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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

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

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): Committee members, departmental officials, I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting 96 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members may attend in person or remotely by using the Zoom application. Today everybody is attending in person.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of all participants.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For interpretation, those in the room will use the earpiece that you have and select the official language of your choice. Interpretation services will be provided. You have the option of speaking in the official language of your choice. If there is a problem with interpretation or translation, please get my attention by raising your hand. We'll suspend while the issue is being clarified.

For the benefit and protection of the translators, I advise you to please keep your earpiece away from the microphone and to make sure the "vibrate" function on your telephone is not on while it is close to the mic because it will cause an issue with the translation.

Again, I remind you to direct all comments through me, the chair.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, September 20, 2023, the committee will begin the clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-318, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code relative to adoptive and intended parents.

I will provide members of the committee with some instructions and a few comments on how the committee will proceed with the clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-318. As the name indicates, this is an examination of all the clauses in the order in which they appear in the bill. I will call each clause successively, and each clause is subject to debate and a vote.

If there are amendments to the clause in question, I will recognize the member proposing it, who may explain it. The amendment will then be open for debate. When no further members wish to intervene, the amendment will be voted on. Amendments will be considered in the order in which they appear in the bill and in the pack-

age each member received from the clerk. Members should note that amendments must be submitted in writing to the clerk of the committee.

The chair will go slowly to allow all members to follow the proceedings properly.

Amendments have been given an alphanumeric number in the top right corner to indicate which party submitted them. There is no need for a seconder to move an amendment. Once an amendment has been moved, you will need unanimous consent to withdraw it.

During debate on an amendment, members are permitted to move subamendments. These subamendments must be submitted in writing. They do not require the approval of the mover of the amendment. Only one subamendment may be considered at a time, and that subamendment cannot be amended. When a subamendment is moved to an amendment, it is voted on first. Then another subamendment may be moved or the committee may consider the main amendment and vote on it.

Once every clause has been voted on, the committee will consider and vote on the preamble, the short title, the title and the bill itself. If amendments are adopted, an order to reprint the bill may be required so that the House has a proper copy for use at report stage.

Finally, the committee will have to order the chair to report the bill to the House. That report contains only the text of adopted amendments as well as an indication of deleted clauses.

We have appearing with us this afternoon witnesses from the Department of Employment and Social Development. We have Madame Nandy, director general, employment insurance policy, skills and employment branch; Madame Field, executive director, employment insurance benefits processing; Soojin Yu, director, special benefits; Magalie Brochu, manager, special benefits; and Neil Burron, manager, strategic policy and legislative reform.

• (1535)

Pursuant to Standing Order 75(1), consideration of the preamble is postponed.

I, the chair, call clause 1.

(On clause 1)

The Chair: Ms. Gazan, go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you.

I'm a visitor at the committee. I know that you've spoken and reviewed these amendments prior. Are we at proposed subsection 1.2? Is that right?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Gazan. No, the committee did not meet and review the amendments.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay, so we did not.

Are we at proposed subsection 1.2, though? Is that right?

The Chair: That's correct, yes. We're at proposed subsection 1.2.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay, we're at proposed subsection 1.2.

The Chair: Yes, and there is an amendment, NDP-1.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes.

The Chair: Do you wish to move the amendment, Ms. Gazan?

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes, I wish to move the amendment.

The Chair: You have the floor.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

I feel it's like *The Twilight Zone*. I'm back here again having to justify why these amendments are relevant in terms of being able to amend the bill.

We'd like to change it to "For greater certainty, in this part, a reference to the placement of one or more children with a claimant for the purpose of adoption includes a situation in which one or more Indigenous children are placed, in accordance with the customs or traditions...to which they belong, with a claimant, other than their parent, for the purpose of giving the claimant primary responsibility for providing their day-to-day care."

In the last Parliament we passed Bill C-15, which means that all legislation going forward has to be consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I'd like to read into the record the eighth paragraph the preambular paragraphs in Bill C-15 specifically, which states the following:

Whereas the implementation of the Declaration must include concrete measures to address injustices, combat prejudice and eliminate all forms of violence, racism and discrimination, including systemic racism and discrimination, against Indigenous peoples and Indigenous elders, youth, children, women, men, persons with disabilities and gender-diverse persons and two-spirit persons;

I'd also like to refer to preambular paragraph 18 of Bill C-15, which states:

Whereas the Declaration is affirmed as a source for the interpretation of Canadian law;

We knew that well before Bill C-15, so moving on, we see that section 5 of Bill C-15 speaks specifically to consistency. It reads:

The Government of Canada must, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, take all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the Declaration.

I want to start out by first commending MP Falk for putting forward this bill and for working with stakeholders who pushed to get this bill forward. One of the areas stakeholders were concerned about was that kinship and customary care were not included, which is something that MP Falk and I had an opportunity to speak about before and which is something that is critical.

Before I refer to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, I'll give you a couple of reasons that this bill is not only not consistent with Bill C-15 but that it also does not uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly articles 19, 21 and 22, which I'll read into the record.

Ninety per cent of all kids in care in Manitoba are indigenous. There are more kids in child welfare now than at the height of the residential schools. There is no secret about it. The fact that we're even debating whether this falls out of scope is disturbing to me, quite frankly, when we passed Bill C-15 in the last Parliament and when we know that almost all kids in care in this country—over 90%, certainly, in my province—are indigenous.

If you look at article 19 of the UN declaration—I'm going to read it into the record—you'll see that it states that "States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions"—which includes child welfare institutions—"in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them."

Article 21 states that:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security.

2. States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

We know the child welfare system is a direct pipeline to murdered and missing indigenous women.

● (1540)

Article 22 reads:

Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities in the implementation of this Declaration.

It's something that this bill, in its current iteration, does not do.

I want to commend other parties in the House that understood the importance of ensuring that Bill C-15 was compatible with the child care legislation.

Once again I'm here to talk about the very essence of reconciliation, which is giving our kids back. We need to have the decision-making power and the financial resources to be able to care for our kids in the way we choose to care for our kids, which is primarily through customary and kinship care arrangements.

In terms of child care, which is outside of the scope of the bill, the last time I was at this committee all members, including one Liberal, voted in favour because they understood that the government has a legal obligation to ensure that all legislation going forward is consistent with the United Nations declaration. This bill needs to be amended so that it does just that, so I'd like to keep this amendment on the floor.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

As chair I must rule on admissibility of amendments. My responsibility is to ensure that the procedure of the House of Commons that has been adopted by all parties is followed.

Before I give a ruling on the amendment moved by Ms. Gazan, I'm going to ask whichever official feels it is appropriate to speak briefly to the issue.

