prevention legislation for federally regulated workers. This was a gap, believe it or not, that existed in the federally regulated space.

As you know, we've not stopped. We have taken many other actions, including anti-scab legislation, a federal minimum wage that is indexed to inflation and adding paid sick days to the Canada Labour Code. The list goes on.

That has all been done with the focus of creating a strong federal labour force, in some cases meeting the provincial codes, and in other cases inspiring a level playing field for workers across the country.

[Translation]

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

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to go quickly, because time is running out.

Minister, the departmental plan calls for a spending reduction of \$156.8 million in 2026-27. What services will be affected, in concrete terms? There are 30 seconds left.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In 30 seconds, I'll turn to the officials for a very brief—

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: I have more questions for you, so be brief.

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'll turn to the officials briefly.

[Translation]

Paul Thompson (Deputy Minister, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you very much for the question.

We're going to protect service delivery. That's a very important principle when it comes to budget cuts. We're focusing on the administrative aspects and the sectors that support the rest of the department, and we're minimizing the impact on service delivery. Only people in administrative functions will be affected by these cuts, for efficiency reasons.

Andréanne Larouche: Thank you.

Minister, earlier, you mentioned the Canada summer jobs program and the issue of youth employment. Despite everything, I am receiving resolutions from municipalities. Budgets are obviously still so tight that it's hard to meet the needs of organizations and municipalities. In a context where young people are struggling to find jobs, a number of community organizations still find the Canada summer jobs program too rigid. The same is true for municipalities.

What measures could be put in place to simplify access to funding? I ask because, clearly, there are still people who can't qualify, and young people who won't have a job this summer as a result.

• (0855)

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I disagree. We have 100,000 jobs, which is an increase of about 40,000 youth summer jobs, and we don't think we're going to have a problem filling those spots. This is a program about youth employment. We usually get more applications than we can fund.

We work very closely with all of you, as you know. There is a department that's also screening. You have an opportunity, as an MP, to influence what jobs will be available in your riding, for a variety of reasons. For example, in my riding, I have to reorganize—

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: There are more applications than needs. You are going to receive resolutions from community organizations back home and municipalities that have been unable to get these jobs, given their limited budget.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

Next we have Ms. Falk for five minutes.

Rosemarie Falk: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thanks, Minister, for being here.

I need to follow up on comments you made to my colleague.

You cannot sit here and say that collectively we need to restore honour to the skilled trades and promote them as great careers for our young people while continuing to vilify skilled trade workers. It is your government that suggested that bringing construction workers into rural communities had harmful social and gender impacts, and it is your government that has continued to vilify the Canadian energy sector and those who work in that sector.

I will not take you saying one thing out of one side of your mouth while your actions say another. That is the truth. Your government has never supported trade workers.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I would counter that your party has voted repeatedly against trade workers. Every time we make investments in the trades—

Rosemarie Falk: Is that why former prime minister Justin Trudeau, in Argentina—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: You don't like this answer, do you, Ms. Falk?

Rosemarie Falk: It's my time.

The Chair: Order.

Please, if you're going to direct a question, give a reasonable time to the witness to respond.

Rosemarie Falk: It was a statement.

The Chair: Then thank the witness and tell them that you have another question and want to move on.

Rosemarie Falk: Okay.

I will say, to add to the statement I made, that it was your leader, Justin Trudeau, who at the G20 summit in Argentina said, “there are gender impacts when you bring construction workers into a rural area. There are social impacts because they're mostly male construction workers.” Being the head of a state and saying something like that on the world stage sends a message. That message was sent.

Those were my comments. I'm pointing out the hypocrisy of your government during the time you have sat in cabinet since you were a Trudeau-era appointed minister.

We know that Canada's natural resource sector remains one of our country's largest sources of high-paying entry-level and skilled trades jobs, particularly for our young workers, which you alluded to in your opening remarks. During our youth employment study, we heard that these sectors are facing barriers to investment and expansion. We know, as we have heard not just in this committee but in committees across the precinct, that Liberal anti-energy policies like Bill C-69—the “no more pipelines” bill—and the shipping ban are discouraging investment and sending jobs out of our country and down south.

Given your government's stated goal of building Canada strong and restoring honour to the trades, you must be in support of scrapping these harmful bills, which are choking our economy and holding back job creation. Is that correct?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I'd like to go back to the hypocrisy statement, and I would like to—

Rosemarie Falk: I'm sorry, Minister, but it is my time.

I have given my statements. I have done what the chair has said. I have moved on, and I have asked my questions. I would expect enough decorum and respect from you to answer the question that I am asking. This is not question period. We know we never get answers, which is why—

Leslie Church: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Clearly state the point of order.

Leslie Church: The point of order is that the member has asked a question, and the witness should be able to give a response.

• (0900)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Church.

I would again remind members, when you're directing a question or a statement, to give reasonable time for a witness to respond and then move on. It is the member's time.

Go ahead, Ms. Falk.

Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

My question was this. You must be in support of scrapping these policies, because they are preventing youth in Canada from going into the trades, with the well-paying jobs that you alluded to. I agree that trades are great-paying jobs. They give a great work-life balance a lot of times. These people are able to provide for their families.

It would make sense, then, with what you said in your opening remarks, that you do not support the anti-development, anti-energy policies that your government has pushed through.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I was a Trudeau minister when we built a pipeline. I will say that continually—

Rosemarie Falk: When you sold a pipeline....

Hon. Patty Hajdu: —we have supported energy projects across the country. Most recently, it was very exciting to hear about the sale of LNG to Germany through Ksi Lisims, which is obviously partially indigenous-owned.

Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, Minister.

My question was specifically about—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I think there are so many opportunities—

Rosemarie Falk: Minister, my question was—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair, I would like to finish my sentence.

Rosemarie Falk: I would like an answer, but you're not answering the question.

I asked specifically about energy policies like Bills C-69 and C-48, which was the tanker ban that your government pushed through under Trudeau. You're not answering that.

I will note as well that we've had investment leave this country. We had TMX, which was in Canada. It was made such a debacle by over-regulation with your government, with you sitting at the helm next to Justin Trudeau, that it left the country. We sold it down south, and now it's making money.

Our energy projects produce revenue for the government. Is that correct, yes or no?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Mr. Chair—

Rosemarie Falk: The revenue collected from the government goes to our social programs. It goes to our seniors. It goes to our \$10-a-day day care. It goes to parents with the child benefit.

