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

EVIDENCE

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Monday, February 7, 2022

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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey



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

Monday, February 7, 2022

• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

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

Today's meeting is taking place in the hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website, and the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and the recommendations from health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain two-metre physical distancing and must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when seated. They must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the room entrance.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank members in advance for their co-operation.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few of the rules. Members may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French audio. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we will ensure that interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings. The “raise hand” feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or to alert the chair. For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute. I will remind you that all comments by members should be addressed through the

chair. With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

The committee will now proceed to the consideration of matters related to committee business. The floor is now open.

I call on Mr. Long and then Madame Chabot.

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair, and good morning to my colleagues, my friends. Hopefully, everybody had a restful weekend.

Chair, I'd like to present a motion, please.

**The Chair:** Mr. Long, you have the floor.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** It is as follows: “That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on a) the financial challenges that persons with disabilities face and how a benefit administered by the federal government, similar to the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, would reduce poverty among working age Canadians with disabilities; b) the challenges persons with disabilities encounter when dealing with the federal government, how the government can improve access to federal programs and services for persons with disabilities and ensure that disability inclusion is considered in all government programs, policies and services; c) barriers to employment—”

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** I have Madame Chabot.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order because I introduced a motion at the end of our proceedings on Thursday and because we adjourned that meeting on the understanding that we would resume proceedings starting with that motion. Consequently, I don't understand how another motion besides mine can be introduced.

I ask that we be able to finish our discussion and consideration of my motion. Then Mr. Long can present the motion he wants to introduce. I have a proper point of order because we agreed that debate would resume at the start of this meeting on the motion that I had introduced and that is still under consideration.

[English]

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Chair, if I might, I think the last meeting was adjourned, not suspended, and I believe that Madame Chabot would have to move that motion again, if I'm correct.

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

Mr. Long is correct. I was waiting to—

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I challenge that decision.

Yes, we adjourned the meeting, but a motion was nevertheless under consideration at the end of that meeting.

You clearly said we would resume debate where we had left off.

[English]

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

The adjournment adjourned all debate that was currently on the floor, but you have the option of returning to it when I call on you after Mr. Long.

Mr. Ruff.

**Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** On the same point of order, I agree with Ms. Chabot. I'm not disagreeing with Mr. Long that procedurally what you've done is quite legitimate. When we agreed as a committee to adjourn here last Thursday or Friday, whatever day it was, it was under the understanding that we were going to come back and the first order of business was going to be Ms. Chabot's business.

• (1110)

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

Ms. Chabot, because I've recognized you to follow Mr. Long, I will allow Mr. Long to proceed with his motion and then I will call on you. Then the floor will be yours to continue debate of your choice, Ms. Chabot.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I nevertheless have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

With all due respect, I don't think this procedure is conducive to democratic process in our committee. You know perfectly well that, if you allow Mr. Long to introduce his motion, discussion will then proceed on it, whereas we very clearly agreed that we would begin with mine.

I think we should read the minutes from time to time and take what committee members have to say into consideration. Even though we adjourned our proceedings because the meeting had ended at 5:30 p.m., as the committee schedule provides, we were supposed to resume starting with a duly introduced motion.

Furthermore, if you allowed me to continue on the motion, you would see that that we could readily accept what followed.

I don't know by what mechanism we can proceed to a vote on a point of order, but I'd like us to vote on the fact that I am challenging the way we're proceeding today.

[English]

**The Chair:** We're in discussion on Mr. Long's motion, which has already been moved to the floor. He was recognized.

Ms. Ferrada.

[Translation]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Would it be possible to request unanimous consent of the members of this committee to resume the debate that Ms. Chabot began during the last meeting so she can inform the members that she wishes to continue on that motion and how she wishes to do so?

I think that's where we stood at our last meeting. If we had unanimous consent, we could give her the floor.

Would the clerk please explain the procedure?

[English]

**The Chair:** The committee chooses its own destiny. Ms. Chabot has challenged the direction. I'm in the hands of the committee.

I'll call for a vote on Ms. Chabot's motion. You've heard the motion.

Madam Clerk, just so everybody is clear on the direction we're going, would you advise the committee?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Widmer):** Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 5)

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

I recognize Madame Chabot.

You have the floor, Madame.

• (1115)

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair and colleagues.

Before debating my motion on the temporary foreign worker program, I'd like to review some facts that may be discussed at future committee meetings.

First, there's a procedural matter. You're probably abiding by the rules, Mr. Chair, but, with all due respect, I noticed that, before the meeting had even started—you know this is a hybrid meeting—Mr. Long's hand was raised, whereas the meeting hadn't yet begun. I consider that practice undemocratic. It's like a game show where you have to hit the button first. It's also unclear how it would work in a hybrid format. The use of the raise hand feature before the meeting has even started could be challenged. That's why I raised my hand at the start.

When should we raise our hand? I think it should be at the start of the meeting, but then there would be a race to raise hands first. You also don't necessarily see it in hybrid mode.

Now I'll turn directly to my motion. As you know, I introduced a motion regarding a study on the effectiveness of labour market impact studies, or LMIA's, and the temporary foreign worker program. Mr. Long noted for our information that the committee had previously conducted an extensive study on that topic in 2016. I don't know whether you did it, but I took the time to read the entire study and found that it contained points that would justify me in maintaining my motion because many promising recommendations may not have been implemented and we have two dissenting reports at this time.

However, in view of all the work we have to do in this committee, I'd be prepared to withdraw my motion concerning the study of that program if I had the unanimous consent of members of this committee. Not because it wouldn't be prudent to examine those matters—the LMIA process and the temporary foreign worker program—but because we've previously adopted motions to invite ministers regarding their mandate letters and to complete the seniors study. There also appeared to be a consensus on the labour shortage study, even though I know we'll have a subcommittee to address priorities. We've also added an important question on affordable, social and community housing.

In short, I think it wise that we conduct an extensive study on the temporary foreign worker program, but I'm prepared for the moment to withdraw my motion and I'm seeking unanimous consent to do so.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The committee has heard the position of Madame Chabot. Do you want to move to considering her request, or is there further debate?