Does Bill C-318 infringe on Bill C-15? You heard the concern outlined by Ms. Gazan. Could you briefly address that before...?

• (1545)

Ms. Anamika Mona Nandy (Director General, Employment Insurance Policy, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): Yes, we did hear the brief description of Bill C-15 with regard to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That said, we are not here to speak to the content of that particular bill, so we would not be able to make a direct comparison.

I will say, though, that in terms of kinship and customary care, the issue is with regard to the temporary nature of those placements, and that's the focus.

The Chair: Thank you.

Procedure does not allow for debate on the amendment of Ms. Falk because I have to first rule on whether it's admissible before we can go into debate, so at this time I thank Ms. Gazan for her comments.

Bill C-318 introduces a new type of special benefit, an attachment benefit of 15 weeks for adoptive parents and parents of children conceived through surrogacy. The current amendment attempts to create another benefit, whereby an indigenous child could be placed with a claimant different from the child's parents, following different processes from the provincial adoption process as stated in the bill, and the claimant could be entitled to obtain a 15-week benefit drawn from the treasury.

As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, states on page 772:

Since an amendment may not infringe upon the financial initiative of the Crown, it is inadmissible if it imposes a charge on the public treasury or if it extends the objects or purposes or relaxes the conditions and qualifications specified in the royal recommendation.

In the opinion of the chair, the amendment proposes a new scheme, one that imposes a new charge on the public treasury, and as such it would require a royal recommendation. Therefore I rule the amendment inadmissible.

Ms. Gazan, there's no debate. You can challenge my ruling.

Ms. Leah Gazan: It's time to give our kids back, so I'm going to challenge your ruling.

The Chair: The ruling of the chair has been challenged.

Madam Clerk, I call a recorded vote on the challenge to the chair's ruling. Does the committee support the chair's ruling or not?

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

The Chair: Committee members, that brings us to debate.

Ms. Falk, we're on the amendment.

• (1550)

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

I want to also personally thank MP Gazan for moving this amendment.

I introduced Bill C-318 to address the current discrimination that exists in our employment insurance program. I want it on the record that because this bill does not explicitly include claimants in a customary care arrangement, it was my expectation that they would have access to it, as is generally the case with the current parental benefits. I recognize that this amendment will ensure their inclusion, which I believe to be in the same spirit and intent as my private member's bill, so I will be supporting this amendment.

The Chair: We go to Ms. Ferreri and then Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Ms. Ferreri, go ahead.

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

I want to thank my colleague Ms. Falk for bringing this private member's bill forward, because equity is really what this comes down to. That's what this bill is all about. A parent is a parent, and a caregiver. It's a critical bill and it's something to be extremely proud of.

In relation to Ms. Gazan's amendment and what she's brought forth, I can't stress enough how vital this is. We worked together on Bill C-35, which is the child care bill, and we've worked together on the status of women. When this was put forward in Bill C-35 to support the rights of Indigenous parents, the Liberals voted against it. We saw this again, and it just doesn't make sense.

I sense her frustration greatly today. I can feel it from her. I think that if we want to have a great country, we have to have healthy kids, and kids need to be cared for. This is a no-brainer amendment, and quite frankly, I'm shocked, especially when the person who has put forward the bill says that yes, this is well within the scope of what she had hoped for.

I fully support my colleague Ms. Gazan today, and I would deeply encourage.... We see article after article come forward in the news about this marketing slogan of \$10-a-day child care crumbling in each province because the Liberal government did exactly what we said they would do: They set the provinces up to fail.

Do you know who's losing? It's children.

The Chair: Ms. Ferrari, we're on the amendment.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I want to bring it back, because what this all comes back to is parents having choice, parents having flexibility, however they choose to have a child. I just want to fully support my colleague Ms. Gazan today on her amendment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, we're on the amendment.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Chair, can I just ask for a five-minute suspension?

The Chair: Sure. We'll suspend for five minutes.

We're suspended.

● (1550) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1600)

The Chair: The meeting is resuming. When the committee suspended, there was discussion on amendment NDP-1. Is there any further discussion on amendment NDP-1?

Mr. Kusmierczyk, go ahead.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin by thanking the committee for bringing this debate forward on Bill C-318. I specifically want to thank the MP for Battlefords—Lloydminster for her work in bringing this study forward. I also want to say thank you to all the witnesses who testified and to all the parents and the adoptive parents for the incredible love and commitment they demonstrate. I believe the discussion we're having here....

The government bill that will be coming forward as well, which has already been tabled under Bill C-59, also recognizes that selflessness, commitment and love of adoptive parents.

I also want to thank my colleague Ms. Gazan for bringing this very thoughtful amendment forward. We want to do everything possible to make sure not only that the federal laws and policies that we bring forward align with and are consistent with UNDRIP and our responsibilities under UNDRIP, but that our policies, programs and laws also reflect the priorities of first nations, Inuit and Métis people in our country.

This is an important amendment that has been brought forward, and I believe it's an amendment that ought to be studied further. I believe it requires additional research and thoughtful conversation, and above all careful and considerate consultation with first nations, Inuit and Métis across Canada. This is important.

Obviously, children are at the very centre and heart of the work of this government, and so for that reason I do believe there are questions about this amendment that need to be answered. There is

information that needs to be brought forward. I believe that there ought to be a process in place whereby that information can come forward to members of this committee as well as to members of government in designing these policies.

I do believe we are skipping an important step of consultation here, first and foremost, as well as deliberation and information, and so for that reason I will be abstaining from voting on this amendment.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Madame Gazan, you had your hand up. Then we'll go to Madame Chabot.

We're on the amendment.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much for your feedback. I have a couple of things.

This is not a choice: When Bill C-15 became law, there was a legal obligation for MPs to make sure that things were consistent with Bill C-15, so I don't think we're doing anybody any favours by not upholding the rule of law today, full stop.

On the matter of customary and kinship care, the government is saying it still needs to consult when there is ample evidence. The Liberal government has said they support the national inquiry on issues around the child welfare system, and indigenous leadership across the country has been very clear that we need control over our own child welfare systems, which includes having customary and kinship care as a main form of keeping our kids within our communities. We know, certainly in my community, that kids are aging out of care and being dropped off at the Salvation Army. One has only to look at the impacts of the sixties scoop, when kids were taken out of their families and communities and shipped off to other places, to see what that looks like in our communities today, and I'll tell you what it looks like: It looks like a whole lot of people—thousands of people—living with complex mental health issues and trauma after being adopted out and having to live in families where they suffered the most outrageous abuse, something that this government hasn't even looked at yet.

This is an opportunity for the Liberal government and all parties to unanimously support the human rights of indigenous kids in this country, and once again I'm in a committee where that is not happening.