It is baffling to me that your government doesn't want young people to go into the trades. If it did, you would be repealing this legislation—

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

Rosemarie Falk: —and we would be having energy projects across this country.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Order.

We have the minister appearing here on the supplementaries. I would ask all members to keep within the general context of the subject matter before the committee.

Minister, you have 10 seconds to respond.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: It's clear that the member opposite doesn't want a response. She wants to berate the minister, instead of looking at the incredible investment and growth happening in this country, partially stimulated by Bill C-5 but certainly by the Prime Minister, who's been working day and night to make sure that Canada is seen as not only a great country to invest in but also a great country to procure from.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Falk.

We'll conclude with Ms. Church for five minutes.

Leslie Church: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's always a pleasure to be at HUMA.

Thank you, Minister and officials, for appearing.

Minister, following up on that last exchange, I wonder if you would like to comment on some of the reactions to the team Canada strong plan. You and I have met with various organizations and institutions across the country, which have provided feedback on our plan to recruit, train and hire up to 100,000 new Red Seal skilled trades workers. What have you heard in reaction to this plan?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you very much for the question, and thanks for giving me a few moments to respond.

It's been an incredible launch. We've heard real enthusiasm from pretty much all of the sectors engaged. We've heard from employers that this is exactly what they need for recruiting the next generation of talent. We've heard from unions that they're very thrilled with the support for their members, in particular for their apprentices, who often face low completion rates related largely to financial concerns. Many of the measures we are supporting individuals with are financial boosts to make sure that it's not money that makes them drop out of the trades.

We've heard from trainers that they see merit in the attraction stage of the plan, which is about partnering with youth-serving organizations—colleges, high schools—to expose young people to the trades, contrary to what the member opposite was saying. In fact, over the last decade, many governments have worked to attract people to the trades.

We have seen an aging population in the skilled trades. My son is 29 years old, and he is the oldest operator on the job site. You can imagine, then, the challenges that employers are having, and it's with a variety of different skilled trades. It's not just the building trades. It's certainly all of the automotive trades.

There's passion and enthusiasm across the country. There's the \$6-billion investment, which the party opposite voted against. They like to talk about supports for workers and youth, but they vote against them every time, which to me is quite shocking because this is, one would think, something they would support. It's skilled trades. It's big projects. It's unions. It's youth. It's pretty much everyone.

There's excitement and enthusiasm, and everybody wants to help. Everybody has put their hands up to help. This is very exciting. There are some really good ideas out there about how to utilize this program in a way that will help us launch the next generation of skilled trades workers.

Leslie Church: Go ahead, Ms. Harrison.

• (0905)

Emma Harrison (Peterborough, Lib.): Good morning, Minister.

You and I have spoken about this. I come from a skilled trades family. My dad and my brother are members of the International Union of Operating Engineers, and my childhood was marked by travelling Ontario—northern Ontario—to visit my dad. He passed away in 2010 from pancreatic cancer, but this is a moment in time I wish he could have seen. I wish he could see our government's commitment and passion behind supporting and developing Canada's skilled trades sector.

I was recently at Fleming College, which has the Kawartha Trades and Technology Centre, and they are over the moon about what we are doing. I visited with a lot of students, especially in the welding sector, and they don't even have enough spots to host the number of students who would like to go into welding specifically.

My dad was a self-taught welder and a self-taught heavy-equipment mechanic, but he was highly sought after. He spent a lot of

time in Fort McMurray, in the oil sands, as did my brother. When we talk about this, one thing is sometimes missing. Yes, there are really well-paying jobs, highly skilled jobs, but it's about the pride that comes with being a skilled tradesperson. Now that my dad is gone, when I travel the country, there is a physical manifestation of my dad across the country because of the projects he was part of.

As we talk about this, I feel that our government has really encompassed how important these jobs are. We have approached this in a really thoughtful way so we can make sure that people go from start to finish through the Red Seal trades.

If there's still some time left, could you elaborate on some of the supports for this and how we're going to see, from start to finish, people making it through a Red Seal certification?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: Thank you so much for telling the story of your dad. That's the story of so many tradespeople. They were self-taught and certified at a time when it was completely different. I don't know if your dad is retired or not, but those are the journeypeople who are now training the next generation.

I would say that your dad travelled a lot, and to tag into Ms. Falk's comments, there are challenges that men in particular face when they're far away from home. I want to acknowledge how hard that was on your family.

My son also travels for work. There is a deep concern in the trades about mental health supports for men in particular—women too, but it's often men—who are far away from home, feeling lonely and feeling bored, in some cases. They're in a work camp far away. That has come up, and we are working to give full support to people who are far away.

Laila Goodridge: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes.

Laila Goodridge: Those are explicitly the comments that the minister said did not exist. She's literally saying them right now.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I did not say that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Goodridge and Ms. Harrison.

Thank you, Minister.

This part of the meeting has concluded. Thank you for a very spirited round of questions.

Before we—

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

The minister is scheduled to be here for an hour, which isn't that long. We have time for another round of opposition questions.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Genuis.

We're moving to the votes, which I have to conclude.

Garnett Genuis: Chair, no, we're not moving to the votes. We have five minutes to allow questions from the opposition. The minister is scheduled to appear for an hour. It is on the agenda for the minister to appear for an hour. There is time for—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Garnett Genuis: We have very little time with the minister, in general. The minister is here. I want to respect her time and the commitment she made to us.

I'm happy to split the remaining time with the government, which is more than I should offer, frankly.

The Chair: To accommodate that, I will give one question to the opposition.

• (0910)

Garnett Genuis: Two and a half minutes each....

The Chair: No. I'll give you a two-minute question and a two-minute—

Emma Harrison: Can the minister finish her answer?

The Chair: Yes, I'll allow the minister to finish her—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*] question. You're not letting her answer.

The Chair: I will suspend the meeting if order is not restored.

Minister, conclude your answer. Then I'll give one question to the opposition for two minutes, and I'll give two minutes to the government.

Rosemarie Falk: She was already over time and now, instead—

The Chair: Do you want to suspend or do you want the question?

Minister, finish your comments.

Then we'll go on, and then we'll conclude.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I will finish my comments.

I want to say two things. Unions are very concerned about supports for their members when they're pursuing labour mobility, which is a big part of life in the trades. There's a lot of work happening with unions around mental health in the workforce, especially with remote working, including things like physical activity and opportunities for entertainment. Many unions talk about the unsuitable accommodations provided by the employer and the advocacy they're doing to get better accommodations for people who are working far away.

