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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

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• (1105)

[English]

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

Committee members, the clerk has advised me that we have a quorum and that those appearing virtually have been sound tested.

Welcome to meeting number 93 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 beginning its study on intergenerational volunteerism.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, meaning that some members and witnesses are appearing in the room and some are appearing virtually.

I would like to review a few items.

You have the option of choosing to speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation is available in the room by using your headset and selecting the appropriate language. For those appearing virtually, please click on the world icon at the bottom of your screen and choose the official language of your choice. If there's an interruption in translation services, please get my attention, and we'll suspend while it is being corrected. For those who are here virtually, you can use the "raise hand" icon to get my attention. For those in the room, simply raise your hand.

I would like to remind the members in the room to keep their earpieces away from the in-room microphones for the safety of the translators' hearing.

Our witnesses are Trevor Moss, chief executive officer, Central Okanagan Food Bank, who is appearing virtually, and Megan Conway from Volunteer Canada, who is in the room.

Before I begin with the opening comments, I want to speak for the benefit of the committee.

You will recall that last week, at one meeting, there was a point of order by Mrs. Gray, at which time I said that I would take under consideration my position as it related to moving motions during your speaking time allocation. At the last meeting, a question was asked regarding the fact that the clock is not stopped when a member has the floor to question witnesses and, during the intervention, if he or she moves a motion, if the time provided for questioning the witness has expired, at the end of the debate on the motion, the

floor is given to the next member who wishes to question the witness.

In making the decision I'm about to give, I was guided by a few principles. First of all, members have complete discretion to do whatever they want with the time allotted to them. They can question witnesses and move motions. Second, this decision in no way alters the right of members to debate the motion in accordance with the established rules. I decided to do this in order to give all members as many opportunities as possible to ask questions, which I have a responsibility to do. It's a question of fairness. Everyone can use their speaking time as they see fit.

In fairness to all the members around the table, I want everyone to be able to exercise their right to speak. In short, everyone does what they like with their speaking time. When the time is up, we move on to the next member unless the committee is debating a motion. In that case, anyone can speak with no time limit. This decision does not deprive any member of their right to ask questions or move motions.

With that, committee members, I will move to opening comments from Mr. Moss.

Mr. Moss, you have the floor for five minutes or less.

Thank you.

Mr. Trevor Moss (Chief Executive Officer, Central Okanagan Food Bank): Thank you, esteemed members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, for providing us with the opportunity to share our insights on intergenerational volunteerism.

Intergenerational volunteerism is not just a philosophy. It is a daily reality in the heart of our operations. The Central Okanagan Food Bank serves as a meeting ground where individuals from all walks of life converge to make a collective impact. Through these interactions, connections are forged, relationships are built and the diversity that enriches our community is celebrated.

Each generation brings a unique perspective and skill set to volunteer positions that impact their fellow volunteers, the organization they are working with and the community at large. It's this diversity that evokes real and impactful change in our communities, and we see this daily.

Youth volunteers bring a dynamic and fresh perspective to organizations like ours through their energy, enthusiasm and willingness to embrace innovation. Their open-mindedness and adaptability make them valuable assets, as they often approach challenges with creativity and a willingness to try new approaches. Additionally, young volunteers tend to be tech-savvy, bringing a digital fluency that can enhance organizational efficiency and outreach efforts.

The passion and idealism of youth can inject new life into projects and initiatives, inspiring others and fostering a positive organizational culture. Their diverse backgrounds and experiences contribute to a rich tapestry of ideas and solutions. Moreover, young volunteers often have a deep connection to contemporary issues, enabling organizations to stay relevant and responsive to evolving societal needs.

For young adults, volunteering offers opportunities to develop and enhance their professional skills. They can gain experience in leadership, communication, project management and teamwork, which are valuable in both personal and professional spheres. Additionally, interpersonal skills such as empathy, cultural sensitivity and adaptability are often honed through volunteer experiences, contributing to well-rounded personal development.

As middle-aged adults engage in volunteer work, they bring a wealth of expertise and a strong sense of responsibility toward community development. This age group often finds fulfillment in applying their skills in novel ways, contributing not only to the success of the volunteer organization but also to their personal growth. Volunteering becomes a platform for continuous learning and a means to diversify their skill set, creating a positive ripple effect that extends beyond individual well-being.

The impact of this intergenerational collaboration on our senior volunteers is profound. Beyond the tangible contributions to the Central Okanagan Food Bank, seniors experience enhanced socialization and a sense of purpose. Engaging in volunteer activities has shown to reduce feelings of isolation, improve mental well-being and foster a strong sense of belonging.

Moreover, the act of volunteering contributes to the physical well-being of our senior volunteers, who make up an impressive 60% of our overall volunteer base. It promotes mobility, encourages an active lifestyle and reinforces the idea that age is not a barrier to meaningful community involvement. Seniors, through dedicated service, not only receive essential support but also find joy in the connections and empowerment that come with being an integral part of our volunteer family. As seniors bring their wealth of experience, they become essential mentors, offering valuable guidance to our younger volunteers.

This collaboration helps our youth develop necessary skills like problem solving, communication and leadership, crucial for their personal and professional growth. This intergenerational teamwork fosters empathy and understanding among our young volunteers, acting as a bridge that nurtures a sense of community and dispels generational gaps.

- (1110)

The intergenerational aspect of volunteering not only enhances the impact on community projects but also forges connections that

withstand the test of time. Whether it's the exuberance of youth, the strategic acumen of middle-aged individuals or the seasoned wisdom of elders, each age cohort complements the others, creating a holistic and sustainable approach to community service. In this way, volunteering becomes a powerful tool for fostering unity, understanding and a shared commitment to build a better, more compassionate society.

Volunteerism is a transformative force that not only strengthens community but also enriches the lives of individuals. By recognizing its value and embracing collaboration across generations, we lay the foundation for a more inclusive, resilient and compassionate society. Together, we can create a legacy of positive change that transcends age boundaries and fosters a spirit of co-operation for the betterment of all.

In this sphere of volunteerism, we observe a dynamic relationship—

The Chair: Mr. Moss, could you bring your comments to a close, please?

Mr. Trevor Moss: Yes.

In this sphere of volunteerism, we observe a dynamic relationship among generations, where the wisdom of our seniors meets the enthusiasm of our youth. Each generation, through its dedication, becomes a beacon illuminating a path for those who follow. Together, we forge a legacy of compassion, resilience and community strength, with each generation inspiring the next in an unbroken chain of goodwill.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Moss.

We'll now go to Megan Conway for five minutes or less.

Ms. Conway, you have the floor.

Dr. Megan Conway (President, Volunteer Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for organizing this important study on intergenerational volunteering.

My name is Dr. Megan Conway, and I am the president and CEO of Volunteer Canada. We are a registered charity that provides national leadership and expertise on volunteerism to enhance the participation, quality and diversity of volunteer experiences. We represent 1,100 members across the country and support them in their efforts to strengthen Canada's volunteering infrastructure.

This study comes at a critical juncture for Canada's social infrastructure. We're facing a growing loneliness epidemic alongside an intensifying crisis in volunteering and participation. Combined, these challenges deplete the ability of communities to support those in need and threaten our health, well-being, economy and resilience, as well as the collective fabric of our nation.

Intergenerational volunteering holds the power to address these mutually reinforcing challenges. It is a powerful avenue for building, belonging and connecting, offering positive multiplier effects for our communities. To deliver intergenerational initiatives at the scale required to address these complex challenges, we need to build a stronger support infrastructure and capacity.

Today I'll share more about the interlinked nature of the loneliness epidemic and the crisis in volunteering and participation, and I'll offer insights into how intergenerational volunteering can help counter these challenges. I'll also present a series of recommendations for how the Government of Canada can contribute to building the infrastructure necessary to effectively promote and support intergenerational volunteering.

The COVID-19 pandemic eroded our social connections and led to a significant rise in social isolation and loneliness. Just a few weeks ago, the World Health Organization declared that loneliness is a global public health concern. Combined, social isolation and loneliness have profound consequences for our public health systems, and they threaten the social capital and sense of belonging that keep our communities connected and productive.

In Canada, one in five Canadians now identify as lonely, with certain groups disproportionately affected, including newcomers, indigenous people, those living on low incomes and people with disabilities or chronic health conditions. Ageism and social isolation are closely associated, leaving older adults and youth particularly at risk.

Since 2015, rates of loneliness have increased by 67% among women aged 65 to 74, and 45% among men in the same age bracket. Today, an estimated 30% of older adults in Canada are at risk of social isolation, with this number expected to increase as the proportion of older adults multiplies in the coming years. The risk is compounded for older adults with intersecting risk factors, such as living alone, having compromised health, living with a low income or living in a rural area.

Our youth are also grappling with loneliness. Nearly one in four Canadian youth between the ages of 15 and 24 report feeling lonely, with higher rates of loneliness among young women. Given that a feeling of belonging and connection with others is fundamental to healthy youth development, this is deeply concerning.

