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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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• (1540)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 110 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

As you have noticed, the room makeup is a bit different, and there's a reason.

Before we begin, I would like to remind all members and other meeting participants in the room of important preventive measures.

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that can cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times. As indicated in the communiqué from the Speaker to all members on Monday, April 29, the following measures have been taken to help prevent audio feedback incidents.

All earpieces have been replaced by a model that greatly reduces the probability of audio feedback. The new earpieces are black in colour, whereas the former earpieces were grey. We've noticed that. Please use only an approved black earpiece.

By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of a meeting. When you are not using your earpiece, please place it face down—face down, Ms. Falk—on the middle of the sticker for this purpose, which you will find on the table as indicated. I'm sorry for picking on you, but it was just obvious.

Please consult the cards on the table for guidelines. This is serious. There were incidents, and the internal economy committee had extensive meetings and came up with these options.

The room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between microphones and to reduce the chance of feedback from an ambient earpiece. These measures are in place so that we can conduct our business without interruption and protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. Thank you all for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I'm informing the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

I have a few comments for members appearing online and in the room. Please wait until I recognize you by your name before speak-

ing. For members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. For those appearing virtually, please use the "raise hand" icon on the bottom of your Surface device and wait until I recognize you.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through me, the chair. As well, you have the option of choosing to speak in the official language of your choice. In the room, interpretation services are available through the headset. I ask those in the room to please check the globe icon at the bottom of your service and choose the language of your choice. If there's an issue in interpretation, please get my attention. We'll suspend while it is being corrected.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on February 26, 2024, the committee is commencing its study of the subject matter of supplementary estimates (C) for 2023-24 and the main estimates for 2024-25.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. We have Kamal Khera, Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities.

Welcome, Minister.

From the Department of Canadian Heritage, we have Isabelle Mondou, deputy minister, and Gaveen Cadotte, assistant deputy minister, anti-racism strategy and action plan.

From the Department of Employment and Social Development, we have Kristina Namiesniowski. She is senior associate deputy minister of the department.

We also have Andrew Brown, the associate deputy minister, and Brian Leonard, director general and deputy chief financial officer, corporate financial planning.

Madam Minister, you have five minutes or less for opening comments, after which we'll go to questions.

You have the floor, Madam Minister.

• (1545)

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, colleagues and committee members. Thank you again for inviting me here today. I'm very happy to be here to discuss the important progress we have made as we work toward building a more accessible and inclusive Canada.

As the minister responsible for diversity, inclusion and persons with disabilities, my goal is to create a more accessible and inclusive Canada where everyone, regardless of their ability or identity, is included.

I'm pleased to report that when it comes to creating a more accessible Canada, our government has taken significant steps, thanks to the Accessible Canada Act, under which our government launched the first-ever disability inclusion action plan.

The action plan has been our road map for creating a more accessible Canada, in partnership with the disability community. Under this plan, we have been working to make our economy and workplaces across the country more accessible through the disability inclusion business council and by investing millions of dollars through the opportunities fund.

We've also been breaking down barriers in communities across the country through the enabling accessibility fund.

Most recently, we unveiled budget 2024, which is our plan to make life fairer for every generation of Canadians. In this budget, we reached another significant milestone under the action plan by announcing \$6.1 billion for a new Canada disability benefit, thanks to the relentless advocacy of the disability community. This is the first federal benefit especially designed to support some of the most vulnerable working-age Canadians with disabilities. This benefit fills a program gap in the federal government's social safety net between the Canada child benefit, old age security and other mechanisms that we put in place. The disability benefit is intended to supplement, not replace, existing income support measures. Also, we will continue to call on provincial and territorial governments to do their part and not claw back what Canadians receive through the Canada disability benefit.

I also want to take an opportunity to talk a bit about the work we're doing when it comes to creating a more diverse and inclusive Canada. I firmly believe that as a country, our greatest strength is our diversity. You know, I always say that in Canada, diversity is a fact, but inclusion is a choice. It is that choice that our government has been very deliberate in making.

