



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 102**

Monday, February 26, 2024

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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey



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

Monday, February 26, 2024

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)):** Committee members, I call the meeting to order. Welcome to meeting 102 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, October 18, 2023, the committee will begin the clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-319, an act to amend the Old Age Security Act.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person and virtually by Zoom. You can choose to participate in the official language of your choice by using the translation services, with your headset in the room and, if you're appearing virtually, click on the world icon at the bottom of your Surface and choose the official language of your choice. I advise members to please be conscious of our translators and keep your earpiece away from the mic, as it causes popping, which can be harmful to the translators.

As a reminder as well, all comments should be directed through me, as chair. For those in the room, please raise your hand to be recognized. For those appearing virtually, use the “raise hand” icon and I will recognize you.

Finally, I would like to introduce Mr. Kevin Wagdin, director, old age security policy and legislation, from the Department of Employment and Social Development. Mr. Wagdin is present to answer questions you may have, as required. As well we have legislative counsel with us for any questions on the bill.

Madame Chabot, is Madame Larouche joining us?

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** No.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Chair. I didn't notice this before, but in fact I am getting some feedback in the earpiece when you're speaking. Mrs. Gray pointed it out and....

• (1535)

**The Chair:** It could be one of the mics.

Mrs. Gray, is it okay?

**Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC):** It's like an echo. You're talking and then we're hearing it in our ear a couple of seconds later.

**Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.):** I know what it is. It's because they're virtual. The translation is virtual.

A couple of weeks ago we had that happen to us. There was a delay.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** We're hearing what you're saying twice.

**The Chair:** It's fine, obviously, on the French line.

**Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.):** When you speak in English, it's doubled up.

**The Chair:** Are you politely telling me that you do not want to hear me twice? I get it.

I'm being told it's fine and that it's meeting the quality standards. If it does become an issue, get my attention.

Are we ready to begin clause-by-clause of Bill C-319?

(On clause 1)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Zarrillo.

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

I have an amendment to clause 1, which I believe was circulated to the committee in both official languages.

Could you verify that?

**The Chair:** Yes, Ms. Zarrillo, I have your amendment.

Do you wish to read it?

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

We heard from witnesses that the cap could be higher. The NDP believes that the cap should be higher on being able to have employment income before—

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Chair, I have point of order, just for a second.

Could we have the mic turned up so that we can hear MP Zarrillo?

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Ms. Zarrillo. I'm not hearing you well either.

Could you begin again?

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

I have an amendment to clause 1. The NDP believes that the limit on the income allowed before clawback should be raised in this bill. I will read my amendment.

It is that Bill C-319, in clause 1, be amended by replacing lines 17 to 21 on page 1 with the following:

- (i) the lesser of \$13,000 and the combined amount, and
- (ii) if the combine amount is greater than \$13,000, the lesser of \$13,000 and half of the amount by which the combined amount exceeds \$13,000,

I can give some explanation or an example of that if needed, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I will allow an explanation, and then I have Mr. Van Bynen on a point of order.

Ms. Zarrillo, give a brief explanation.

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** Thank you very much.

As I said, we're looking at increasing the cap of income allowed to be earned before clawback to \$13,000. That's what we are asking for.

How this would work is that it would mean that the amount of income that would be exempt would be the lesser of \$13,000 or whatever they earned. For example, if someone earned \$14,000, the exemption would be \$13,000. Half of the difference between the \$13,000 and the \$14,000—that being \$1,000—would be clawed back, if that is the language we want to use. It would be clawed back and the worker would be able to earn \$13,500.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1540)

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

Mr. Van Bynen, do you have a point of order?

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

This substantially changes parts of the bill.

Could you clarify as to whether this motion is in order?

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

As you recall, this morning the Speaker was clear in the chamber on the power of committees. My role, as your chair, is simply to conduct the meeting.

I will give my ruling on the amendment proposed by Ms. Zarrillo and that will answer your question, Mr. Van Bynen. As I indicated, the Speaker was clear in the chamber this morning on the scope of amendments at committees, but committees still give their direction.

I will briefly....

Did you have your hand up, Mrs. Roberts?

**Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC):** Can I just ask a question for clarity purposes?

Is the \$13,000 on the...? Say, for example, we have someone who is self-employed. Is that on the self-employed net income or on the gross income?

**The Chair:** I'll ask Mr. Wagdin to give a technical answer on that.

**Mr. Kevin Wagdin (Director, Old Age Security Policy and Legislation, Department of Employment and Social Development):** Thank you.

The exemption would apply to the total amount of the person's employment income or self-employment income combined after their self-employment deductions have been made.