Shifting patterns of social connection extend the way people engage in their community, including through volunteering. While volunteering has historically served as a safeguard for the support systems we rely upon and as an avenue for social connection, there are signs that volunteering and participation are no longer givens. Charitable and non-profit organizations across the country are reporting a shortage of new volunteers, challenges with volunteer retention and an inability to fill long-term roles. The pandemic has exacerbated these issues, with many older adults—who have historically contributed significantly to volunteering—not returning to their roles due to health concerns. Youth, despite their willingness to participate and make a difference, face persistent barriers to volunteering, such as not being asked to participate, time constraints, ageism and financial limitations.

We have an opportunity to reinvigorate the virtuous cycle between volunteering and social connection. We know individuals who volunteer are more connected to their communities and experience higher levels of belonging and inclusion, and that the benefits of volunteering are even greater among those who are socially connected. Intergenerational volunteering amplifies these benefits. When different generations come together, they nurture friendships, understanding and compassion, reduce ageism and strengthen communities in the process. There is a robust evidence base pointing to the benefits of intergenerational volunteering, including enhanced well-being and mental health, skills transfer and increased cross-cultural competency across generations.

Currently, Canada lacks the infrastructure necessary to promote and support purpose-fit and inclusive intergenerational programming and services. For example, effective intergenerational programs require staff training and support, but insufficient investment in volunteer management capacity limits organizations in these areas.

- (1115)

Moreover, there's a substantial data gap in understanding how older adults and youth engage in volunteering, especially when it comes to different ethnic and cultural groups, intersectional identities, religious affiliations, generational trends and rural versus urban volunteering.

These gaps are indicative of a more widespread issue across the volunteering landscape, and many of them stem from the lack of a cohesive and integrated national approach to promoting, supporting and facilitating volunteering.

In 2019, the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector recognized many of these persistent problems and called for the federal government to implement a national volunteer strategy. Volunteer Canada was identified as the leader in this effort and is interested in collaborating with a diverse network of stakeholders.

To this end, we have three recommendations that we wish to make: that the Government of Canada commit to engaging and strategically investing in the development and implementation of a national volunteer action strategy; that it invest in building a robust evidence base on intergenerational volunteering; and that it deepen and expand its investment in long-term, high-impact intergenerational volunteering initiatives that increase the number and diversity of participants in intergenerational volunteering.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening statement. I'm happy to answer any further questions that the committee might have.

- (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Conway, for a very interesting factual synopsis of what's happening in the country. I experience it quite a bit in my constituency amongst those demographics, so thank you.

With that, we will begin with Mrs. Gray for six minutes.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being here and for the work that you do.

My first questions are for Trevor Moss at the Central Okanagan Food Bank.

We hear more stories of working families needing to access the food bank and food banks. Are you seeing this? Also, can you provide a brief rundown of the demographics and sociographics of the clients you serve, and has there been a change over the last 10 years?

Mr. Trevor Moss: What we're seeing is an immense need in our region. Over the last nine months, we have seen a 32% increase in reference to that. What we are projecting is another 100% increase in the next three to four months because of inflation. This is something that we are seeing continually. Of our newest clients who are coming in, some of the biggest pockets are seniors, immigrants and single individuals. They are predominantly the ones who are coming in and who are struggling the most.

We couldn't do this, what we're doing, without our volunteer base, which is 500 volunteers. They actually give us over 30,000 hours to pull this off at our two locations, in West Kelowna and Kelowna.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

I want to confirm that you said that you are expecting a 100% increase in food bank usage over the next three to four months due to inflation.

Mr. Trevor Moss: We're seeing projections. These are projections, but what we're seeing is that the curve is continually going up. Now, with the cost of living and interest rates, this is what we're seeing. The pressing need is huge, especially in the last four weeks. It's just skyrocketing, so we are concerned for the future.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Are you aware of any cases where there would be individuals who used to donate to and/or volunteer for your organization and who now are actually having to come in as clients?

Mr. Trevor Moss: Yes, we're seeing that often. Many people are letting us know that. Also, our physical donations have dropped over 50% in reference to food drives, in reference to those situations, so that is a common experience.

Just last week, we had a 91-year-old lady who came in to the food bank for the first time because she just couldn't make it, and she was on a fixed income.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Wow. Thank you for sharing that. These are really shocking numbers that you're giving when you're talking about donations being down yet the usage being so much greater. I'm sure it's creating a lot of challenges for your organization in trying to serve the community. I know that you're doing all that you can, and you do such really good work.

Are you finding there has been a shift in the demographics, specifically in the ages, because this is about intergenerational...?

Have you seen a shift in different individuals who might be coming in to volunteer, and would they have, maybe, different reasons?

We have seen, in some cases, that there have been some reports that people just don't have the time anymore because they are having to work more. We're seeing reports of seniors having to go back to work in order to pay for basic necessities. Are you seeing a shift where people maybe used to have the time and want to volunteer but just can't because they have to get that second job or go back to work? Are those any of the stories that you're hearing?

Mr. Trevor Moss: Yes, there are three stories that come to my mind. One is seniors who, because of their fixed incomes, have to go and get more occasional jobs to meet the growing need. The second is more in reference to our youth, because they need the money for education, for schooling and those types of things, and the third area is the area of immigration. That's another area where we are seeing that people can't volunteer as much.

There are also working families. This is the highest thing we're seeing as well. Working families are coming in more and more, and they have less to give. Whereas maybe one spouse was working before, now both of them need to, and that's where we're seeing a drop-off as well.

• (1125)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

We've also heard reports that people would like to volunteer, and maybe they've had to reduce volunteering because of the cost of transportation and specifically the cost of gas. Are you seeing volunteers or people wanting to volunteer who maybe can't just because of the transportation needs in getting to and from locations? Is that something that you're hearing at all?

Mr. Trevor Moss: Yes, that is something we are hearing in reference to volunteerism. That is absolutely the case, because we're hearing that more and more. The number one request from our food bank right now is bus tickets, and the other thing that we've had to do is create satellite locations in our area for our clients, because they do not have the money to get on the bus to come and get food, which is tragic indeed. These are some of the barriers that people are encountering day to day.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

We have only about 20 seconds left here. Do you have you any final comment you'd like to make before we sign off?

Mr. Trevor Moss: The only thing that we are seeing in reference to volunteerism is the relational poverty piece, and I think the pandemic did a real number on this. We have also presented a positive piece, in that charities can really help people come together and weave them together. People are moving out of isolation, but the two biggest challenges right now are isolation and putting food on the table.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share some insights on the daily workings of the Central Okanagan Food Bank and the clients we serve.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

Mr. Van Bynen, you have six minutes.

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

I'm really looking forward to what we might learn from this study.

I can say that, as a volunteer for the food bank in Newmarket—Aurora, I understand the dilemma that one of our guests is experiencing. On the bright side, though, just last week we celebrated that one of our churches raised 50,000 pounds for the local food bank, so it's good to see that there is a voluntary response to some of the concerns that we have here.

I'm very interested in hearing more from our guest from Volunteer Canada, Megan Conway. We did have a conversation earlier. Given that this is a national study, I'm looking forward to your contributions.

You had some recommendations but the time limitation had you go through them quickly. Could you expand on your recommendations, please?

Dr. Megan Conway: Sure. Thank you.

In 2019 the Senate produced a report, "Catalyst For Change", and the number one recommendation in that report is that Canada invest in the development of a national volunteer action strategy. Over the last three years, since the pandemic has hit, we've seen significant impacts to volunteering infrastructure across the country.

In the 2022 November business conditions survey from Statistics Canada, 65% of organizations surveyed indicated that they've had difficulty recruiting or retaining volunteers. That has meant that, of those surveyed, 35% of organizations have had to reduce or close programs altogether.

We have a crisis in volunteerism right now, where we're seeing people not able to return to volunteering for a variety of different reasons. Seniors have identified challenges related to health and safety. They've historically been the largest demographic in the country to contribute the most number of hours. That's a significant concern that charities such as the food bank, Meals on Wheels and other direct service organizations are grappling with.

We believe that it's time for there to be a national volunteer action strategy. That's one significant recommendation we would make. We also believe that it's important to build out more robust data and evidence about the benefits of intergenerational volunteerism and about what the landscape of volunteerism looks like in the country at this point, given significant technological shifts across the country.

We believe that volunteerism is a direct way of addressing the loneliness epidemic that we're facing in the country.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you.

You mentioned the need for a national volunteer strategy. What would the objectives be?

My concern is that our volunteers, the ones who are stable over a longer period of time, are aging out on us. How do we get youth more actively involved, and what would the target be?

Dr. Megan Conway: One of the significant concerns we have seen is that young people often don't feel like they have been asked to participate in the community. They feel like it is a domain that is for perhaps an older demographic.

We think there are great advantages to bringing older people and younger people together in volunteering. We have recently identified through some research that the landscape of intergenerational volunteering programs across the country is very chaotic and disparate. Individuals who are really advancing intergenerational initiatives across the country are often themselves aging out and older, and they lack the kinds of organizational infrastructure necessary.