Mr. Long, your hand is up.

Madame Chabot, your hand is up as well. I do not hear any more discussion, so I will ask if there is consensus on Madame Chabot's request to withdraw. I see thumbs up.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion withdrawn)

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, the committee has consented to your request.

Just on the point that was made, to clarify for the committee, in future meetings, when I hit the gavel signifying that the meeting is called to order, I will be looking. If there are hands up on the screen or in the room prior to my hitting the gavel, I will discount those. I will wait until I hit the gavel and call the meeting to order to recognize the speaking order.

Thank you, committee.

Mr. Long.

• (1120)

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thanks to Ms. Chabot for going back and pulling that report on temporary foreign workers that we did previously, and for withdrawing her motion.

Also, just for the record, sometimes when I get on—I've done it in the past and I know Ms. Chabot has done it also—I click to put

my hand up first. I'm certainly not the only one who puts their hand up before the gavel drops. I could certainly reference many, many times.

Anyway, moving on, I would like to introduce this motion. I assume I need to reread it, Chair?

**The Chair:** That's correct, Mr. Long.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Okay. It reads as follows:

“That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on: a) the financial challenges persons with disabilities face and how a benefit administered by the federal government, similar to the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors, would reduce poverty among working age Canadians with disabilities; b) the challenges persons with disabilities encounter when dealing with the federal government, how the government can improve access to federal programs and services for persons with disabilities and ensure that disability inclusion is considered in all government programs, policies and services; c) barriers to employment faced by persons with disabilities and measures the federal government can undertake to implement a robust employment strategy; and d) steps the Government of Canada can undertake to improve the social and economic inclusion of Canadians with disabilities; that the committee hold a minimum of eight meetings; that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.”

Chair, I just want to say that this is something that is very, very important to me personally. We in this office deal regularly with the challenges that persons with disabilities face, their barriers to employment and the struggles they have. I know that previously we've had some wonderful witnesses at HUMA. Mark Wafer from Tim Hortons would be one. Randy Lewis from Walgreens would be another one. They talked about what they did in terms of employment.

This is an area in which this committee could really have a big impact on government policy.

I thank you, Chair, and hopefully the members of this committee will agree with me on how important this motion is.

**The Chair:** Madam Chabot, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I imagine we'll agree in principle on the challenges that persons with disabilities encounter in employment and many other areas as well. I would nevertheless like to raise two points.

First, as the motion is quite long, I'd like to know whether it could be provided to us in writing so we can see what it entails.

Second, I'm trying to understand how this motion is related to the fact that the minister is currently working on an action plan for persons with disabilities. We could hear what she has to say when she appears to address these issues. Under her mandate, a new allowance similar to the guaranteed income supplement is being planned to support those individuals. These initiatives, which are part of the work the minister is doing, are currently in the works.

In short, could someone provide us with the motion in writing and, more particularly, tell us how these items are related to what the government already has on the table?

• (1125)

[*English*]

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

The clerk is circulating the motion. You should have it shortly.

Now I'll go to Madam Kusie on the motion.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** I certainly think that we could be in support of this motion. It's certainly very important and relevant to our society, especially in the evolving pandemic environment and, hopefully, coming out of the pandemic.

My only concern would be where we prioritize it. I believe that there are other studies that we have already approved and that would take priority over this one. However, we certainly could support this, recognizing that once we have tackled more pressing issues, we could turn to this one, Mr. Chair.

I thank Mr. Long for putting this motion forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Kusie.

I have Mr. Long.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** One thing I wanted to say here is that, yes, it's no secret that our government campaigned on support for persons with disabilities, but I think we have a wonderful opportunity here as a committee to really have solid input to make any legislation that much more comprehensive and effective for persons with disabilities.

I welcome the opportunity to bring witnesses in and talk to people with that lived experience to really strengthen any legislation that we move forward with.

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

Madame Zarrillo, you requested the floor.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP):** I just want to say that I'm fully supportive of this. I'm really happy to see that it's a lot more expansive than the motion I put on the floor. I really appreciate this.

There is one thing that I wanted to ask for specifically. I'm looking at the corporate strategy document for CMHC for housing for 2021-25. The aspirational statement says, "By 2030, everyone in Canada has a home that they can afford and that meets their needs."

Under "focus", it says, "Understand needs of Canadians who are vulnerable," and under "outcomes", it says, "People who are vulnerable have reliable access to secure and affordable housing."

I would ask the mover if they would be open to an amendment to just call out the fact that we need to start tracking accessible housing for persons with disabilities. I had an Order Paper request recently around tracking accessible housing in Canada. Unfortunately, we don't do a thorough job of that. In fact, there are many gaps in understanding how many units of accessible housing are available to Canadians and what's potentially being decommissioned in the gentrification of many of our neighbourhoods.

I'd just ask if the mover would be open to calling out, or at least tracking accessible housing.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I would, most definitely. We would certainly look at a friendly amendment here. I would agree with MP Zarrillo that it is absolutely something that is needed. I'd certainly be open to an amendment on that, yes.

**The Chair:** Before I go to Mr. Ruff, Madam Zarrillo, are you going to move an amendment?

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I would like to. I just need to pop open the email that has the motion in it. I'll read it and then I'll.... I would also welcome comments from anyone else on how they think that could be done.

**The Chair:** Now we're going to Mr. Ruff on the motion.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Chair, I have no real issue with the motion, and moving ahead we'll figure out where it fits in the priorities. I know we won't get to it before the next budget, but I just want to acknowledge for the Liberal MPs on the committee and for those who face disabilities, how important having the support through the different programs is—things like the Ready, Willing and Able labour force inclusion program, and seeing the aspects of that moving forward. I'm hoping that everybody can have discussions about that as pre-budget consultations go on. I think it's important to discuss that program and how it can move forward.

• (1130)

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

Mr. Van Bynen, go ahead on the motion.

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. With respect to the motion, I'm wondering if the scope will be able to capture the relationship between federal and provincial support programs. I know that in some provinces, if the federal deduction creates more revenues for people who have disabilities, then the provincial programs reduce that amount.