Since 2015, our government has been working with community partners to combat racism and hatred in all its forms. Back in 2019, we launched Canada's anti-racism strategy. Very soon we will be launching the brand new anti-racism strategy 2.0, which incorporates lessons learned from the first strategy, expanding its scope by enhancing our whole-of-government approach to combatting systemic racism in all its forms.

In 2018, Canada recognized the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent. Since then, we have committed \$860 million to better support Black communities right across the country. Just recently, our government reaffirmed our support by announcing our support for a second International Decade for People of African Descent, while also noting that

Canada's domestic efforts in support of the decade have already been extended through 2028.

At the same time, we know there has been an alarming rise in hate, both here in Canada and around the world. As a government, we have always been clear that hatred has no place in Canada. With budget 2024, we have taken a significant step in this fight against hate by investing \$273 million through Canada's first-ever action plan on combatting hate. Thanks to these critical investments, we will be able to better support communities in law enforcement reform, tackle the rise in hate crimes, enhance community security, counter radicalization and increase support for victims.

Mr. Chair, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, my goal is to build a Canada where everyone, regardless of their ability or identity, is included. We know building a stronger, more accessible and fairer Canada for every generation isn't just the right thing to do: It's also the smart thing to do, and the Canadian thing to do.

Our government remains steadfast in our commitment to celebrate diversity and promote inclusivity, because we know that as Canadians, we're always stronger together.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm happy to take any questions.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

We have Mrs. Gray for six minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here today.

Minister, are Canadians living with disabilities facing a cost of living crisis?

Hon. Kamal Khera: It's important to recognize that working-age Canadians with disabilities in particular have been, for far too long, twice as likely to live in poverty than other Canadians.

Since then, as a government, we have been there by supporting the work we've been doing through—

• (1550)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Minister, are they in a cost of living crisis? My question is, are they in a cost of living crisis?

Hon. Kamal Khera: I think we can all agree that it's been a challenging time, particularly postpandemic. We know of disruptions in supply chains and other issues, certainly issues around the world that have—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Minister, can you please answer the question? Are persons with disabilities in a cost of living crisis? You've said that they're having a challenging time. Can you say today if they're having a cost of living crisis?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, I think it's important to recognize that since day one, we have been at the forefront in supporting Canadians, particularly Canadians living with disabilities—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Minister. I'll go back to my time. You obviously don't want to answer that question, so I'll go on to something else. It's really clear that you don't want to answer.

Are there regulations completed and in place for the Canada disability benefit?

Hon. Kamal Khera: They will be completed, as has been mentioned in the budget.

If I may, I think it's important to, first and foremost, recognize that for the first time in Canadian history we have a Canada disability benefit that is going to support over 600,000 persons with disabilities—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Minister. Yes, you mentioned that in your opening address.

To go back to my questions, the previous minister for disabilities told this committee on October 31, 2022, that your government would announce the regulations in early 2024. Now that promise has come and gone, and that is a broken promise.

You're the only minister responsible for the Canada disability benefit. Is that correct?

Hon. Kamal Khera: That is correct.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: So the buck stops with you.

Hon. Kamal Khera: That's right, and the—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Minister, when did you decide to move the regulations and the implementation of the Canada disability benefit to late 2025?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, I think it's important for the committee and Canadians to, first and foremost, understand where we are when it comes to the Canada disability benefit.

The legislation for the Canada disability benefit was passed and got royal assent last year. Since then, we have been consulting with the community on regulations. In fact, there was an online consultation period, and regulations from those consultations will be coming in place by June 2024, this year.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Minister.

The timeline that was promised to persons with disabilities in 2022 has come and gone. As I said, it's a broken promise.

Was this a misrepresentation from the previous minister?

Hon. Kamal Khera: The timeline is exactly what was stated in legislation. It's in the legislation, so it is exactly where it needs to be.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Minister, what the previous minister for disabilities said at this committee on October 31, 2022, was that your government would announce the regulations early in 2024. Is this mismanagement by your department? Has something changed with

government priorities that has now pushed this off to late into 2025?