I just wanted to acknowledge your dad.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Genuis, it's your question. You have two minutes.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

Just to follow up on claims about the airline worker strike leading to shortages of organ tissue, Blacklock's did an ATIP request on this that revealed there was simply no evidence for that claim. Was the department's response to the ATIP not accurate?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: There's evidence that comes in from a number of different sources. I was briefed that there would be a shortage of medical supplies, including, potentially, organs and—

Garnett Genuis: Did that briefing include departmental officials?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: In the number of briefings I had, I was informed that this was going to create critical shortages of medical supplies.

Garnett Genuis: Were officials present or providing that briefing?

Caroline Desrochers (Trois-Rivières, Lib.): I have a point of order.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I've said three times now that I received a briefing.

The Chair: This is getting repetitive, Mr. Genuis.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: There were many people working on this, and it was undeniably clear.

Garnett Genuis: I understand what you're saying, Minister. It's just that the department had absolutely no record of any of those conversations.

An hon. member: I have a point of order.

Garnett Genuis: It does seem that the precise correlation between the information you communicated and the facts is such as to cause epistemological problems of sufficient magnitude as to lay upon the logical and semantic resources of the English language—

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I know what epistemological means as well.

Garnett Genuis: —a heavier burden than they can reasonably be expected to bear.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: When there is a labour disruption the size of the one that occurred last summer, there are many disruptions, including for the cargo that Air Canada was supplying around the country—and the world, in fact.

Garnett Genuis: The department has no record of your being briefed on that.

Caroline Desrochers: The department already answered that.

Garnett Genuis: You claim you've been briefed. You won't tell us if officials were present or not for that briefing.

I'll go back to the officials. Normally when briefings take place, senior officials are present. There is a record of that, yet this ATIP provided no response. Was the ATIP accurate? Does the department have any such information?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: I find it interesting that the member has never been a minister, and he “normally” knows what briefings look like.

Garnett Genuis: I was a ministerial staffer. I know how briefings work. I've sat in on many of them.

The Chair: Ms. Church, you have two minutes.

Leslie Church: Minister, I know how important the provinces and territories are as partners in delivering on employment and our skilled trades objectives. I'm just wondering if you could speak a bit to how important the government's labour market agreements with provinces and territories are in supporting training and upskilling our workers affected by tariffs.

Hon. Patty Hajdu: The majority of training, including for Red Seal workers, is jurisdictionally the responsibility of the provinces and territories, and we are there as a supportive partner.

First of all, we transfer \$3 billion a year to provinces and territories to help with training. The training occurs in a number of different ways. Some of the institutions, you might be familiar with. Youth Employment Services, for example, would be supported in part by federal funds. Of course, provinces and territories have contributions of their own to skills training in a variety of different ways. We also support them through additional top-ups, as I mentioned. I won't reinform you about that. I think you heard my answer around EI measures.

Then, finally, we partner with provinces and territories in a number of important ways on our youth employment strategy. We augment transfers through funding youth employment opportunities across the country. Student work placements are often coordinated through provincial and territorial organizations. We work very closely with them to make sure we're not duplicating and stepping on each other's toes.

What we're trying to offer is really an approach where people have.... I like to say that every door is the right door, and no matter where someone goes in, they're going to find supports. Obviously, there are still gaps. That's why we have the spring economic update, with the \$6-billion investment in Red Seal trades.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We're going to conclude, to be fair, with Madame Larouche for two minutes.

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche: Minister, requests for food assistance, housing support and social services are skyrocketing across Quebec. That's what I heard on the ground during the past two constituency weeks.

Does the government consider that the current budget meets the scale of the needs? What programs could be enhanced?

Hon. Patty Hajdu: We're working with Quebec, with all due respect, because the province is very good at carrying out programs. We have meetings with the provinces to provide funding so that they can improve their own programs. I often think of the programs that work very well in Quebec. We learn from them: We draw in-

spiration from how its programs are designed and apply that to other federal programs.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

Thank you as well, Minister and officials.

[English]

We will now move to the votes on the main estimates.

CANADIAN ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$11,786,820

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$8,500,000

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Vote 1—Program expenditures.....\$5,947,344

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$1,111,834,762

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$12,513,074,018

(Votes 1 and 5 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report these votes on the main estimates to the House, less the amount voted in interim supply?

An hon. member: On division.

The Chair: I will report them to the House on division.

Thank you, colleagues.

We'll now suspend for a short time to prepare for the next panel, which is on homelessness.

● (0915)

(Pause)

● (0920)

The Chair: Committee members, please take your seats as we begin the second hour of today's meeting.

I would like to take a few moments to remind those appearing who were not here before that you have the option of participating in today's meeting in the official language of your choice. To do that, please make sure you're on the right channel. If you're in the room, have your earpiece on so that you are hearing the presentations. If you're appearing virtually, please click on the globe icon at the bottom of your screen and choose the official language of your choice. If there is an interruption in interpretation, please get my attention and we will suspend.

Having said that, one witness who was to appear virtually, Ms. Savage, did not pass the sound quality test for interpretation, so she will be rescheduled for a later time.

Please direct all comments through the chair. Wait until I recognize you by name before proceeding.

We are now moving into our study on homelessness in Canada. I would like to welcome our witnesses appearing in person.

From the Calgary Drop-In and Rehab Centre Society, we have Sandra Clarkson, president and chief executive officer, and from Table itinérance Rive-Sud, we have Gilles Beauregard, coordinator.

You each have up to five minutes for opening statements.

We'll begin with you, Ms. Clarkson, please.

● (0925)

Sandra Clarkson (President and Chief Executive Officer, Calgary Drop-In and Rehab Centre Society): Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for the invitation to appear here today.

As mentioned, my name is Sandra Clarkson. I'm the CEO of the Calgary Drop-In Centre, which is one of the largest homeless shelters in the country. It's able to shelter over 1,000 individuals each night. I'm also a co-chair of the Canadian Shelter Transformation Network, which is a growing national collaboration of shelter leaders, frontline organizations, researchers and system partners working together to modernize homeless response systems.

This shift is critical to the homelessness response in Canada. As we're witnessing from coast to coast, homelessness has become more complex. Shelters are increasingly responding to severe addiction, mental illness, chronic health needs, aging, cognitive impairment and long-term homelessness, while communities also face deep housing affordability pressures and too little supportive housing.

Shelters are being asked to serve as emergency response, health stabilization, mental health support and housing providers of last resort. This is not sustainable or humane. We need a homelessness response that remains housing-focused, is better integrated with health and recovery systems and is designed for the level of complexity that communities are now facing.