**The Chair:** That's expenses.

**Mr. Kevin Wagdin:** Yes, that's expenses.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** It's net.

**Mr. Kevin Wagdin:** Yes.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Okay. Thank you for clearing that up.

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, did you have a question?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a few comments to make.

I can—

I'm also hearing an echo. Apparently, that happens a lot when interpretation is done remotely. So I hear myself talking and, I tell you, it is tiring. I'll wait until it's been resolved, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Chabot. I'll ask the clerk to speak to that.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Ariane Calvert):** Members, we did verify, and I did receive confirmation that there is a bit of feedback, but it's within the parameters expected for the remote interpretation program.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** When did we start having remote interpretation?

**The Clerk:** My understanding is that the whips made the decision when they came back in 2024.

**The Chair:** Seeing no further questions, you have heard clearly the amendment that was proposed by Ms. Zarrillo—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Chair, I would still like to make a few comments. So I'm going to talk while hearing myself talking.

It's not that I'm against people having as decent an income as possible, but I just want to remind you of the objective of Bill C-319. The bill has two parts. The first is about increasing the old age security pension by 10% starting at age 65. We know that this increase was granted to people aged 75 and over. So that's the first objective. The other objective is to increase the amount of income that those who receive the guaranteed income supplement can earn from work without seeing that supplement reduced. That amount had previously gone from \$3,500 to \$5,000. We are asking in the bill that it be increased from \$5,000 to \$6,500.

I would remind you that the purpose of this bill is not to require people who receive an old age security pension to work. However, we need to enable those who wish to do so not to be penalized. Sometimes perfection is the enemy of the good.

You will recall that, during the testimony, Ms. Zarrillo asked witnesses if they had any amendments to propose to the bill. However, these witnesses were clear: They want the committee to support Bill C-319 so that it can go through the steps in the House.

So I am going to vote against Ms. Zarrillo's amendment.

• (1545)

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

[English]

I see no further.... The amendment has been moved. I gave latitude in some discussion. As chair, I must rule on admissibility, as dictated by *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*.

Bill C-319 seeks to amend the the Old Age Security Act by raising the exemption for a person's employment income or self-employed earnings that are taken into account in determining the amount of the guaranteed income supplement from \$5,000 to \$6,500. The amendment, as proposed by Ms. Zarrillo, attempts to increase further that amount to \$13,000, which in turn would provide to some people access to a greater benefit than they would without the increased deduction, creating a new and distinct spending to be drawn from the treasury.

*House of Commons Procedure and Practice Third Edition* states the following 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.

As precedent dictates to me as chair, in light of the advice I received, in my opinion and for the above mentioned reason, the amendment proposes to increase spending related to the old age security benefits, which imposes a charge on the public treasury to a level superior to the one already provided in the bill. Therefore, I rule the amendment inadmissible.

Seeing no further discussion, shall clause 1 carry?

(Clause 1 agreed to)

**The Chair:** Shall clause 2 carry?

Mrs. Gray.

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

Before moving on, I'd like to move a motion. This has been circulated following all procedure. I move:

That, given that the Liberal Minister of Housing recently stated, "I think it's a generational moral failure that there are people sleeping without a roof over their head in a country as wealthy as Canada. I will not be able to say with a straight face that I have properly addressed the housing crisis if we still have to walk past people who are sleeping on the streets in Canada," the committee concur in the minister's remarks and report them to the House.

This should be very simple. It's not asking for extra work on the committee.

Thank you.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** I'm going to stop the discussion at this moment. It's in order. However, as I'm moving from clause to clause, I had already called clause 2. We have to deal with clause 2. After we deal with clause 2, it's in order for you to repeat your motion.

Shall clause 2 carry?

(Clause 2 agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** Mrs. Gray, you have the floor.

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

I would like to move:

That, given that the Liberal Minister of Housing recently stated, "I think it's a generational moral failure that there are people sleeping without a roof over their head in a country as wealthy as Canada. I will not be able to say with a straight face that I have properly addressed the housing crisis if we still have to walk past people who are sleeping on the streets in Canada," the committee concur in the minister's remarks and report them to the House.

This should be very easy to deal with here, Mr. Chair. It's not asking for a study by the committee. It is work that can be done in the House of Commons.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

I've been advised that the motion is in order.

Is there any debate on the motion by Mrs. Gray?

Mr. Fragiskatos.

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

I have no problem with concurring with the minister's remarks. What I do have a challenge with is what follows after the last comma, which is "the committee concur in the minister's remarks and report them to the House."

We all know, as experienced parliamentarians, that this is intended to generate a concurrence debate in the House of Commons, which takes away valuable time from the legislative agenda and stands in the way of valuable measures being passed for the benefit of Canadians.

With that, I wish to introduce the following amendment.