Is that considered to be part of the scope of this discussion? Is that the intent, that we would capture that or at least understand what that is about?

**The Chair:** Mr. Van Bynen, that will be at the discretion of the committee as it discusses the motion, if the motion is voted on and accepted by the committee.

Have all committee members received the main motion? Everybody has.

Yes, Mr. Long.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe Ms. Zarrillo needed a few minutes to work on her amendment, so I would suggest maybe we just take a three-minute break here to let her come up with the amendment she wants to table.

**The Chair:** What's the wish of the committee? Is everybody in agreement that we suspend for three minutes?

Okay. Thank you, Mr. Long. The committee will suspend for three minutes.

• (1130)

(Pause)

• (1135)

**The Chair:** The committee is back in session.

Madam Zarrillo, do you have your amendment prepared?

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I do, and I just want to thank members of the support team here today for the collaborative effort for the committee.

**The Chair:** Madam Zarrillo, could you just read it slowly into the record, so that it gets translated?

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** All right. After point (b), after the semicolon after “services”, add “including but not limited to affordable housing programs”.

**The Chair:** The committee has heard the amendment by Madam Zarrillo.

Before we went into suspension, Madame Ferrada, you had your hand up. Did you want to speak to the amendment? You have the floor.

[Translation]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We just want to support Ms. Zarrillo's amendment. This is indeed a major problem. We must have a record of what's being done on housing, and we're very pleased to be able to support the amendment.

[English]

**The Chair:** The amendment has been moved. I see no further debate. I will now call for a vote on the amendment of Madam Zarrillo.

Is everybody clear on the amendment? I see nods of “yes”, Madam Clerk, so we'll vote on the amendment of Madam Zarrillo.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** If there's no further debate, do we have unanimous consent on the main motion as amended? Indicate by a thumbs-up.

(Motion as amended agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**The Chair:** Mr. Coteau, you have the floor.

**Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to move a motion, and it will be passed around:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study regarding the government's plan to enhance the capacity and effectiveness of Black-led and Black-serving organizations through the Supporting Black Canadian Communities Initiative and that the Committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

• (1140)

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

Is there any debate?

Madame Chabot, you have the floor.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Coteau, I think the motion's very good, but could you please explain its objective?

[English]

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** It would be my pleasure.

There was a \$25-million investment in the 2019 budget to support Black-led, Black-supported, community-based organizations throughout the country. This report would look to see if the program has been successful and how it's working, to better align it to support organizations even further. It's something that is just part of good governance. It's something that government should be doing: looking at the programs we provide and reporting back to the House.

**The Chair:** Next is Mr. Long, and then we have Madame Ferrada and Mr. Ruff.

Mr. Long, you have the floor.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I just want to say that certainly I support this motion. I think it's very relevant. I know that in my riding of Saint John—Rochesay I work with great organizations like PRUDE, with Ralph Thomas at the Black History Heritage Centre, and with the Black Lives Matter New Brunswick organization. They are doing great work, but they certainly can use more support and more focused programs from the federal government.

This is a wonderful motion, and I wholeheartedly support it.

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

Madame Ferrada, you have the floor.

[Translation]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're celebrating Black history month and the reality is that racialized communities, including the Black community, face specific challenges with regard to community organizations and the funding necessary to promote the business of Black entrepreneurs.

There is a large Black community in my riding and it faces challenges every day. I think this motion comes at the right time to help us clearly understand how we can do better for this community, which is spread across the entire country. We have a duty to support it more effectively and this motion is a timely encouragement to address certain issues.

[English]

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

Mr. Ruff, you have the floor, followed by Mr. Van Bynen.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Intuitively I have no issues with the motion, because my own daughter is of mixed ethnicity. I just believe that we treat everybody equally.

I guess my question is more for the mover, Mr. Coteau. He says that the purpose behind this is to address whether the program, which was just introduced a couple of years ago with the funding, is working yet. It's good to do due diligence. I totally agree. I come from multiple years of working in uniform within the public service. To me, it is just normal practice to see if the program is working or not, and there should be that necessary follow-up.

This is almost more of a question. Have we had indications that the program is failing, that it's not doing what it's supposed to do? I think we're almost jumping the gun a bit here on a program that was just introduced, from the rationale that Mr. Coteau brought forward.

If he can shed more light on that, if he has more information, I'd appreciate it, Chair.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I appreciate the support in recognizing that it's good practice to shed light on programs that we put forward almost three years ago. There's a lot of indication out there that the program is very successful. It has gone into investing in infrastructure and programs that were not traditionally funded by government in the past, and there is a lot of learning.

Historically, the Black community in this country has been disproportionately funded in different programs, and a lot of the organizations that have come forward to access this type of funding have built new relationships with government. I know that seeing this shift in policy by government allows new organizations to take advantage of this type of funding. It's up to us as parliamentarians to look to see what works and to replicate and scale up.

These types of reports and insights into this type of funding allow us as parliamentarians to just do a better job. Again, traditionally, prior to this government, governments were not funding organizations at this level when it came to the Black community. There's a huge opportunity for us to figure out what's working and what's not working and to replicate and scale up.

I would appreciate your support on this.

• (1145)

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

We have Mr. Van Bynen and then Madame Ferrada.

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** It's so appropriate that we consider this motion, particularly since we're in Black History Month and celebrating the contributions of our diverse communities.

I've had the opportunity to have direct dialogues with a couple of organizations in Newmarket and Aurora: the Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association and ABC, a community in Aurora.

Although they're aware of the programs, they're trying to get a better understanding of the revenue streams and the funding sources and how to access those funding sources, so I think it's quite appropriate that we take a look at the programs now and find out where we could make some improvements.

I'll be supporting that motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

Madame Ferrada, you had your hand up. You have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know the question wasn't meant for me, but I'd nevertheless like to respond to my colleague's comment.

The idea behind this motion isn't necessarily to see what does or doesn't work but rather to show that the program is working.

We want all racialized communities to be treated in the same way, but, in reality, that's not always the case. This kind of program is necessary precisely in order to help these communities get ahead and expand their businesses and to provide the necessary services to people who need them.