Housing must remain the central goal. Homelessness is fundamentally a housing issue. Emergency shelters matter, but they cannot become long-term destinations or carry the full burden of the housing crisis.

We need greater investment in support of housing, including deeply affordable housing, transitional housing, medical respite, and housing models with integrated supports matched to differing levels of acuity. Buildings alone do not create housing stability. Supportive housing succeeds when there is sustainable funding. Federal investments are strongest when capital development and long-term operational supports are aligned.

Homelessness and addiction cannot be discussed separately. The toxic drug supply has sharply increased the medical and behavioural complexity seen in shelters and on our streets. One of the clearest themes emerging is the profound impact of addiction and the toxic drug supply. This is not simply about public disorder. It is about human vulnerability, trauma, health and survival. Communities need treatment, detox, mental health supports, harm reduction

and long-term recovery pathways that are integrated with housing responses.

Reaching Home should support system transformation. Reaching Home has strengthened coordination and housing-focused practice, but its next phase should also help communities modernize outdated systems. A dedicated homelessness system transformation fund could support integrated health care partnerships, stabilization and recovery environments, prevention and diversion, coordinated access modernization and stronger pathways into housing so that communities can move beyond managing demand and toward better outcomes. This dedicated transformation fund would allow communities to innovate while remaining grounded in measurable outcomes.

Policy must reflect high-acuity need, sustainable operations and prevention. Federal policy should recognize high-acuity homelessness as a distinct challenge requiring integrated housing, health care, mental health and recovery supports. It should also align capital investment with sustainable operating funding, support workforce stability and place greater emphasis on prevention and diversion, including discharge planning, eviction prevention and indigent-led approaches. Communities need integrated federal-provincial responses built around shared outcomes, not isolated funding silos.

In closing, homelessness in Canada is more complex and more acute than our current systems were designed to address. The response must stay grounded in housing, but it must also be better integrated with health, addiction and recovery supports. If we want better outcomes, we must invest not only in an emergency response, but in system transformation, sustainable operations, and prevention.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear today. I look forward to your questions.

● (0930)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Clarkson.

[Translation]

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

Gilles Beauregard (Coordinator, Table Itinérance Rive-Sud): Good morning, everyone. My name is Gilles Beauregard. I am the coordinator of Table Itinérance Rive-Sud, as well as a proud dad of three children and granddad of grandchildren. I'm proud of all of that, and that is why I mention it.

I have been working in the addiction and homelessness field in Quebec for 40 years. I'm very proud of that. I would like to thank just about everyone.

In the 2000s, I saw what homelessness was like in downtown Montreal. It wasn't easy. That was when funding first came into existence for homelessness groups. The federal government first set up the homelessness partnering initiative. It was then renamed the homelessness partnering strategy. It's now called Reaching Home.

Over the years, this funding for Quebec has gone from \$20 million to \$35 million. After the COVID-19 pandemic, that amount rose to \$80 million. I think that Quebec currently receives \$90 million a year. This has changed the face of Quebec. In the past, most of the funding went to downtown Montreal. Now, more and more funding is being allocated to Quebec as a whole. That's a good thing and a triumph.

Before I comment on what needs to be improved, I think it's important to mention the successes we have collectively achieved. During this period, we have seen both Liberal and Conservative governments come and go. Everyone has done good things, then, and that should be highlighted.

It has also served as a lever for Quebec. In the early 2000s, it was mainly the federal government that gave money. In fact, almost 100% of the money came from the federal government. Over the years, the provincial government has also given money. Its share is now 40%. Of course, the federal government is still very present, but the Government of Quebec also provides funding. Obviously, I can't speak for the other provinces. I can't speak for Ms. Clarkson or for Alberta. What I can say is that, for Quebec, it was a good thing.

For those who don't know, Canada and Quebec have an agreement regarding homelessness. This agreement isn't always easy to manage. Even so, people get along. Quebec very much favours a holistic approach. Fundamentally, this approach focuses heavily on housing, as well as—and this is what we hope to see—resources such as street outreach and support services. For us, it's important to have various measures in place.

When it comes to the Reaching Home program, which is ongoing, there are things that concern us. We would like its funding to be indexed. Unfortunately, despite all the good work we are doing, despite all the money that has been put into this, homelessness is on the rise. It is important to continue the fight and index this money. Often, we receive an envelope for each year, but the amount is not indexed.

It should also be possible to carry amounts forward. Administratively speaking, amounts committed in one year cannot be carried forward to the following year. That sometimes makes the work difficult, especially since the administrative rules aren't always that clear. This leads groups to spend a lot of time working on accountability and less time working with people experiencing homelessness, even though that's what they want to do.

Quebec had a count of people experiencing homelessness, and the number of people experiencing visible homelessness has gone from 10,000 to 12,000. We expect that number to continue rising.

Homelessness exists in all regions of Quebec, and I think it must also exist in all regions of Alberta. Homelessness is everywhere, and it's very worrisome. Small towns that didn't have a homelessness problem now do. Some members of the committee, such as Ms. Larouche, Mr. Joseph and Ms. Desrochers, are very present on the ground.

You can see it; there is homelessness everywhere. We still have work to do to reverse the trend.

I'll end on that.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beauregard.

[English]

We'll now begin the first round of questions. We'll go to Mr. Aitchison for six minutes.

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

I want to thank both of the witnesses who are here.

I'm going to start with Ms. Clarkson.

Can you talk to us a bit more about the efforts you're making at the drop-in centre—not just to house people in emergency shelter, but to truly house people? I'd like to get into this business of understanding not just why homelessness is growing, but how we need to address the issue long-term. The goal is actually ending homelessness.

I'm wondering if you could speak specifically to efforts you're making at the drop-in centre and what we should be doing differently nationally and provincially.

Sandra Clarkson: At the Calgary Drop-In Centre, we made a very conscious choice in 2018 to become a housing-focused emergency shelter. Every program and service we offer is intended to lead to a positive housing outcome. Since that time, we've housed over 4,000 people, 70% of whom are in private market housing without a rental subsidy and have been able to maintain their housing. Our return-to-shelter rate has been less than 5% since that time.

A fundamental shift as we look at homeless services across the country is to ensure that every program and service is aimed at a positive housing outcome that can be maintained for people. We need to recognize that it might not always stick the first time, but it's about getting clear on the individual needs and matching them to appropriate housing with relevant supports for the time they need them. Moreover, we need to recognize that everyone who's experienced an episode of homelessness does not necessarily need supportive housing and that CAA should really be considered a last resort for many.