It's that the words after the final comma in the last sentence, which are "the committee concur in the minister's remarks and report them to the House" be stricken. Everything else remains the same. The comma would be changed to a period after the word "Canada".

**The Chair:** We have an amendment, so now the debate will be on the amendment by Mr. Fragiskatos.

I have Ms. Ferreri and Mr. Aitchison on the amendment of Mr. Fragiskatos.

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

I think folks watching at home must just be a little bit stunned at what they've heard from the Liberal member, who says that it will waste valuable time in the legislature to talk about the housing crisis. This is exactly what we were elected to do, to my member opposite.

Absolutely, a concurrence debate is not wasting anyone's time, Mr. Chair.

To reiterate this motion that my colleague, Mrs. Gray, has put forward, these are the minister's words. These are the minister's words of the failure of this government. These are the minister's words saying that people are not housed: "I think it's a generational moral failure that there are people sleeping without a roof over their head in a country as wealthy as Canada. I will not be able to say with a straight face that I have properly addressed the housing crisis if we still have to walk past people who are sleeping on the streets in Canada."

The Liberal member has now put forward an amendment to take out the next part of this motion, which says, "the committee concur in the minister's remarks and report them to the House", because he doesn't want a debate in the House to talk about this Liberal failure.

This is the biggest crisis facing our country right now, and he thinks it's a waste of time to debate this in the House.

What a nonsensical amendment. I would challenge him and ask him.... The parliamentary secretary for housing, no doubt, should know that we should absolutely be spending our time talking about this and coming up with solutions. If it is our job and they are so collaborative, then bring it to the House. Let's debate it and let's solve this problem.

Those would be my remarks to the member opposite. Thank you.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The debate is on the amendment of Mr. Fragiskatos.

I have Mr. Aitchison, Madame Chabot and Mr. Long.

Mr. Aitchison, you have the floor.

**Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm not surprised by this amendment because it's become obvious.... I was in the House earlier today and they were talking about how they need to extend sittings because Conservatives get in the way by opposing the government. This isn't opposing anything. This is actually a discussion. We'd like to have a discussion in the House about what I think are fairly profound statements by the minister. We've tried to have him come here. That's no good. We don't like that because I still don't know why. My colleague has been instructed not to let the minister come here. We don't want to talk about this in the House.

My colleague, Ms. Ferreri, pointed out, and I think quite accurately, this is the challenge of our time. This is the crisis of a generation. We're talking about the number of homeless in this country being at record highs. The crisis exists at all points on the spectrum of the housing continuum. I appreciate that the parliamentary secre-

tary to the minister is obviously eager to make sure we don't talk too much in the House about their record on the file, but perhaps a discussion about what the minister said in the House would reveal some new ideas for this government to propose in terms of working with the municipalities and the provinces to address specifically the homelessness situation and the growing number of Canadians who are unhoused and the growing number of people who are literally dying in the streets. The number of homeless people in Toronto who don't survive the streets is growing.

I just find it fundamentally flooring that the Liberals don't want to have a discussion about ideas, about proposed solutions. As a House of Commons, as an elected body where the issues of the day of this country are supposed to be discussed and debated—that is the purpose of the place or so I thought—why wouldn't they want to have those discussions? It smacks of deflection and cover-up, and frankly I'd be embarrassed if I were in his shoes.

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

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor on the amendment.

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

I agree with the amendment and I will explain why.

Everyone here agrees that there is a serious housing crisis in Canada, that homelessness is reaching record highs—in Quebec, it is unprecedented—and that there is work to be done. I don't want to be partisan, but I think the best way to find solutions to this crisis is to move motions for the committee to undertake studies that would enable us to get to the bottom of things. I don't think this motion will do that.

We can already report that the committee approves of the minister's comments. I think that takes into account the minister's comments. I imagine that, in doing so, we are conveying our comments to him. The minister has already come to testify on this subject. We hope he will be able to come back before us. There are other motions to that effect that we could consider. I think that, when he appeared, the minister admitted that one of the reasons we ended up in this situation today was that successive governments had not invested public funds in housing.

Many motions on housing and homelessness have already been moved. Instead of dealing with the motion currently before us, I think it would be more appropriate to conduct a study on the issues facing us today, in order to try to find solutions and resolve the situation.

• (1600)

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

[*English*]

I have Mr. Long, Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. Gray.

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

Good afternoon, colleagues.

Chair, first and foremost I want to correct what MP Ferreri said about the minister admitting the failure of this government. He did no such thing. He commented generally on the challenges we face as a country, which—I think we all agree—have been unfolding over many years and many governments.

For some reason the members opposite do not want to talk about the provinces and their responsibility with respect to housing and... I mean, there's question period. I don't believe there's been a question asked of the Minister of Housing for a while now. There are all kinds of other opportunities. The minister has been here personally several times and answered questions.

