



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 081

Monday, October 16, 2023



Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

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

Monday, October 16, 2023

• (1105)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 81 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting on a study of the Canada summer jobs wage subsidy program.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I believe all committee members and witnesses are attending in the room.

I would remind all members attending that you have the option of participating in the official language of your choice. If there is an interruption in translation services, please get my attention. We will suspend while it is corrected. I would remind members to speak slowly, if possible, for the benefit of the interpreters. As well, be careful with cellphones near the mikes, or your earpiece, as it can cause popping that can cause harm to the translators. Just as a reminder, direct all comments through the chair.

We will be meeting in the first hour with Minister Ien.

Madam Minister, welcome to the committee. We will begin with five-minute opening comments from you on this very important subject.

As well, I would like to welcome Frances McRae, deputy minister; Catherine Demers, associate assistant deputy minister; Rhonda Fernandes, director general; Jenny Tremblay, director general; and Damon Rourke, director of workforce development. They will be staying for the latter part as well.

We will begin with Minister Ien for a five-minute opening comment.

Madam Minister, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Hon. Marci Ien (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and hello, everyone.

Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to talk about the Canada Summer Jobs program.

[English]

It is a program that is part of our strategy to get young people jobs and valuable work experience.

However, first I want to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

We are in challenging times. We know that young people are feeling the impact. To chart a path forward, we need to make sure we're creating opportunities for young people. That's why we have a youth employment and skills strategy. This includes youth programs as well: the student work placement program, which helps develop work-ready skills through things like co-ops, internships and project-based activities; the Canada service corps, which creates volunteer opportunities for young people looking to give back to their communities; the youth employment and skills program, which gets students and other young Canadians quality jobs in their fields, where they can gain valuable work experience; and of course, Canada summer jobs, a successful program that has changed the lives of a lot of young Canadians.

I mention these programs because they show that this is a comprehensive approach. It is a comprehensive approach to helping young people, so whether they're looking for their first opportunity or graduating and looking to get a job in their field, we're going to be there every step of the way.

In 2020, during the pandemic, when youth unemployment rose to a staggering 30%, we responded with one of the largest youth support packages in the world to make sure that no young person was left behind, and Mr. Chair, our approach is working: Youth unemployment has returned to its prepandemic level, and recent data shows that 65,000 more young people were working in August this year than before the pandemic. This is what happens when smart investments are made at the right time. They pay dividends.

I saw the impact of this up close when I was in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, and stopped by to get what I'll call really cool accessories from a young woman named Sarah. Sarah told me that during her CSJ job, she was able to work on her sewing skills. She worked on those skills, and that led her to selling garments and accessories online. Today she has launched her own business. It's called Sarah Crowe Designs. She does, as she told me, what she loves every single day. There are stories like Sarah's right across this country, CSJ success stories.

Here's what we also know: We know that not every young person has the same access to these opportunities, which is why our youth strategy takes into account gender, race, socio-economic status, sexual orientation and disability. We know that these factors can be barriers to gainful employment, and when we look at the data, we see this: In 2020, for example, StatsCan reported that the employment rate for those with disabilities was 65% compared to 80% for those without.

There's always room for improvement, and we're being thoughtful about the changes that we need to make to continue delivering these programs while adapting to new realities. We're not resting. Where there are improvements to make, we'll make them, and we'll do so by listening and learning.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Our young people deserve a good life and a good start in the labour market in careers that they like. We have to make sure that no one is forgotten.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity.

[*English*]

I'm happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Now we'll begin the first round of questioning with Madam Vecchio for six minutes, please.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Welcome, Minister.

I'm going to read a bit into the record first, regarding some of your testimony. According to the OECD, Canada experienced a larger change in youth employment during the pandemic compared to other OECD countries:

In 2019, the year prior to the pandemic, Canada's youth unemployment rate was 11%. The youth unemployment rate in the UK was similar at 11.4%, higher in Ireland at 13.5%, and lower in Germany at 5.7%.

In June 2020, the youth unemployment rate in Canada increased over 16 percentage points to 27.4%.

You alluded to that, but in countries such as Germany and the U.K., where job retention programs were introduced, they experienced increases of only 1.6 and 2.4 percentage points respectively.

By summer 2021, youth unemployment rates largely recovered but remained elevated compared with their levels in 2019 across most of the OECD countries, and Canada was no exception to this trend. In Canada, the youth unemployment rate in June of 2021 was 2.6 percentage points higher than in June of 2019. The

difference was lower for Germany and the U.K. at 1.2 and 1.5 percentage points, respectively, but slightly higher for Ireland....

Specifically looking at this, we know that there were job retention programs, but in Canada we didn't actually have that. It was very, very different for people when it came to job retention.

Minister, I'm reading this into the record so that I can talk about key indicators. In 2016 we saw a doubling of the Canada summer jobs program, where we saw a nominal increase from 2015 and 2016 of 0.1%. When I'm looking at the 2021 funding for the program, which was five times more than in 2015, and I'm removing the data from 2020 and 2021, can you advise me of whether quadrupling the funding for Canada summer jobs actually quadrupled the number of jobs?

Hon. Marci Ien: Karen, thank you so much for the question and for the information you provided.

I'll start with 2015-16, because you made an excellent point.

When this program started in 2015, it was at 35,000 jobs. That simply was not enough. That's why we doubled those jobs to 70,000.

You make excellent points about the unemployment rate, and that is true. What we've done, though, with this program and the suite of programs that we have—and I'll talk about those in a second—is delve deeper into those numbers. What those general numbers don't show are the numbers for unemployment in Black communities, racialized communities, indigenous communities and people with disabilities. Those numbers are even greater, so that's what our national priorities with regard to those programs focus on.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Fantastic.

Looking into that, with the quadrupling, can you tell me what the numbers were, then, compared with Canada summer jobs, if we're looking at it? What were the numbers employed through Canada summer jobs in that final year when it was quadrupled?

Hon. Marci Ien: What I can tell you is that this program has been severely oversubscribed for some time. I'm going to give you some comparative numbers on that.

In 2019, Karen, 148,000 people applied for this program.... I'm sorry; 79,000 were actually the jobs that were offered. I'm looking at basically doubling those numbers. This is a program in which 148,000 people wanted to take part, and there were 79,000 jobs in organizations.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm sorry, Minister: You're saying that in 2019 it was 79,000 jobs.

Hon. Marci Ien: Yes: 148,000 jobs were requested and 79,000 were provided. It was meant to be 70,000, but there was—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: From 2015, those numbers went from what you're saying was 35,000 to 70,000 in 2016, and in 2019 it was only 79,000.

Hon. Marci Ien: Then it goes up from there, because we had a pandemic. When you—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Let's take those pandemic years out of there.

Hon. Marci Ien: I don't think we can, Karen.

• (1115)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I think it's important that we do, though, because—

Hon. Marci Ien: I don't think we can take them out, because that was catastrophic. When we look at the mental health of kids, when we look at kids who were doing high school at home.... We have to remember that we have a suite of programs in the youth employment strategy. Canada summer jobs is one of them, and it's high-schoolers.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Minister, I really respect what you're saying there, though I think with the pandemic we did see the government explode a lot of money out of there. We can talk about WE Charity, but I don't think that's the right thing to do in this space.

Hon. Marci Ien: No, but it was necessary to increase the jobs there—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: But on the number of jobs, when we looked at the number, the fact that job retention programs.... We actually had close to 30% of Canadian youth not working compared to what other countries—

Hon. Marci Ien: And it went down to 10%.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: But compared to other OECD countries, we only saw an increase of 2% or 3%. There was a different approach that we could have taken so that kids may have been able to have the opportunity to work.

I want to move on to another thing. We do know that over the five-year period, there was a change. How did you communicate to constituents, not only to the members of Parliament but to employers? We know that in 2022 we went back down. The number that was provided for funding, the 2019 prepandemic funding, was reduced.