To get back to your question about youth, specifically, though, I think asking youth is critical. Supporting youth with any kind of honorarium relative to their travel costs is important because they are experiencing costs relative to participation. Also, it's important to recognize that the youth themselves have skills, whether they be technological skills or different kinds of design thinking skills, for instance, that are new and cutting-edge ways of solving complex problems.

I think youth bring different skills and capacities to the table. Older adults also have the perspective of wisdom. Bringing those two demographics together, I think, holds huge promise. There is an opportunity to re-engage youth and build a culture of service across this country that we haven't seen in many decades.

• (1130)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: An observation I have received is that the more senior volunteers are longer term, as opposed to the youth being more project-oriented, so more frequent projects.... Is there any way we could shift that perspective, or is that the study you're looking for?

Dr. Megan Conway: I think we need to understand what the picture of volunteerism looks like across diverse demographics. We have very little data or evidence that speaks to what the models of participation for diverse ethnocultural communities look like. For instance, I've been informed that, across indigenous languages, there is not a word for "volunteering". However, we know that indigenous communities and individuals in indigenous communities participate significantly.

I think there's a way in which we could be developing diverse models that are much more future-focused around volunteerism and participation and that will serve our current context, rather than the context of 50 or 60 years ago.

I think back to my grandmother, who was a hospital auxiliary volunteer. She did tremendous work in the community and raised significant funds, but that generation of volunteers has sadly aged out. We need to think about new models of participation that are going to be more resonant and durable for the long term.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you.

What should be the main criterion for federal government programming to encourage intergenerational volunteering?

Dr. Megan Conway: The World Health Organization has identified a number of criteria for effective, high-impact intergenerational volunteering programs. Some of the criteria include things like involving participants in the design of those programs, making them inclusive, having them be universal and basing them on the concept of friendship, which I think is a very interesting concept these days when we think about how disconnected and polarized we have become. It's about recognizing that friendship and the notion of relational connection are really critical.

Having them be durable and over the long term, with a significant investment in their sustainability, I think, is critical. As I have indicated, individuals age out and may no longer have the capacity to really invest in that kind of work. Thinking about principles of equality is also important in the design of those kinds of programs.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: You mentioned—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Good day, everyone.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for joining us.

My first question is for Mr. Moss.

First of all, I'd like to congratulate you. I think you have given a fair account on behalf of all the people who volunteer, both young and old, in terms of both know-how and interpersonal skills.

Our study is not so much about the benefits of volunteering, but about how we can promote and encourage it. So my question to you is the following: do you have any suggestions in that regard?

[*English*]

Mr. Trevor Moss: What we're seeing is, number one, don't be afraid to ask. That's the biggest thing we are finding in reference to the intergenerational gap. We are so thankful for our seniors.

The other thing we are finding is that when volunteers, no matter what age, come into our doors, one of the biggest things we are realizing is that we are expressing our thanks. It's not just a project. It's not just a task. It's about whoever's coming in, especially youth and young adults. There are huge studies out there about the isolation piece. Our goal is to create this community, this culture, that actually gives back to them as well. What we're seeing is that they're starting to press in a little more.

I'm not saying it's not challenging. I'm not saying that they're flooding our doors. We are making certain that they almost feel like it's a place called home, where they're valued and appreciated.

The other thing we are trying to do, and we mentioned it, is in the area of technology. We're really trying to create that through social media platforms, where they're being encouraged to come in and to understand what their impact means and that they do have something to give and make a difference.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you very much.

Ms. Conway, I had the pleasure of meeting one of Volunteer Canada's members. You sent a letter to the committee outlining your recommendations. Essentially, your recommendations are in line with what we've heard here: namely, to collect better data on volunteering and to set up campaigns to encourage volunteering. Thank you for your views. I also thank you for your commitment. It is essential.

We've seen that young people do volunteer work, but not in the same way as seniors or retirees. They do it almost full-time, because they have the time to give, so to speak.

There are hundreds of organizations in my riding, and many of them rely on volunteers.

You're right in saying that it's more difficult these days for volunteers. Is there a crisis? How can we look at things differently? Things have certainly changed. Young people are getting involved in specific causes, but not full-time. What role can the Canadian government play in this regard?

[*English*]

Dr. Megan Conway: There are a number of interconnected roles that the government might want to play.

One of the things we've learned in our research is that Canadians have a deep desire to participate in their communities, but many of them lack the understanding or awareness of how to do so.

There is a network of volunteer centres across the country. Those volunteer centres are deeply underfunded and lack the infrastructure needed to do their critical work in their communities. They, indeed, help amplify and communicate what volunteering opportunities exist across the community. One area of investment would be to reinvest in volunteer centres and strengthen that network nationally.

Secondly, the government could support the development and enhancement of white label tools or resources that could be redeployed for different organizations in the community and that would support recognition, recruitment and re-attracting volunteers to specific causes in the community.

Thirdly, the government might invest in gathering better data about what the picture of volunteering looks like across communities and by diverse demographics. We work closely with Statistics Canada, for instance. While there is an effort there to work across and gather data from diverse ethnocultural communities, I believe there's much more that could be done.

The other piece that I would identify is that charities and non-profits, which are highly dependent on volunteer infrastructure, lack core and sustainable funding to do their work effectively. Volunteer managers were the first positions that were cut during the pandemic. Those positions have not returned in those organizations. That requires an investment in strengthening the charitable and non-profit sector across the country.

[*Translation*]

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

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

I'll give you an example. In Quebec, we have the Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec, which is a federation of volunteer centres. It has set up a website called jebenevole.ca, meaning "I volunteer". Volunteering is being promoted in all kinds of fields.

Canada-wide, what support can be provided to Quebec and the provinces, more specifically? I have to say that at the federal level, this seems more remote to me.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have time for a short answer.

Dr. Megan Conway: To give you a short answer, I know some provincial jurisdictions are investigating this. The provinces of Quebec and Newfoundland, for instance, are exploring ways of doing this. I think we're ending up with a bit of a fragmented province-by-province approach. I think there is a leadership role here to elevate the issue nationally.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Chabot.

Ms. Zarrillo, go ahead for six minutes.

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

I'm going to get right to some questions around what the government can do in relation to programs they're already running. I'll ask both witnesses this.

Mr. Moss, we can start with you.

New Horizons is really focused on seniors. Is there a way to modify that program to get some intergenerational connections?

The Canada Service Corps is very much focused on youth. Could we do more on the government side to help bring seniors into that program?

Then the other one is on volunteer awards. I'm interested in some thoughts about how these programs or other current programs could be modified to make them a little bit more inclusive when it comes to intergenerational....

● (1140)

The Chair: Ms. Zarrillo, could you lift your mic a bit? The interpreters....

Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Moss.

Mr. Trevor Moss: I think some of the programs, and even the grant funding that you mentioned, are critical to organizations, especially not-for-profits like us. What we're experiencing is that, as you're fulfilling your mandate, the problem with not-for-profits is that we have to write grants all the time. Doing that sucks up time and energy. We also have to do reports. I would love to see this streamlined right across nationally, so that there is a very clear understanding of where we can go to get those resources. We're still willing, of course, to apply for the funding. I think it's important to keep those and to actually add more in.

I'll give you an example. We have over 30,000 volunteer hours. We've equated that with an amount of money that is over a million dollars. If we could put some of that money into the infrastructure to connect to youth, the middle-aged and seniors, that would be such an amazing give-back to organizations, the country and people. I would encourage you to do that continually.

Also, be creative with our younger generation as to how this unfolds, maybe through summer jobs and grants. That's another idea, even though it's not volunteerism. The summer grants program is an amazing thing, but it's only seven weeks. It should be for the full summer. That would help impact as well. Maybe it could be a bit of both, with work and volunteerism, so that students could get both.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: That's great. Thank you so much.

Ms. Conway, go ahead.

Dr. Megan Conway: Thank you.

I think there are a number of things that Volunteer Canada has done. Historically, we've worked with Canada Service Corps and New Horizons, for instance.

We've recently received three-year funding from an anonymous donor to establish a strategy to bring older adults back to volunteering and to develop an intergenerational volunteerism hub in Canada. It's similar to Generations United in the United States, for example. There are models in other jurisdictions that I think are high impact and evidence-based. They are doing this work effectively and addressing well the loneliness gap and the participation crisis we're seeing in communities.

Something I would also say government needs to consider is the capacity challenges that exist across charities and non-profits. Applying episodically for funding is great, but it means that there are often dips in funding or lack of continuity. Thinking about the ways and the ability for the government to really strengthen volunteerism and how we can become a leading-edge country that really invests in supporting people to participate is mission-critical for the government.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

Mr. Moss, I want to go back to your comment about the bus passes and some comments about food insecurity.

I wonder if there is an opportunity for the federal government to support this approach of giving out bus passes to allow for transportation or of having a meal program or funding to entice volunteers to come because a meal is served.

Mr. Trevor Moss: Yes, the bus passes, as we're seeing, are ongoing with our seniors and even younger volunteers, because the cost of transportation can be a barrier. I mentioned, of course, our clients. You could even put some of those extra funding pieces into it. I think that's an amazing idea that would help with that.