Scott Aitchison: I have a follow-up question, then. Would you say there are very well-meaning organizations in the homelessness space that don't approach their operation the same way you've described, but just look to house as many people as possible?

Sandra Clarkson: Emergency shelters traditionally have been funded with the expected outcomes being more output-based, such as sleep nights, meals served, etc., without any expectation of housing outcomes. Certainly in our experience in the province of Alberta, our funding agreements were actually incentivizing us to be full and not have flow-through shelter, because it was based on a per diem rate. That is the wrong metric to be incentivizing; it should be about positive housing outcomes.

We've worked very closely with the provincial government to incorporate housing-focused outcomes and language into the core service agreements. It's about moving beyond immediate needs—food, clothing and shelter—to actually finding a pathway for people out of homelessness and reintegrating them back into the community.

Scott Aitchison: Would you say that oftentimes—certainly in the past—the approach to addressing homelessness issues in communities was all too often about creating a band-aid, like giving some money to make sure there aren't people on the street, and that's where it ended? Are we only now starting to address this in a more comprehensive way?

I think it was said that Quebec favours a more holistic approach. A holistic approach, I would think, is actually ending homelessness. Imagine if our goal were to put you guys out of business, for example.

What would you change federally, whether it's the Reaching Home program or the renewal that's about to start with the government's national housing strategy? What would you change with the way those programs operate to make the work you're doing easier?

● (0940)

Sandra Clarkson: The biggest need we see is for more supportive housing and operational support to provide that housing, particularly for really complex individuals. The Calgary Drop-In Centre is a low-barrier shelter, and the complexity of the people we see continues to increase year over year. The challenge is that there is nowhere for them to go, so they continue to languish in shelter. They are often our high system users who are very visible in downtown cores, and we need to address that really complex population to help with some of the visibility issues. More and more, people in the community don't want to see them. They don't really care what happens; they just don't want to see them.

We have an opportunity to really modernize our homeless-serving systems of care to be relentlessly housing-focused, from prevention to getting somebody into recovery treatment and housing. That's what I would recommend: that we look at the continuum and work together with provincial partners to ensure that we're all rowing in the same direction and not operating in silos.

The Chair: You have five seconds left.

Scott Aitchison: Thank you. I hope we'll have an opportunity to talk some more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aitchison.

[Translation]

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

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

I'd like to thank Mr. Beauregard and Ms. Clarkson for being here.

Mr. Beauregard, we're going to discuss prevention. Many experts say that prevention remains the most effective tool for reversing the trend. Based on your experience, do you agree with that observation?

Gilles Beauregard: Prevention is definitely important. For example, young people leaving youth centres find themselves without support and end up on the streets. That isn't what we want. Homelessness isn't their life journey. That means it's important to intervene quickly with that type of client. We don't want these young people to experience homelessness. Like all members of this committee, we want to end homelessness. This is an important way to prioritize these young people.

These days, a new phenomenon is emerging in the major shelters, which Ms. Clarkson is no doubt seeing in Calgary. People who work, who have jobs, are ending up in the centres. It makes no sense. It's important to work with that type of client. In terms of serious cases, it's more complex when the time comes to intervene. However, these cases are less complex: Since these people have fewer experiences with homelessness, the mountain to climb is lower. It's important to reach young people aged 18 to 25 and workers.

However, when it comes to intervening in complex cases, relationships have to be built. When someone in their family—be it a brother, sister or uncle—has a substance abuse and addiction problem, it takes time to develop a trusting relationship with them; there's no magic wand. The profile of people experiencing homelessness differs across Canada: there are young people, seniors and people who are working. Their journeys are completely different, and that's why each case has to be addressed on its own merits. There's also the case of indigenous people. If people from Manitoba were here beside me, they could tell us about the indigenous people who live in Winnipeg. These are complex situations.

When it comes to Quebec, what it does well is that it makes a collective effort within the ecosystems. There are a number of ecosystems in Quebec, some 15 of them. Whether it's in Trois-Rivières, Longueuil, Montreal or Laval, each ecosystem approaches the problem a bit differently. It makes a difference when communities work together, when communities, cities, police, community groups and the municipal level work together. Working in partnership makes a huge difference. There isn't just one solution; there are several.

● (0945)

Natilien Joseph: There are experts who say that prevention costs less than getting someone off the streets. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Gilles Beauregard: The Union des municipalités du Québec did a study on the cost associated with that. I think it determined this to be around \$70,000 per homeless person. Of course, there's always a cost associated with reintegration. There may be a way to look at homelessness from an economic perspective. However, the fact remains that these people are human beings; they are our brothers and sisters. It's important to mention that we're all responsible. We have a collective responsibility in this regard.

Natilien Joseph: If I understand correctly, you're telling us that prevention costs less.

Gilles Beauregard: Yes, certainly.

Natilien Joseph: Statistics show that the loss of affordable housing is the main cause of homelessness.

Build Canada Homes is the new federal agency, which will soon be a Crown corporation. It is providing an initial amount of \$1 billion dollars to build supportive, transitional housing. Do you think its goal, which is to build affordable housing at scale, is a practical solution to reverse the trend?

Gilles Beauregard: I commend the fact that a lot of money is being invested. We will be happy that there's money for our projects. We're not quite sure how it's going to go. Build Canada Homes is being organized slowly, not quickly, but we also think it's important for it to not be at the expense of the Reaching Home program, for which we're requesting an increase and indexed funding.

Natilien Joseph: A 2026 CIRANO report determined that, for Quebec alone, the economic costs associated with homelessness for the 2022–23 fiscal year were conservatively estimated at \$782 million. Should we present the fight against homelessness more as a social and economic investment?

Gilles Beauregard: As an economic investment, that's fine. However, earlier, I was walking around Ottawa and saw some pretty wild things. Things are pretty chaotic here too. As a father, it touches my heart that, yes, we can approach homelessness from an economic perspective, but these are still human beings. It remains unacceptable that we see people in crisis in Ottawa.

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Beauregard.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

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

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

Ms. Clarkson, thank you very much for sharing a perspective from western Canada.

For my first question, I will turn to you, Mr. Beauregard. I commend you on your work. How many years of commitment were you referring to?

Gilles Beauregard: It's been 40 years.

Andréanne Larouche: It is to your credit that you work in an environment that is not always easy.

As you said, things are very turbulent, but it's not just in Montreal and on the South Shore. I am a member of the National Assembly, and my constituency is Granby. Homelessness has spread enormously. Even in the suburbs surrounding major cities, homelessness is often less visible but growing rapidly.