Hon. Marci Ien: That was the 2019 funding.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: When people were applying for this in the communities, how did they know there was less than half of what there was in the previous year?

Hon. Marci Ien: Karen, this is a program run by 338 MPs, who have priorities. In my riding of Toronto Centre, I basically said we were going back to prepandemic numbers—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Minister, did all of the—

Hon. Marci Ien: —and then put my priorities, as MPs can do, and listed them the way they need to be.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Minister, we're so fortunate because we have that experience. I'm thinking of members of Parliament who joined us in 2021.

Hon. Marci Ien: I joined in late 2020, so I'm one of those new members.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Right, but you also are very aware of the program.

Were there a lot of members of Parliament in 2021 who recognized it?

Hon. Marci Ien: I wasn't that aware of the program, so I can speak to my experience as a new MP.

What I will say to you, Karen, is that—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Minister, this is really important for my time.

We know that many people had a reduction. Were the new members of Parliament aware of the reduction?

I know, from speaking to members of Parliament, that they weren't aware and that people in our communities were not aware that the money had been decreased over the last four years.

Hon. Marci Ien: It was listed in FES—the fall economic statement. It was there.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Okay. Canadian companies knew. Thank you. That's perfect.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vecchio.

We'll go to Mr. Long for six minutes, please.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Good morning to my colleagues.

Minister, thank you so much for coming.

Obviously, I'm going to focus my attention mainly on the Canada summer jobs program, but before I do, I want to talk about the youth employment and skills strategy program, or YESS, which is an unbelievable program in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay.

We have an organization called the Human Development Council that administers that program. I can honestly tell you that it's probably the most transformational program that we deliver as a government in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay. We have given to literally hundreds of youth who needed it and who face many barriers a chance, a second chance, whether it's through on-the-job training, writing skills or social skills. The program is unbelievable.

First and foremost, I want to thank you and I want to compliment you on the YESS skills training for jobs. The program is absolutely unbelievable.

I was elected in 2015. I started to learn a lot about programs, what we were doing and what we were going to deliver. The Canada summer jobs program is a program that we doubled. We started to talk to mainly non-profits in the riding about the unbelievable need and our responsibility to offer programs to youth. I can speak to my riding. Give or take, there were about 300 jobs we offered in the first year. We're almost in my ninth year, so that would be almost 2,500 to 2,700 jobs that we have offered youth in my riding.

It's transformational. We have given them wonderful opportunities. Obviously, the priority is not-for-profits. We can rank and list, but not-for profits.... Whether it's the YMCA of Greater Saint John, the Crescent Valley Resource Centre, the Teen Resource Centre or ONE Change, the list goes on and on of the programs and the number of youth we're giving that opportunity to for summer jobs.

It's a vital initiative, obviously. It allows employers to expand their workforce. It gives young Canadians the opportunity to learn skills that will benefit them in their future endeavours.

My first question, Minister, is this: Can you discuss how the department takes employer and youth feedback into account and how, if at all, that feedback helps to shape the Canada summer jobs program?

Thank you, and good morning.

• (1120)

Hon. Marci Ien: Good morning, Wayne. Thank you so much for this question.

First and foremost, thank you for highlighting that Canada summer jobs is an important program. It's what I call a jewel in a crown, but there are other jewels in that crown too. YESS is part of that. It's about meeting kids where they are, at different ages and different points in their lives. That is something we listened to and heard about. This is why the suite of programs under that strategy exists.

With regard to YESS and the success rates among employers and among students as well, YESS does very, very well. It homes in on something really important, and that is learning skills and being skills-ready to take a job. These are young people between the ages of 15 and 30, so it goes outside the scope of high school and beyond that to post-secondary, where some people still considered youth might have left school and are looking for new opportunities. It provides those opportunities in a skills-based and work-integrated way that is so important. It's what's necessary. With regard to employers and student success, the number we're looking at is 96%. They love it. More importantly, it's bearing results.

I'll go back to CSJs for a second, if I might, since that's why we're here. Half of the kids who work those summer jobs are employed beyond that, meaning that employers see something in those kids and they hire them, so the jobs continue.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thanks. Just in the essence of time—

Hon. Marci Ien: Yes, please. I see the one and a half minutes.

Mr. Wayne Long: I have lots of questions.

One of the great things I love about the program—obviously, we're back in our constituencies in the summer—is that we can get out and visit the employers. We can get ops—

Hon. Marci Ien: It's the summer tours.

Mr. Wayne Long: Yes. We can get pictures with students. It's wonderful. What I love about the program too is that MPs have input into this program—

Hon. Marci Ien: It's like no other program.

Mr. Wayne Long: —like no other program.

Hon. Marci Ien: When I say this is run by 338 MPs—

Mr. Wayne Long: It is.

Hon. Marci Ien: It's like no other program.

Mr. Wayne Long: We can always improve, but it's one of the programs that we can actually look at and determine rankings, evaluations and things like that.

I speak with my constituents and business owners, and I just want to make sure that what I hear from them is reflected in the job opportunities provided. Can you elaborate for a minute on the selection process and whether you, like me, think the MPs' role in the delivery of this program is integral?

The Chair: Please give a short answer.

Hon. Marci Ien: Yes, Mr. Chair.

MPs get to rank local priorities. They know their communities best. That's what this program is about. They're on the ground. They know. They can advise.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Long.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello, Madam Minister. I want to thank you and the members of your department for being here.

I listened to your remarks carefully, but I want to focus on the Canada Summer Jobs program, since it is the focus of our study. That does not take anything away from the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, but that is not our focus today.

Our goal is to determine whether the program's funding and terms can be reviewed. I will speak on behalf of my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois, and also for other colleagues, for a very simple reason: we sent you a joint letter, from the four political parties, on Mr. Morrice's initiative.

It was a great shock in our respective ridings to learn that funding for the Canada Summer Jobs program had been cut by 30% compared to previous years, during the pandemic. Without fanfare, we went back to the budget from before the pandemic, from 2019-2020, even though it is now 2022-2023.

It is true that the program is increasingly popular, not to say populist. Increasingly, it meets the needs of organizations and of young people seeking work experience. You yourself said that you had met a young woman who had started a company under the Canada Summer Jobs program, a company that she was still operating. There are many such positive experiences.

Did you observe or assess the shock that the funding announcement caused, in terms of applicants and the number of jobs available to young people?

Moreover, since the finance minister is expected to table the budget update soon, are you prepared to ask for and demand a funding increase for the Canada Summer Jobs program?

• (1125)

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you for your questions.

[*English*]

I'll deal with the number of jobs first.

We can't discount the pandemic of 2020. Our government responded to the need at that time, with a 30% unemployment rate among young people, to say that we were going to do all that we could. Some of those things were off-cycle requests and some of them were base funding within Canada's summer jobs program. We responded with 100,000-plus jobs, an unprecedented number.

We are now back to prepandemic 2019 spending. That is exactly what I, as an MP, told employers and anybody who asked that we were doing, and why. CSJ, as I mentioned, is an incredibly successful program. It's an oversubscribed program, but it's not the only program, and it's important to look at everything as a whole.

That said, I want to point out—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Minister, to clarify, I did not say that we should disregard the pandemic period.

My question is very clear. You have been asked several times why, in 2023, you did not consider the increase in applications, the cost of living, indexation and the circumstances that have changed since 2019. Funding for the program should have been increased in keeping with all those factors, but instead you came back with the pre-pandemic budget. Going back to the 2019 budget means going back in time after two years of the pandemic, so it is the status quo. In reality, however, it is no longer the status quo.

[*English*]

Hon. Marci Ien: Madame, it's far from the status quo. For example, in 2019—this is for your riding, Thérèse-de Blainville—you received \$693,345. In 2023, Madame, that number was \$840,182 in CSJ funding. There are particular funding models that take into account all of the factors you just described.

What we were talking about is an oversubscribed program and a pandemic in which we went above and beyond. When this program started, it was 35,000 jobs in 2015, and we doubled it. We did so because there are funding formulas, but also because we were prioritizing youth, and still are.