Child welfare is a pipeline to the justice system. Child welfare is a pipeline to become murdered or missing—murdered or missing men and boys and murdered or missing indigenous women and girls.

We have an opportunity to uphold our legislative duties, to uphold the Constitution, which now includes Bill C-15, and the fact that we are using consultation as an excuse shows the normalization of violence against indigenous people in this country that has been perpetrated through systems and, I would say, at the very worst, through child welfare systems. This is why lead advocates for this bill called for the inclusion of customary and kinship care.

Abstaining is silence. It's saying, "I'm going to stay silent to violence against indigenous kids in this country." It's time we get our kids back. Given the kind of violence that kids undergo in the child welfare system and the stories that you hear about the way the system has failed our kids—including for my own family and in the case of my mother, who grew up in child welfare—we have an obligation today to do what's right.

I am asking everyone at the table for the votes to show a true act of reconciliation. That's what I'm asking for in honour of the kids who have been lost in systems. I'm asking for your courage today to not abstain.

I'm going to leave it at that, but I wanted to share that, because that is how critical this amendment is. I'm glad that the Conservative folks around the table and the Bloc along with the NDP understand the critical nature of these amendments when we're talking about anything related to child welfare.

Thank you.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

Madame Chabot, go ahead, please, on the amendment.

[*Translation*]

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

I think we are all encouraged to vote in favour of Bill C-318, which fundamentally seeks to recognize the equity between adoptive and biological parents. I don't think this is the only inequity in the EI system that we need to address, but that's another issue.

That goes without saying. Adoptive parents, in particular, have testified very accurately about what an adoption can mean. I must say that I am quite proud because this has been done in Quebec since 2021.

In all fairness, we shouldn't have any reservations about passing this bill. I also agree with the amendments proposed by Ms. Gazan of the NDP. Beyond all the studies that will have to be done, the purpose of these amendments, according to the principle of the bill, is to take into account the culture based on the group's customs and traditions, as well as the children who are being placed who are not with their parents. I think that's the spirit of the wording. This can indeed lead to recognition so that, according to customs and traditions, those who welcome a child can benefit from the benefits we are about to adopt.

I think it's a matter of principle. I think it is well worded in each of the provisions where it is necessary. I completely agree with that. I don't think another meeting is required to weigh the pros and cons.

I urge us to vote in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Ms. Falk, go ahead on the amendment.

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

The substance of the amendment we are debating right now is to ensure that kinship and customary care will be added to this bill.

I find it very frustrating when MP Kusmierczyk makes the accusation that consultations weren't done, that they weren't completed and that the committee didn't hear. I've met with many stakeholders in the drafting of this bill. We also had many witnesses come here to testify. Does the excuse of an abstention due to lack of consultation mean there was no consultation put into Bill C-59? That would be my question.

We're voting in favour of this amendment to ensure that it is put into Bill C-318.

The Chair: Mr. Coteau is next on the amendment.

I would remind members to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Yes, it's on the amendment.

I have a question for the member opposite, whose bill we're discussing here.

Did you consider putting this amendment in before, when you consulted with the indigenous community? Why were they excluded from your bill?

The Chair: Ms. Falk—

Mr. Michael Coteau: Specifically around the kinship piece—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I think the chair gave me the floor.

Maybe the member wasn't listening when I took the floor the first time to address MP Gazan in thanking her for doing this. They weren't intentionally left out—indigenous people. The way I assumed this would happen is that they would have access to it as they generally do. This is something that's going to solidify it to make sure nothing gets missed on the regulation standpoint.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Coteau, on the amendment.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I've been involved in crafting legislation for child protection. It was a 250-page document in Ontario when we wrote the entire child protection act, and it took several years to get to that point.

My concern here is that there's a.... The member opposite knows that I'm very supportive of the indigenous community and many of the pieces she's talking to. My problem right now is that I feel this is a last-minute attempt to fix something that fundamentally doesn't really cover a comprehensive issue that deserves more attention than this. To miss out completely on the indigenous community and at the last minute throw them in with an amendment, rather than building a comprehensive type of bill, worries me. What else is missing here? What else has been left out?

I'm personally not going to support this amendment, based mainly on the fact that I don't think it does justice to the indigenous community.

I respect the member opposite who made the amendment. I think that's the right thing to do, but I don't have confidence in just putting this in at the last minute without really going out there and listening to the community. They've been completely ignored in this bill. They're not included in it. I think it's insulting to the community, to be honest.

Thank you.

• (1615)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Gazan, on your amendment.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Again, it's respect, but here's the thing: There's been lots of research, documentation and publications by indigenous child welfare agencies supporting the need for kinship and customary care. What's missing is that family members or kinship and community often have to take on this responsibility with zero income.

You find me an indigenous person.... You talk about disrespect. I'll tell you what's disrespectful to indigenous communities from my perspective, speaking as one indigenous person: It's that we have to consult about stupid stuff like whether we want toilets and how we feel about clean drinking water in our community. You find one first nations community that doesn't want to have control over matters that impact their kids in a way that is consistent with our customs and traditions. You find me one.

This is at the very foundational level of the TRC. One of the worst things was that the state stole our kids and then criminalized us as parents. The state did that, and now the state continues to do that through the child welfare system. The only people who are wards of states are kids in child welfare and people who are incarcerated, and for most kids in care, it is like a lifetime incarceration that leaves lasting identity issues and lasting issues.

We cannot risk children having to be taken away from family and community for issues of poverty, which sometimes results in kids going into care. It's not lack of parenting but issues of poverty. The consultation piece about saying we're not doing indigenous people justice doesn't fly, which is why I put forward this amendment, which is what we're supposed to do in committee. It's that people put forward legislation, even in parties that are not my own, and my job as a legislator is to put forward amendments to strengthen legislation.

An hon. member: And you've done a good job.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes.

With all respect, I know change is hard, and I mean this, but when are we going to be brave enough to just honour human rights without question and qualification? I'm hearing questions and qualifications, and now it's consultation. That does not fly, especially with what has been said loud and clear by leaders in our community, including our women.

I'm going to leave it at that. I don't mean to sound like Martin Luther King. I'm not trying to, but this is like....

This is about our kids. If the government is too scared to give our kids back, when are we going to reconcile in this country to give us what we need to look after our kids?

I'm going to leave it there.

The Chair: Seeing no further discussion on NDP-1, I will ask for a vote on NDP-1, the amendment to clause 1.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Shall clause 1 carry as amended?

(Clause 1 as amended agreed to)

The Chair: The following clauses have no amendments. With unanimous consent, we can group them. On clauses 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, no amendments were received. Shall clauses 2 through 7 carry?

(Clauses 2 to 7 inclusive agreed to)

(On clause 8)

The Chair: On clause 8, we have amendment NDP-2.