I also want to hear solutions from the other side, and not just “build the houses”, “axe the tax” and “cut crime”. What are the actual solutions put on the table to build more homes? What I hear right now is, “Blame local mayors.” Again, for some reason—maybe it's because there are Conservative premiers across the country, mainly—there's not a word about the responsibility that the provinces have in this role, so thanks for that.

Again, I just want to reiterate that the minister in no way admitted the failure of this government. I think we know the minister. We know he's trying to deal with a very serious problem. He's called it an emergency himself. It's going to take some time, and I believe we are on the right path. I'll just leave it at that.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next is Mrs. Roberts, and then Mrs. Gray and Mr. Aitchison—I see Ms. Ferreri has her hand up—on the amendment.

**Mrs. Anna Roberts:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One of the things you said is that we have no plan. We do have a plan. First of all, we have to build homes. We cut the red tape. We encourage builders to build affordable homes so that people have a place to live.

The challenges we're facing today are not in just one area. It's right across the entire country. I spent the week speaking to seniors who now have to sell their homes and move in with their children, because not only can they not afford their home any longer but they can't even afford rent. There are no rental opportunities for them to house themselves.

This is an embarrassing situation. This is not the Canada that our parents and grandparents came to. They came to Canada, a land of promise, and right now that promise is gone. There's no hope. We need to recreate that hope, so why are we not acting more quickly to allow the development of homes so people don't have to live on the streets? I think this is an important issue we all have to face, and we should come together to come up with some solutions.

We have a solution. Let's cut the red tape. Let's build the homes. Let's give people an opportunity to live properly and not on the streets.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Roberts.

Go ahead, Mrs. Gray, on the amendment.

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

To speak to this amendment, which the Liberals have put forth to remove a discussion and debate on housing in the House of Commons, specifically on the housing minister's comments that there's a moral failure in having people live on the streets.... For the Liberals to bring forth this motion to not debate this in the House of Commons just shows that it's not a priority for them, and it's really too bad that they brought this motion forward. I hope the other opposition parties can vote against this amendment to the motion and then vote for our original motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

Go ahead, Mr. Aitchison, on the amendment.

**Mr. Scott Aitchison:** I want to point out that, although my Liberal colleagues may not like the slogans, Conservatives have proposed some solutions. We've proposed all kinds of ideas. In fact, it would be a great opportunity for us to have a conversation in the House about the housing accelerator fund, for example, which we've been promised will deliver more homes by doing deals with cities, which I guess the current government has finally acknowledged is part of the problem in this circumstance.

The fact of the matter is that we've asked for the agreements. We don't know what's in those agreements. All we know is what we can highlight from the news media. Of course, when you dig a little deeper, you find out that the cities they've done these deals with are promising to do certain things, but none of that has actually been put in place.

As an example, permitting fourplexes, as of right, in any residential zone requires a zoning amendment change. Not one of those municipalities has actually done that, so I'm actually calling this the “pay for promises” program, which is kind of the way this government operates. We could talk about that in the House of Commons. However, if we had the opportunity to take the minister's comments, report that to the House and actually ask him directly about the pay for promises program, as opposed to the rewarding results program that a Conservative government would offer....

The point, I guess, is that instead of having those debates in the House of Commons, where we're supposed to have them, this government would rather hide behind their procedures and not talk about this kind of stuff in the House of Commons. I find it disappointing that they have such disrespect for the chamber, but it would be a great opportunity to propose some more ideas instead of just more photo-ops.

• (1605)

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

I have Ms. Ferreri on the amendment.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thank you.

To this amendment the Liberals have put forward that they don't want to speak in the House of Commons and debate and waste—in their words—valuable time talking about the housing crisis, and to my colleague's point that the minister hasn't admitted failure, these are just facts. Rent has doubled. Housing prices have doubled in the last eight years under this Liberal government. Those are just facts.

The point I want to make is that I'd like to go to a vote and see where this is because I think this amendment is bonkers.

To the NDP, I think it is going to be up to them, as we look at their coalition, and where they stand on this. Quite frankly, for somebody who has been so vocal on preventing homelessness and standing up for people who are most vulnerable, I sure hope they don't support this amendment that says don't talk about this in the House of Commons to find solutions.

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

Ms. Zarrillo, go ahead on the amendment.

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

I wasn't going to speak to this because this is a political fight between the Liberals and Conservatives, who have both done terrible things over the last four decades to cut supportive housing for people. I wasn't going to speak to it, but I'm really at the end with the Conservatives trying to do their little fishing trips, where they try to throw out comments about the NDP and me and then just clip them and send them around.