I hope this committee can examine this program and come to the conclusion that it's working well but that it will have to be further expanded in order to meet other needs in many other communities.

I wholeheartedly agree with Mr. Ruff that we would like everyone to be treated fairly and equally, but that's unfortunately not always the case.

[*English*]

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

Is there any further debate on the motion by Mr. Coteau?

I see no raised hands, Madam Clerk, so we will move to a vote on the motion by Mr. Coteau. All members are clear on what we're voting on.

Before we begin, go ahead, Mr. Ruff.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** I'm sorry. I will double-check here. I haven't seen it in writing yet. Was it disseminated?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** I'm good then.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** Madam Zarrillo, you have the floor, and then Madame Ferrada.

Madam Zarrillo.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a motion to move to the floor, please.

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee invite the Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion and the Minister of Indigenous Services to update on progress on the strategy for the indigenous housing as the government committed to it in 2017; that the committee invite each of the ministers for one hour and the officials of both departments for one hour.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** The committee has heard the motion.

Is there any discussion on the motion?

Madame Ferrada, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.



We agree on the principle of the motion introduced by Ms. Zarrillo, but I'd nevertheless like to inform her that the minister will be appearing before the committee to discuss his mandate letter, that the committee has examined a lengthy study on the issue of housing in indigenous communities and that the minister will have to appear before the committee again concerning his report. That's included in the report's recommendations.

I wonder if Ms. Zarrillo could introduce this motion again, if need be, once the minister has appeared before us to discuss his mandate letter. I would encourage Ms. Zarrillo to reconsider voting on this motion now.

Having said that, I repeat that we agree on the principle of her motion.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Is there any further debate?

Madam Zarrillo, do you want to respond?

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** My only question or comment would be around the report. I don't think the report came back to this committee or went to the House after the last sitting.

Can I get an update on where that report from the last Parliament is sitting in relation to who has seen it? Has the committee seen it? Has it been tabled in the House?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Zarrillo.

Madame Chabot, I will go to you in a moment.

Madam Clerk, do you have the information she was requesting?

**The Clerk:** I will take a look and come back to the committee about that.

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, on the motion of Madam Zarrillo, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I understand Ms. Zarrillo's motion very clearly, but I just want to confirm that the report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on the urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy, which took up nearly eight meetings, was tabled in the House of Commons and that the government received it. I witnessed it, which is why I can confirm it for you. As I mentioned the other day, the recommendations from that report call for the committee to be kept informed. That hasn't been done, of course, as a result of delays. So I had virtually the same question in mind: given where we now stand, would the government already be able to table a report?

We spent a lot of time on that report and it was a major study. As for what might be considered the right time to receive the report, even though I agree on the principle, I think we should make sure it's the right time. It would be unfortunate if we were told that very little had been put in place to date, which could be explained. I encourage you to read the report and remind those who were there during the study that the primary objective is that the strategy be developed for indigenous people and by indigenous people.

It's nevertheless a good thing for the committee to be able to receive a report, but now the task seems to be to determine the right time to receive it. I agree that this is a question we could put to the minister. Then we could see where we stand.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Chabot, for that informative information.

Madame Ferrada, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I suggest that my colleague Ms. Zarrillo ask the minister a question during the discussion of his mandate letter. In the meantime, my colleague could reintroduce her motion.

For the moment, then, I request that we adjourn debate on this motion.

• (1155)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Since it's a dilatory motion to adjourn debate, I have to put the motion to adjourn debate on this motion to a vote currently.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Continuing with committee business, Madame Ferrada, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I, in turn, would like to introduce a motion to members of the committee. Allow me to read it to you. I believe that Madam Clerk already has copies that she can distribute to committee members. The motion is very brief but appropriate in the present circumstances.

The motion reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study of the government's plans to develop a national school food policy and its objective of a national healthy school food program; that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I will actually suspend for a couple of minutes while the clerk circulates the motion, so that committee members will be clear on what's before them.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1200)

**The Chair:** The committee will resume.

I take it that committee members now have the motion that has been circulated. Could everyone indicate by a nod that they have it?

Madame Chabot, do you have your hand up to speak to it, or are you just indicating that you have the motion?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to comment on the motion.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, you have the floor, and then Mr. Ruff.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have received and read the motion. But we are sort of getting ahead of ourselves. I'm trying to see why we are considering this motion at the moment. My understanding is that it's what the government wants. In fact, it hasn't happened yet. It's part of the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development's mandate letter, which we will be receiving soon. This is like the debate that we just had.

In the motion, the committee is being asked to undertake a study on the government's plans, but we need to know what these plans are. The committee is also being asked to develop a national policy on food.

In other words, we need to know how the minister intends to carry out her mandate. After that, we could determine whether it's relevant. I'm wondering about how the various tasks set out in the minister's mandate letter are related, and the fact that we were carrying out a study on this subject ourselves.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'll ask Madame Martinez Ferrada to respond, and then we'll go to Mr. Ruff.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleague for her question about this.

It may in fact appear somewhat contradictory to take action beforehand. But if there's one thing that's very clear at the moment, it's that poverty is intrinsically related to the issue of food insecurity.

As we have seen during the pandemic, there has been growing demand from food banks. It wasn't only people who were working less who were using them, because children needed them too. In my own riding, an organization established a food policy program in a school. Its purpose was to prevent any stigmatization of poverty based on the meals children were eating at school.

As a country, I think we have a duty to make sure that children, including children from poor families, have healthy food to eat. We are responsible for ensuring that there is a national food policy to deal with this. Even though it is part of the government's commitment, it's in our own interest as a committee and as a country to ask questions about how to develop a policy that would meet the gen-

uine needs we have been observing in the field. That's why I believe this policy and this study are extremely important.

I'm happy to answer any questions from my colleagues. At the very least, it could be an exploratory study. I'm completely open to the idea of having a discussion with my colleagues if some of them think that the wording of the motion needs to be clearer. The purpose of the study is in fact to investigate ahead of time what things are like in the field so that we can develop a policy that makes sense. I believe that it is part of the committee's responsibilities and terms of reference to ask these questions.