I wanted to point out the numbers in your own riding because they go up significantly between 2019 and 2023. I'll repeat them: It was just under \$700,000 in 2019 in Thérèse-de Blainville, Quebec. Then it was \$693,345. To your point, in 2023 it was \$840,182.

With regard to where we go from here, I will always advocate having the funding we need for this program going forward.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame, you have time for a short question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Minister, did you ask the Minister of Finance for a budget increase for the Canada Summer Jobs program, or will we be in the same boat as last year?

[*English*]

Hon. Marci Ien: We will make sure that we always advocate for this program and advocate for the suite of programs that we have under the strategy.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Ms. Chabot.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

We have Madam Zarrillo for six minutes, please.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

I just wanted to revisit something you raised earlier around the discrimination that happens in employment in Canada and this opportunity to address that.

Based on the data that I have seen, the reduction in the postpandemic funding disproportionately hurt women, girls, indigenous youth and youth with disabilities. This is absolutely true in my riding, where a lot of the summer jobs opportunities are summer camps, which also affects women who are working and who need these summer camps. I can think specifically about one summer jobs application for which their funding was cut by half this year. Even though they maintained the 10% of my budget, their actual funding was cut in half.

I want to focus on the importance of this program for women and girls. Two-thirds of the participants are women and girls. I want to understand more. What job categories are they taking on? What is the wage gap between the genders and what is the tracking of these jobs?

Hon. Marci Ien: First, Bonita, thank you so much for your question and for your advocacy.

At this point, I really want to highlight the national priorities, because they take into account what you're saying. They take into account the listening and learning that I was talking about before. These are not just overall general numbers; you have to look beneath those numbers and dig a little bit.

In 2023, we had five national priorities. Youth with disabilities was number one. Then I dug a little deeper and wanted to know about the jobs: How many young people with disabilities? Right now, that's 9%. We have to improve that. I'm hoping that MPs who have the tools to improve that will see that and prioritize those organizations: Black and other racialized youth were at 21% and indigenous youth were at 4%, and then it was small businesses and not-for-profit organizations. Then it was small businesses and not-for-profit orgs in environmental sectors. Those were the national priorities.

I say this, Bonita, because it's important within that women and girls lens to look a little deeper and understand who they are and which communities they're from. As the minister responsible for youth and responsible for this program, I look at our number one priority being youth with disabilities, and I see 9%. I want to say that in this forum because I want that to improve, but that means MPs and all of us working together to prioritize these organizations. That's how it improves. I want to see greater numbers with Black and other racialized youth as well. Women and girls fit in there. I want to put it out there in this forum that it's at 21%, and I'd like to that to improve too, as well as indigenous youth, which is only at 4%.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I agree with you.

Is it also captured in category or channel? Is it service? Is it child care? Is there a capture as well in which we can look at it even one layer deeper?

Hon. Marci Ien: Please go ahead, Deputy.

Ms. Frances McRae (Deputy Minister, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Thank you for the question.

We are at this time looking at an evaluation that would cover that type of data in terms of the types of jobs by category. We'll certainly take that one under advisement.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: That's great. I'm very interested in that.

It says here it is mandatory for the employer to respond to a follow-up survey, but for participants in the program it's not necessarily mandatory. Could this committee please get the qualitative and quantitative information from the student participants? I'd love to be able to see that.

I want to ask another question about participants involved in this program.

Many young people don't know about their tax filings. Many young people don't know about the disability tax credit. They don't know about the caregiver credit, and many of them may be doing caregiving at home.

Are there other skills and tools and knowledge around tax filings and things to which these students are entitled that the Government of Canada can pass on to them as they're funnelled into and out of the program?

I'm going to share an example. A young person in my riding who was hired as a cook through the summer jobs program didn't realize that they would be potentially eligible for the disability tax credit based on some of their learning abilities. These had been identified all through their schooling, but they were not aware that they were entitled to some tax credits when they went into the job market.

I wonder if there is an opportunity for us to be educating them as they come into and out of the program.

● (1135)

Hon. Marci Ien: We are constantly educating.

You bring up a really good point. I was thinking about this. I was a new MP in 2020 and I was going through Canada summer jobs. At that point we had a very limited amount of time. Now, as MPs, we have about two and a half weeks to go through it. That was something we learned through feedback—that we needed more time. I realized that the same larger organizations in my riding were getting CSJ. There was a whole educational component that involved going to smaller organizations and saying, “Do you know about this?”—meaning, as you mentioned, the disability tax credit—and saying, “This would be great for you.”

I see the difference between 2015 and now with respect to who is involved in this program, who is taking part in this program, and the role of an MP.

This program is unprecedented. It's paramount here, because we know our communities. It is about providing information. You make some excellent points, Bonita. It is about education as well. It's about knowing our ridings, and it's about finding the information that is needed by those we serve.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

Everybody has gone over a bit, but you can see that it's an engaging discussion.

Ms. Zarrillo, you made some really valid points on education.

Ms. Grey, go ahead for five minutes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Your government announced the Canada summer jobs program with respect to both funding and how the number of anticipated jobs would drop back down to virtually match prepandemic levels. You confirmed that with us here today.

Did you take into account inflation and payroll tax increases when calculating the number of placements?

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much, Tracy, for the question.

We took into consideration the feedback we got from MPs as well as the feedback we got from young people in the program and from employers. We looked at all of it—from during the pandemic and from after the pandemic and from where we were. What we realized—and I want to say this, Tracy—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Minister, I'm asking about the financial part of it.

If the funding is the same or virtually the same, simple math would show that your estimate for placements is off, because there are actually going to be fewer jobs because the average wage has increased since 2018. Would that not be true?

Hon. Marci Ien: I'm going to pass this over to Frances, who can delve into the numbers a bit more.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Actually, Minister, we will have the officials here afterwards, so if you're not able to answer that question—

Hon. Marci Ien: I'm able to answer, but what I'm saying is that we were looking at our programs as a whole and listening and learning, Tracy, and understanding that this is Canada summer jobs and not a year-round program. CSJ wasn't meant to be a stimulus program; CSJ was meant to be an opportunity for high school kids to get a summer job. If we're talking about jobs and indexing—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I'm not talking about who or what the places are. I'm talking about the numbers you've given for how many job placements there would be, because wages have gone up.

Hon. Marci Ien: Yes, and it's because those numbers coincide with the suite of programs. This is what I'm saying.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I don't think you're calculating that correctly. The average wage has gone up, and yet you haven't incorporated that into the number of jobs you're considering.

I will move on to something else—

Hon. Marci Ien: I want to say, Tracy, that I'm looking at your numbers and I'm looking at the calculations here. While we say, for example, 70,000 jobs, when it goes to second-round funding and allocations, it's always higher, so 70,000 jobs is usually closer to 79,000 jobs.

• (1140)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Minister, how much has the average wage increased since 2018? Do you know that number? Have you incorporated that into your numbers when you're looking at how many jobs there are in terms of the total funding?

It's a yes or no. Have you incorporated that?

Hon. Marci Ien: Well, it's not a yes or no, because you're also dealing with different provinces. You're dealing with different minimum wages, so it's not a yes or no. What happens, Tracy, in Kelowna—Lake Country, British Columbia, is not the same as what happens in Toronto, Ontario.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I will go on to something else, Minister, because you're not answering the question.

What is the ESDC department cost decrease year over year to administer half as much Canada summer jobs funding and fewer job placements? What is the cost—

Hon. Marci Ien: What do you mean by “fewer job placements”? Can you give me those numbers?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Sure. I mean, we've got the numbers—

Hon. Marci Ien: I just want to clarify what you're saying here.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Well, you've confirmed yourself that there are not as many job placements.

Hon. Marci Ien: But I want to hear from you, as far as “fewer job placements” is concerned, if you could—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Sure. This goes right from your own numbers.