This is a serious issue. I'm making serious choices, as well as my NDP colleagues. The Conservatives are not a serious party when all they're trying to do is get clips. I don't appreciate it. I had no intention of supporting the Liberals' amendment. I don't appreciate the taunting, the tempting, the bullying. I don't appreciate it.

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

Ms. Ferreri.

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

To my colleague, there was no taunting or bullying, and if you don't support that amendment, that's wonderful.

Again, back to facts, to my NDP colleague, through you, Mr. Chair, this is an agreement they put in place. This is not some kind of political jargon. There is a supply agreement in place that is propping up the Liberal government. That is just the fact of what is happening.

We are Conservatives. We are in the opposition, and yes, this is a serious topic.

No, this isn't bullying. This is the fact of what you signed onto, as the NDP, with the Liberals, to give them power. Either you care about homeless people or you don't. That is where things stand right now. I'll appreciate it if you do support his motion, and I will work with you fully to do that, to help people who are most vulnerable.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Zarrillo, do you have your hand up again on the amendment?

**Ms. Bonita Zarrillo:** I do, Mr. Chair, and I don't think that the political conversation is really helping people in Canada. I don't think it's helping residents, and it's certainly not helping the seniors I saw this weekend. Five seniors passed away recently. Their housing and access to medication is precarious. Their health, in general, is failing due to cuts that the Conservatives brought, generationally, to health care, so I don't really want to get into a conversation like this in committee. This is important work that we need to do, but I think the Conservatives need to stop being unserious and start being a serious party that takes language and their parliamentary duties seriously instead of talking about tag lines and accusations that they know aren't true.

I'm going to say, as an NDPer, that I'm proud of the work we are doing to rebuild the safety net the Conservatives pulled apart, over decades, in relation to housing, health and supporting seniors. We could have this conversation all day, but I don't want to. I want us to get to the business, so I will reiterate again that I won't be supporting the Liberals' amendment and I'd like us to get to Mrs. Gray's motion.

• (1610)

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

I would remind you—building on Ms. Zarrillo's comment—to keep your comments to the amendment that's on the floor.

Seeing no further discussion, I will call a recorded vote on the amendment of Mr. Fragiskatos.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Now we'll vote on the main motion as amended. It's a recorded vote on the motion from Mrs. Gray, as amended.

I'm sorry. No, I missed—

**An hon. member:** Are we still going to a vote?

**The Chair:** No. She had her hand up before I got to it—in fairness to Mrs. Gray. I was blocked by the computer screen.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes. I'm not in your sightline here.

Basically, this motion right now isn't calling on the committee to take any particular action, so that's what the Liberals have created here. Now with the amendment, they've stricken taking any particular action from this. It's basically just a statement, so I'm not sure what the purpose is that the Liberals want to create here. If housing is important, there should be.... It's unbelievable, but they took out our discussing this in the House of Commons. It's a real shame.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Zarrillo, on the main motion as amended.



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

I just want to encourage the Conservatives to ask for an emergency debate in the House. That's what the NDP did, and it was denied. I am concerned that this government is not taking it seriously, and I would encourage them to use those tools in the House of Commons to spark a debate. I'm really disappointed that, when we, the NDP, asked for an emergency debate on homelessness, it was denied to us in the House of Commons.

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

Seeing no further debate, I call a recorded vote on Mrs. Gray's motion as amended.

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

**The Chair:** Order, committee members.

We now resume clause-by-clause.

(Clause 3 agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

(Clause 4 agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

(Clause 5 agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** Shall the title carry?

We'll have a recorded vote on the title.

(Title agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** Shall the bill carry?

(Bill agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** Before I move to the last part, go ahead, Mrs. Gray.

• (1615)

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have two things.

First of all, I want to comment on this legislation before we finish it up here today. This is something that will be there for seniors. It brings equity, regardless of the age of seniors. We had really impactful testimony at committee from a number of seniors on how their lives are affected by crushing inflation and interest rates, so I just want to comment that the work this legislation does will actually help some seniors.

The second thing is that, before we complete here today, I want to table another motion, which has been forwarded to the committee and is in order. I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee invite the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages; the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities; the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities; the Minister of Labour and Seniors; the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development; and the Minister of Citizens' Services, to separately appear for two hours each with departmental officials to testify on the Supplementary Estimates (C) for the fiscal year 2023-24; and that they appear before the end of the current supply period.

I'm bringing this forward today because I know that there's work that the committee will be doing that will be.... We're going to be looking at the studies coming forward, so this really is the last opportunity to bring this forth. We know that, with the supplementary

estimates, there is a timeline we need to meet in order to meet the current supply period, so that's why I'm bringing this forward today.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

The motion is in order. It was received in time. Is there discussion on the motion by Mrs. Gray?