• (1205)

[*English*]

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

It's Mr. Ruff and then Madam Kusie.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** I sort of agree with Madame Chabot. I think we're jumping the gun here a bit on this one.

The government has committed to coming up with a plan. Let it come up with a plan. Also, at times I don't know how efficient we are compared to other committees, but we have a little under an hour here left. We've introduced a pile of motions and a pile of studies. Either we should commit to getting the subcommittee for prioritization moving forward, or we should try to solve that right here and now in the next few minutes. I know we have to put this one to rest, but I just don't see how this study on what the government's planning to do, when we don't know what the plan is, is a higher priority than are all of these other motions. If we get there, so be it.

I'm not trying to be alarmist or anything like that. We are in a minority government. I don't know if the clerk can calculate the total number of meetings we've already committed to, but I think we'll be pretty busy now for darned near the next year. As for anything, we as a committee have to have the flexibility, since there will be a lot of stuff coming out of the ministers' meetings and other prioritized issues. I have faith in our health experts and our food experts and really in our provincial jurisdictions as well with regard to how our kids are getting fed. I know I try to feed my daughter to the best of my abilities, and I fully acknowledge Ms. Ferrada's points about those who are challenged from a poverty standpoint, etc.

I'll leave my points at that, Mr. Chair, but I think we should just try to come up with a prioritization here for the remainder of today's meeting.

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

Madam Kusie, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to echo what Mr. Ruff said. I'm getting very concerned about the number of studies we are passing and agreeing to undertake. I'm also getting very worried about prioritization and the amount of time we have.

Frankly, they are the government. They have, within their scope, an ability to implement anything they see fit, or otherwise. In a situation such as the labour shortage, where industry and the provinces, in fact, are crying out for solutions, we really should be focused at this time on facing the great issues that are before Canada. In particular, as we struggle to emerge from this pandemic, we really haven't given a lot of thought, it would seem, to what the economy and the world will look like going forward. I would say that more consideration of that would alleviate some of the problems and struggles we're seeing. I know that, even in my community, in terms of families being able to buy food for breakfast as well....

I think this is starting to become a little silly, with the number of motions we're presenting. I could certainly present motions until the cows come home, in terms of what I think is of interest, or what I think are priorities for my community. It's endless, frankly. It just feels like it's really starting to devolve into a number of motions that we realistically will never attend to. We simply don't have the time.

Let's be serious about what we're going to do, perhaps through to the end of June. I think that's realistic. The clerk can give us a good idea as to the number of meetings that remain, but I think it's starting to feel a little silly, frankly, that we're just introducing motion after motion.

All of these issues are important and pertinent, but let's do a good job on a few things—the most critical things facing Canadians at this time. There were certainly several good ideas presented and passed, but it's starting to get overwhelming in terms of our commitments to this committee and to Canadians. Let's prioritize and get to work on the most important issues facing Canadians coming out of the pandemic at this time.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Kusie.

Mr. Van Bynen will now speak to the motion.

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** I support the motion.

My wife is a teacher. Over some 20 years, she's seen many kids come to school without a proper meal. Many of these kids are in families that are living in their own homes, but they're living such busy lives that they don't find the time for their children.

It was found, in many of the programs that were put out, that students were much better at learning and their education marks were much stronger if they had the opportunity to have a meal. It created a social gathering, and it also created an environment in which kids weren't stigmatized if they didn't have the resources to do that.

I think this motion is a good motion. Indeed, one of my constituents, Mr. Frank Stronach, founder of the Magna corporation, has established a foundation called the GUHAH Foundation—which is “grow up healthy and happy”—as a legacy project. It's not just us, but the general communities that are concerned about kids being properly fed and getting healthy food in schools.

I would support this motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

I have Mr. Collins next. Do you still want to speak to the motion, Mr. Collins?

Mr. Collins will speak, and then Madame Chabot.

**Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.):** Along the same lines as Mr. Van Bynen, I'm supportive of what's in front of us here. Locally, as a city councillor, I had the honour and privilege of working with local residents to open a food bank here. I know very well, leading up to the food bank's opening and having participated in food drives, that food insecurity is a huge issue, not just in my riding and here in Hamilton, but across the country in many communities. That same situation exists in local elementary and high schools. Here in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, we have Food4Kids. They provide services in our municipality to over 70 schools, providing food security for children who go to school hungry.

The motion we have in front of us is a terrific one. It gives us the opportunity to reach out to organizations across the country, which have in a piecemeal way provided services to educational institutions at both the elementary and secondary levels. We can find a way to create a government program that takes the best of those programs and puts them together to support people, not just in local communities but on a nationwide level, with criteria that have been established, again taking from those organizations who are doing it very well today, much like Food4Kids here in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

I'm very supportive of what's in front of us. I understand that we have a full plate, but we're going to reach a point later this year at which we're going to have to adopt additional motions. The one we have in front of us has merit, and there's no reason we shouldn't be looking at filling our agenda for the remainder of the year to ensure that we continue to do good business on behalf of the people we represent.

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

Next is Madame Chabot, followed by Madam Zarrillo and then Mr. Coteau.

Madame Chabot, you have the floor on the motion.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's about nutritious meals, the circumstances of children in schools, and food banks. We could take stock of everything being done in each of our provinces to deal with this undeniable problem. We could cite many different examples. We could agree that this question is indisputably a priority. In any event, nutrition is a key factor in healthcare. That's something I know about.

As for the wording of the motion, I think we need to see things concretely. It is one of the Liberal government's objectives. And that is where the motion comes from. Establishing a future national policy on this issue is part of the minister's mandate. I'd be tempted to say that the government should develop its program and ideas before specifying what it wants to do. We could see afterwards whether our committee is in favour of what the government is planning to implement.

It is certainly not our committee's responsibility to conduct a study that falls within the government's sphere, and about which we know very little. I don't know how you would interpret that, but I still don't think we should put the cart before the horse. In any event, it's beyond the scope of my question.