Hon. Kamal Khera: As I mentioned, Mr. Chair, if the honourable colleague will allow me, the Canada disability regulations are coming forward in June of 2024, in about two months.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Then, Minister—

Hon. Kamal Khera: It's the same timeline that was in law.

Kristina, if you don't mind correcting, and also perhaps walking through the—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Minister, thank you. I'll go back to my time here.

The previous minister said in 2022 that she had already written to the provinces, and she told us in 2023, "We have actually funded specific national organizations to go out and do those consultations for us and to work with the department to pull together as much information as we can in anticipation of the regulatory process".

However, now we hear that the regulatory process is not well under way and that it won't be announced for well over a year from now. What has happened between those comments from that minister and what is taking place right now? It sounds like a broken promise, and that is what a lot of persons in the disability community are saying.

Hon. Kamal Khera: Well, if I may, Mr. Chair, the honourable member is just not right in what she's saying. The Canada—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I was quoting the previous minister, Minister.

Hon. Kamal Khera: The Canada disability legislation puts forward a plan. We have to have regulations in place by June of this year, and that's exactly when we will have the regulations in place.

At the same time, I think it's important to underscore the fact that in this budget, our government has put forward \$6.1 billion for the new Canada disability benefit, which is going to help more than 600,000 individuals with disabilities.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you, Minister.

Going back to the timeline here, and back to my time, how many meetings with your provincial counterparts have you had on this since becoming minister nine months ago?

Hon. Kamal Khera: I think I've met with most of my counterparts already.

• (1555)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Are you saying that you haven't met with every one of your counterparts in the provinces and in the territories?

Hon. Kamal Khera: I have met with almost every single one of them.

As you can imagine, not everyone is available for—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: In nine months, you haven't met with all of your counterparts. That's what you're saying.

Hon. Kamal Khera: I have met with the majority of my colleagues who have been available.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Which ones have you not met with?

Hon. Kamal Khera: I can provide you with that list.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Would you commit to sending to this committee a list of all the meetings that you have had with your provincial counterparts since July of 2023?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Absolutely.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Would you not consider this a priority, considering that this is a priority of your government and is in your mandate letter?

You haven't even met with your provincial counterparts, which is what has to occur in order for the regulations to be finalized. Don't you think that's surprising?

Hon. Kamal Khera: I actually have met with most of my colleagues. Perhaps because there have been elections in different provinces or the ministers have changed, I have not engaged with one or two of them.

In fact, we have been doing this work from the very beginning, because one fundamental thing we want to make sure of is that provinces do not claw back any of the benefits that the federal government is putting forward when it comes to the Canada disability benefit.

Those conversations have been very preliminary. I've been having very positive conversations with my colleagues.

What this budget allows us to do is actually a lot and ensure that we actually [*Inaudible—Editor*] this work—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I would actually submit that this is a new talking point. That's not something you have said before.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray. We went a little over, but it was a good exchange.

Now we'll go to Mr. Coteau for six minutes.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for being here to join us at our committee.

I want to start by thanking you for the work you have been doing around anti-racism and all the work around the Canada disability benefit. I want to thank you for the work you have been doing, because I think we're in a place where we continue to build. We're part of a government that has brought forward new programs in a way we've never seen before.

Over the last 30 or 40 years, we haven't seen new national programs at this level being developed. I think establishing dental care, a national child care program, a student nutrition program and this historic benefit plan that you have brought forward is quite extraordinary. Thank you for the work you have been doing.

Today I want to talk about your work around anti-racism. I know the new strategy is being brought forward. You started off by say-

ing that there was a lot learned during the last strategy. I would be interested in hearing about that, but before we get into that, I would like to just make a comment around where we are as a country when it comes to racism.