The number of Canada summer jobs created in 2021 was 124,000, roughly, and in 2022 it was 114,000. You have confirmed that they are now down to about 70,000, so my question is this. You're cutting the funding down to prepandemic levels, and there'll also be fewer job placements than there have been over the last couple of years. What is the decrease—

Hon. Marci Ien: Have you had—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Let me finish my question, Minister, because this is my time—

Hon. Marci Ien: Please do.

Mrs. Tracy Gray:

What is the decrease in the cost to your department for going back to prepandemic levels in administering this program? What is the cost decrease to your department?

Hon. Marci Ien: I'm still looking at the numbers, Tracy. What I'm saying is that your math doesn't work for me. I'm listening to what you're saying and I'm listening to the math. You have the number of jobs going down. I'm looking at your numbers. I see up, not down, for Kelowna—Lake Country.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Minister, these are your numbers. You have confirmed that the funding is going back down to prepandemic levels.

Hon. Marci Ien: That's double what it was in 2015.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Regardless, it does go back to prepandemic levels—

Hon. Marci Ien: No, it's not regardless, Tracy. The program started at 35,000 jobs and it's 70,000.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: My question, Minister, is this. You're going back to prepandemic levels. What will be the cost decreases to the department for administering less funding and administering fewer job placements than there have been over the last couple of years?

Hon. Marci Ien: You're asking a department question, so I will go the department.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: You're not familiar with what the cost decreases would be.

Hon. Marci Ien: Tracy, do you know what? I reject that wholeheartedly. I would say, and respectfully so, that I'm here, obviously, as the minister, but to insinuate at all that I don't know what I'm talking about—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Well, Minister, you're not able to answer the questions.

Hon. Marci Ien: I did answer the questions, Tracy—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: No, you didn't—

Hon. Marci Ien: —and the question that you didn't answer was about your costing and how it's gone up.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gray. Your time has gone over.

Thank you, Madam Minister.

Mr. Coteau, you have five minutes, please.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

You have one of the most important jobs, I think, in government. The piece around youth and the investment into the future is such an important piece for our government and for the priorities of Canadians. I want to thank you for being here and thank you for the work you're doing.

I know that in my community, these investments make a huge difference. Last week I was at Flemingdon Park Ministry. They have a tiny little room in a building in Flemingdon Park. It's probably close to 200 to 300 square feet. Literally hundreds of people come through that space every week for either a quick coffee drop-in or service. The investments that the program has made historically into small organizations like that make a huge difference in Don Valley East. I want to say thank you for the continued work on this.

I have always believed that government itself can play an important role in shaping society for the better. Investments that governments make can make a huge difference in the lives of people. I personally benefited from a program that was very similar to this one. It was offered through George Brown when I was about 17 years old. It provided me with one of the first opportunities I had to work in a professional environment. That experience followed me throughout my career in politics and also in the not-for-profit sector. These types of investments can make a huge difference.

Minister, as we continue to invest and as we see labour markets shift constantly and priorities change, how do we ensure that the investments we're making into these types of programs are aligned not only with labour market needs but also with the jobs of the future? Is there any relationship attached to those two pieces?

• (1145)

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you, Michael.

There is a huge connection to those pieces. Work-integrated learning and providing kids with skills in co-ops, work placements and projects is huge.

There's the Canada service corps and volunteerism. Through a pilot program that started at 15 but now starts at 12, because we wanted to reach kids earlier, we wanted to let kids and those who are already in that frame of thinking know that volunteering in their community builds confidence and pride in community. It didn't need to start at 15. It needed to start earlier.

We knew that middle school—and I am speaking personally of my riding of Toronto Centre—is where kids start to go astray. A lot of them are latchkey kids. They're coming home to empty houses. If they can volunteer in their communities and do that at 12, in grade 7, it means something. It gives them something—not just a place to go, but a place in their community—and it builds pride. That can only be a good thing.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Are those youth connected in the future to other opportunities?

Hon. Marci Ien: They are. This is the thing. If you're 12 years old and you're volunteering in the Canada service corps, I will draw that link and make that connection to a post-secondary-school young person who is applying to get into a university, because universities look at whole people and the life journey of a young person.

What did they do? It's not just about marks. Did they help in their community? That person then includes their volunteer years. "I started at 12 and I did it right up to 18, and now I'm applying to you because I am a young person who cares about those around me and not just me."

Mr. Michael Coteau: I have one other question. I think I have about 45 seconds left.

Hon. Marci Ien: Yes.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Just for clarity, can you tell us where the numbers were in 2015 when the program launched with regard to participants and the investment of dollars, and where we are today?

Hon. Marci Ien: As we've heard a lot, it started at 35,000, but it was actually just under that. It was 34,000 actual jobs. I think it was 34,719, but the targeted number was 35,000. There wasn't a ton of uptake, frankly, on the program. Fast-forward to that program doubling to 70,000, but also to the engagement of MPs who, in their communities, were saying, "This is a program you might want to look at."

Mr. Michael Coteau: It was all MPs across the country.

Hon. Marci Ien: It was all MPs right across the country. This is something that's special for us. I include myself in that group. I know who my local organizations are. I know who wouldn't have participated in this program and who is now participating because I engaged and I said, "You need to know about this."

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Madam Minister, thank you once again for being here.

Do you recognize that the demand for the Canada Summer Jobs program is increasing over time, in particular as a result of demographic growth and inflation? This program serves a dual objective. First, it offers employers a solution, especially non-profit organizations, and represents their survival. Those organizations do not have 50 positions to fill. Sometimes it is just one or two positions, for 10 to 12 weeks. I don't know if it is the same elsewhere, but throughout my riding I was told that it was a maximum of eight weeks. I will have questions about that in the second hour.

If we look at this program as an investment and not an expenditure, it should be improved in order to meet the needs. It might have been improved a bit, but we must not let it stagnate or ignore demographic growth and inflation. If we looked at this program as an investment, I think we would be proud to offer solutions to support organizations that cannot carry out their projects because they do not have a minimum of staff. Yes, the program is in high demand because it meets the needs of employers and young people alike.

In the letters you sent us, which we thank you for, you said that you are willing to keep working with all stakeholders to improve the program every year. What will you do to improve it this year?

• (1150)

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you for the question, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

You said something very important. You said that employers survive thanks to this program. Respectfully, Madame, that is not what this program is. This program is not about fiscal stimulus. That's not what it is. It is a program that provides opportunity to young people during the summer.

It is a testament that this program is oversubscribed. MPs love it and 338 help run it, but that's not what it is. This is why there is a suite of programs in concert with Canada summer jobs to meet the needs you're talking about.

This is a program for kids for the summer. Is it perfect? No, but we are constantly listening and improving. We heard from MPs that MPs needed more time with regard to choosing their priorities and choosing their organizations, so we did that.

There are several feedback tools we use and incorporate—

The Chair: Madame Chabot, you have time for a short rebuttal.

Hon. Marci Ien: Yes, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: When I mentioned survival, I was not referring to the employer's survival. Take for example a day camp for autistic children. Being able to staff two positions also helps young people, but for this organization it is a question of survival. If Canada Summer Jobs does not fund those positions, there will be no day camp for those young autistic people.

[*English*]

Hon. Marci Ien: I have a quick rebuttal, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Give a short answer, Madam Minister.

Hon. Marci Ien: I absolutely agree. Those camps are so important. I visited a camp in Montreal recently for kids with disabilities. There were young people—CSJ students—working there and helping. It is so very important.

Absolutely, those camps are extremely important, but what I'm saying is that it is up to MPs to prioritize what they would like to see in their communities.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Madam Zarrillo, you have two and a half minutes, or extra, as the others had.

Go ahead, Madam Zarrillo.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to go back to some of the comments that have been made around the table today about how this is an important program for social services in our communities.

As well as the skills and abilities that are learned, it also does support a lot of the community-building work that happens in our communities. With that in mind, we see it's over-indexed for women and girls and over-indexed for the not-for-profit sector, so I'm concerned. We know we need to get people together more and we need more community-building happening. We know that postpandemic there's just more work to do in that area.