• (1620)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes. Can I put forward the amendment, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you. We want to amend for exactly the same reason. It's to be consistent with Bill C-15. This is the amendment:

For greater certainty, in this Part, a reference to the placement of one or more children with a self-employed person for the purpose of adoption includes a situation in which one or more Indigenous children are placed, in accordance with the customs or traditions of the Indigenous group, community or people to which they belong, with a self-employed person, other than their parent, for the purpose of giving the self-employed person primary responsibility for providing their day-to-day care.

It's for the same reasons I put forward before: to be consistent with Bill C-15 and the articles in UNDRIP that I outlined.

The Chair: Is there any debate on the amendment referenced, NDP-2?

Oh, I'm sorry; before we get to debate, again it's my responsibility as chair to follow the procedure adopted by the House, which requires me to rule on the admissibility of amendments.

Again, Bill C-318, as it was presented to the committee and debated by the committee, introduces a new type of special benefit, an attachment benefit of 15 weeks for adoptive parents and parents of children conceived through surrogacy. This amendment attempts to create another benefit, whereby an indigenous child could be placed with a self-employed person different from the child's parents, following processes that are different from the provincial adoption process indicated in the bill. The claimant could be entitled to obtain a 15-week benefit drawn from the treasury.

As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, states on page 772, "Since an amendment may not infringe upon the financial initiative of the Crown, it is inadmissible if it imposes a charge on the public treasury, or if it extends the objects or purposes or relaxes the conditions and qualifications specified in the royal recommendation."

In the opinion of the chair, the amendment proposes a new scheme that imposes a new charge on the public treasury, and therefore it would require a royal recommendation. Therefore, I rule the amendment inadmissible. My ruling is not subject to debate but can be challenged.

Go ahead, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'd like to challenge your ruling, Mr. Chair. We need to get our kids back.

The Chair: The chair's ruling has been challenged. I would ask the clerk to call a vote on the chair's ruling.

• (1625)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Ariane Calvert): Members, the question is, "Shall the chair's decision be sustained?" That means that if you vote in the affirmative, you're voting in support of the chair's decision, and if you vote in the negative, then you're voting against the chair's decision.

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

The Chair: The amendment NDP-2 is now on the floor for debate. Is there any discussion?

Mr. Kusmierczyk, go ahead.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Could we just have a vote on division?

Ms. Leah Gazan: I would like to comment.

The Chair: Ms. Gazan, you have the floor.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Once again we are going to have to debate. I know that there is going to be indigenous leadership watching this. I know that families and kids who are now fighting for compensation because of the abuse they experienced in care or because they're having identity issues because they were brought up away

from their families are watching this right now, and we have an opportunity to do the right thing.

We are in different parties, but human rights are a non-partisan issue, and we can demonstrate an act of reconciliation by voting together today to remedy a system that has caused irreparable ongoing damage to indigenous families. Again, there are more kids in care now than at the height of residential schools, something that we always scoff at, or the fact that women and girls, men and boys are going missing and getting murdered. If you look at the research, you see that most of them spent time in child welfare away from family and community. Their families weren't given the same financial resources because this country doesn't recognize the way we care for our children, just as it did not recognize this kind of child care during residential school times, care that includes kinship and customary care arrangements in our community.

I'm pretty sure of the outcome, but I just want to bring the point home when it comes to violence in our communities. If you can't take a stand on child welfare.... You can still do the right thing here. I'm again going to ask everybody here to please do the right thing and vote for what indigenous leaders have fought for, which is child welfare reform, so that we don't have to do Jordan's principle settlements, whereby the Liberal government tries to give half the money that is owed as a result of kids in care.

I'm going to leave it there. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Ferreri, on amendment NDP-2.

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

For people who are maybe trying to follow politics at home, we're trying to be as transparent and accountable as possible on this private member's bill that we're debating right now, which was brought forth by my colleague Ms. Falk to make it equitable for intended parents and surrogate parents so that they also have access to attachment—meaning EI—which makes total sense. It's a great bill.

Then, to my colleague Ms. Gazan's point, when we talk about indigenous families and kinship and customary care, it is a no-brainer to try to reunite families, right? I guess my question, through her, is just on the work she's done. I worked with her on child care around this bill as well, and we were very supportive of ensuring the rights of indigenous peoples.

Through you, Mr. Chair, why wouldn't this just be a no-brainer? I'm having a hard time. If people are watching at home, I guess that would be my question, through you, for Ms. Gazan. Why would we be having comments from the Liberals that there needs to be consultation or that this is an insulting amendment, as has been said today? It's just very confusing, and that they're just abstaining.... That would be my question, through you, Mr. Chair.

• (1630)

The Chair: Your comments are on the amendment.

Is there any other debate?

Go ahead, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I don't know. I suspect it has to do with money.

I suspect it has to do with money because if I look at why the federal government was taken to court, it was for deliberately racially discriminating against first nations kids and child welfare on reserve. I'm not quite sure what it is, but I suspect it's money, and the more we keep discriminating, the more money it's going to cost the government, which is why it's important to uphold human rights and which is why I think this is happening.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk, on NDP-2.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and again, I really do appreciate the work of my colleague Ms. Gazan, who has brought this amendment forward.

This is an important issue. It's an important issue that we absolutely take to heart. I can tell you that every one of my colleagues at this table takes this amendment and this issue very seriously.

But simply put, we want to study it further. We want to understand it better so we can act on it. We need to understand it. First and foremost, I do believe that the principle of "nothing without us" is absolutely paramount. We want to hear from first nations, Inuit and Métis here around this committee table and on Parliament Hill on this very issue, and I think it is an important issue.

It's important for those watching at home to understand that our government is bringing forward a bill that will introduce 15 weeks of EI for adoptive and intended parents. That bill is already in front of the House of Commons in the form of Bill C-59. That bill will introduce 15 weeks of EI for adoptive parents. It builds upon the works of this committee. There will be an opportunity with the government bill that's moving forward, and hopefully, with the support of our opposition members, Bill C-59 will pass in the House quickly. Right now it's facing some headwinds from our opposition colleagues, but we hope to see it pass quickly so that we can get those benefits into the hands of adoptive parents as quickly as possible.

That bill will have an opportunity to come before committee, and there will be opportunities for first nations, Métis and Inuit members to come to Parliament Hill to talk about kinship and customary care relationships to provide members of Parliament with information and with deeper understanding of what that means and of how it fits into this EI policy framework.

It is an important issue, and we feel that it is so important that we want to hear from indigenous partners and communities. There will

be an opportunity as this bill is debated at committee, as Bill C-59, which contains the EI provisions for adoptive parents, is debated in committee.