I'm sorry, but I forget the second part of your question.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: A lot of times, having a meal or food available entices volunteers.

Is there an opportunity for the federal government to be involved more in that part of organizations—to entice volunteers to a meal?

Mr. Trevor Moss: It's interesting because they don't have a lot of money, but they're giving their time.

We tried to have a volunteer whose role was to cook meals for our volunteers in the food bank. The number one thing that came back was a resounding "thank you".

I actually love that idea that there would be sustainable funding to say thanks to our volunteers. I think that would help push them more towards not-for-profits to give back. We're doing a simple thank you, but it's also helping them because they may be struggling as well.

• (1145)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Could I ask Ms. Conway the same thing?

Dr. Megan Conway: There are definitely direct supports that could be provided through government, as a centralized funding mechanism, that would enable stronger rates of participation and volunteerism—for sure. There is a way that this supports participation and also builds community in charities and non-profits across the country.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you.

Ms. Conway, are cities involved with your organization? Do you rely on cities? Can you partner with cities? How do cities play a role?

Dr. Megan Conway: In our new strategic plan, we have a municipal focus in the work that we're doing. That's definitely an area of increased opportunity moving forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Ferreri, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much to our witnesses.

What a powerful, articulate study. There's some shocking testimony coming out here today as we study volunteerism and the crisis that is happening in our country in recruiting volunteers.

I'll start with you, Mr. Moss. Your testimony today has been shocking, in that you're expecting at the food bank a 100% increase in the next four to five months, in a time of historical highs.

I met with the Lions of Canada, which is an incredible service organization. Some of the local organizations were saying their average age is 70. We know through recent media reports.... Global News is saying seniors have to go back to work to account for the cost of living increases and inflation.

How much has the cost of living impacted your ability to recruit volunteers?

Mr. Trevor Moss: We're starting to see that trend. I think we've always been strong and hopefully we'll remain that way in reference to how we can engage our volunteer base.

I do agree. I'm hearing more from our seniors. They're not really telling us boldly, but they're telling us they need to go back to work. We are seeing huge rises in the number of seniors accessing the food bank. Let's be honest; it's a simple thing. They're on a fixed income and that income is not matching up with inflation costs. We're at the highest in 40 years in reference to inflation.

The biggest crisis, even outside of COVID, is inflation for our people. It's having a very deep impact, whether it's on transportation or our volunteers. This is really concerning for us.

When we have these dips, we have to keep going with our mandate, just like any other not-for-profit. That's where the biggest challenge is for not-for-profits. It's something we are seeing day in and day out. We're really trying to maximize and connect to our base. This is why it's critical to try to bring our younger generation into that, but they're also quite busy because they're struggling as well.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much for that.

For those watching at home, it is the Government of Canada's job—which is set by the Liberal government right now—to have fiscal responsibility. Fiscal responsibility comes back to how money is spent. That is what we're seeing with the highest rise of inflation in 40 years.

I want to tell people—and I'd love to hear both of the witnesses chime in—that one of the first areas to get hit is charities. A lot of these service organizations rely on donations.

I'm going to read a little blurb here from Global News: “The surging cost of living doesn't just have more Canadians turning to shelters and food banks for help—it's also forcing charities themselves to do more with less, as the donors they rely on find their own budgets under pressure.”

Mr. Moss, how critical is it to have fiscal responsibility and to have inflation under control, so that we can ensure you recruit more volunteers and ensure that people can donate to help the valuable organizations that you are running?

Mr. Trevor Moss: In reference to the inflation piece and the crisis that we are experiencing, we are concerned. I think every food bank across the country is concerned, because the numbers keep rising. Also in our situation we are one of the provincial hubs in B.C. We are looking at that 100% increase through Food Banks Canada and Food Banks B.C., and we're also shipping food to remote areas where they're even harder hit than some of the urban centres.

Our concern is that inflation has to pull back, because it's been rising over the last four years. Sometimes we say, if inflation goes back 2%... However, if you look at food costs, rentals and all of those things, you see that it probably equals 25% to 30%, and that's the problem for the average person. It's not like anyone really says, “I want to go to the food bank.” They realize that they have no other choice. They're showing up at our door with humility, and we're saying, “Listen, we're going to do our best to help you.”

• (1150)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you for that.

I'll go quickly to Ms. Conway. You had chatted in a recent article, “Critical lack of volunteers putting Canadian not-for-profit services at risk”. You talked about that number—65%. That was a shocking number having difficulty recruiting new volunteers.

I know my own daughter, who's in university, doesn't have time to even consider this, but she would love to. One of the things you talked about was the cost of fuel. I think about that, and we talked about that with buses. People have to pay for the gas to get there. You mentioned that in your article.

Do you still feel that the cost of gas is an issue in recruiting volunteers?

Dr. Megan Conway: The cost of living across the board presents a barrier for diverse demographics. I would also say that people, postpandemic, reprioritized. Older adults, who have historically given a ton of time, may have had child care responsibilities for their grandchildren, for instance. I do think there's a shift there that's been impactful across diverse demographics, for sure.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ferreri.

Now we have Mr. Collins for five minutes.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to the witnesses for their appearance today at committee.

Mr. Moss, I'll start with you. As a city councillor in 2017, I worked with my residents to open a food bank. My ward was about 50,000 residents in size, and I worked with volunteers on that project to make that facility a reality. I know that, through the pandemic, it was an incredibly difficult time for our volunteers and for the social agency, the non-profit that we partnered with, Mission Services, here in Hamilton. We were forced to drop our volunteer base, because of the pandemic and some of the restrictions that came with the lockdowns. We were forced to use full-time and part-time staff at Mission Services, which increased our costs.

During that time the federal government and other levels of government provided financial support to organizations to help offset some of the labour that volunteers had provided to us. I know that the emergency community support fund, which was provided by the federal government, through Community Foundations, Food Banks Canada and others, provided tremendous support.

Could you highlight for us the challenges that you faced through the pandemic with volunteers, and how income supports from municipal, provincial or federal governments helped assist you through very turbulent, rocky times?

Mr. Trevor Moss: This is our trend, and I can't speak for other food banks. For the first two months we were really scrambling when COVID hit, because we had to change our full operations. No one was allowed in the building, technically. We remained open. Then after two months, we realized that...and we went to Ontario Health and different places and said that volunteers were critical, so they had to be considered staff. There was an allowance for that, but the problem was that seniors were scared too. What happened was that a lot of people lost their jobs. For the first three or four months we were actually fine, but then after that, when people started to resume a little bit of normalcy, that's when our volunteer numbers really dropped and we were scrambling.

We were also appreciative of some of the interim funding, because traditionally food banks never had any federal or provincial funding. I'm not saying they don't get it through grants or those types of things, but it was helpful, because it was needed in that COVID pandemic situation.

I'm not trying to overstate this, but I think right now we're in a bigger crisis than we were before, and that's a statement. When I bring this together, anything that helps us to provide an opportunity for volunteers, whether they're university students or right across the board, any structure or funding or awareness, I think, is a win for every not-for-profit. Sometimes not-for-profits go under the radar, when they need to be put up a little bit more on the radar, no matter what not-for-profit it may be.

• (1155)

Mr. Chad Collins: Great. Thanks, Mr. Moss.

Dr. Conway, I've always found, as someone who's been in office for quite some time, that the exercise of matchmaking in terms of finding the volunteer, in this case I'll point to our youth, and matching them with volunteer opportunities has always been a challenge for me, whether it's the community cleanups that I've hosted for 20 years or... How do you get them to the event? How do you advertise?

I go back to the days prior to social media and the Internet. It was the very traditional form of letters through the neighbourhoods and the local schools. Even with the social media platforms we have today and all the tools we have to communicate with youth, I still find it a challenge in terms of getting people out, whether it's to one of the food drives that I participate in, my local cleanups or other events that I host or am a part of.

Do you have any suggestions in terms of that matchmaking exercise with regard to how to connect with youth and how to let them know those opportunities exist, so that we can increase our numbers with whatever volunteer opportunity we're talking about?

Dr. Megan Conway: Engaging and asking youth to participate is mission-critical. The work of that matchmaking is a relational activity and that actually requires people to do that work, and people often require resourcing infrastructure and supports.

One other thing I would flag is that we need to make sure the ways in which we are supporting volunteerism manage risks, and we also believe this is an opportunity to think about a screening platform. One of the barriers we hear people talk about is police record checks. We believe there are other examples in other jurisdic-

tions that are better models, like the blue card system in Australia, for example.

For me, I might have to volunteer for hockey. I might be a hockey coach one day, and I might go into the school the next day. I need two separate police checks. Those are barriers. People don't have the time if, say, they need to that twice. We could reduce inefficiency and streamline some of those processes while still managing risk in important ways.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Collins.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Louise Chabot: Ms. Conway, we know that people volunteer in many sectors. You talked about a volunteering crisis. I'd like to ask you two questions about that.

Firstly, are there any sectors in particular for which your data demonstrates that we are in crisis?