I'm wondering if it's your plan, Minister, to increase the funding for this program next year, and to what levels. I'm interested in what information you've used to determine how this program should look next year.

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you so much, Bonita, for the question.

We will make sure the program functions into next year the way it is functioning right now. I am always advocating for this program, and not just as a minister but as an MP.

I also understand what this program is. When you take 70,000 jobs and look at the checks and balances that have to happen with those 70,000 jobs and you have 338 MPs with their local priorities, it's a lot. This is huge. I have to say that only so much is possible. The reality is the reality.

Will CSJ continue? Absolutely. Will I always advocate? Absolutely I will, as a minister and an MP.

We also have to recognize it is huge. It is popular. At the centre of everything, it really is the kids who are being served. For these kids to get the best experience that they can over the summer is what it's about.

• (1155)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'll take this opportunity to reiterate that any cut in the program does disproportionately affect women, girls, indigenous youth and youth with disabilities.

I did note you had some data there from different ridings. If I could ask you to provide the Port Moody—Coquitlam information at the end of this meeting, that would be awesome.

Hon. Marci Ien: Yes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I want to go back to the wage gap question that I asked earlier. Is there data collected around the wage gap by gender?

I'm very interested to know because we know that the not-for-profit sector is heavily made up of women. Pensions are not a thing and wages aren't necessarily as high as they are in other markets, so I just want to make sure that we're not setting up girls and young women in salaries that are not competitive.

Hon. Marci Ien: We know that from province to province it's minimum wage, so there wouldn't be a disparity there, but we can get you some more numbers for sure.

I will just quickly give you your numbers. In 2019, Bonita, it was 718,083. In 2023, it was 775,673. I would be pleased to give you more numbers as you need them.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

We'll adjourn the first hour with the minister at about 12:05, because we started a few minutes late.

I'm going to give four minutes to the official opposition and four minutes to the government. I understand it will be Mr. Morrice.

We'll now go to Ms. Ferreri for four minutes, please.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Minister, for attending the committee today.

Can you table with the committee the new mandate letter that was issued to you, because there was a shuffle in cabinet by the Prime Minister?

Hon. Marci Ien: My mandate letter is unchanged.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Is it unchanged?

Hon. Marci Ien: I have the same ministry.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Were there no new mandate letters issued or...?

Hon. Marci Ien: Not for me.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you.

One of the issues that we've heard today is how the program is being rolled out. You said in your opening remarks that you want to make changes and do so by listening and learning.

I would like to share with the committee a letter from my riding and the Township of Selwyn. There was a motion that was carried. I'm going to read into the record a bit of what was said:

Whereas in 2023, the Selwyn Public Library, as well as other libraries in Peterborough County, did not receive this federal funding valued annually (Selwyn's case) at approximately \$6,300, and did not learn that funding was not approved until mid July and that given the late notice had to use fundraising dollars to fund summer students to support library programming;

You can imagine how challenging it would be to not have any answers when you are banking on money that you would have received and also have to deal with a program that's not giving any correspondence, any information, until mid-July.

I guess what I'm asking here, on behalf of the township, Minister, is this: How do you reconcile the inefficiencies in the system and the communication gaps that are clearly happening and are impacting what is supposed to be the mandate with ensuring that students are becoming employed and that the businesses are benefiting from these students being employed?

Hon. Marci Ien: I would ask, first, where was the library with regard to your priorities? Members of Parliament have the tools to do that. I know as an MP that I list the organizations that I believe should benefit from this program, and then there is another round.

I'm just trying to understand where the Selwyn library was in all of that.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: For sure, it was prioritized. It was at the top of the priority list.

The other point that needs to be made is that only 10% of the local priorities.... In 2018, the committee's study on Canada summer jobs had a recommendation to respond to national and local priorities to improve access to the labour market, and it goes on from there. The scoring criteria give only 10% to local needs that are balanced and serving communities well.

Do you think that is fair? It's 10%.

• (1200)

Hon. Marci Ien: As I said before, Michelle, I'm trying to understand where Selwyn was.

You said it was prioritized—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Of course.

Hon. Marci Ien: Where? Was it prioritized in the first round, and on top of the list, and it was told no?

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: It wasn't told anything. That's the whole problem. There was no communication. It wasn't informed of anything until mid-July.

Hon. Marci Ien: I shouldn't be delving into specific cases, but what I will do, Michelle, is we'll talk after this, because that concerns me. I want to understand what happened, okay?

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: For sure, and I do appreciate that.

That's one of the big concerns. We've heard from across the way, and there are supposed to be benefits here and 100%, but I would challenge you greatly, Minister, when you're saying that this program is run by MPs. With all due respect, Minister, it is run by your ministry. It is not run by us.

Hon. Marci Ien: There is no other program that has the type of MP involvement. I know that as an MP—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: MP involvement is significantly different from saying we run it. That's what you said on the record, Minister—that we run this program.

Hon. Marci Ien: “Help run” is what I said.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: No, you didn't. You said this program is “run by” 338 MPs. That's what you said.

Hon. Marci Ien: Okay.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I just would challenge you on that greatly, because there's a lack of transparency or correspondence. This program does help a ton of small businesses, and it is small business week, so there's a big shout-out to them, but there is a massive lack of communication, and these businesses are waiting until the last minute, scrambling because they haven't had any communication from your ministry. That's not on us as MPs, Minister, so for you to insinuate that it is today is very unfair.

Hon. Marci Ien: No, what I was talking about, Michelle, was the choice and the selection, and that's what I mean. There isn't another program that says, “MPs, because you know your constituencies best, because you know the local organizations that may not be—”

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Yes, 100%, but it's—

Hon. Marci Ien: —because you know all that best, we're going to prioritize....” It's because, with all due respect, Service Canada

has no idea what's going on in your riding. Service Canada does not know what's going on, but you do.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Then why is it only 10% of the priority?

Hon. Marci Ien: Listen, that is something that we will continue to work on, but what I'm saying is—and we know this as MPs—that there is no other program that gives the opportunities that this program does for MPs to connect with their local organizations and to suggest which organizations should benefit—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: But 90% of that is not local; it's only 10%.

Hon. Marci Ien: Are you saying that the organizations that are prioritized in Peterborough—Kawartha are not organizations that you have put there, that you have suggested? Is that what you're saying?

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Miss Ferreri.

We'll go to Mr. Morrice to conclude.

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, colleagues.

Minister Ien, it's wonderful to see you here. I wanted to follow up on our conversation from this past summer.

Hon. Marci Ien: We've had several. We've been in touch a lot, Mike.

Mr. Mike Morrice: I appreciate the conversations we've had, particularly as a result of the letter we worked on with both the Bloc and NDP to dig in to some of what we've heard throughout this conversation today.

First of all, I appreciate, as I've heard from you several times already, your advocacy in the fall economic statement to see the numbers. The program right now is \$278 million. I would continue to join in the advocacy to say that we see significant funding elsewhere and would like to see the funding increased. I recognize you're in the midst of that advocacy already, so I'd like to focus my question more on the 70,000 jobs, because behind that number are—in my community, at least—many employers who received only eight weeks of support as opposed to 16 weeks.

While there were 70,000 jobs, there's a significant cut in the number of weeks per job. It's also a minimum wage program still, so often it's the lowest-wage role for that employer, and it's also communicated very late, so a lot of these employers are having a difficult time learning in mid-April about how to acquire resources.

I'll give you an example. Red Raccoon Bike Rescue in my community are a bunch of volunteers who fix bikes. They received two jobs at eight weeks each, and they heard about it towards the end of April. We were able to work with Service Canada in this case, and with your team, to have the advocacy to say actually we'd prefer only one job at 16 weeks over the two jobs at eight weeks, given how small this organization is.

In addition to your advocacy to see funding increased, can you speak about what we can be doing collectively to see the wages increased, to see the communication moved up for employers to plan for the roles, and to see 16-week roles returned to more often?