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have your hand up.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** The amendment I'm about to introduce will still have ministers appear to be held to account, but it will do so in a way that's more conducive to the timeline this committee has set out in terms of the things it wants to look at and study.

With that in mind, I wish to introduce the following amendment—and I'll speak slowly for translation purposes. It is:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee invite the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages; the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities; the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities; the Minister of Labour and Seniors; the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development; and the Minister of Citizens' Services, to appear for no fewer than one hour each, in two panels of three, to consider the supplementary estimates (C) for the fiscal year 2023-24 and the main estimates for the fiscal year 2024-25.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Committee members, you have heard the amendment of Mr. Fragiskatos, so discussion and debate will move to the amendment.

Ms. Ferreri, I believe you raised your hand. Go ahead, Ms. Ferreri.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

For clarity, you don't want them to appear separately. You removed that word.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** It's pretty clear. This allows for ministers to come, to appear and to answer any questions in a way that I think is much more conducive to what we're doing as a committee, in terms of getting other work through. We're not saying ministers wouldn't come—quite the contrary—but I think this is just a better way to do it.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** What I'm trying to clarify is that, by removing the word “separately”, it feels like they wouldn't have to testify individually.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** We've seen that before. There's a precedent for that here.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** Why would we want to do that? The whole point is to interview each minister individually and separately with regard to their file.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Chair, through you, we've seen that many times at this committee. It's common practice at other committees. This would allow for ministers to be asked questions—in fact, ministers whose files overlap as well—instead of having a situation in which questions are asked but aren't answered because the relevant minister isn't present. One might be asked a question but their file doesn't directly relate to the matter that's being put forward. Instead of waiting and delaying to get that answer from the department, the minister can be there in the same panel to take up the issue that's been put on the table, so to speak. I think that's just one reason.

There are other reasons—and it goes back to what I said before as far as other reasons go. The time we would have.... This allows us, as a committee, to take up our responsibilities around the estimates. The way that the original motion was worded, this would eat up a huge amount of time and not really get us to where we need to go as a committee, in terms of carrying out our other obligations to look at other matters.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** On that note on precedents—which I'm not a huge fan of, to be honest with you—I think that just because something has been done a certain way doesn't mean you don't need to re-evaluate it, because if it's not working, which, clearly this government isn't I think you have to change things.

To the member's point, through you, Mr. Chair, we need three panels of two for one hour each, which we had last year, which was this member's own precedent. That would be my feedback there.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

On the amendment, Mrs. Gray has the floor.

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

The amendment that the Liberals have put forth, just so we're clear, is to have three ministers within one hour. The way it plays out, and we've seen this at this committee, is that each minister gives their opening statement for roughly five minutes. Now we're 15 minutes in, which gives us only 45 minutes to question three ministers. When you time it out, looking at the time for interventions, that's two rounds of questions. If you have a few questions to ask one minister, it means that one minister literally won't even get asked questions. We have only two rounds of questions.

This is not open. This is not transparent. These ministers have large portfolios. We're looking at seniors. We're looking at all of the services the government does. We're looking at housing. We're looking at disabilities. There are a number of topics here, and we're going to be able to ask a few minutes of questions to one minister.

This is how we bring forth the voices of all the stakeholders we meet across Canada, the people in our communities and even all of our colleagues. There are four on this side. We're only going to get two rounds of questions. That means two colleagues on this side won't even have an opportunity to ask one of the ministers a question.

This is a really egregious affront to our accountability and to our ability to ask ministers the really important questions that we hear from people all the time. This is an opportunity for us to delve into

their portfolios. One hour with three ministers really doesn't allow us to do that. It's a real affront to accountability and transparency.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor on the amendment.

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

Although I don't have the amendment in front of me, my understanding is that this is an attempt to replicate the formula that has already been used by having more than one minister appear at a time. I've had to make choices about the issues I wanted to raise and the ministers I wanted to question.

I am rather of the opinion that we should maintain the idea of hearing from the ministers separately. However, two hours may be too much, given our schedule. We have to think about how much time we have left between now and June. The committee will have other bills to study. We have a lot of motions to consider. A meeting will actually be held on the topic tomorrow.

In summary, the meeting with the ministers is important, especially before a budget is tabled. However, two hours each may be too long. We could ask them to appear separately, for one hour each.

Am I proposing a subamendment?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, you're making a subamendment to the amendment. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** No, I'm proposing a subamendment to the main motion.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, you can only make an amendment to the amendment by Mr. Fragiskatos. Are we clear?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** No.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay. You can—

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** No. I want to propose an amendment to Mrs. Gray's proposal.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Chabot, you would have to make it after we deal with the amendment by Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Okay.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Long, we're still on the amendment by Mr. Fragiskatos.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Can we suspend for five minutes, Chair?