The principle of "nothing without us" is absolutely paramount, and on an issue as important as this one, we believe that it is absolutely imperative that we hear from indigenous partners, indigenous communities. There will be an opportunity to do that as Bill C-59, our government bill that will introduce 15 weeks of EI for adoptive parents, is brought before committee very shortly.

With the help and support of our opposition partners, it will come before committee very quickly.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Gazan, please go ahead on amendment NDP-2.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Clearly there has been lots of consultation on child welfare. You just have to look at the work of Cindy Blackstock. Kinship and customary care are a top priority. I find it very patronizing to indigenous people that they think we're so stupid that we have to consult about things that we have been talking about publicly for years.

If you look at any first nations child welfare agency and if it's now an issue just because I'm bringing it up, maybe the onus isn't on us. Maybe if people really cared, they'd actually read, when they're spending money on reconciliation, what's being said. I know I'm emotional here, but our kids are dying on the streets.

I have to be honest: I don't care if you're bringing a bill forward. I'll sit in committee and I'll make the same amendments to your bill, and if the Conservatives vote against it, I'll say the same thing. Do you know why? It's because this is a human rights issue.

When you're using “nothing about us without us”, let me give you examples in real time about how it's everything about us without us, including the fact that this government spends nothing on murdered and missing indigenous women when we're very loud and clear about what the needs are, so please spare me. Our kids are dying. If we're going to make excuses about why we're not supporting the human rights of indigenous families to have the economic resources so that they have food on the table, then let's just be honest here about where this country's at with reconciliation. I don't want to hear about “nothing about us without us”, because I have a whole list of items that are happening without us.

When it comes to our kids, it seems to be a reachable excuse, and that is unacceptable to me. In fact, it's pretty racist.

I'm going to leave it there.

• (1635)

The Chair: I will again remind members to speak to the amendment.

Go ahead, Madame Chabot.

[*Translation*]

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

I will support this amendment, as I did the other one. I believe there are four similar amendments, this being the second one. I want to point out that no one around the table is opposed to the principle of “nothing without us”, just as no one is opposed to the principle of “by and for” in the case of people with disabilities.

I would like to give an example related to the principle of “nothing without us”, even though it may not be relevant to the amendment. I'm wondering where the implementation of the urban, rural and northern indigenous housing strategy is at. I agree with the principle of “nothing without us”, but in Bill C-318, there is a proposal that people who care for a child who is entrusted to them for a certain period of time for the purpose of adoption in accordance with indigenous customs and principles will receive 15 weeks of benefits. It seems to me that such a proposal does not require three years of consultations.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Seeing no further discussion, I will ask the clerk for a recorded vote on amendment NDP-2.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 0)

The Chair: Shall clause 8 carry as amended?

(Clause 8 as amended agreed to)

The Chair: The next grouping is of clauses 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 of the bill.

There have been no amendments received. With unanimous consent, I will ask for an indication of carrying clauses 9 through 13 as presented. I see no dissension.

(Clauses 9 to 13 inclusive agreed to)

(On clause 14)

The Chair: On clause 14, we have amendment NDP-3.

Go ahead, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Chair.

Again, for consistency, proposed subsection 3.3 would amend as follows:

For greater certainty, in this section, a reference to a child who is in the care of an employee for the purpose of adoption includes an Indigenous child placed, in accordance with the customs [and] traditions of the Indigenous group, community or people to which the child belongs, with an employee, other than the child's parent, for the purpose of giving the employee primary responsibility for providing the child's day-to-day care.

For the same reasons, Mr. Chair, I'm putting this amendment forward.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

My responsibility as chair is to rule on the admissibility of all amendments before the committee.

Bill C-318 amends the Canada Labour Code to introduce a new type of special benefit to extend parental leave in case of the transfer of a child through adoption or a child born through surrogacy. The amendment attempts to create another benefit where an Indigenous child could be placed with an employee other than the child's parents, following different processes than the provincial adoption process as indicated in the bill, and the employee could be entitled to an extended parental leave.

As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, states on page 770: “An amendment to a bill that was referred to committee—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I no longer have access to the interpretation at all.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there translation now?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: You can continue speaking, but I did not have access to the interpretation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. Do we have...?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, is everything okay?

[*English*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: That's okay.

The Chair: As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, states on page 770, “An amendment to a bill that was referred to a committee after second reading is out of order if it is beyond the scope and principle of the bill.” In the opinion of the chair, this amendment introduces a new concept that is beyond the scope of the bill as agreed to by the House at second reading. Therefore, I rule the amendment inadmissible.

Ms. Gazan, go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'd like to challenge the ruling of the chair.

The Chair: The chair's ruling has been challenged, which means we go directly to a vote on upholding the chair's ruling or changing it.

Madam Clerk, could we have a recorded vote on my ruling, please?

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

The Chair: The chair's ruling has been overturned. Therefore I will call a vote on amendment NDP-3.

We'll wait just a moment.

Ms. Gazan, go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Do we have room to discuss this quickly?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm going to ask all of my colleagues once again to take this opportunity to really support each other across party lines and support reconciliation in this country as it relates to indigenous families and children.

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Seeing no further discussion on amendment NDP-3, I shall call for a recorded vote on NDP-3.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 0)

The Chair: Shall clause 14 as amended carry?

(Clause 14 as amended agreed to)

The Chair: There are no amendments for the next two clauses, 15 and 16, so I would ask whether the two clauses could be carried together as presented.

I see no dissent.

(Clauses 15 and 16 agreed to)

(On clause 17)

The Chair: On clause 17, we have amendment NDP-4.

Madame Gazan, go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'd like to amend this article just for consistency:

(3.3) For greater certainty, in this section, a reference to a child who is in the care of an employee for the purpose of adoption includes an Indigenous child placed, in accordance with the customs or traditions of the Indigenous group, community or people to which the child belongs, with an employee, other than the child's parent, for the purpose of giving the employee primary responsibility for providing the child's day-to-day care.

To speak to it, as I said before, I'd like to find any indigenous person who would have to be consulted on why they could raise their kids in accordance with the customs and traditions of their indigenous group, on why they would need consultation on it. If the Liberal bill comes forward and if they also have not included custom and kinship care, I look forward to fighting this with the same

level of intensity. Again I want to give this opportunity to not abstain and to stand up for reconciliation and indigenous kids and families in this country and to actually take a stand.

I'd like to thank all of my colleagues, the Conservatives, the Bloc, and the NDP. Human rights are a non-partisan issue. I welcome the Liberal Party to do the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before the amendment is brought to debate, as chair, I again must give a ruling on the admissibility of said amendment.

Again, Bill C-318 amends the Canada Labour Code to introduce a new type of special benefit to extend parental leave in the case of the transfer of a child through adoption or a child born through surrogacy.