Beyond the number of people experiencing visible homelessness, we could also talk about those experiencing hidden homelessness, such as women who, unfortunately, agree to sleep on a couch in exchange for certain services, under conditions that aren't always ideal. I'm also thinking of a story I heard last week about a mother and her daughter who are forced to stay with an uncle in a house with, to put it mildly, questionable sanitary conditions, because they have nowhere else to go. They can't find anything suitable for them. How does this reality manifest itself today—this hidden homelessness? How does it manifest itself outside of major urban centres?

Gilles Beauregard: Hidden homelessness is even harder to address outside major urban centres, in rural areas like Granby or other places, because it's hard to spot. When it's outside major urban centres, it becomes difficult for our teams to access resources and reach people, because they're so far away. When our teams go to their homes, the trips are long, and they see very few people.

We had a conference on homelessness in Sherbrooke on Monday, and one of the things that came up was the meaningful connection you build with the people you serve. When people are far away, that connection is hard to establish. Personally, I have family issues. I have to go see the person, and I have to meet them, because we're close. You have to build a lot of connections with people. Hidden homelessness is truly a major challenge for groups in Quebec and everywhere, I'm convinced of that. You have to be very proactive in these approaches. You can't be reactive; you have to reach out to people. You have to try to identify them.

It's important to have people doing outreach. A lot of outreach is needed. Let's try to get people out in the field. Increasingly, in Quebec, we're proud of our community policing services. They don't just respond to incidents; they do a lot of outreach. I strongly encourage this. We work with various police stations. I think we have some initiatives in Trois-Rivières as well. We have some in Longueuil. In Montreal, we have the Mobile Mediation and Social Intervention Team. It's important that we have a lot of people on the ground who aren't necessarily responding to incidents, but who identify individuals and sound the alarm if they think something serious is about to happen.

• (0950)

Andréanne Larouche: The staff at the Granby police station, which I visited, have also developed significant expertise with community police officers, particularly regarding homelessness. Over the past two weeks, I've actually had the opportunity to speak with them. It's extremely interesting. There are also mobile units that have been set up to travel around and locate people, notably Impact de rue Haute-Yamaska. I also know that, in the Rouville area, they go out into the Saint-Césaire and Rougemont neighbourhoods. They do this because, outside major urban centres, the reality is that we have to locate people across vast areas to see what is happening and where these people are. So, I want to emphasize that.

Do federal programs take these regional realities and hidden homelessness sufficiently into account?

I'd like to go back to the Reaching Home program. Mr. Beauregard, I'd like to hear your comments, because there are new communities that would like to be designated. It's not normal that there are places on the South Shore that aren't designated communities, and that Granby isn't yet a designated community. These communities aren't getting their share of the Reaching Home program.

Gilles Beauregard: That's for sure. For those who weren't present, the concept was that in Canada, there were designated areas. There were about forty designated zones, including surely about fifteen in Quebec. Calgary was also one of them, as were Edmonton, Vancouver and Winnipeg. In Quebec, there were several. However, unfortunately, there were places where there were no designated zones. Back then, that was fine, because homelessness was concentrated mainly in the major cities. Now, however, it has spread everywhere, and municipalities that are not designated unfortunately receive less funding.

This concept of designated zones could be somewhat re-examined as part of your review, because homelessness is a phenomenon that has changed, and this concept results in certain areas being left out and lacking funding. Our network is increasingly trying to ensure that the concept of designated zones is used less as an intervention tool.

On the South Shore, there have also been instances where federal funding was available, but it was not allocated based on designated zones. There have been agreements, but I think this should be reviewed.

Andréanne Larouche: This week, I also received a letter from the Haut-Richelieu-Rouville Community Development Corporation regarding organizations such as POSA/Source des Monts and others in the Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu area. These people explained to me just how much they clearly need far more resources right now to take action, because the needs are there and growing.

Gilles Beauregard: Let me remind you of what I said earlier about follow-up. POSA/Source des Monts is an outreach organization. We're talking about support. That's what's needed, because, right now, yes, shelters are good, but support is also needed to ensure that—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beauregard.

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

[English]

Laila Goodridge: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the work you guys do in communities.

Specifically, Ms. Clarkson, I had an opportunity to tour the Calgary Drop-In Centre back in August 2023 and got to see first-hand the spectacular work you guys do serving a very vulnerable population and specifically the successes of your targeted encampment program. I met many of the individuals you took out of encampments, and I got to hear their stories and about their journey towards recovery.

Could you talk a bit about that program? I ask because so many communities are having problems with encampments, but their provincial or local governments haven't taken the leadership role that Calgary and Alberta did to dismantle encampments.

• (0955)

Sandra Clarkson: Thank you for that.

During COVID, we had significant encampments build up outside of our main shelter facility in the downtown core of Calgary, and it was becoming very unsafe for individuals who were out there, for people trying to seek access to our services and for our staff to come to work.

We approached the Calgary Police Service with the idea of working collaboratively with them to address the safety issues of those encampments with a social-service-first, enforcement-second approach. We found there were many individuals in the encampment who were housed in the community but were using tents as cover for organized crime.

We took the time to figure out who was who in there and who was vulnerable and who was being predatory, and we really targeted social service interventions for those who were the most vulnerable and worked with them first. We housed 32 individuals directly from the encampment as part of that exercise. It was called Operation East Side. It was highly collaborative with multiple departments in the city and worked very well. That is something we will continue to advocate for each and every time.

Laila Goodridge: One thing that I find sets you apart from many other organizations that I've had the opportunity of touring that are in the no- or very low-barrier homelessness space is your recovery-oriented system of care. Can you speak a little more about the successes you see in getting people into recovery and on their path toward treatment?

Sandra Clarkson: With the increase in the toxicity of the drug supply, the opioid crisis and its impacts, at the Calgary Drop-In Centre in 2018, which was the first year we started measuring or counting the number of drug poisonings that we responded to, we had 87. In 2023, we had over 3,000. It's a significant increase. We thought, yes, it's important to keep people alive, 100%. They need to be alive to take the next step, but it's not enough.

We advocated with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addiction in Alberta to provide medically supported detox or withdrawal management, as well as a recovery transition program for individuals so that we could offer something beyond naloxone. It has become a very critical and central point of the work we do.

The intention there was really about opening up more pathways to housing. If people are dealing with acute addiction issues, they're not going to be successful in housing, so this was a way to open that up.