Secondly, when you ask for better data, what specifically do you have in mind?

[*English*]

Dr. Megan Conway: Thank you.

I know, for instance, that the child and youth sector has been hit very hard by the lack of volunteers. If you want to have someone participate in Girl Guides, for instance, in B.C. there is a two-year wait-list because of the lack of volunteers. That's a significant impact in terms of the quality of life of young people across the country. Child and youth services, I believe, have been hit significantly hard.

I believe the impacts of volunteering are across sectors, so there isn't necessarily one or another that stands out more in the data. However, I do think there is something to pay attention to in terms of the kinds of upstream interventions we want to be having and the ways in which we make it easy for people to volunteer in health, in child and youth, in recreation, in arts and culture—across the board.

In terms of data, we need to understand the diverse demographic picture of volunteerism. What does it look like if you're living in a small rural community in Saskatchewan versus if you're in downtown Toronto in Regent Park? What are the models that are going to be effective across diverse demographics and across different kinds of municipalities?

Some of that data, I believe, needs to be done qualitatively in a much more fulsome picture of what effective models exist and what their high-impact practices might look like moving forward into the future.

I would also say corporate Canada has a role to play, and we need to better understand the baseline data that exists around employee-supported volunteerism across corporate Canada as well. There is a role to play in terms of data gathering there too.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Who can provide us with that data? Could Statistics Canada?

[*English*]

Dr. Megan Conway: There's a way in which we could work with Statistics Canada to do some of that data gathering. The general social survey on giving, volunteering and participating happens every five years. There may be an opportunity to do a bit of a research study as well through academic partners, where they are doing some more qualitative data gathering. I believe there's a way it could be done in partnership across academic institutions as well. Then working through the survey on business conditions with some more focused questions might be another opportunity to speak to charities and non-profits specifically.

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

We go now to Ms. Zarrillo for two and a half minutes.

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

Dr. Conway, on the diverse communities, I wanted to bring something up that happens in my riding in Port Moody—Coquitlam. There's an organization called Immigrant Link Centre Society, and it's an amazing group that has the logistics challenges of a corporation, I'm sure. There are hundreds of volunteers. They serve thousands of families every single month.

It is an entry point for English language learning. They work with new immigrants to the community and introduce them to the city, to the organization, to families, but it's a great way for language learning. I know that's one of the aspects.

I wonder if you would be able to share with us some of the reasons that people volunteer and maybe some of the reasons why they just haven't been able to continue over the last three or four years.

Dr. Megan Conway: There's a whole, broad range of reasons why people volunteer, from individual reasons—like wanting to build skills—to thinking about issues and cares in their community or paying attention to a specific cause that might matter to them.

Based on your example, we know many newcomers gain their first Canadian experiences through volunteerism. While they may not be able to work immediately when they come to the country, they are often acclimatized to Canadian community through deep and supportive volunteering experiences. There might be an opportunity for the Government of Canada to think about a skill-building program that supports a volunteer-to-career pathway, for example, not just for newcomers but also youth. We know that youth, often-times, gain critical skills through mandatory volunteer service in high school, for instance.

There's an important skill conversation that needs to be had, but there are also reasons related to addressing loneliness or isolation issues or, for instance, just a personal “it's something my parents did”. That's often the main reason why people volunteer. They learned about it from their parents or grandparents. There are diverse reasons. I think it's individual-specific and context-specific.

I believe there are ways of doing some better supportive thinking for individuals and across communities around those issues.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

As a follow-up to that, one of the other organizations in my community, Soroptimist, does scholarships and awards. Through that, they've also been able to include newcomers and create those community connections.

Do you have any examples of other activities that potentially result in volunteerism and greater connection to community, such as award programs or...?

Dr. Megan Conway: Annually, Canada celebrates National Volunteer Week. That is a time when we recognize and celebrate the contributions of volunteers. It's a one-week opportunity in April for the entire country to shine a light on these important contributions. I think that's a way. Recognizing and celebrating contributions are ways you can recruit and retain more volunteers, moving forward.

I would flag that this is an important week as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

That concludes our first round.

Before we suspend, I want to thank you very much, Mr. Moss and Dr. Conway. Your testimony was extremely informative. I appreciate it.

We'll suspend for three minutes while we transition to the next witnesses.

● (1200)

(Pause)

● (1205)

The Chair: The committee will resume for its second hour of witness testimony.

I would like to welcome Shiven Khera, the treasurer of the Age-Link Society, and Christina Bisanz, the chief executive officer of Community and Home Assistance to Seniors.

We will begin with an opening statement from Mr. Khera for five minutes.

Mr. Shiven Khera (Treasurer, Age-Link Society): Thank you.

Good afternoon, honourable members. Greetings to all of you.

First of all, it's an absolute honour to be here, and I appreciate all of your ongoing efforts and work for people all across Canada and beyond.

My name is Shiven Vinod Khera, and I am representing the Age-Link Society. I am a former student at the University of British Columbia Okanagan. I completed my graduation just last year, in 2022. I am a member of Age-Link's board of directors and have the honour to be the board treasurer.

The Age-Link Society is a registered non-profit organization operating in the Okanagan in British Columbia. Here's a fun fact: The Age-Link Society was started as a student club at UBCO in 2016, and it was later registered as a non-profit organization in 2021.

When I was elected vice-president of the students union in 2021, I used to work very closely with the Age-Link student club.

What does the Age-Link Society do? We promote intergenerational social connections and friendships in our community through organizing social events such as picnics, galas, board game events, trivia nights and coffee socials. Our main membership is made up of students and seniors. Our goal is simple. We create events and invite both seniors and students, so we can create a well-bonded community together.

Over the years, we have successfully reached more than 200 seniors and more than 1,000-plus students in our community. Seniors volunteer their time to mentor, inspire, guide and support students and share their wisdom and time with the students. On the other hand, students share their skills, time, stories, culture and experience with the seniors. Both seniors and students have reported that Age-Link provides them the opportunity to enrich their social connections, improves their mental well-being, gives them joy and purpose and broadens their life perspectives.

As financial times become harder with the cost of living and individuals debate whether to attend our event or take an extra shift at work, we have received more and more regrets from members who would have otherwise wished to participate in our activities or volunteer. Economic hardship has affected seniors and students alike. I know about two amazing student leaders who were heavily involved in the organization as volunteers last year but who have not yet attended any of the more than seven events we have organized this year because they're busy working and prioritizing their financial stability—and justifiably so.

Students are picking up more and more jobs, given rising rent and the cost of living expenses. This means that some seniors have missed the opportunity to connect and volunteer with these students and, for those who are already connected, the students might have turned down invitations to continue socializing and maintaining their intergenerational friendships.

For seniors, our interactions are very recreational, but, anecdotally speaking, we know one senior who has gone back into the workforce and is seeking freelance consulting, given the rising costs that he and his wife are facing.

Volunteering is important and critical to the operations and thriving of organizations like the Age-Link Society. The Age-Link Society has been able to make events barrier-free by having all our

events as free admission. This has been helpful; however, volunteers are human beings with needs and, once faced with economic hardship at the individual level, they will prioritize activities that address that need over our barrier-free events, which they would have otherwise wished to attend.

We appreciate all the work all of you are doing and the programs and schemes you are bringing forth to tackle affordability, and we're hopeful that you will shed light on some of the most vulnerable populations—students and seniors—in your plans as well.

Thank you.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khera.

Now we'll go to Ms. Bisanz.

Ms. Christina Bisanz (Chief Executive Officer, Community and Home Assistance to Seniors): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon to the HUMA committee.

We appreciate the opportunity to be here, and we thank MP Van Bynen for bringing forward intergenerational volunteerism for consideration by the committee.

I'm the CEO of CHATS, Community and Home Assistance to Seniors, one of the largest multicultural non-profit seniors organizations in Ontario, serving some 8,000 older adults and their caregivers in York Region and South Simcoe. Our mission is to enable seniors to have the choice to live with dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.

We believe the power of intergenerational volunteerism is tremendous. We see the benefits every day in our work as we strive to improve the health and well-being of seniors in our communities.

This discussion is timely for three reasons: first, demographic shifts in the older adult population impact the pool of seniors who are volunteering; second, increasing social isolation amongst older adults calls for renewed approaches to engaging both young and old in supporting seniors in the community; and finally, intergenerational volunteerism has considerable potential to address systemic ageism in our society.

Seniors are an important part of Canada's volunteer workforce, but demographic changes have also impacted volunteerism. Older adults are more likely to contribute more hours on average than any other age group, with an average of 218 hours annually. Those who do volunteer report better overall physical and emotional health and well-being.

However, older adults are remaining in the labour force longer. We have seen workforce participation rates for those 65 and older more than double in the last 20 years, and this impacts their availability for volunteer activities. The potential decrease in the pool of seniors as volunteers is important, because one of the most pressing issues among older adults is social isolation. Numerous studies have shown that social isolation can have significant consequences on the physical and mental health of seniors, and it's not just a matter of loneliness. It can lead to an increased risk of chronic diseases, depression and a diminished quality of life.