The amendment attempts to create another benefit whereby an indigenous child could be placed with an employee other than the child's parents, following processes different from the provincial adoption process that was indicated in the bill, and the employee could be entitled to an extended parental leave. As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, states on page 770, "An amendment to a bill that was referred to a committee after second reading is out of order if it is beyond the scope and principle of the bill."

In the opinion of the chair, the amendment introduces a new concept that is beyond the scope of the bill as agreed by the House at second reading. Therefore, I rule the amendment inadmissible.

Go ahead, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'd like to challenge the ruling of the chair.

The Chair: The chair's ruling has been challenged.

Madam Clerk, we will have a recorded vote on my ruling.

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

The Chair: The amendment has been adopted by the committee.

Is there discussion on the amendment?

Seeing no discussion, Madam Clerk, I will call a recorded vote on amendment NDP-4.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Shall clause 17 as amended carry?

(Clause 17 as amended agreed to)

The Chair: That concludes the clauses.

Shall the preamble carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the title carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the bill as amended carry?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Ms. Gray, you're speaking to the bill as amended.

• (1650)

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

I just want to take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Falk for bringing this important piece of legislation forward. I hope that everyone can support this bill, including the amendment. I just want to take this opportunity to thank her for that.

Also, Mr. Chair, I'm wondering if I can be put first on the speaking list once we are done with this, please.

Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Gray, you will have to get my attention when that time comes.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Yes.

The Chair: Shall the chair report the bill as amended to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Shall the committee order a reprint of the bill as amended for the use of the House at report stage?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The committee has agreed, has reviewed the bill and has adopted several amendments. The bill will be brought to the House.

That concludes the consideration of Bill C-318.

At this stage, is there other business before the committee?

Go ahead, Mrs. Gray.

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

At this moment, I would like to move the following motion, which has been put on notice and has been circulated appropriately.

I move:

That, given that:

(a) Canada's housing crisis continues to worsen.

(b) According to the CMHC, starts on new housing construction were down 7% in 2023, putting Canada further from the 2030 target to restore housing affordability.

(c) No housing has been built as a result of the Housing Accelerator Fund.

The committee invite the Minister of Housing and the Acting President of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to testify before the committee separately for no less than two (2) hours each, within 14 days of the passage of this motion.

I'll just speak on this briefly.

The housing situation in Canada has become worse since the housing minister and the CMHC CEO were here last. Housing is the responsibility of this committee, and the most recent update from the Bank of Canada's housing affordability index shows that

affordability is now worse than in the 2008 financial crisis and also worse than in the mid-1990s. As a result of the Liberals' inflationary spending, the Bank of Canada still cannot bring down interest rates, further putting mortgage holders in a crisis.

Now the CMHC just reported that there were 7% fewer housing starts in 2023 compared to 2022. This is more than 17,000 houses fewer in 2023 compared to 2022. The CMHC's outgoing president told the Senate finance committee that there is no plan at CMHC to build the number of homes needed by 2030 to restore affordability. This is why we need the current CMHC CEO and the Liberal housing minister to come before this committee to answer on the worsening housing crisis and explain how there is no plan to restore housing affordability.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Just before we continue, I want to advise the witnesses that they're free to leave because the part of the committee meeting that they were here for has been concluded.

Thank you.

With that, the motion is in order. Is there any discussion?

Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): I will seek to amend the motion, Mr. Chair, in light of the fact that the minister has appeared at committee several times and that there is now only an interim CEO at CMHC, since Ms. Bowers has gone to the IMF.

In light of those things and in light of the important fact that there's not enough emphasis in this motion, with all due respect, on affordable housing or co-op housing, I would amend it so that it reads:

Given that:

Canada is in a housing crisis; the committee undertake a study of co-op and affordable housing. That the committee invite the President and CEO of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation once appointed to testify before the committee for no less than two hours.

I can repeat it if that was too fast.

The Chair: Can you forward a copy to the clerk? Perhaps you can forward it and then I will ask you to read it again slowly into the record.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Sure. I will read it again slowly, and then I will forward it. How's that?

The Chair: That's good, and then we'll print it and circulate it.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It is that, "Given that Canada is in a housing crisis, the committee undertake a study of co-op and affordable housing, and that the committee invite the president and CEO of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, once appointed, to testify before the committee for no less than two hours."

The Chair: Committee members, the motion has been read into the record. Unless it's available in both official languages, we'll have to deal with it as it's presented verbally on the record.

Do you have it in both languages?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I don't at this point.

The Chair: Okay. In that case, the clerk cannot circulate it, but the amendment is debatable.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you've verbalized it.

It's over to Mr. Aitchison, and then who else had their hand up? Was it Madame Gazan?

Okay, we have Scott, and then Leah and then Tracy.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Maybe I'll take my hand down now, because I want to hear what everybody has to say first, including Madame Chabot.

The Chair: That's fine.

I have Mr. Aitchison, and then Madame Chabot and then Ms. Gray.

• (1700)

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

I think it actually would be okay if we added some further analysis of co-op housing. I think it's one of the many tools that should be at our disposal to solve the crisis of housing and affordable housing.

I guess what concerns me about that amendment is this notion that despite the fact that we're in a housing crisis, the current interim president of the CMHC is apparently not up to the job of coming to talk to us about the issue. Is that the message I'm supposed to receive here?

I think the current interim president happens to have worked at CMHC for some time. It's not as though he's new to the game. I wonder how long we should wait for the new president to be installed. In the meantime, is the place just adrift? Is there nobody at the helm and we can't really talk to the current president? What's the message we're supposed to receive from such a strange amendment?

The Chair: It's Madame Chabot, then Ms. Gray, and then Mr. Fragiskatos on the amendment of Mr. Fragiskatos.

Madame Chabot, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: From the outset, I would have been inclined to support Ms. Gray's motion, but I have a question about it. We may disagree on some of the arguments, but they are essentially true.

In 2023, new housing construction declined. We are talking about a housing crisis, which is a priority for everyone. We see that, in 2023, there was a drop, and it is true that no housing was built. However, the housing accelerator fund has been in place since 2022. In concrete terms, nothing has been built. Agreements are

ending. They are still being signed, but no changes have been made.

I agreed with that strategy and I have already said so to CMHC representatives. This strategy is spread over 10 years. There is a housing crisis, half a year has gone by and all we see are difficulties. How are we going to adapt? These are good questions.

The amendment that Mr. Fragiskatos has put forward is to wait until the new president of CMHC is appointed. When will he be officially appointed? How much longer will that take? It also proposes adding co-ops and affordable housing. I think there needs to be a broader definition.

I would be inclined not to go with the new proposal and to go with the original proposal.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Chabot.