• (1205)

Hon. Marci Ien: Thanks so much, Mike, and for your incredible advocacy as well. We've been on the line a lot.

With regard to the eight weeks, I will say that this is a summer program. That's what it is. Obviously there are always things to be considered, but that's what it is, because it's meant for a certain cohort. That's what I mean about the different cohorts and the different programs. This one is meant for high school kids.

With regard to employers and late notice, it was one of the things that we heard from MPs, and we changed. The call for proposals, the call for employers, starts in November. It starts in a month and will go until January. We heard that things happen too late and that people need to know earlier, so November is now the time. In a month from now, that will be happening.

Mr. Mike Morrice: I think the notification to the employer, though, remains at April 19 or so this year, so I'd encourage anything that can be done there. I know that Service Canada is working hard.

Anything that could be done to move the entire window earlier and for applications to open earlier would be good. If notifications could be made in February or March so that employers would be ready to act and a post-secondary student, for example, who would like to start on May 1 could.... If we could see more of those opportunities made available with more notice....

Certainly I can speak for employers in Kitchener. I know you've received some letters from them. They are very keen to have that extra notice period. There could even be a challenge to Canada summer jobs to pay a living wage. Maybe the Government of Canada could say, "We'd encourage you to ensure that every role in your organization is paid a living wage and we're going to help make sure that you can do that." On behalf of employers in Kitchener Centre, I strongly encourage you to have that advocacy included, along with a return to pandemic funding levels.

Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Minister, do you have a response?

Hon. Marci Ien: Thank you, Mike.

I just want to thank Mike and, frankly, thank everybody. It isn't often that you come into a room like this and find people are not just excited but are advocating so hard for a program that obviously is not perfect but is working so well for young people across this country. I'm just honoured to be with you here today, and I thank you.

There is much to consider. There's information that we need to get back to you, obviously, but I will tell you that it feels very much as I leave here, Mr. Chair, that we're on the right path. It's not a perfect path, but we're on a path that serves young people well, so thank you for the time.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. You're right. There were some very valid points raised here that would improve the delivery in the ridings. We appreciate your taking the time to listen to them.

The committee will suspend for two minutes, let's say, and then we'll go back into the final hour with the department officials.

Thank you again, Minister.

I forgot to welcome Madam Vecchio, who is in the committee—

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's unbelievable—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Ms. Hepfner is leaving as well.

It was good having you here, and having you, Minister. You can see that it's a program that members of Parliament are quite in tune with.

We'll suspend for two minutes.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1210)

The Chair: Committee members, could we resume, please? We may be interrupted, so if we could have officials ready, we'll be going directly to the questioning round.

The committee is back in session with the officials from the ministry. We'll begin with the first six-minute round. I understand that Mr. Aitchison is going to lead.

There are no opening statements and the officials have been introduced, so we'll begin the first round of questioning with Mr. Aitchison for six minutes, please.

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

I'd like to take this time to move a motion that we have on notice. I'll read it, if you don't mind: I move:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities recognizes Canada is in a housing crisis, and that this motion be reported to the House.

I'd like to move that motion.

The Chair: Committee members, a motion has been moved by Mr. Aitchison. The motion is in order, I have been advised.

Is there discussion on the motion?

I have Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): We do recognize that Canada is in a housing crisis, Mr. Chair. The minister has spoken about it and has acted accordingly.

I was just at a panel discussion with the Canadian Real Estate Association with my colleague. It was a good discussion on where things are and a good discussion on measures introduced by the government thus far, and there's more to do.

I'm just wondering what the intent is to bring the motion here when it has been acknowledged already that the situation is as described. That's a question.

• (1215)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Aitchison.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: I'm happy to speak to that.

Mr. Fragiskatos is quite correct. At least the new minister acknowledges that we're in a crisis, and we've talked about housing. We've had studies on housing. I think it's important for this committee to unanimously declare it and report that to the House. Anybody who's been on a municipal council knows that occasionally we would pass motions just like this to identify an issue and signal to constituents that we acknowledge that a problem exists and that we're working to fix it. That's really all it is. It's an acknowledgement.

I think this committee knows that as well, and that's why I suggest that we do it.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

Do you have your hand up, Mr. Fragiskatos?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I do, yes.

Usually if an idea is put on the table like this, it would come with attached ideas: Canada is in a housing crisis, and therefore X, Y and Z should happen.

I mentioned to my colleague today that I was disappointed to see that the Conservatives had put half measures on the table when it comes to their approach to waiving the GST. As you know, Mr. Chair, it is not an across-the-board waiver for purpose-built rentals. There's a very important asterisk, so to speak, that would prevent housing from being built. Some housing would be built, but not nearly as much.

I wonder if my colleagues had a chance to review the testimony at the finance committee that was made available a few days ago. The blues are there. Finance officials made it clear that the Conservative approach on this particular issue would not lead to very much housing, certainly not in comparison to what the government has done. This is, as you know, a much broader waiver with respect to the GST, which will see purpose-built rental apartments constructed across the country. In fact, Dream Unlimited, a very large developer in Toronto, has said that they will now, as a result of this specific measure, construct more than 5,000 units.

Where are the ideas? If we're just going to report to the House a statement, I'm wondering if my colleague is trying to find ways to eat time from the House of Commons and distract from the legislative agenda of the government. Is that the overall intent of the mo-

tion here? We know that Canada has this particular issue in front of it, which I agree is a crisis. Then what exactly is the approach?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Aitchison.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: The committee could be forgiven for thinking that maybe my colleague is trying to waste the time of the witnesses here, and I'm not trying to do that. The minister was here and acknowledged that we're in a crisis. It's not a complex thing. I just think it's important for us to be unanimous in declaring that it is a crisis, just like your minister has done. It shouldn't be complex. I didn't think it would take this much time. I know these folks are here to talk about other things, and I thought it would be a fairly quick thing to do.

We have a crisis. I think it's important for us to acknowledge that crisis, as your own minister has, and I thought this would be a fairly quick thing we could all agree on.

The Chair: We have Mr. Long on the motion.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

Can we suspend for a couple of minutes, Chair?

The Chair: You request a suspension. We'll suspend for two minutes.

• (1215)

(Pause)

• (1220)

The Chair: The committee is resumed.

Mr. Long, you had the floor.

Mr. Wayne Long: I'm happy to chat, Chair. I don't know if I have the floor. I just asked for a suspension.

The Chair: I see Mr. Fragiskatos and Madam Zarrillo.

We have Mr. Fragiskatos, then we'll go to Madam Zarrillo on the motion.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'll just go back to the point that I made earlier, Mr. Chair.

He knows this. I won't belabour the point, and I have a lot of respect for the colleague opposite. He's an effective critic, and he knows his file. He knows it because of his years in the municipality, and I know that he spent time in real estate as well. Therefore, he knows better that something like this is only going to distract from the overall legislative agenda.

There is important work that's happening in the House, including the lifting of the GST on purpose-built rentals that I hope Conservatives support. I know it's under their skin now that the measure we've introduced—and it's verified—is more effective, but what they're doing now is not a way to blow steam effectively. If they're upset about that, this doesn't move things in a terribly meaningful way.

I'll just leave it there, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame Zarrillo.

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

I wanted to hear the debate on this one today, but I definitely had concerns when the past housing minister came to this committee and wasn't willing to admit that the Liberals had undertaken a market-driven program to try to get housing built in this country and had totally walked away from social housing, as had the Conservatives.

There was a comment today from the Liberals about Dream Unlimited. I brought it to this committee that Dream was awarded money from the Canada Infrastructure Bank. Dream is a group of three different companies with publicly traded TSX shares. One of them is a REIT with a portfolio of over \$13 billion. We're talking about that being the solution. Now that it's getting a GST rebate, it's actually willing to build some rental housing. It's insulting.

When I was sitting as a municipal councillor, I brought forward the motion on the GST rebate that went to the FCM. It's been in the FCM policy book for a long time, and now the Liberals are saying this is revolutionary. They need to have a fire lit under them, because they don't seem to understand the critical nature of what we're dealing with here.