As you know, Minister, I did a lot of work in Ontario. I was the minister for anti-racism, where we put forward our own strategy. Back in 2015-16, we saw a drastic increase in online hate. I thought it was isolated specifically around that time period, but I have seen over the last several years a drastic increase in online hate and also in hate incidents in general.

It is our job as politicians to identify it and to track it and to collect the data—no data, no problem. That's why it's important for us to collect that information and to put in place anything we can do to mitigate the growth of that type of hate and stop it.

I want to thank you for the work you have been doing. You mentioned expanding the Decade for People of African Descent. I know that in my community, in the Black community in Toronto and across this country, there have been a lot of efforts made there. I just want to say thank you.

I also want to comment on one more piece before I ask you for a bit of those learnings and maybe go into a bit more detail around the strategy.

Last week we saw the Leader of the Opposition pull into a camp where there was an alt-right organization. That's what the major media have said. Up until this point, I haven't heard the Leader of the Opposition even comment on it. I do think it's important.

Yes, someone can stumble into a place. You can be in a place and realize, "Wait a minute; what am I doing here?"; and you can speak on that. You can speak to the issue and you can apologize for those actions, but I have heard nothing from the Leader of the Opposition.

I want you to reflect on why it is important for us to address racism head on and talk about these issues. What is this plan going to do to move us along as a country?

I think it's important for us, especially in this day and age, to stick together and build off of what made this country so successful. It was what you said at the beginning, which is that it's our choice to be inclusive.

I will turn it over to you, Minister, for comment.

• (1600)

Hon. Kamal Khera: Thank you so much, Mr. Coteau, for all the work that you have done and continue to do as a champion. You and I have had many conversations around the work in addressing systemic racism within our own institution, because we know that it's real.

At the same time, we certainly see the rise in hate across this country. I know that there are many incidents outside the country that are having those effects in our community. It's really important, first and foremost as Canadians and particularly as leaders, that we denounce hate when we see it. It shouldn't be an "if and when"; when we see it, we should call it out. We have to be deliberate about doing that, because it's a responsibility for each and every one of us.

You're right. We see the Leader of the Opposition cozying up to dyed-in-the-wool supporters and white supremacists, and not denouncing that is quite shameful. It's not just reckless; it's quite dangerous. I think we need to be very attuned to what is happening, whether it is online or in our communities. I think we have to be doing a lot of work on that front.

I'm very proud of the work that we're leading, particularly with Canada's action plan on combatting hate. In fact, this really is about taking a whole-of-government approach in addressing hate, whether it is supporting grassroots organizations and building support there or whether it is enhancing security infrastructure programs within the public safety purview or collecting data. At the same time, it's about supporting victims, because we've seen incidents across the country, unfortunately, so we need to make sure that we're supporting victims as well.

In this particular budget, we've put forward \$270 million for Canada's action plan on combatting hate, a plan that will address exactly the type of thing that you have mentioned. At the same time, soon we will be launching Canada's newest anti-racism strategy, which we'll be talking about. We want to ensure that Canadians see themselves in the work that's been happening. The world is not what it was a few years ago, and I think we need to be attuned to those realities and ensure that we're constantly working towards building a very inclusive Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Good morning, Madam Minister. Thank you for being here.

I pinched myself when I read in budget 2024 that a maximum amount of \$2,400 per year was announced for the Canada disability benefit. That's \$200 a month, or, as the groups representing people with disabilities put it, \$6 a day, starting in 2025.

As I understand it, you're not complying at all with the Accessible Canada Act, which was enthusiastically welcomed last year by all the groups consulted—I'd even say with jubilation and almost a hand over the heart—to show that, this time, we were there.

The act provided that the eligibility criteria, the conditions under which benefits would be paid, the amount of the benefit and the method of calculation would be defined by regulation, among other things, according to the "nothing without us" principle.

This is important for the government. The regulations were due to be tabled a year later, in a month's time.

We still don't have any regulations, there was no consultation with the people concerned for whom those regulations were to be defined, and now a maximum benefit of \$2,400 is being announced as of July 2025.