It's Ms. Gray and then Mr. Fragiskatos on the amendment of Mr. Fragiskatos.

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

On this amendment, basically saying that the current CEO of CMHC would not be coming to this committee means that the Liberals are proposing that the person will never come to committee, that there won't be a representative from CMHC coming to committee. We don't know when there will be a permanent appointment. It could be after the next election, so basically what they're saying is that they don't want accountability.

This is an organization that is responsible for housing. We have new information, which I have laid out here, that has just been released since we had the CEO of CMHC and the housing minister here the last time. Therefore, it is absolutely relevant that we have both of them come here today.

Also, they've taken out the part about having the minister come, again to have no accountability from the minister. Basically they're saying we don't know when anyone will be able to come to this committee to talk about housing. That's just completely wrong, considering how it is one of the top issues, the top priorities, for Canadians.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, go ahead on your amendment.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: If colleagues choose to hear what I've said in a particular way, I can't control that, Mr. Chair, but I would share with them a few different things.

First of all, if our side were opposed to the idea of hearing from CMHC, we would have shown that before, but on the contrary, we've backed motions that ultimately brought CMHC here many times in the part of the session that started in September and ran through to the middle of December. There is that to consider.

To Mr. Aitchison's point about the interim CEO, I would prefer to hear from a full CEO when one is appointed. That, I think, is not out of place. Ms. Chabot asked when that appointment would come. I'm not sure when it will come, but I would expect it to come in due course. When that happens, I think we will be able to have a much more substantive discussion on the issues at hand.

Furthermore, because I do remember colleagues around the table—including Ms. Kwan, who is the housing critic for the New Democrats and who has been here on previous occasions, although she's not here today—talking about the importance of rent-geared-to-income housing in all of this, if there's a view that suggests that it should be included as well, I would be open to that. Then we would look at co-op housing and rent-geared-to-income housing, emphasizing the importance of non-market housing. All of these things could be taken up in what I think would be a serious and substantive meeting.

I know Ms. Gray comes to this issue with very good intent and thoughtfulness, but I'm simply seeking to strengthen the motion that was originally put on the table so that we can have a better meeting, frankly, and provide stronger recommendations to the government.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Aitchison, go ahead on the amendment.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

We hear what we hear, I guess, is what it comes down to. What I hear is that my colleague isn't quite familiar with the fact that the housing situation in this country is in a crisis. The previous minister wouldn't use the word. The current minister does actually use the word, but it seems his parliamentary secretary isn't seized with the matter.

I think the interim CEO is the interim CEO because they have a certain skill set and knowledge and understanding of the organization and the issues, and that's why they're there. If they're not capable of speaking to committee, then they shouldn't be the interim CEO, I suppose.

The fact of the matter is that this is a delay tactic. I recognize that the minister doesn't like the photo ops he gets here rather than out around the country, but that's what we're here for—to raise the issues that matter to this country and the people of this country. This is the most pressing issue our country is facing right now.

I'm looking at one of my colleagues here who used to be a city councillor. I was reading about one of his former colleagues—

Mr. Michael Coteau: I think he's talking about you.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: —in Hamilton, Mr. Collins.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Chad Collins: If it were a Soviet-style co-op, would you support it?

Mr. Scott Aitchison: You know, this sounds a lot like deflection, and I'm fully opposed to any watering down of this motion. We

need to have the minister here. As well, if we wait for this government to appoint a CEO, a new CEO, a permanent CEO, we might wait forever.

The Chair: Do you wish...? Is it Mr. Van Bynen or Mr. Fragiskatos?

Go ahead, Mr. Van Bynen.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): I haven't seen the circulated motion yet.

The Chair: We cannot circulate it because it was not produced in both languages. It's verbal. I will reread the amendment when we get to that stage.

We'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos, and also, who had their hand up?

Ms. Leah Gazan: I would prefer just to listen and then—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I was merely going to ask for a suspension for a few minutes—

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: —and if that's not the case, I have some other points to make, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll suspend for three minutes.

• (1705)

(Pause)

• (1710)

The Chair: The committee is back in session.

When we suspended, discussion was on the amendment of Mr. Fragiskatos. Since then, I have Mr. Coteau and then Mr. Fragiskatos and Mr. Long.

• (1715)

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Can we hear the amendment one more time, please?

The Chair: It is that, “Given that Canada is in a housing crisis, the committee undertake a study of co-op and affordable housing, and that the committee invite the president and CEO of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, once appointed, to testify before the committee for no less than two hours.”

The amendment would remove paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) of the original motion.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Through you, Mr. Chair, to the clerk, can we find out how many times the minister was here last year?

The Chair: We'd have to verify and report back. The clerk does not have it immediately.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I think it's been about three times. I just wanted to find that out.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The clerk will report back.

I have Mr. Fragiskatos and then Mr. Long.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, any amendment I've moved here today is in keeping with amendments I've introduced previously, and I think I can speak for colleagues on this side that we do so with sincerity.

It's not as if we think the motion presented by the Conservatives through Ms. Gray is not substantive; there is some substance there. We're simply trying to strengthen it to ensure that we have the ability to have a meeting that allows us to formulate serious and focused recommendations that will ultimately be put to the government. That's the goal.

I'm surprised that the Conservatives did not include a focus on affordable housing and emphasize it. The importance of non-market housing—co-op housing, rent-geared-to-income housing and all of these types of housing, which thousands of Canadians rely upon—are crucial.

In fact, a few months ago—and I think this merits emphasis, Mr. Chair—the Conservative leader talked about co-ops as “Soviet-style” housing. How someone could describe that type of model in those terms is beyond me. There are hundreds of thousands of Canadians who live in co-op housing. It's an alternative model of housing. It's a very interesting one, and it's one that I think can go a long way to alleviating a genuine crisis.

Mr. Aitchison said that I don't use that word because I'm somehow afraid to use it. No, that's not the case at all. We are living in a very challenging situation. It's one that amounts to a crisis. That's why the government has acted through the national housing strategy. More than 70,000 people, I think, at last count, who were either on the street or very close to living on the street now have a roof over their heads, quite often with vital wraparound supports that go a long way toward ensuring that they make a positive transition to a meaningful, dignified life.

At this committee in particular, a committee whose mandate is quite broad in its reach, if we're going to achieve anything on those issues and this specific issue of housing, we have to find ways to work together, so why a party—the official opposition, no less—would dismiss co-op housing as “Soviet-style” housing is beyond me. There is that.