Many of us who are in the Confederation Building and who go back and forth from the West Block would have seen the person outside today saying that winter is coming and we need to address homelessness. Encampments are growing.

I have a friendly amendment that I hope the Conservatives and the committee will be open to. I move that after "recognizes Canada is in a housing crisis", we add the words "that requires urgent action by the federal government to end homelessness".

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll ask for a friendly amendment. If that's not the way we'd like to go, I could move a firm amendment, but I'm going to first ask if the mover would be open to a friendly amendment.

• (1225)

The Chair: Madame Zarrillo, could you repeat that slowly so that it's in the record?

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: After "housing crisis", it would read, "that requires urgent action by the federal government to end homelessness".

The Chair: Okay, committee. You now have an amendment by Madame Zarrillo to the motion of Mr. Aitchison.

Mr. Aitchison, do you want to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Scott Aitchison: I'm just going to say that I'm amenable to that friendly amendment. I think it's good. Thanks.

The Chair: I have Mr. Coteau on the amendment.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can we hear the amendment one more time, please?

The Chair: I will read it in.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: After the words "in a housing crisis", we would add "that requires urgent action by the federal government to

end homelessness". It would then continue with "and that this motion be reported to the House".

The Chair: Seeing no further discussion on Madam Zarrillo's amendment, I'm going to call a recorded vote.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Mr. Aitchison's amended motion has been adopted unanimously by the committee and will be reported to the House.

With that, I will return to the committee's study on the Canada summer jobs program with the officials. We will now go to Mr. Aitchison for six minutes.

• (1230)

Mr. Scott Aitchison: I'm going to give my time to Mrs. Gray.

The Chair: You can give it to whomever you choose.

Mrs. Gray, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: That's great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to—

The Chair: We'll probably only get one full round in.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Okay. That's great. Thank you so much.

Thank you to the officials for being here today.

Has the minister given you any directives regarding the Canada summer jobs program?

Ms. Frances McRae: Mr. Chair, this program is managed by the department, as you know, and we do seek decisions from the minister on the parameters of the program on an annual basis.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Is that something that you would be able to table for this committee during the duration of this study?

Ms. Frances McRae: Mr. Chair, I believe it's well understood that advice to the minister is not something that we share with committees.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Okay.

Do you track Canada summer jobs inquiries, issues and complaints that may come in from both employers and applicants?

Ms. Frances McRae: I'm going to turn to my operations colleagues to answer the specifics of the tracking.

I will say that we do have significant conversations both with members of Parliament and with applicants who may, for example, require additional information on their applications. This is a routine part of the work in managing the application process.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: If I may, just without getting into the weeds as to what those specifically might be, could you say, for example, that you've had this many concerns on this topic, this many concerns on that topic, or this many questions? That's sort of what I am looking for. If possible, could you table for this committee, before the end of this study, any of that analysis that you might have on how you might track the incoming inquiries and issues that come in? Is that possible?

Ms. Frances McRae: I can answer that, Mr. Chair.

The queries that we get are very specific to the actual applications in almost all cases, so they would be things like “We have this additional piece of information that we'd like to provide to you.”

We do have, as we talked about, the surveys that are mandatory for employers and that are voluntary for the youth. I can certainly give you numbers about satisfaction levels and the views—at the employer level—of the roles that the youth played in terms of their operations. We're happy to share those.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great. Thank you very much for that.

Have you made recommendations to the minister on ways to reduce red tape on the Canada summer jobs program?

Ms. Frances McRae: In fact, every year we do look at how we could become more efficient. I will maybe add for context that the program operations branch that manages the Canada summer jobs program actually also manages a wide range of programs. Over 40 programs are run at ESDC, and 70 unique program streams. When we provide advice on efficiency, we do consider how that efficiency can be distributed across the programs.

I would just say that it's our objective to make sure we get the material out and the program launched as early as possible, as early as we can. Certainly we do talk about efficiencies as we run the program in terms of making sure that we can get answers out to employers as soon as we can.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Great. Thank you.

Are you able to table for this committee some of those internal recommendations or objectives that your department might be working on regarding the administration of this program?

Ms. Frances McRae: Mr. Chair, as I mentioned before, any recommendations that we would make to the minister or any advice that we would provide in terms of efficiencies or other recommendations on the program are not documents that we can table.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Okay. Thank you.

What are your service standards for responding to questions? What are your service standards specifically for timelines in responding to questions that might come in from employers?

Ms. Frances McRae: From employers and MPs, we do have very specific processes. In particular, our Service Canada offices regionally are very much in touch with all 338 members of Parliament. As you can imagine, there are questions that come in during the application period—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: But what are the service standards and response times? A lot of departments will have certain response time service standards. Are you meeting those service standards?

Ms. Frances McRae: I will turn to my colleagues in terms of timelines, but I would just say two things: One, we run very well-attended information sessions every year for members of Parliament—

• (1235)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Right. I just want to focus on this. My time is almost up.

Ms. Frances McRae: On the questions, it depends on the complexity, I would say.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: If I may, we're hearing that it takes anywhere....

I had a constituent from my riding reach out—I have a copy of the email—and say that it took a month to have a response back to a question they had. We have heard from other business groups that it takes up to three months to get a response back from the department on a very simple question.

Whatever information you can provide and table for this committee on what your service standards are and if they are being met would be very helpful.

Ms. Frances McRae: Go ahead, Damon.

Mr. Damon Rourke (Director, Workforce Development and Youth, Program Operations, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you.

As the deputy mentioned, it depends on the correspondence. There are some inquiries we get from MPs directly through our Service Canada offices that we endeavour to answer as quickly as possible. It does depend on the complexity of the issue raised, but on simple ones the service standard is as quickly as possible.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: What is “as quickly as possible”? Do you have so many days, or...?

Mr. Damon Rourke: It depends on whether or not we have to go back to the employer to clarify exactly what the question may be. We work with them directly to be able to resolve it. Sometimes we resolve it quickly—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Do you have service standards? That is, when somebody inquires, do you have to respond within a certain time period, depending on the complexity? Do you not have those different standards? Are you not able to speak to those?

Mr. Damon Rourke: We do have standards in place—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: So what are they?

Mr. Damon Rourke: —in terms of....

I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray. You were over your six minutes, so we have concluded there.

The bells are now ringing in the House. They are 30-minute bells. What is the wish of the committee? We will not get in the full six-minute round for everybody.

Go ahead, Ms. Vecchio.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Since I'm here at the committee for the first time, I recommend that we go an additional 15 minutes and that we provide ample time for us to get across to vote.

The Chair: Are we okay with 15 more minutes? That should get us a complete round, although I will cut you a bit short.

I'm seeing "yes" nods.

Mr. Van Bynen, you'll have six minutes, right on the time, and then I will go to Madame Chabot and Ms. Zarrillo.

Thanks for that, Ms. Vecchio.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me begin by acknowledging the incredible value and impact our community has received through the Canada summer jobs program. Just this last year we supported 320 jobs for young adults and supported 60-plus organizations with the Canada summer jobs funding in my riding of Newmarket—Aurora.

The impact does not stop there. In fact, countless families were able to find programming that supported their children's camp programs. The programs would not have existed without the Canada summer jobs program. It is without a doubt one of the most anticipated and successful programs our government provides to communities across the country.

As we seek input from those with first-hand knowledge of the program in future meetings, let us make sure that our mandate is to improve on the program that is already highly valued.

This past summer, I visited and spoke with numerous organizations that were running programs funded by the Canada summer jobs program. In many cases, the young adults who attended these programs had also attended them when they were younger. There are a lot of repeats, and that's critically important. They had intimate knowledge of the experience and were quick to return when they had the opportunity. We cannot underestimate the value of the work experience these young adults have gained from the Canada summer jobs program.