Madam Minister, do you agree that what is historic is the total violation of the act?

[*English*]

Hon. Kamal Khara: Again, it's important to recognize, Mr. Chair, that for the first time in Canadian history, we have a statutory benefit and a Canada disability benefit that is funded. It is thanks to the relentless advocacy of the community that we're at this point.

As a government, we have been steadfast in our commitment to support persons with disabilities right across this country, and that is the next step.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Minister, you're not answering my question.

For the first time, you want to make an election announcement, when the act clearly states that you must consult the people concerned on the regulations to be tabled.

I'm not even talking about the progress reports you had to present here to the committee and in other places in the House six months later.

You've almost violated the act, and you're telling us it's the first time.

It would be better if there was no first time and things were done properly.

How will you guarantee that, within a month, we will assure people with disabilities that they'll get regulations that correspond to the purpose of the act, which is to lift people out of poverty?

[*English*]

Hon. Kamal Khara: Mr. Chair, after the Canada disability benefit got royal assent, the last year since then has been the consultation period with the disability community in the true spirit of Nothing Without Us. There have been many round tables in which people with disabilities actually participated. In fact, I myself participated in different round tables, looking at the different intersectionalities of persons with disabilities, whether it was women with disabilities, whether it was seniors with disabilities, whether it was the regional intersectionality of ensuring those voices were heard. There were also online consultations that were put forward—

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: The groups themselves say that the details were announced using the motto “nothing without us” when there had been no real consultation with the disability community, which is not in line with the act.

How do you explain that the groups are really very angry and disappointed?

[English]

Hon. Kamal Khera: As I mentioned, I think it's important once again to recognize the fact that, first and foremost, we have a statutory benefit for the first time in Canadian history. I think that is significant.

When it comes to the consultations, as I was mentioning, we have consulted not only with the community; there was also an on-line consultation in which thousands of persons with disabilities participated alongside their caregivers. All that will be put in the regulations that will be put forward in June of this year. I'm sure you'll be very happy to see some of those results.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I have one last question.

How did you arrive at the \$2,400 maximum annual benefit?

[English]

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, again, it's important to recognize that we put forward for the first time ever \$6.1 billion in a statutory benefit that is going to support more than 600,000 working-age persons with disabilities. It's important to also recognize, just like any progressive—

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Madam Minister, please explain to us how you arrived at that amount. You should be able to explain to us how you came up with the \$2,400 a year maximum benefit.

[English]

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, as I was mentioning, it's important to recognize for any progressive benefits that our government has put forward, whether it is old age security, the guaranteed income supplement or the Canada child benefit, that all these benefits are meant to be enhanced. We certainly recognize there's more to do, but we won't do that unless we know the provinces and territories won't claw back any of the benefits that we put forward. I think that is really very important. This is an income supplement, not an income replacement, and we're absolutely committed to doing that work.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Madam Zarrillo, you have six minutes, please.

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

Welcome to the minister.

I'm very pleased that you're here because you really are accountable for the decisions that were made in the budget, and we want to get to the bottom of it today.

Minister, the budget announcement on the Canada disability benefit proved that your government ignored the input of persons with disabilities and have decided to legislate poverty for persons with disabilities rather than reduce it.

People with disabilities called for an adequate benefit, one that was easy to access, one not subject to clawbacks from provinces and territories. Your government has chosen to do none of these things. This government never seems to run out of money for hand-outs to giant corporations and rich CEOs, but when it comes to the critical support promised to people living with disabilities, suddenly the offer is crumbs. Two hundred dollars a month is offensive, and you've seen the response from Canadians. They are not happy.

Why did you choose to ignore years of input from the disability community and bring forward a \$200 benefit that is tied to the inaccessible disability tax credit?

• (1610)

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, again, I think it's important to recognize that we have, as a government, put forward for the first time ever a Canada disability benefit so that individuals with disabilities will be able to actually get that support. We're going to be able to support some of the lowest-income individuals who are living in poverty.