On the importance of affordable housing more generally, let's think about it in these terms. Rent-geared-to-income housing and the non-market models that are there are all quite crucial to addressing the crisis at hand. I would like to hear from the CMHC their thoughts on those things. Unfortunately, we won't really have the ability to do that in substantive terms, because it's led by an interim CEO now. I'm not sure about you, Mr. Chair, but when I'm trying to get to the bottom of something, I don't want to talk to the interim head of an organization; I want to talk, in this case, to the incoming new permanent CEO. If they're not permanent, you can take my point: I want the new appointee, not the interim leader. I think that is vital if we're going to be serious about the work we're doing in providing recommendations to the government.

We have a lot of abilities at this committee. Mr. Aitchison was just pointing out before the suspension the municipal background

of my colleague to my right, who was a city councillor in Hamilton. Mr. Aitchison was the mayor of a community in northern Ontario, if I'm not mistaken. Let's harness that experience—and those are just two examples—and put that experience to good use and ensure that we can formulate recommendations that are truly in keeping with what this committee should be doing. Instead, I find that the Conservatives in particular are continuing to propose—this is not true of the Bloc and this is not true of the NDP—motions at this committee that won't get us anywhere.

The minister responsible for housing has appeared at this committee multiple times. In fact, part of me wants to support the motion of Ms. Gray, because in previous appearances, the minister has done extremely well to highlight not just the actions of the government, but the contradictions in the Conservative approach.

● (1720)

They want more housing built, but they want to tax builders, for example. They say that they're for affordable housing and for different types of housing, but they go after co-op housing in the way that I've already described. As well, when in office, they never did anything serious to advance affordable housing in the country. That is something, I think, that can't be overlooked.

All of these things, Mr. Chair, present me with questions about the Conservative approach. I have said that they've been sincere in raising motions, but as I talk here and think about it and further consider it, I see that there are holes in the approach. How seriously can you take an approach that says to have the same old meeting, time and again, that we've already had in the middle of a housing crisis, when we know that this type of meeting is not going to do anything to provide strong recommendations that can move us forward in the way that we need to see?

Mr. Chair, I'm not sure whether you've had a chance to see the news, but just today it was announced that universities can actually now take out low-interest loans.

Mr. Michael Coteau: That's great news.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It is great news.

I talked about municipal experience on the part of my colleagues. Mr. Coteau has provincial experience that can be put to good use if we're serious about allowing members to carry out the work of committees.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We have a point of order. Clearly state the basis of the point of order you're calling.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: My friend and colleague has strayed quite a bit here, I think, from the point of his amendment. I wonder if we could rapidly move along so that we can get to a vote.

The Chair: No, that's out of order. He was staying on co-op housing. He's been talking about housing.

Mr. Scott Aitchison: He was talking about my municipal experience.

The Chair: Oh, well—okay. Stick to—

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Order.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have the floor.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Keep your comments to housing.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I was just saying that sometimes you can't win in this business. I was simply trying to compliment colleagues across the way. I suppose that's how it is. That's fine. I have very thick skin.

I am keeping within the scope of what's been proposed. Again, just in case colleagues have forgotten what exactly the amendment is all about, Canada is in a housing crisis. Again, to Mr. Aitchison, who said that I didn't embrace that, no. What I just described and what the amendment looks at and recognizes is that the committee should undertake a study of co-op housing and affordable housing. Well, how could we actually have a serious study of housing if we didn't look at those things?

I opened it up to committee members to say whether they wanted to look at the importance of non-market housing or of rent-geared-to-income housing, to be more specific than what the original amendment on my side proposed. If committee members want to go down that path, then I would be open to a subamendment to that effect; that's quite fine with me.

I have a hard time understanding, Mr. Chair, how we could actually have a serious meeting when we would bring back the minister again to share with us the many actions that the government is taking to address the crisis at hand. I would like to hear them, of course, and I think opposition members should hear them, because oftentimes they overlook that aspect or are not aware of it. I'm not sure.

However, the meeting with the interim CEO is not something that... I think Mr. Long has something to add on these points as well, so I won't belabour the point, but I don't see how bringing the interim CEO here will do very much.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

The current minister has been here twice since his appointment.

Mr. Long, you have the floor on the amendment, and then we'll go to Madame Chabot.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's great to be back in Ottawa. It's great to see all my colleagues.

Obviously, I respect MP Aitchison, MP Gray, MP Falk and MP Ferreri for their work on HUMA.

On the motion that MP Gray put forth, I'll be honest. You lost me with the "(c) No housing has been built as a result of the Housing Accelerator Fund." I think that to be fair on that one, the minister has gone across the country. He's probably signed 32 agreements so far.

A voice: Yes, that's pretty close.

A voice: Wow.

Mr. Wayne Long: I think anyone who understands the housing accelerator fund is going to realize that there hasn't been housing built yet. I mean, it's accelerating the process and it's breaking down barriers. Obviously, municipalities have to submit a plan that they're going to build so many houses over so many years. If they do that, if they achieve those goals, they'll get money. It's a wonderful program. I was actually thrilled to have the Prime Minister in my riding here two weeks ago. We made an announcement for Saint John—Rothesay, and it was received very, very well by the community. We announced nearly \$9.2 million for the City of Saint John. In addition to that, we announced \$4.9 million for the rapid housing initiative.

I'm happy to say that I'm probably the ranking member here, since I've been on HUMA since 2015. When I started with HUMA, we did travel across the country at that point. Adam Vaughan was parliamentary secretary for housing. I learned a lot from him, and we came up with the national housing strategy. It's puzzling to me that when a federal government is trying to lead in housing through rapid housing, co-ventures, co-investment, and different programs through CMHC, all of a sudden we seem to own every problem that's happening across this country in housing.

I think we all know that this has been an issue that's been unfolding over many, many years and over multiple levels of government. How the provinces have gotten away with not leading on this file is shocking to me. I think we are delivering. I think, as my colleague MP Fragiskatos said, that we obviously have a crisis. We do have an issue. A lot of things have happened, whether it's labour, the supply chain or the pandemic. Again, this has been unfolding over many, many governments and many different levels of government over many, many years.

I'm proud of what we've done. I think that Mr. Fragiskatos' amendment is fair. Minister Fraser, as we all know, handles himself very well when he's here. Again, I've been here for nine years. I understand the reasoning of bringing officials in so that the opposition can ask questions and maybe get a good clip or a misstep or what have you, but I think there's good work being done. I think there's productive work being done. We're not going to solve this problem, obviously, in a year, but I'm really very proud of what we're doing.

Mr. Chair, how are we on time?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Wayne Long: I'd like to move to adjourn, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I have a point of order—

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I said "point of order" before you banged the gavel.

Some hon. members: The gavel went down.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I said “point of order” before you banged the gavel. You do not have consent to adjourn, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It is 5:30, and I do—

• (1730)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: You do not have consent to adjourn, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I do not see consensus to extend beyond 5:30. Do we have consensus to move beyond 5:30?

A voice: We don't have consensus, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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