I'm going to ask for an adjournment of this debate. It would be unfortunate if this motion were abandoned. But the government needs to go into further detail about the contents of its program. If establishing a program falls within its mandate, then I would imagine it has an idea of what it wants to do. That's the way things work.

I am therefore requesting an adjournment of debate on this motion.

• (1215)

[English]

**The Chair:** We have a motion to adjourn debate on the current motion, so it has to go to an immediate vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 1)

**The Chair:** I have Mr. Van Bynen and then I'll go to Madame Kusie.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, you indicated that you would not be accepting hands prior to the meeting starting. I'm wondering if the same ruling would apply prior to the previous business being completed.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Kusie.

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** Mr. Chair, as a matter of clarification, I did take my hand down when the vote started, and I put my hand up shortly after that.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** On a point of order, that's not the same. I could also have raised my hand during the time of the vote. It's when the business is completed. In my opinion, it should be the ruling, precedent and practice going forward that when the business is completed, we raise our hands, or at whatever point I could have put my hand up during the vote prior to Mr. Van Bynen and he could have put it up after me.

The point is it's still during the business that is occurring, so in my opinion, I believe you should decide whether we are permitted to indicate our desire to speak when business is taking place, or if the business must adjourn and then we raise our hands.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Kusie.

I will be keeping a close eye on that. Currently, Mr. Van Bynen has the floor.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** On a point of order, what is your ruling, Mr. Chair? Is it that we should indicate our will to speak after the current business has been completed, or that we should...? Going forward, if I were to raise my hand now to speak, as the next order of business, you would recognize that, even though we're going to hear what Mr. Van Bynen has to say?

**The Chair:** I will conclude the discussion on Mr. Van Bynen. We were concluding a vote there. In the future, when a vote has been concluded, I will look to see who is looking for recognition on the floor and recognize them.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Mr. Chair, this seems to oppose what you just said, which was that you would look to who will speak next during the current business that is occurring. In that case, it would seem to me that I would be indicating that I would like to speak after Mr. Van Bynen's business has concluded, which you just did previously.

**The Chair:** You're correct.

When Mr. Van Bynen has concluded, I have recognized you as being next. Thank you.

Mr. Van Bynen, you have the floor.

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to propose a motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the difficulties that seniors face in rural Canada; that the committee invite experts and departmental officials to testify; that the committee hold at least five meetings; that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

Mr. Chair, I grew up on a 50-acre farm just outside of London, Ontario, and I know that the social network and support programs in rural communities are substantially different from those in urban areas. For that reason, I think this type of study would help level the playing field and provide some consideration to people who need support, particularly the support that's been identified as a result of the COVID pandemic. I think that has aggravated the situation and that it's an opportune time for us to take a look at how that can be righted.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

Madam Kusie, you have the floor on the motion.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I like Mr. Van Bynen's thinking. However, initially, upon hearing the motion, it seemed a little too narrow. I was looking to broaden it with an amendment. If we could receive the motion, this would be helpful in enabling me to evaluate what we might see as necessary to broaden it with.

**The Chair:** I will suspend for two minutes while the committee reflects on the motion put forward and Madam Kusie has the time to analyze it.

• (1223)

(Pause)

• (1226)

• (1225)

**The Chair:** We're resuming committee business.

We're in discussion on a motion by Mr. Van Bynen. Madam Kusie had the floor to move an amendment.

Go ahead, Madam Kusie.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Again, I really like the thinking of Mr. Van Bynen, but we thought that we could perhaps broaden it with this amendment: Instead of “on the difficulties that seniors face in rural Canada”, we would change it to “on the difficulties rural Canadians face, in particular seniors”. We wanted to change the wording to that.

**The Chair:** I will ask the clerk, Madam Kusie.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** It's to broaden it to Canadians, with the emphasis on seniors, but to broaden it to rural Canadians.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I'll just give the clerk a moment to read it back for the benefit of committee members, so we're all clear.

**The Clerk:** Ms. Kusie, I'll read the whole thing. “That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the difficulties rural Canadians face, in particular seniors”—

Would that be correct?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Yes. Thank you.

**The Clerk:** —“that the committee invite experts and departmental officials to testify; that the committee hold at least five meetings and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.”

**The Chair:** Before we move on, for the benefit of committee members, Madam Clerk, one more time, could you just read in its entirety the motion as amended by Madam Kusie?

**The Clerk:** Yes. It reads:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the difficulties rural Canadians face, in particular seniors; that the committee invite experts and departmental officials to testify; that the committee hold at least five meetings; that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

**The Chair:** Madam Kusie, does that reflect your amendment?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** It does. Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** We have Madame Ferrada on the amendment.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to ask my colleague a question about her amendment.

My understanding is that the purpose of my colleague's motion is to have us study the issue of seniors living in the regions. But if the study is about problems for the entire rural population, we wouldn't be studying only seniors.

I would have preferred a more focused amendment that specifies the kinds of problems affecting the seniors we would be studying. If the study covers problems being experienced by the entire rural population, we would be missing the real objective, which is to study problems that specifically affect seniors.

My view is that the current motion targets seniors. Otherwise we could be talking about all kinds of problems, different sorts of problems being dealt with by different populations. That means that we would be missing the point of the motion.

I'd like to hear from my colleagues on this.

● (1230)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mrs. Kusie, before I go to Madame Chabot and Mr. Long, do you want to respond to Madame Ferrada?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** My general belief is twofold. One is that when we have broader studies, it allows for greater goodwill within this group, because it's like the buffets that we have lost sight of during this pandemic. There's something for everyone. That's really important as we think about working together for Canadians. It's not really a big deal, in my opinion, to expand it.

The reality of these committees and these studies, Mr. Chair, is that regardless of what the scope says, and we hear calls of relevance all the time in the House, members approach these studies how they want to, when all is said and done.

I don't know why we don't harness the goodwill of the committee. We passed a lot here. I heard you remark with much satisfaction at the end of the last committee meeting that everybody got something. Isn't that really the way these committees should be?

It's really not a big deal in my opinion if we expand it to all rural Canadians, in particular seniors. It's a small act of goodwill for what really is an endless number of studies that we have before us now. I'd be shocked, looking at the calendar, if we got through more than our top four, and we're heading well into the double digits here.