Intergenerational volunteers bring fresh perspectives, energy and enthusiasm that can breathe new purpose into the lives of seniors. Connecting younger generations with seniors fosters not only a sense of community but also invaluable support and companionship. Our programs at CHATS illustrate this impact. Students have engaged in activities, meals, social interaction and relationship building. Of note was a digital storytelling initiative that supported connections between elderly clients and youth.

Prior to the pandemic, CHATS would have monthly visits from preschool-aged kids and weekly visits from students from St. Andrew's College. We partnered with 360°kids, an organization that supports youth at risk, engaging them in preparing and serving meals to our adult day program clients. The pandemic did impede the in-person engagement of our young volunteers, but we're slowly gaining them back. This year, students from Pickering College have been collaborating with our clients to build birdhouses.

The benefits of intergenerational volunteerism are not one-sided. Studies show that youth who engage in volunteer activities with seniors gain a greater appreciation for the wisdom and experiences of older generations. This fosters empathy, understanding and a stronger sense of community among our youth.

This brings me to my third point: the value of intergenerational volunteerism as a way to address systemic ageism in our society.

I'd like to refer you to the Government of Canada's 2022 discussion guide on ageism in Canada, which identified young people, health care professionals, government policies and employers as groups most often demonstrating age-based discrimination. It's important for us to understand these trends and to adapt our strategies to engage different age groups effectively. By spending more time with older adults and providing meaningful engagement opportunities that bring the generations together, we can encourage a sense of understanding and respect between them.

CHATS recently launched a new initiative called the volunteer program refresh, made possible with funding from the Government of Canada's community services recovery fund. The purpose is to create and implement a new vision and model for CHATS' volunteer program. As we build our program back to full strength follow-

ing the pandemic, we're actively working on engaging a broader volunteer demographic and expanding our volunteer activities.

Because of the enormous benefit from volunteers, our federal government can continue to play a crucial role in promoting and encouraging intergenerational volunteerism, and I'd like to share three opportunities to continue growing the area.

First, through policy and funding, our government can encourage participation in programs that bring different generations together. An initiative such as the New Horizons for Seniors program is an excellent example of the direction we must continue to pursue. While the program rightly supports community-based projects that are designed for seniors by seniors, I believe we could also include youth-driven proposals or collaboration projects to find new models of intergenerational activity.

● (1215)

Second, education and awareness will also foster this much-needed connectivity. The creation of Intergenerational Day provides a launch pad for numerous opportunities and education to raise awareness and garner support.

Third, the federal government should form long-term partnerships with organizations that promote intergenerational connections. These partnerships would benefit from resources that allow for scaling, promotion and collaboration.

Intergenerational volunteerism is not just about helping others. It's about enriching our communities and ourselves. It's about learning from each other, sharing experiences and building a stronger, more inclusive Canada.

I urge each one of you to consider that intergenerational volunteerism is not just a solution. It's an investment in the well-being and vibrancy of our communities. The rewards are immeasurable and the impact profound.

I thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bisanz.

We will open with Mrs. Gray for six minutes, please.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being here and for the good work that you do.

My first questions are for Shiven at Age-Link Society.

The unique thing about your organization is that it was actually founded to connect different generations, which is really unique compared to other non-profits. I hear from students on campuses in my community that they're facing severe affordability challenges. UBCO, where you said that you went to school, even has a food bank now to help students with food security. You talked about cost of living challenges making it more difficult for Canadians to volunteer, and you even mentioned seniors having to go back to work.

My question is this: Have you had to reduce services or maybe not grow them as much as you'd like with the activities you're doing due to the lack of availability, to not being able to grow your volunteer base?

Mr. Shiven Khera: Absolutely. I think we've been lucky that, with UBCO being a 10,000-person university, we've been able to find volunteers one way or another. However, finding volunteers has absolutely been challenging for us, given that people are a lot busier—at least the students. They're doing more part-time jobs. They're working longer hours to fuel their funding for rent as well as for the cost of living in general—for groceries and other things. We've definitely seen challenges.

Overall, our programs, thankfully, have gone through. We've been able to do the events that we've had, but it's definitely been challenging for us.

• (1220)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you for those insights.

Do you believe that if people had more disposable income, and maybe if they didn't have to have that second job or take on a lot more hours just to feed themselves, they'd be able to support more non-profits like yours?

Mr. Shiven Khera: I think so. It would absolutely be extremely beneficial if that was the case, because we've seen that. We're an organization that's been running since 2016, at least as a student club, and we've seen the number of volunteers who used to come to our events. What we're noticing is that, obviously, a reduction in volunteers is a big problem for us, and it would be very beneficial if people had more disposal income so that they could come to events. Our events are barrier-free. It's just the time and availability that we want to see.

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

I want to say thank you again for the good work that you're doing. I did have the opportunity to actually attend one of your events to see first-hand the connection between the different generations and how happy everyone was to be there, so I want to thank you for the good work that you're doing.

It is important to hear testimony here at this committee, and we've had the witnesses make statements. This committee does have other work that it does as well, so, Mr. Chair, I would like to move a motion.

I move:

That, given that:

- (a) the carbon tax threatens the income security of farmers, farm workers, and employment in the agricultural sector;
- (b) the Senate is expected to vote on Bill C-234 to remove the carbon tax from grain drying and barn heating;

(c) Canadian farmers have called upon the Senate to pass this important legislation;

(d) Bill C-234 would save farmers one billion dollars, and help lower food prices for Canadians;

the committee call upon Senators who are delaying the passage of the legislation to stop playing political games with the livelihoods of Canadian farmers, recognize the decision of the elected House of Commons, and pass Bill C-234 into law without further delay.

Part of the mandate of this committee covers income security programs.

That is the entirety of the motion. It has been circulated to the committee members.

The Chair: I have been advised by the clerk that the motion is in order.

Mrs. Gray, continue.

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

As I was saying, this committee does deal with income security programs. We're responsible for issues of income security that include government policies that affect cost affordability for Canadians, including the affordability of food.

In fact, we will have bills coming to this committee dealing with food security and food costs. We know the results of increasing carbon taxes on farmers puts Canada's food security at risk and increases the food costs for all people in our communities. Removing the carbon tax from all farm fuels is important to help address this.

We know that food costs for Canadians continue to rise. In fact, some of the testimony we heard here today from not-for-profits was talking about the cost of inflation, the cost of food, the needs of not-for-profits and how volunteerism is so important to serve not-for-profits. It is directly within the mandate of this committee.

We know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer reports that farmers will pay just under a billion dollars in carbon taxes between now and 2030. We know that this is increasing the cost of food for Canadians. A lot has been reported around costs for farmers with how much they are paying in carbon taxes. For example, we have one farmer with a chicken broiler business who said that the cost of the carbon tax to their company was \$120,000 in 2022. It will be \$180,000 in 2023. Once the carbon tax reaches its full amount, it will be \$480,000 to that individual business.

This legislation is really important to pass, so that we can start addressing the inflation and affordability crisis that Canadians are dealing with.

We know that other organizations have talked about how much they're paying in carbon taxes. A mushroom farm talked about paying \$150,000 in carbon tax alone. As this increases to the 2030 level, that farm will be paying over \$450,000 per year in carbon taxes.

This is affecting the price of food that Canadians are paying. As I mentioned, this does directly flow into a lot of the work of this committee, because we look at a lot of affordability issues directly affecting Canadians.

Another example I want to provide is a poultry farm in Alberta that had talked about the increases in its carbon taxes. We see this right across the country. I know that I've heard it from businesses in my community as well. At a Saskatoon berry farm in Alberta, their energy bills went from \$12,000 a month to almost \$27,000 a month.

We know that we are an exporting nation for a lot of the products that we farm here. This is making us uncompetitive. We are exporting, the prices for our farmers are higher, the food costs are higher and this making us uncompetitive and less productive. Passing this legislation will help somewhat in putting our farmers on more of an equal ground than they are on right now.

We know that when we're looking at inflation, food inflation is actually considerably higher. The thing with food inflation is that it's by each specific category of food, so some types of food are up higher than others. We can look at turkey, for example, which is up 67%. Green salads are up 33%. This is higher than the inflation rates that we've seen over the last couple of years. Food inflation is consistently higher than the inflation rate. Beef, pasta and fruit are also up.

• (1225)

We have to remember that, with inflation, it's compounding, but the worst kind of compounding. With investments, you want your investments to compound positively. This actually compounds negatively. If we have inflation at roughly 3%—we know that food inflation is higher than that—that's on top of last year, where inflation might have been 8% to 10% during that month. It's not like it's going back down to a zero level. It's actually compounding every year.

For our farmers, who are having to pay this onerous carbon tax, it only will keep increasing the cost of food for Canadians.

We've heard the finance minister talking about not wanting to pour fuel on the inflationary fire. In fact, policies like increasing the carbon tax every year do that. This legislation that we're calling on the Senate to pass is one step in starting to counter that.