I'll be the first one to say, and I think we all recognize, that there's a lot more work to do, but this is a first significant step that we have put forward, and just like all the progressive benefits that our government has put forward in the past, it is meant to be expanded. These measures are meant to be enhanced. That's exactly what we're committed to, but we have to do it responsibly. We have to do it—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry, but I don't have a lot of time, so I'm going to go to my next question.

Hon. Kamal Khera: —in a way that provinces and territories do not claw back any of the benefits that—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: The NDP secured amendments to Bill C-22 so that this legislation would lift persons with disabilities out of poverty. Why are you okay with an inadequate \$200 a month top-up, which violates the CRPD and is barely enough to buy groceries? Does your government think that people living with disabilities are worth only \$200 a month?

Hon. Kamal Khara: Again, I think it's important to recognize that this is a first step but a very significant step. It is \$6 billion, the single largest budget item that was put forward last week, or two weeks ago, perhaps. It is not insignificant, with a tax-free amount of \$2,400 per year for individuals who are going through extremely tough times. That is not insignificant.

I'll be the first one to say that we all recognize that there's more to do. I don't think there's anyone—I hope—at this table who doesn't recognize that there's more to do, but we have to do it in a responsible way to make sure that people with disabilities—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Minister. I'm just going to have one more question that I want to ask you. You talked about—

Hon. Kamal Khara: I think it's important for me to answer the question that you've asked me, Madam Zarrillo.

The Chair: Madam Zarrillo has the floor.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: As you talk about doing it in a responsible way, the CRA has confirmed that the disability tax credit, the DTC, cannot be correlated on a one-on-one basis to a person with a disability. It doesn't work for the CDB, the Canada disability benefit, because, of the almost one million DTC claimants, only 8% have income below the poverty line. Why is the government leaving behind the majority of people with a disability who are in poverty, and will you remove the barriers to accessing the CDB?

Hon. Kamal Khara: I think it's important to recognize also that there are 13 different mechanisms through which different provinces and territories give and deliver benefits within their own jurisdictions. The DTC is a way for Canadians with disabilities to ensure that they get the support. More than 600,000 individuals with disabilities will be able to ensure that they get this benefit.

It's also important that in fact we have put forward additional dollars in the budget to ensure that we have a barrier-free mechanism to ensure more people can access the disability tax credit, which in fact is also a mechanism for some provinces and territories, like other benefits such as dental, the Canada child disability benefit and some of the other benefits the federal government provides that these individuals receive.

I think it's really important that we have consistency across the country to make sure some of the most vulnerable in our communities.... It doesn't matter if you live in Newfoundland or in British Columbia; we want to make sure there's consistency—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry, but we don't have a lot of time today.

I just want to clarify: The CRA has confirmed that the disability tax credit cannot be correlated on a one-to-one basis to a person with a disability. It is confirmed by the CRA they cannot do that. They do not know the income of a person with a disability to marry it to a disability tax credit. They do not have that information, so how are you going to find those people who need to have the Canada disability benefit?

• (1615)

Hon. Kamal Khara: You do not need to be employed to access the disability tax credit. In fact, it is a gateway to other benefits that individuals with disabilities can actually receive, whether it is, as I

mentioned, the Canada dental care plan, the Canada child care benefit, the disability benefit or the other benefits.

Kristina, do you mind just going through some of the other benefits that DTC people can also access?

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Minister, but my questions are really to you and are around the disability tax credit. It's an institutionalized mechanism that requires someone to visit a doctor and have a judgment from a doctor on whether or not they have a disability. We know that the majority of folks who live in poverty and with a disability do not have access to that disability tax credit. How are you going to locate these people living in poverty, especially those in the deepest poverty, to get access to the Canada disability benefit?

The Chair: Please give a short answer.

Hon. Kamal Khara: There is significant funding in the budget to make sure that we actually streamline the process for DTC and that we actually remove some of the barriers, particularly when it comes to the disability tax credit.