Let's pass this. I'm not confident we'll get to it in this Parliament.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Kusie.

We have Madame Chabot, followed by Mr. Long, Mr. Ruff and then Mr. Van Bynen.

Madame Chabot, you have the floor on the amendment to the motion.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am troubled. That may be putting it a bit strongly but nevertheless I find both the amendment and the motion itself disconcerting. We are being asked to conduct a study on problems faced by Canadians living in rural areas across the country. But what specific problems are we to study? Do they pertain to services or housing? It's not clear. We're being asked to conduct a study on the circumstances faced by rural Canadians, and seniors in particular,

In Quebec, there are organizations that work on problems specific to rural communities. One such example is Solidarité rurale du Québec. Even before the motion was amended, I found its scope rather broad. There must be an objective underlying this motion. Why would the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities Conduct a study on rural Canada? What specific problems are we to address?

I'm going to abstain from voting because the wording is unclear.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Long, you have the floor, and we're debating the amendment.

• (1235)

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Certainly, props to Mr. Van Bynen for the motion, but with respect to the amendment, I would argue that it's out of scope. When we're studying seniors, that's under the purview and mandate of this committee. When you widen that to rural Canadians, it's definitely out of scope for this committee. I can't support that amendment. We need to focus on seniors, which is a responsibility of HUMA.

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

Mr. Ruff, you have the floor on the amendment.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** I'll just address Mr. Long's point. We're the human resources committee, so I don't think it's out of scope at all. It's well within scope.

Madame Chabot makes some valid points, too. We should maybe narrow this down a little, not from the amendment perspective but just on what issues specifically rural Canadians face. That's a valid point.

I've stated this in the House before. One of the reasons I got involved with federal politics was the ever-increasing rural-urban divide. I really think we need to figure out how we get all Canadians working together. This is a specific issue that is worthwhile. The amendment takes us to that bigger sort of thing.

I don't have the stats in front of me for all of the ridings for all the members here, but I would bet money that my riding likely is a significantly older demographic than most of the other ridings around the table, and the issues that apply to seniors apply to all rural Canadians in a lot of ways.

I'd make a proposal. If Mr. Van Bynen's open to it, why don't we just pause this one and rework it so we can address the concerns of Madame Chabot and our concerns on our end and then get to the issues that we need to resolve here in the next 20-some minutes of prioritizing the remaining things.

Those are just my two cents, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Van Bynen and then Mr. Coteau and Madam Zarrillo.

**Mr. Tony Van Bynen:** I am in agreement with what Mr. Long had to say. My concerns are that things are very different in rural Canada, for seniors specifically. If we get into a much broader analysis or study, we're going to lose the impact of what I'd like to accomplish, and that is to get a better understanding of the support infrastructure.

For example, in many urban areas you'll have seniors centres that have not been established in rural areas. The transit infrastructure is not there. Access to reliable Internet services is not there. There's social isolation in rural communities for seniors. That impact, I think, has been far more dramatic and highlighted during this last pandemic.

My concern is that the seniors group is a very high-risk group that needs a good understanding in terms of what we can do to support them because of their age, but also the nature of their location and the community structure they're living in. I think that we would lose an awful lot if we broadened that to include everything. That would be like an effort to boil the ocean. That's not going to provide us the kind of information that I'm seeking, which is very specific toward seniors, the impact of being more isolated, and how we can put forward some recommendations that could be considered for the government to deal with that.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

Madame Chabot, you still have your hand up. Unless it's new, I'm going to Mr. Coteau.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** I had lowered it, but I raised it again.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Coteau, Madam Zarrillo, Madame Ferrada, and then we will go to Madame Chabot.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I want to thank Mr. Van Bynen for the motion. I think it's very timely. It's very specific. Members opposite want to amend it to expand the scope of it, but there's no question, looking at the original motion: The member has a specific area of focus that he would like this committee to look at, and that's seniors and how they're impacted in rural Ontario and Canada as a whole.

It's interesting, because about half an hour ago, a member from the opposite side said that student hunger, bringing that forward, was silly and it was time for us to get serious. We have a short timeline. At the same time, what this amendment is doing is opening up the scope to make it so wide and not specific. It's doing the exact opposite of what the member argued half an hour ago.

If any of the members on this committee want to introduce a motion that is wider in scope and looks at different issues, they have the opportunity to do that, but to take the original motion and its intent and dilute it in such a way when it's obvious it's focusing on rural Canada and seniors is taking away from its intent.

I take this issue very seriously, just like I take student hunger very seriously, and I think we should focus on the specific scope of what the member's trying to achieve here.

• (1240)

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

We will go to Madam Zarrillo next, and then Madame Ferrada and Madame Chabot.

Madam Zarrillo, you have the floor on the amendment.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Speaking to the amendment that would widen it, there is a lot of conversation, even in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, about the rural-urban divide. It's definitely a conversation that we need to elevate. I'm concerned about the hollowing out of our rural communities due to the lack of existing public services and infrastructure in those communities. I definitely like the idea of an expansive study. I'd love to see an expansion of our economy go out into rural communities. I'd like to see the government invest in more public infrastructure and more social supports.

I'm thinking about immigrants and about the refugees who come to this country. In my riding we've had a number of refugees come in over the years. They put them into these high-density urban centres, because the social services and the support networks are there, but the housing is totally unaffordable. Finding employment is really difficult.

There are a lot of issues here. I'm sorry to say that I think the amendment potentially needs to be a bit narrower. I'd like to focus on public infrastructure and social supports that are missing in those rural communities for seniors, but also for all Canadians.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Zarrillo.

Next on the amendment is Madame Ferrada and then Madame Chabot.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm an MP, but not in a regional riding. However, my 72-year-old mother lives in one. Conditions for seniors in rural communities are truly difficult. I am worried that unless we conduct a study focused on seniors, we will dilute the stated intent.

I'll come back to this subject—I'll mention my mother's case once again, and say hello in case she happens to be listening—to point out that things like transportation are more difficult for seniors. For example, when seniors lose their driver's licence there is no transportation available in their region. It's therefore very difficult for them to get around.