The largest contributor to year-over-year CPI increases includes food purchases. Grocery prices rose faster than overall inflation, as I've said. Overall consumer prices have risen by 11.4% over the last two years. According to StatsCan, Canadian food prices are growing at the fastest pace in 40 years. The carbon tax is part of that. The continual increasing of the carbon tax is increasing the cost.

• (1230)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

We've brought in a witness here. I'm challenging relevance. We're trying to talk about volunteerism. We've had some excellent witnesses. I'm asking that you rule on relevance, and we get on with the business of this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

I've been following closely. Mrs. Gray's comments are relevant to the motion currently on the floor.

I want to remind witnesses that I'm not sure of the timing on this. The member has the right to introduce the motion, which she has. The motion must be dealt with by the committee before we can return to the business of the committee, which was hearing testimony on the study.

I would ask for your patience until we either conclude with the motion, or we reach one o'clock.

Mrs. Gray, please stick to the relevance of the motion.

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

I appreciate that, and it's unfortunate. The way that committees work is that we have such limited time every week. We only have two committee meetings for a couple of hours each, and we have to address a lot of different things during that time. This is a normal part of our committee practice.

I do appreciate the fact that we have witnesses who have been able to give a statement, so thank you.

Back to my motion, when we're looking at the cost of food, which, as I said, directly flows into the study that we're discussing right now, we've heard testimony on how there's a crisis of volunteering in Canada, and we've heard testimony here today from multiple witnesses that some of that is due to the cost of inflation and the affordability crisis that we're having in Canada. One way to help address that is to remove the carbon tax from the farmers who are producing our food.

We heard from a previous witness regarding the crisis in volunteering right now and how volunteerism has decreased. A lot of not-for-profits are having trouble finding volunteers because of inflation and because of an affordability issue that ties directly into the motion that I have on one way to bring down the price of food.

We've heard that there are a number of comments being reported out there where, for example, the Big Brothers of Greater Vancouver have kids with no adults to connect with them. They no longer accept children into this mentorship program in Surrey, B.C., due to a shortage of volunteers.

The Chair: Mrs. Gray, speak to the motion, please.

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

Going back specifically to the price of food, which is what the motion is, this is a motion looking at one way to bring down the price and the costs of the farmers producing our food. Food Banks Canada released a report saying that food banks were visited nearly two million times during one month alone, an increase of 79% from 2019.

Statistics Canada published a study into food insecurity that showed that the number of families who are food-insecure increased by more than 12% from 2021 to 2022. Again, the motion that I have before us is one way to look at addressing the cost of food.

According to Feed Ontario's annual hunger report, Ontario has seen food bank use “explode”—that's their word—as Canadians struggle to keep their heads above water amidst skyrocketing inflation and interest rates. Between April 1, 2022, and March 31, 2023, over 800,000 people in Ontario alone accessed a food bank, and in total there were 5.9 million visits to a food bank in this time period.

● (1235)

The Chair: Mrs. Gray, I would reference your motion, which is security of farmers, farm workers and employment in the agricultural sector, so could your comments address the actual substance of your motion?

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

Going back to the farmers themselves, we've heard that these carbon taxes, which I quoted earlier, in the hundreds of thousands for many of these farms, then reduce their ability—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'd like some clarification, because I understand that the motion is about influencing the Senate. It doesn't have anything to do with the content of the bill. It has to do with parliamentary influence over the Senate.

Could I just get some clarification on the motion? Is it in regard to the Senate, or is it in regard to the content of the bill?

The Chair: The motion you have before you, Ms. Zarrillo, is correct in that the motion, if adopted, is asking the committee to call upon the Senate, which is delaying the passage of the legislation. That is the substance of the motion.

Mrs. Gray, Ms. Zarrillo's intervention is correct. Please limit your comments to the motion that you introduced.

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

We know that—

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The reference in this motion is with respect to delays similar to what's happening in this committee. Is that correct?

The Chair: I'm sorry. Can you clarify?

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: The reference is to concerns about the delays in the Senate. Is that not similar to what's happening now in this committee with the study that we're undertaking?

The Chair: Certainly the committee is being delayed on its study, but Mrs. Gray has the floor.

I will only remind you one more time—and then I'll move on—to keep your comments relevant to your motion.

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

Just to answer the question, this motion has been—

The Chair: Keep your comments to your motion, Mrs. Gray.

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

I won't answer the question then from the other member.

The Chair: The question was not directed to you.

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

Through you, this motion is to ask for what parliamentarians have voted on and have approved in the House of Commons to move forward—the piece of legislation that has been voted on and has been approved by Parliament. That's the substance of what the motion is.

This is something that has been agreed to and needs to move forward in order to affect the costs to farmers, which are affecting inflation, which is, again, tying back to the study we're dealing with right now with the cost of living for Canadians.

This committee, even more so than probably a lot of other committees, actually deals with the substance of what that piece of legislation that's sitting in the Senate right now is, because that legislation does have to do with affordability for Canadians. We know that a lot of the programs—either the programs or the pieces of legislation—that come through this committee have to do with income security programs.

The Chair: Mrs. Gray, your motion is in reference to farmers, not the public in general, and is specific in calling on the Senate.

I will not remind you again to keep your comments relevant to your motion. I'll call you out of order if you stray again.

● (1240)

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

Again, we're calling to pass this piece of legislation, which has passed through Parliament, in order to make it happen and to bring down the costs of farmers. That's the substance of the motion. It's calling for this committee, which we have the absolute right to ask for.....

This committee can write and can ask for things to happen in Parliament or call on other groups in order to press forward on issues that are important to this committee. That's what the substance of that motion is. It's calling for this committee to make that request.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

Next, I have Mrs. Falk, Ms. Ferreri and then Mr. Long.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you very much—

The Chair: On the motion currently before us...

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Are you pointing your finger at me?

The Chair: No, but I'm pointing at the committee in general. I'll hold your comments to the relevancy of the motion currently under debate, which is very specific.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

In this motion, Chair, it states that the carbon tax threatens the income security of farmers, our farm workers and employment in the agricultural sector. As we heard earlier today, that also is threatening our non-profits and also Canadians—

The Chair: That's not in the motion.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: —ultimately the vulnerable Canadians. We have Canadians with disabilities whom this committee has in its purview.

The Chair: Mrs. Falk, stick to the motion or I'll call you out of order.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: —as well as seniors and as well as families and workers.

That is something that is in our motion, that the carbon tax threatens the income security of our farmers, our farm workers and employment in the agricultural sector.

We have heard that there is an affordability crisis in this country. We heard that again today with the testimony that was brought forward. We know, when government decides to tax the farmer who grows the food, tax the trucker who ships the food and tax the stores that sell the food, who pays for that: Canadians.

It affects Canadians who are disabled and have disabilities. It affects families and parents with young children.

The Chair: Mrs. Falk, I will call you out of order, unless you stick to the motion currently under debate.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I see myself as sticking to the motion, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, you are not. The motion—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Absolutely.

It's right in there: “given that: (a)”. It is in the motion. What I am talking about is in the motion.

The Chair: What are you referring to?

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I see it as absolutely relevant.

The Chair: Where is the “given”? You did not continue. The motion—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: It's the first line: “given that: (a) the carbon tax threatens”. This is in the motion.

The Chair: It's “the income security of farmers, farm workers, and employment in the agricultural sector”. You've strayed several times beyond that.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: In the riding I represent, Mr. Chair, a lot of farmers have families. They're parents. They're energy workers who have to work in the energy sector to supplement their agriculture income. This absolutely matters. We have to recognize—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: —that the farmers are the ones who grow our food.

The Chair: Mrs. Falk, there's a point of order raised by Ms. Zarrillo.

Ms. Zarrillo, go ahead on your point of order.

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

I'm feeling particularly uncomfortable with this entire conversation. As a parliamentarian, I would like to raise the fact that I feel this is contempt of Parliament. This motion is asking us to influence, intimidate and block fellow parliamentarians.

I wonder if we could get a ruling on that. I'm feeling particularly uncomfortable being involved in anything that is trying to intimidate or put obstacles in front of the Senate.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo.

I will have to take your point of order under advisement and report back to the committee.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): There's a point of order from me, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I want to talk about process here.

As a committee, we agree on our schedule and on how we move forward on items. Mr. Van Bynen's study was put in place a year ago. He was—

• (1245)

The Chair: Mr. Coteau, could you bring yourself to the specific point of order you are raising? Process is not one.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I was going to bring up the point that we've accommodated the Conservatives to prioritize what they would like to do, but this tactic constantly being used to score political points and delay the process—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau. Unfortunately, that is not a point of order.

I will return to Mrs. Falk, and I will move to—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I have a point of order on that, Mr. Chair, if I may, before you return to me.

The Chair: You're calling a point of order. Clearly state the point of order.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: The point of order is this: What political points? It is totally inappropriate to make accusations like that.

The Chair: Mrs. Falk, that is not a point of order.

I'll return to Mrs. Falk.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Clearly state your point of order, Mrs. Gray.

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

My point of order is on Ms. Zarrillo's point of order referencing intimidation. I want to address that.

There is no one intimidating anyone here. I'm offended by that. This is a motion calling for the committee to do something. There's absolutely no intimidation occurring here. I want to address that, because it was brought up here, Mr. Chair.