Let's also acknowledge, though, that there is room for improvement. I appreciate the many challenges that the Canada summer jobs program creates for the applicants, with the planning, budgeting and interviewing of applicants to provide support to programs and to staff programs. Then there's accepting young people into the programs. When I look at the timelines, I have to ask if the deadlines really work or if there should be changes in the application period and the funding notification.

This is for whoever is able to answer that question.

Ms. Frances McRae: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

The program is a very high-volume program. I think we heard about that a little bit earlier.

Obviously the application period is designed to allow MPs to reach all of the employers in their communities who may be interested, so there's a fair opportunity to apply. Then we have to assess the applications. The applications are assessed against 15 criteria, which are outlined in the applicant guide. It does take a fair bit of time to get through the assessments and the eligibility list. Then, of course, there is the MP engagement in terms of setting priorities.

I will say that we learn every year how we might be able to improve in terms of efficiency. For example, when employers decide they are going to withdraw some applications or they're not able to find youth for the jobs, then we want to reinvest that money so there are additional opportunities for members of Parliament to identify five priorities they would like to see funded should money become available as time goes on.

The process of getting to the final applicants is a lengthy one, partly because we are working with 338 different members of Parliament. Also, we're constantly having employers who shift their plans.

• (1240)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: The solution to that would be to start the process sooner. How much consideration has been given to starting the process sooner?

Ms. Frances McRae: Mr. Chair, the process we have.... In fact, we are not even quite finished Canada summer jobs 2023. The process we have will launch Canada summer jobs 2024 in the coming weeks.

We do our best to try to make sure we can have an early launch. We know that those weeks are really critical for both employers and members of Parliament. We'll continue to make sure we can close that gap on timing as well as we can. We know it's critical that jobs start as early as possible for the summer season.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: That's great. Thank you.

I've also heard that there needs to be more flexibility in the work weeks. The hard and fast rule of eight consecutive weeks can be difficult for young adults and organizations.

What are your thoughts on the possibility of creating more flexibility—for example, with a one-week break during that eight-week period and an extension of the period of time during which the student is eligible?

Ms. Frances McRae: I think we've talked about the nature of the jobs and the length of the jobs. You're talking about a specific kind of gap and whether that would be possible.

I'm going to turn to my colleagues and see whether that can be accommodated in the program. I will say that we will be very interested in what the committee has to say about that kind of advice as you complete your report.

Thank you.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: My question then is this: If we have trusted employers, and the employer sees fit to create a break or to modify those hours, as long as our commitment is for jobs and hours, can we not put more confidence in the employers to apply the program as it best fits their requirements and accommodates students as well? That's a consideration I'd like to see a response on so that it can be part of our recommendations as we go forward.

The Chair: Give a quick response, please.

Ms. Jenny Tremblay (Director General, Workforce Development and Youth, Program Operations, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The flexibility is in certain situations. It currently exists for employers, for example, if they're having a challenge finding additional youth for that second placement. We do have that built into the program as a flexibility at the moment. We do encourage, and continue to encourage from a policy point of view, as many participants in the program as possible, which is what the eight-week placements provide, especially in some areas of the country where there may actually be more youth available to participate in those valuable job opportunities.

We're certainly looking forward to hearing back from the committee on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

[Translation]

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

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

I want to thank the departmental officials for being here.

As to the application of the problem... sorry, I meant to say "program" and not "problem". The Canada Summer Jobs program is certainly not a problem. In our study, we do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

I think most of us are proud that this program contributes to regional, economic and social development, for non-profit organizations and young people alike. Of course, we would also like to improve the program because we have noted problems every year since 2019.

Is it possible to inform us and employers in advance of changes to the program? You said we will learn about the new program in a few weeks. MPs have been given many powers. If we had the power to do so, I would double the number of positions on my team. In reality, however, we do not have that much power.

Is it possible to provide certain information before the program comes into effect? For instance, can we find out how much will be allocated under the next program and how many positions will be funded? Once all that has been determined, it is a question of numbers. It is tough for employers and young people. Can you give a heads-up and let MPs and organizations know about the upcoming changes?

● (1245)

Ms. Frances McRae: Mr. Chair, I want to thank the member for her question.

As to providing information to employers, we do that in a number of ways. We rely in particular on MPs and their staff to promote the program. In addition, there is always some public information: as the minister said, the fall economic statement includes public information.

This year, however, we are preparing a special kit for MPs so they can promote all of our programs, not just the Canada Summer Jobs program. Specifically, we have launched the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, and a call for proposals was issued last week. I would say we rely primarily on MPs, because they are the ones with the local contacts.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I see. You can appreciate that MPs were surprised by the amounts last year. It is true that we can work together and determine objectives, but only in general terms: we do not give you a list of the organizations that we would like to see funded. What are our priorities? Are they community organizations or municipal ones?

You announced investments, but MPs were shocked to learn that the budget had been cut by 30% as compared to the pandemic years, with all that means for applications.

It would be helpful to know the amounts in advance. Do you know if the budget will be increased?

Ms. Frances McRae: The number of jobs for next year is 70,000, the same number as has been publicly stated.

Ms. Louise Chabot: So we will be in the same boat as last year.

Ms. Frances McRae: This number has been announced, it is nothing new.

Ms. Louise Chabot: It is still possible that the Minister of Finance will make an announcement in the fall economic statement. Do you know whether the minister and your department, in view of the program's record, have concluded that it should receive more funding, given the number of applications? Has that been done?

Ms. Frances McRae: As you know, the fall economic statement is created by the finance department, so we do not have any information about what this year's fall statement will contain.

In the past five years, the number of applications for this program has increased by 200% to 300%, so it has been very popular in recent years.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I have one last question for you. If you do not have time to answer, you may do so in writing.

Would it be possible for MPs to receive feedback after the program has been implemented, regarding the employer satisfaction rate, or what worked well and what didn't? I expect you collect that information from employers and young people. Do you use that feedback in assessing the program and determining what must be improved for the following year? If so, could that assessment be shared?

• (1250)

Ms. Frances McRae: The employer survey is indeed an essential part of the program. For young people, taking part in the survey is optional. That said, we do have some information that we can share.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Could you submit that to the committee, Ms. McRae?

We'll have Madame Zarrillo to finish this because we are getting close to the vote.

Go ahead, Madame Zarrillo.

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

I'm just going to go ahead and reiterate two questions and give one question to answer here because we do not have a lot of time.

I just wanted to be sure to reiterate my request to have the most recent qualitative and quantitative data for the CSJ. I'm assuming it's 2022, but if it's 2021, then it's whichever.

Also, I would personally like to ask for the data for Port Moody—Coquitlam to come to me in my office.

I also assume that there will be an analysis of this year's Canada summer jobs grant based on the impact of the drastic reduction in funding. I'm very interested in those results too, so I'd like those to also be reported to this committee once they're available.

My question is around information sessions for those communities where English or French is not their first language. I think about my riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam, where there's a very strong presence of Korean and Persian small businesses that have not been able to be aware of the program or to have access to the program.

Is there a plan to have information sessions that are demographically aligned with the community?

Ms. Frances McRae: I will just say for purposes of information sharing that all information related to the program in terms of uptake and employers is posted on opencanada.ca. That's something that members might be interested in.

In terms of information sessions, we do currently run them in English and French, as the member notes. We have not had significant demand in other languages, but we would be happy to work with different MPs about specific gaps for information to see what we can do to fill those.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Zarrillo

Thank you, committee members.

Just before we adjourn, I want to advise the committee that I'm setting a deadline for the AI study witness list for 4 p.m. on Monday, October 23.

Could we agree to accept written briefs for Bill C-318, with a maximum length of 2,000 words? Is that agreeable to the committee? This is on the legislation.

I see that the committee agrees to accept written briefs for Bill C-318, the legislation, with a maximum length of 2,000 words.

Thank you, committee members. Thank you, department staff. You can see that this is a program that engages members of Parliament, and we thank you for your input today.

With that, the committee is adjourned.

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

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

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

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

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

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

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