**The Chair:** That sounds like a great idea.

We'll suspend for four minutes.

• (1625) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1635)

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

We suspended at the request of Mr. Long.

Mr. Long, you have the floor. The debate is on the amendment by Mr. Fragiskatos.

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

I'd like to propose a subamendment, please, to Mr. Fragiskatos's amendment.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** The subamendment would begin after "Citizens' Services" and would read as follows:

to appear for no fewer than one hour each, in three panels of two, to consider the supplementary estimates (C) for the fiscal year 2023-24 and the main estimates for the fiscal year 2024-25.

Again, instead of "two panels of three", the subamendment would call for "three panels of two". There would be three one-hour panels with just two ministers. If the opposition wanted to gain a little more time, we could cut out the opening statements.

**The Chair:** You're amending the amendment by Mr. Fragiskatos.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** It's a subamendment to Mr. Fragiskatos's amendment.

**The Chair:** You are in order.

Can you please read it again slowly?

**Mr. Wayne Long:** After "Citizens' Services", it would read as follows:

to appear for no fewer than one hour each, in three panels of two, to consider the supplementary estimates (C) for the fiscal year 2023-24 and the main estimates for the fiscal year 2024-25.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** The debate now moves to the subamendment of Mr. Long.

Is there discussion? Going once, twice....

Seeing no further discussion, I'll go to the clerk for a recorded vote on the subamendment of Mr. Long.

(Subamendment negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** That returns us to the amendment by Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Fragiskatos, go ahead on your amendment.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Again, to my colleagues, the concern is that this would take up so many meetings. We'd be devoting—

**An hon. member:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I mean, if Mr. Aitchison is saying that he doesn't want to look at housing matters, I suppose he's now on record saying that, but we can look at that. There might be other colleagues who want to put very worthy issues on the table in order to deal with the broad mandate of this committee.

I think we've proposed something on this side that works as a compromise. This committee could look at various things. If we devote ourselves to this particular motion by Mrs. Gray, then we are putting ourselves in quite the bind, I think, preventing us from looking at all the other matters that this committee can take up. We don't have that many more meetings, in fact.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Have you concluded, Mr. Fragiskatos?

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** I suppose I could say one more thing: What if we made them one hour each?

**The Chair:** Now we're on your amendment.

I'll go to Mr. Coteau on the amendment.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** Just for information, considering that we're talking about time as a potential issue, can the clerk explain to us how many studies and how many meetings we have? In March, for example, we're here for one week. What's our timeline? What does our schedule look like from now until June?

**The Chair:** I have to bring relevancy to the amendment that's currently under discussion. We can do that in committee business.

**Mr. Michael Coteau:** I won't argue over it, but if one of the issues is that this will take up a lot of our committee time, I just want to see if it actually fits into what we're trying to achieve with our other commitments. That's all. I think that's a fair question.

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

I will restrict debate to the amendment by Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Collins, you had your hand up on the amendment.

**Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.):** I was going to move what Peter suggested earlier, and that is one hour each.

**The Chair:** Okay, so we're clear here, there's been a number on it.

Could you clarify your subamendment?

**Mr. Chad Collins:** I think Peter's suggestion was one hour per individual.

**The Chair:** You have six ministers, which would be one hour for each one. Am I correct in what I'm interpreting?

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Yes.

**The Chair:** You're making that as a subamendment.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** I would.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Collins has made a subamendment that the committee invite the referenced six ministers to appear for one hour each, constituting three two-hour meetings.

Mr. Collins, did I paraphrase you correctly?

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Yes, I think you did.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** Just so everybody's on the same page, can we have that read out so there's no confusion?

**The Chair:** Mr. Collins, you would have to confirm that your amendment would remove the reference to “in two panels of three”.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Yes, I don't think the math works if it's one hour each.

**The Chair:** No, not really.

Just so we're clear—and you correct me if I'm wrong—Mr. Collins' amendment would bind the committee to have three two-hour meetings inviting the six ministers, as referenced, for one hour each in those meetings.

We have to capture that. I want to get the language before I go to Mrs. Gray. I'll read it back into the record. Each minister would be solo for one hour.

[*Translation*]

Just a moment, madam.

[*English*]

I'm going to ask the clerk to read her understanding of Mr. Collins' subamendment.

**The Clerk:** I'll read the entire motion, from my understanding:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee invite the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages; the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities; the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities; the Minister of Labour and Seniors; the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development; and the Minister of Citizens' Services, to appear for no fewer than three panels of two hours each, for one hour each, to consider the supplementary estimates (C) for the fiscal year 2023-24 and the main estimates for the fiscal year 2024-25.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Are you confirming, Mr. Collins?

Mr. Collins, is that clearly articulated?