One other thing I also want to mention is that the CRA, particularly with the disability tax credit, has a disability advisory committee that actually has worked alongside the disability community to ensure they remove any of the barriers around the disability tax credit, and it's really important—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We're over a bit, but it is important for Madam Zarrillo's question.

Next we have Ms. Ferreri for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here as we discuss persons with disabilities and inclusion.

We have heard a lot from disability advocates. In particular, last week in my riding I met with the Council for Persons with Disabilities.

I just want to ask you this: Do you think \$6 a day would lift somebody out of poverty?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, I think it's important to recognize that the \$6 billion—the single largest budget item that we put forward in this budget—is going to significantly close the poverty gap—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you. I'm going to go back to my time here.

What we have seen here today is the minister answering every single question with the same response. If you're just watching this....

People are looking for some answers, Minister. With all due respect, this is your file. That's done. What you've been doing for the last hour here or however long we have been here, is done.

The disability amount is \$6 a day. It's \$200 a month. When the former minister, Ms. Qualtrough, testified in this committee about Bill C-22 on October 31, 2022, she said, "It really will lift a significant number of people out of poverty, big time."

People are watching at home. They can't afford to live. An Ontario man is applying for MAID because he's homeless. People with disabilities are applying for MAID.

Give Canadians some answers here today. It's been asked around this table multiple times: Do you think \$6 a day is going to lift people out of poverty, or was your former minister wrong?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, I think it's really important that my honourable colleague and, I think, all individuals underscore the fact that, first and foremost, the \$6 billion that we have put forward is going to support more than 600,000 individuals. The \$2,400 tax-free per year for an individual with a disability is not insignificant—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Okay.

Mr. Chair, it's my time—

Hon. Kamal Khera: I think it's also important, Mr. Chair, that I get the same amount of time that the member was asking questions for.

The Chair: Minister, it is the member's time.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I'm going to tell you the story that the two folks in my riding shared with me. It's how they describe what you have given them. I want you to answer what they said.

To them—and these are their words—the Liberal-NDP government is like a trust exercise. You told them you were going to catch them. It's the trust game that you play with somebody when you say "Fall back into my arms and I'll catch you." You told the people in the disability community that you would catch them when they fell. You gave them these promises. Then, in their words, not only did you not catch them, but you stepped out of the way and didn't tell them.

That is how they feel. They are applying for medical assistance in dying because the homeless rate under this Prime Minister is astronomical. The highest record usage of food banks is happening under this Prime Minister.

To come in here and to tell people you have done this first-ever announcement and it's wonderful, you might as well go be the Maple Leafs' coach and tell them that their effort was great.

This is ridiculous. I think people deserve an answer.

I know you care. You have to care or you wouldn't be in this position, but people are genuinely applying for medical assistance in death because they cannot afford to live and you're sitting here telling them \$6 a day is significant.

Do you think people with disabilities should be applying for medical assistance in dying, yes or no?

• (1620)

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, when it comes to medical assistance in dying, I think we all recognize that's a very personal choice for individuals. I think it's also important—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: It's not personal. I will read to you what he wrote, Mr. Chair: I don't want to die but I don't want to be homeless more than I don't want to die."

This isn't a choice. They don't want to.... It isn't that they are terminally ill. They have no money. They have no housing. They have no food.

Do you agree with that, as the minister for inclusion and diversity?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, since I got elected in 2015, we as a government have put in place many progressive benefits to support Canadians, including persons with disabilities, whether it was the Canada child benefit, which has actually significantly reduced poverty by half—which the honourable member and the party opposite voted against—or whether it was bringing the age of retirement for seniors back to 65 from 67, which the Conservative government wanted to raise to 67—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

Hon. Kamal Khera: It's really rich to hear from them, Mr. Chair, when they have voted against everything we have put forward to support Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Ferreri.

Thank you, Madam Minister.