Laila Goodridge: On behalf of Albertans, I want to sincerely thank you. The amazing work you've done is truly spectacular.

There's one particular individual I had the opportunity to meet when I went on that tour who is now living independently, has their children back and is doing spectacularly well. I've kept in touch with them. That started with the seed you guys planted when you allowed them to access recovery. You met them where they were at, but you didn't just leave them there like so many other places have done.

From the very bottom of my heart, I want to thank you.

● (1000)

Sandra Clarkson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Goodridge.

[Translation]

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

Caroline Desrochers (Trois-Rivières, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Esteemed witnesses, let me begin by thanking you for being here with us, but above all, for the work you do every day. It is incredibly important work. It is work you shouldn't have to do, because we hope to put an end to it. Thank you for being there day after day for the people who need it most.

Mr. Beauregard, as you mentioned, we are already considering the renewal of Canada's National Housing Strategy, one of the pillars of which will focus on combatting homelessness.

Over the past few weeks and months, I've done a lot of fieldwork to meet with organizations in different parts of Canada. What really stands out from these discussions is the importance of prevention, the importance of youth, and the importance of addressing the pipeline early on. So, right now, we need to work on two fronts: We must continue to ensure that we support people who are in a certain situation, and, at the same time, we need to work on the pipeline to prevent these situations from occurring.

The Reaching Home program is important. You mentioned designated communities. We are very interested in your recommendations.

Ms. Clarkson, later on, I'd like to hear you speak a little more about your suggestion regarding the initiative that, in your view, could help, and about how we might reassess the Reaching Home program by keeping what works well and correcting what needs to be corrected.

Obviously, the program to end encampments has been renewed. Initially, it was a two-year program that included emergency measures. It was renewed for a third year with an additional \$125 million in funding, because we heard that this measure had really helped organizations gain a better understanding of what is happening on the ground.

So, my first question concerns the program aimed at ending encampments. It is directed to both of you, Mr. Beauregard and Ms. Clarkson, but please answer quickly, because I have two other questions. Do you find that this program has been very helpful in fostering better coordination among stakeholders in the cities where you work, in gaining a better understanding of the data and in doing

outreach work on the streets to understand the needs of people living in encampments?

[English]

Sandra Clarkson: The encampment funding was incredibly beneficial. We had a challenge in Calgary. We spun up an encampment shelter, working in partnership with two other service organizations that did outreach. One was indigenous-focused and the other was transitional housing for people leaving encampments.

In an eight-month period, the outcomes in that program were extremely high. Unfortunately, the funding ended and then started up again for just another one-year period. It's really difficult to run a program for six or eight months without multi-year funding. I would recommend that multi-year funding and operationally sustainable funding be considered on the encampment side.

[Translation]

Gilles Beauregard: We are in the same situation. Responses to funding requests arrive late, so when we set up the program from September to March, the bulk of the work is done in the summer. As Ms. Clarkson said, we're glad there's funding, but if it were possible to have a longer period, that would provide more visibility.

We mustn't forget that we're developing new programs, but this is still an evolving phenomenon that isn't easy to contain.

So, the answer to your question is yes, but we want greater predictability.

Caroline Desrochers: Perfect. Thank you.

Mr. Beauregard, you mentioned the study by the Union of Quebec Municipalities stating that a homeless person costs the government approximately \$70,000 per year.

[English]

We know that the support of the provinces across Canada is not even...with respect to coming to the table with wraparound services. I'd like to hear from you, Ms. Clarkson—because I'm very familiar with the situation in Quebec—about Alberta and other provinces that you'd be familiar with in respect of that piece about the support for transition. In Build Canada Homes, we have \$1 billion, but it is predicated on the provinces coming to the table and providing support.

Give a short answer, please.

● (1005)

Sandra Clarkson: The provincial partnership is absolutely critical. Ideally, we're working towards the same outcomes.

In the province of Alberta, the encampment funding is a very great example. For that bilateral funding agreement, it took quite a long time to work through the details. You're right that there has to be coordination between the federal and provincial governments if we're going to really make a dent in this issue.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Desrochers.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two minutes and thirty seconds.

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

Mr. Beauregard, let's go back briefly to what I was saying about funding needs. These have been quantified: for example, every year, just for the CDC Haut-Richelieu-Rouville, there is a shortfall of just over \$900,000 across the entire region to maintain current services. In terms of intervention, I'm thinking of groups like Actions Dépendances, Maison Oxygène Haut-Richelieu, Passe-moi la puck, or POSA/Source des Monts. Five services and three organizations are currently at risk and may have to close or scale back their operations by March 31, 2027. I received this information earlier this week.

As for the program to end encampments, at the beginning of the year, I brought together people from various organizations that benefit from it: Auberge sous mon toit, Le Passant, and Partage Notre-Dame in Granby. Last fall, there was talk that it might not be renewed after March 31. Ultimately, funds were allocated. However, how does this kind of uncertainty and lack of predictability hinder your organizations and the work you do?

Gilles Beauregard: Renewal takes place on March 31. When we haven't heard anything by March 1, for example, that means we have to tell the members of the current teams that they may no longer have a job and that we're going to give them their 4%. So, we lose the expertise of these people, who are connected to the field and to our community. I'll say it again: Relationships with people are the foundation. We work on policy, but it's the people on our teams who are out in the field every day.

It's a major problem when we lack predictability. It creates uncertainty. During January and February, workers tell themselves they'll look for another job elsewhere. I don't know if you've ever worked with homeless people; it's not easy. So, we need reliable people. We can't afford to be changing staff on a daily basis.

Predictability is one of our expectations. Could we have agreements not just for one year, but for two or three years—or as long as possible—so that we can develop appropriate programs? Often, these appropriate programs are built over time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

Ms. Falk, you have five minutes.

Rosemarie Falk: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for taking the time to be here to share their experiences with us. I also want to thank you guys for doing the hard work and recognizing the dignity of a person, because people have dignity. Know that I really appreciate that and the work you're doing. I find sometimes this place is very black and white, and that's not life. Life is literally the grey.

A lot of policies are boxed into the idea that you either fit here or fit there, and if you don't fit into either one, then it's "too bad, so sad". It's important that we have the grey area and have people rec-

ognizing the importance of it, because I believe that's where real change and transformation happen. When we look at the dignity of the person, we should meet them where they're at and give them a hand-up.

That's obviously in conjunction with the provincial and municipal governments, with wraparound services. That's also essential to this. I always use the saying that you can take a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. It's the same with us. We can do everything, but if the will is not there.... That's why we meet people where they're at and help to ignite that. I want to thank you guys for doing what you're doing.