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Each minister is here for an hour over three meetings.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Now the discussion is on the subamendment by Mr. Collins, which would request six ministers to appear for one hour each over three meetings of two hours.

Mrs. Gray.

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

I just wanted to clarify that it was each separately—we had that in the original motion—and that's how it reads. It's the assertion that each minister would be separate.

**The Chair:** Okay. It should be “to appear separately”.

**Mrs. Tracy Gray:** I think that's what Mr. Collins intended in what he was saying. I just wanted to clarify that.

**The Chair:** It was removed in Mr. Fragiskatos's amendment.

**Mr. Peter Fragiskatos:** If you're asking me what I think, Chair, yes, I think we've reached a compromise here.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Are we clear that it would be three two-hour meetings, with six ministers appearing separately for one hour each over those three meetings.

**Some hon. members:** Yes.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

[*English*]

Madam Zarrillo, I do not wish to exclude you. You're not in the room. Are you following the discussion?

I'm seeing nodding heads.

We will have a recorded vote on the subamendment of Mr. Collins.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

(Amendment as amended agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** With a little work, Mrs. Gray, you got your motion carried. Thank you.

Mr. Long, before we go, we have one procedural item left on the bill.

Did you want the floor?

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Yes. Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to table a motion previously put on notice. Everyone should have received a copy. I can read it for you, if you'll allow me, Chair.

**The Chair:** Please read it for the record.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you.

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108.... I'll just hold on, Chair. It seems like the members opposite don't have it. It was put on notice.

**The Chair:** It was circulated. Go ahead.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** I'll start again:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the compensation disparities between unionized and non-unionized workers in Canada; the study will examine the reasons that unionized workers receive more powerful paycheques; the impact of unionization on benefits and pensions; and the reasons behind such disparities; that the committee invite to testify, included but not limited to, representatives from Statistics Canada, and subject matter experts; that the committee hold a minimum of two meetings; and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

Chair, I will just say—

• (1650)

**The Chair:** Before we get to that, the motion is in order.

Proceed, Mr. Long.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** Thank you.

I just wanted to give you a bit of context.

When I grew up, my father worked at a lumber mill in Saint John. My mom didn't work.

**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:** She worked.

**Mr. Wayne Long:** She worked looking after us. She wasn't in the outside workforce.

What I learned quickly was that we didn't have the same benefits that some of my dad's friends had who were unionized. I was just a kid growing up. My dad never had a pension plan. He was basically minimum wage. There were no benefits. He was diabetic. There were no health benefits or anything like that.

We grew up just kind of accepting that's how it was, but as I got into my teens, I realized that where he worked wasn't unionized and that there really wasn't somebody that spoke on their behalf. It was a great job, but I quickly realized that a lot of his friends who were unionized had different benefits than we had. This study is important to me, and I hope all of my colleagues around the table will support it.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Given my past experience, I have every reason in the world to support this motion. However, in all honesty, I do not understand its objective.

What Mr. Long is trying to tell us has already been shown. There are plenty of studies showing that, in general, unionized employees receive benefits and better compensation.

I have read the motion several times and I am still wondering what its objective is. Is it to show something? I don't understand why we want to show something that has already been shown.

Given the number of studies we have to do, I hesitate to support this motion. Sometimes a committee does a study because it wants to do research and make recommendations. In this case, I'm trying to understand where such a study would lead us.

[*English*]

**Mr. Wayne Long:** MP Chabot is saying something that's already shown. I think the purpose of the study, again, is to reinforce the impact that unionization has. Unions do fight for the middle class, and unions do fight for wages that help everybody, all workers, so I think it's an important study.

I would appreciate Madame Chabot's support.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I see that there is no further discussion.

You have the motion as introduced by Mr. Long. I'll call a recorded vote on the motion by Mr. Long.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** I think the air has changed in this room.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** We still have the last item to carry on the bill.

Shall the chair report the bill to the House?

(Reporting of bill to the House agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

**The Chair:** We still have a bit of time, committee members. I wish to advise the committee that I have had to make a slight change to the subcommittee meeting. It will be on Wednesday evening for one hour. Had I already...? Maybe I didn't, because that was a Tuesday.

The subcommittee of HUMA will meet Wednesday from seven to eight o'clock. That's the time when the services will be available—I have to have interpretation services—to review the growing list of items on the committee's agenda. That is scheduled at that time. We will forward you the room number. That's when the resources and translation services will be available.

As you know, our next meeting will be on Thursday, February 29.

Does anybody have anything else for the committee at this time? If not, is it the wish of the committee to adjourn?

Seeing nodding heads and everybody happy—the air has remained the same—we shall adjourn.

Thank you, committee members. You have put a lot on your plate.

The meeting is adjourned.





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