There is also the matter of activities for seniors living in rural areas, which is truly problematic. I'm also thinking of the problems they might have in simply trying to get to the supermarket. It can sometimes be two, three or five kilometres from their house. For seniors in regional communities then, the challenges are much greater than for other segments of the population.

I wouldn't want to mitigate the intended purpose of a study on conditions for rural seniors. That's why I believe this motion is very

important. I would have liked an amendment like that, and it seems to me that if we dilute the intent of the motion there is a risk that we will miss out on an opportunity to address an extremely important issue.

[*English*]

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

Next is Madame Chabot and then Madam Kusie.

Madame Chabot, you have the floor on the amendment.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** More broadly, the situation we have just described with respect to rural communities, where more problems might be encountered than in cities, applies to seniors, and also to other categories of residents. For all such instances, I think we need to do something. I'm worried that this might not happen in each of our respective provinces.

In my riding, it's a reality that also concerns health and social services centres, organizations, our municipalities and the Fédération québécoise des municipalités. I don't see how a federal study could deal with all of that. These issues are already being addressed in each of our jurisdictions and I hope that no one opts out.

I don't see why the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities would conduct a study on that and do not believe that it's part of its terms of reference.

As for seniors, I agree that their transportation challenges and the fact that they have more trouble getting around are problematic. I'm happy about the fact that this is being dealt with in Quebec and it is of concern to us. Once again it's not that we are not in favour of the objective being discussed, because we are all concerned about these situations, but rather trying to remain within the committee's terms of reference. I would even go so far as to say, with respect to the status of seniors, that we have agreed to complete the study that our committee had begun.

Could we complete the study, write the report and then see if there are certain aspects to put in perspective afterwards?

Could we do a targeted study?

Are there any factors that do not appear to have been considered?

There have no doubt been some instances of testimony about specific issues affecting seniors in rural communities, but I can't remember any. Can we expect to see the recommendations and the report so that we can avoid having to do the same work twice? Our goal is to come up with concrete and pragmatic solutions for the future.

Thank you.

• (1245)

[*English*]

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

Madam Kusie and then Madame Ferrada on the amendment.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** I want to clarify that I think it's incredibly evident that I don't think breakfast programs are silly. I have attended them before in my own riding. It was, in fact, the idea that we are putting forward more studies than we could ever hope to or dream of accomplishing by the end of this Parliament, let alone by the end of June.

I think Mr. Coteau knew that, yet he tried to blur that, and that's incredibly disappointing. It's incredibly unparliamentary.

I spoke in my last intervention about the goodwill that we are trying to build here. When someone conflates and distorts the position I was trying to take relative to the number of motions that have been put forward rather than hungry children, which it is very evident—and I'm sure everyone knows—this government could in fact be doing a lot more on, it's very disappointing.

Mr. Coteau, please don't do that again.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, we were talking about a student nutrition policy program across the country, and it was her words, not mine, that the study would be silly.

I don't think it's silly to study this type of issue. I think student nutrition is a very important issue.

Mr. Chair, can I just say that we're committee members here?

**The Chair:** Mr. Coteau, that's not a point of order.

We will now move to Madame Ferrada, or is it Madam Zarrillo?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that while we would all like to continue to be collaborative on this committee, this kind of discussion is not leading us in that direction. I'd like to suggest that we return to the motion on the status of seniors in rural communities. To do this properly, I think that we need to have discussions among ourselves to come to an agreement on a motion that we all feel is important.

I am therefore requesting an adjournment of debate on this motion.

• (1250)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You've heard the motion to adjourn debate on the motion and the amendment as a whole.

Madam Clerk, call the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** Debate is adjourned on the motion.

In the time that's left.... I believe at the last meeting, there was consensus that the care study would be the first one that the committee would move on. As I recall, that was the consensus we had. If the committee is in agreement, I'm going to ask the clerk to give us a date, because we should focus on that and the witness list we're going to have. I believe we would be looking at starting that in March.

As everybody said, there are ample motions before the committee. It will take us well into the fall if we go. The next committee

business is to look at prioritizing them, so that we're not losing time.

Is there consensus from the committee that we will move with the care study? I'm seeing nods. We're going with that. We will set it to March 3, and we would look at witnesses by February 18.

Is everybody clear on that? That allows us then to move quickly after the ministers appear. That was the wish of the committee, that we would move to the care study as being our first study. At our next committee business, we will begin to prioritize the motions currently before the committee.

I see Madame Chabot's hand up.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's probably a problem that stems from translation into French. We're talking about doing a study that, among other things, addresses what we in English call the care economy, but to make things perfectly clear, what we're talking about is a study on the labour shortage, including the care economy, are we not? I simply wanted to clarify this with respect to the translation.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Chabot. Madam Clerk will give us the exact study, but you are correct about the one we're referencing. I just used it. Sorry about that.

Give us the full study. Do you have it?

It was a motion from Madam Zarrillo that was carried, Madame Chabot. That's the one that the committee agreed would be the priority.

We have the date for the witnesses. We would ask committee members to begin focusing on those witnesses they wish to have, and we are establishing a date of February 18 to get them in. That gives people ample time to move on them. It's a very important study, and at least we'll be able to get under way.

Mr. Ruff, you have the floor.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Thanks, Chair.

If I understand your intent and what you're proposing, when we return for our next meeting, the first hour would be to deal with the prioritization. We would not be introducing new motions at that time. It would be to prioritize our work, not only for the witnesses but for future studies.

Is that your intent, or what you're proposing?

• (1255)

**The Chair:** That's what I would like. I recognize that motions can be introduced at any time under committee business, but we should be prioritizing.



The other item I would like to have a brief discussion on is scheduling for the Centennial Flame award. I would look to that meeting to discuss that briefly and make a decision on it, Mr. Ruff.

I believe we have ample before the committee. It's the committee's decision, but I would look at setting priorities in the first hour.

Is that agreeable? I don't see anybody offering anything contrary.

That being said, a lot has been done. Thank you, committee members.

The meeting is adjourned.

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