There is no intimidation occurring in any form.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

Ms. Zarrillo raised a point of order on a matter that I said I would take under advisement and report back on.

I will return to Mrs. Falk.

Mrs. Falk, I'll remind you, while you have the floor and are speaking, to keep your comments relevant to the motion introduced by your colleague Mrs. Gray.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, Chair.

Back to the motion, we know—and I believe we just talked about this in the House as well last week—that the Senate is expected to vote on Bill C-234, which was to remove the carbon tax from grain drying and barn heating. As I stated previously, many of the farmers I represent are also employed in other areas in order to supplement their agricultural income, and many of them have families. We know we're farm families. We know that the House talked about this last week, and that this would be a big deal—to remove the carbon tax from grain drying and barn heating.

I've heard from many constituents and Canadians across the country on how much the carbon tax is costing them. Some of our farmers have outrageous bills. Hundreds of thousands of dollars, tens of thousands of dollars are just going to the carbon tax, which has not reduced carbon emissions in the atmosphere and hasn't done anything for the environment. However, it has hurt the pockets of Canadians.

I received a note from a Canadian. The carbon tax on his SaskEnergy bill, which is just the heating, is \$38 a month plus the GST that is then collected on top of that. That equals \$456 a year for just the carbon tax, not including the gas used, the delivery charges or the GST that the government wants to charge on top of the tax. Canadians are paying tax on a tax, and our farmers are definitely not exempt from that.

We know that farmers...but also members of the House of Commons, even some of us who sit around this table, have voted for Bill C-234 to go to the Senate. That's why it is in the Senate at this point in time. We know too that the Liberal Prime Minister has appointed "independent" senators, which we know are not independent. Many of them had Liberal Party memberships before their appointment to the upper chamber. We are hearing rumours that Liberal ministers are individually calling those appointed senators by

phone to tell them not to vote for this, to hold this up and to prevent this from going further, because the Prime Minister had decided to carve out special carbon tax exemptions on home heating for those who live in certain parts of the country, mainly Atlantic Canada. They see that, if this does pass, there will be more holes and flaws in the carbon tax ideology, which I would agree with.

We know that Bill C-234 would save farmers billions of dollars. Coming from a rural part of Canada, I know how much our farmers are donating to the food banks, for example. When the government decides to take more out of their pockets, they have less time and less expendable income that they can then sow into their communities to help fellow community members.

I also know—we all know, actually—that removing the carbon tax will lower food prices for Canadians, as I said.

• (1250)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I think we're only about 10 minutes away from our normal committee meeting end time. I'm wondering if we could ask these witnesses to come back at another time so that we can have a fulsome round of questions and answers with them. They've invested a lot of time. They have a lot to share with us, and all of this time is getting exhausted. I'd like us to have these witnesses back, and maybe just discharge them now and set them free.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

It's not my prerogative to tell them when to leave. The meeting will conclude at one o'clock as scheduled, and the committee can't reinstate whoever it chooses.

We will now return.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Can I request that the member speaking refer to facts? Even recently she said there are rumours out there that the Prime Minister's been making phone calls.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Chair, the interpreter can't...

[*English*]

The Chair: You're right that it is debate, but I'm going to be very strict on the members sticking to the motion that's currently on the floor. As you know, these are the rules that you adopted and accepted.

For any member, I will advise them on two occasions. If they are not staying relevant, then I'll move to the next speaker on the list.

I will go to Madame Chabot.

Madame Chabot, were you attempting to raise a point of order?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Yes, Mr. Chair.

What I want to say has nothing to do with the motion, but I would like to point out that there was no interpretation of Mr. Coteau's remarks, because of sound problems. I think it's my right to tell you when I do not have access to interpretation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Chabot. You are correct.

Can the interpreters comment on Mr. Coteau?

Actually, I'm going to stop there, because I did not rule it as relevant, Madame Chabot, but what I did make clear is that I will follow very closely the relevancy of the motion.

Mrs. Falk, you have the floor.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Ms. Chabot, can you hear me? Okay. Thank you.

To go back to what I was saying, Mr. Chair, with Bill C-234, I believe and I think many around this table believe that it will lower food prices—grocery prices—in this country, which would make life more affordable for Canadians. Like I said, when the farmer who grows the food is taxed and the shipper who trucks the food is taxed and you tax the stores that sell the food, who pays for that? Canadians do.

I think that it is fully imperative that our committee, especially with the purview our committee deals with, which has been set on income security.... We have a lot of those programs that come through this committee. We look at the six ministers who have mandates through this committee touching on families, seniors, Canadians with disabilities and, of course, workers as well.

I think it is imperative that we ask those senators to come to committee and let them know how we feel about this: that it is something that shouldn't be used to play political games and that it should be passed in a very timely manner. Also, the Senate should recognize the will of the House. Members of Parliament are elected to this place. Senators are appointed. I think, especially when we're talking about a tax bill, that the upper chamber should listen to the lower chamber, because we are elected people representing those who have elected us to be here.

With that, I do want to say that there has been a precedent also in this committee for us to write to have groups, CEOs or other people to—

• (1255)

The Chair: Mrs. Falk, you have made that point several times in a row. You said the committee to write to....

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: No, I'm not...which is what I'm getting to here. It's for those senators. I'm saying that there is a precedent in this committee. We have done that regarding Air Canada. The Air Canada CEO wrote to us and said he wasn't going to come. We moved a motion. We talked about it and decided that, no, he needs to come and be held accountable to this committee. This is what I am saying—

The Chair: Mrs. Falk—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: There's a precedent. We have done this before.

The Chair: Mrs. Falk, please bring your comments to—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I absolutely think our committee can write to those senators and ask for them to come.

Thank you, Chair.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Clearly state your point of order.

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

What I heard Ms. Falk referring to was, to answer your question, Mr. Chair, that this committee has called on things to happen. We have written to call for things to happen, so this is not an unusual request. That's what Mrs. Falk was referring to.

Saying that this committee calls for things to happen is an accurate statement. We have done that before, even during this Parliament, so I just wanted to bring that up, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mrs. Gray, that is not a point of order.

I'll go to Ms. Ferreri, who had the floor next.

Mrs. Falk, you had ceded the floor.

Ms. Ferreri, you have the floor.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleague, Mrs. Gray, for putting forward this motion.

For those who haven't been following this, the motion is as follows:

That, given that:

- (a) the carbon tax threatens the income security of farmers, farm workers, and employment in the agricultural sector;
- (b) the Senate is expected to vote on Bill C-234 to remove the carbon tax from grain drying and barn heating;
- (c) Canadian farmers have called upon the Senate to pass this important legislation;
- (d) Bill C-234 would save farmers one billion dollars—

That's according to the PBO as well, Mr. Chair.

—and help lower food prices for Canadians;

the committee call upon Senators who are delaying the passage of the legislation to stop playing political games with the livelihoods of Canadian farmers, recognize the decision of the elected House of Commons, and pass Bill C-234 into law without further delay.

This is important in this HUMA committee, because, in the House of Commons, there were 176 votes in favour—“yea” votes—that passed Bill C-234, and there were 146 “nay” votes. You were in those 176 votes, Mr. Chair. You voted in favour of that bill. Thank you very much for that. I know that you believe in standing up for farmers and helping to make life more affordable.

Then it went to the Senate. This is a tax bill. We're merely just waiting for the passage of this. I'll note for those watching that the whole point of this motion is that, if we can't get this bill passed and it's in the hands of the Senate, we have a major problem. It ties into many things that we study in this committee.

The summary of Bill C-234 says, “This enactment amends the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act to expand the definition of eligible farming machinery and extend the exemption for qualifying farming fuel to marketable natural gas and propane.”

With regard to the motion, the member for Foothills, our colleague, has shared this numerous times in the House. He's also the critic for agriculture.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the NDP, I want to thank the witnesses for today and really apologize for what's happened. I'm really sorry that we didn't get the chance to question or hear from you.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zarrillo. That is not a point of order.

Ms. Ferreri, you have the floor.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Mr. Barlow, the shadow minister or critic for agriculture, has talked about the threatened income security of farmers, which is pertinent to the motion.

There is a chicken farmer in his riding whose carbon tax was \$120,000 in 2022. It will be \$180,000 in 2023. When the tax goes up to \$170 per tonne, it will be \$480,000 in carbon tax per year. What people also don't know is that there is a tax on a tax. It is absolutely asinine when you think about how these farmers, who give their blood, sweat and tears, are taxed on a tax.

There's also the mushroom farmer who we've seen making headlines in Carleton. He has a full breakdown of his costs that people can find online. It was \$150,000 in carbon tax. That's carbon tax.

That's what we are fighting for here today, and that's what this motion is about when we talk about threatening the income security of farmers, which ultimately threatens—

• (1300)

The Chair: Ms. Ferreri, I have to interrupt.

It is now one o'clock.

Do I have unanimous consent to proceed?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): No.

The Chair: The debate on the motion is adjourned.

The meeting is adjourned.

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