My first question is for Ms. Clarkson.

From your perspective at the Calgary Drop-In Centre, how has homelessness in Calgary evolved over time in terms of who is coming through your doors and the challenges they are presenting?

• (1010)

Sandra Clarkson: It certainly has changed considerably in the last 10 years. As I mentioned earlier in my statement, given the increase in the impact of the toxic drug supply and the amount of addiction we're seeing, compounded with mental health issues, the complexity is unlike anything any of us ever could have predicted. It's highlighting the gaps in the mental health system and the health care system.

At the Calgary Drop-In Centre, we really and truly are the catch-all. We work with people nobody else will, and the work is getting harder and harder. Although we're really good at getting people housed as quickly and as sustainably as possible, there are more and more folks showing up with real complexities and there is nowhere for them to go. We really need to address that.

Rosemarie Falk: Are you seeing more people, then, with comorbidities?

Sandra Clarkson: I would say yes, 100%. It's the complexity of mental health and addictions and, with that, hypoxic brain injuries from repeated overdoses, etc.—

Rosemarie Falk: Yes. There are unintended consequences.

Sandra Clarkson: —where there is not a lot of rehabilitative runway.

Rosemarie Falk: I don't know if you're able to answer this question, but how much of the current demand is tied to housing affordability versus health-related factors such as mental health issues and substance abuse?

Sandra Clarkson: Well, I think ultimately housing is the answer to homelessness.

Rosemarie Falk: Yes, for sure.

Sandra Clarkson: We can't get away from that.

Certainly in the city of Calgary, the number of deeply affordable.... Affordable is great, but that's not meeting the need of this population. It's deeply affordable and supportive housing that is a critical component and is currently significantly underserved.

In addition to the health supports you're talking about, right now we're undergoing a study. We're looking at what it would take to house everybody at the Calgary Drop-In Centre tomorrow. We're doing a really deep dive into what the housing and support needs are of every individual. We're estimating that right now, out of the average shelter population of about 800 individuals per night, over 200 of them require some of the higher level of support, and some need the 24-7 high-needs support.

Rosemarie Falk: Do you guys track long-term outcomes?

Sandra Clarkson: Yes.

Rosemarie Falk: Do you have any information that you can table with this committee, even if you don't have it with you today, on what the success rate is for people staying housed in the long term after they leave?

Sandra Clarkson: Yes. What I can share is that since 2018, when we started shifting our focus to being housing-focused, our return-to-shelter rate has been less than 5%, and we've housed close to 4,000 people.

Rosemarie Falk: That's awesome. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Falk.

That's a very impressive outcome, Ms. Clarkson.

[Translation]

We will conclude with Mr. Joseph.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will echo your remarks.

Ms. Clarkson, thank you very much for being here and for the work you do.

Mr. Beauregard, I also thank you for the work you have been doing for over 40 years.

Ms. Clarkson, I would like to ask you two more specific questions about youth homelessness. What percentage of young people in your community are experiencing homelessness? In your experience, how do young people end up experiencing homelessness?

[English]

Sandra Clarkson: The Calgary Drop-In Centre is an adult-serving organization, but in terms of what we're noticing in the city of Calgary, there are a significant number of homeless youths. With our community partners, we've done a really great job of trying to intervene very quickly. You mentioned earlier the importance of having a quick intervention. In fact, they've reduced the number of youth shelter beds in the city of Calgary because they are able to do that prevention diversion work quite effectively.

Continued investment in that upstream effort is a critical component of this solution.

• (1015)

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Ms. Clarkson.

Mr. Beauregard, I would also like to address you on this matter. We know that in Quebec, after the Youth Protection Branch has been involved, there are risks. You mentioned this in your remarks. However, I imagine these are not the only risks.

Can you specify the main risks regarding youth homelessness in Quebec? We have also discussed the other provinces.

Gilles Beauregard: What risks are you referring to?

Natilien Joseph: I am talking about the risks associated with homelessness among young people.

Gilles Beauregard: As Ms. Clarkson said, the longer we wait to intervene, the greater the risk that young people will face various problems. For example, they don't file their taxes, they get into legal trouble, they get traffic tickets, they get recruited by street gangs. It's an attractive environment once you start laying out all the resources. That's why, at a certain point, we don't really want our people to turn to those resources.

Let me give you an example. Currently, in Longueuil, we have a large shelter that houses many adults. There are serious cases of chronic homelessness. We have a youth centre, and we tend to direct them toward a centre that provides housing for about fifteen young people. We prefer to direct them to resources of this type, where there is more support, because we know that large shelters or encampments are not conducive to social reintegration. When they end up in youth housing facilities, we have greater capacity to support them; we can better take care of them and help them move on. We want to intervene quickly.

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Beauregard.

Ms. Clarkson, in your remarks, you spoke about the importance of investing in all areas of the service continuum. Could you tell us more about this aspect in more concrete terms?

[English]

Sandra Clarkson: As I mentioned, we're working with a system that was designed 25 years ago for very different population needs. A system transformation fund could be a very important part of looking at the holistic continuum of care and having the ability to do things like the housing-focused transformation we did, for instance, which has shown amazing results. It's a recognition that from prevention and diversion through to housing, with long-term supports that may be required for some.... Without looking at the entire system of care and continuum of care, we will continue to simply manage the issue, as opposed to working towards solving the issue.

[Translation]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Ms. Clarkson.

Mr. Beauregard, do you believe that more predictable and flexible funding would allow organizations to devote more resources to direct services rather than administrative management?

Gilles Beauregard: Yes, absolutely. I said that earlier. It's a major problem. Personally, I've been dealing with it from the start. Whether it's the Community Action Partnerships Initiative or the homelessness partnering strategy, the situation has always been the same in all these programs.

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Joseph, Mr. Beauregard, and Ms. Clarkson.

[*English*]

Both the witnesses gave very good testimony.

Before we close, Ms. Clarkson, you referenced earlier high system users. Could you explain high system users?

Sandra Clarkson: We use that—in the City of Calgary, anyway—to refer to individuals who have a significant number of in-

teractions with police, the emergency room, shelters and social service providers.

The Chair: I thought it meant demands on the capital system. It's outside. Thank you for the clarity.

Thank you so much for the compelling testimony you gave the committee this morning.

Committee members, we will meet again on Monday.

● (1020)

[*Translation*]

Thank you, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

[*English*]

We are adjourned.

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