The allotted time has gone well over. We will now move to Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I yield my time to Mr. Gerretsen.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, as we know, Canada is a wonderful country that is extremely diverse. That diversity is part of what makes Canada such a rich and prosperous place. It is my view—and I'm sure you will agree—that political leaders representing a country such as Canada have a responsibility to bring people together, to promote the diversity that makes us a stronger country based on shared values and to condemn any far-right extremist groups that threaten that social cohesion.

We know that the Conservative leader, Mr. Pierre Poilievre, has been hosting secret fundraisers with who knows who, but last week it came to light that the leader of the Conservative Party visited an encampment set up by individuals linked to Diagonon, a group that promotes violent rhetoric and hateful views and espouses white nationalist objectives.

In fact, over the weekend, the leader of Diagonon posted this message on his Telegram channel: “Conservatives need to wake up to [the] reality that they are in physical danger, that their families will be targeted and there is no way any version of peace can exist with these people freely roaming about. We cannot coexist, so someone has to go.” The message continues to call for a civil war in Canada, telling Diagonon followers to prepare for a civil war and stating, “War is coming, act accordingly.”

What is your reaction to Mr. Poilievre's affiliation with these extreme groups that do not believe Canadians of different faiths or ethnicities are able to coexist and that “someone has to go” or otherwise it would lead to war?

Hon. Kamal Khara: Thank you for that, Mr. Gerretsen.

To your question, I quite frankly think that it's not just disgusting or reckless; it's actually very dangerous. I think we all know of the rise in hate that we're seeing right across this country, which is deeply concerning and upsetting. I think that standing up to hate shouldn't just be.... It's the right thing to do, and as a leader, you should be standing up against hate.

As I mentioned earlier when I was talking about our action plan on combatting hate, we have put forward \$273 million in this budget, quite frankly because of the rhetoric we're hearing across this country. The Leader of the Opposition should be ashamed of cozying up to the Diagonon supporters, a far-right terrorist organization, and I think he should also be held accountable for it. I think Canadians ought to ask him where he actually stands. He has not denounced it yet.

It's also very telling to Canadians that all he cares about is gaining political power and not the actual issues that are affecting Canadians right now. I think that being associated with such far-right extremist groups that incite violence and misinformation is reckless. It is dangerous and, quite frankly, Canadians ought to know where he actually stands.

• (1625)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

With that, Mr. Chair, I have a motion I would like to move. It's seconded by Mr. Fragiskatos:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities report to the House the following:

That, given that the Leader of the Opposition recently met with and toured the trailer of supporters of Diagonon, a group described by the House of Commons as a violent extremist organization, after having been photographed shaking hands with the leader of that organization, the committee strongly condemn

(a) the white supremacist group Diagonon, and

(b) any attempts by Conservative Party politicians to court far-right extremists.

I have it in both official languages, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Do we have that? We do not have it on the order.

Do you have it in both official languages?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It has just been emailed to the clerk.

The Chair: Okay. I will allow the introduction.

Madam Clerk, does everyone—

Go ahead, Madame Chabot.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I believe the clerk wants to speak.

For my part, I ask that we adjourn debate on this motion so that we can get back to the agenda and hear from the ministers who were called today.

My request is to adjourn debate on this motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. It's a dilatory motion.

Madame Chabot has made a motion to adjourn the debate.

Madame Chabot, are you moving a motion to adjourn debate? Did you make a motion there? It seemed to me that you moved to adjourn debate on this motion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Yes, that's right.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's a dilatory motion. I will call a recorded vote on the motion of Madame Chabot.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: I have Mr. Gerretsen on the motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: This is very simple, ladies and gentlemen. We can take this vote in a matter of 10 seconds and then return to asking the minister questions.

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

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's a very simple yes or no.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, I have a point of order from Ms. Gray.

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

We don't have any information. We don't have a copy of the motion.

I'm not sure what we're even debating here. We don't have any information.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Ms. Falk. Is it on the same point of order?

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

I know that Mr. Gerretsen is new to our committee, but it has been common practice that we all receive copies in both official languages via email or in print before we go forward.

The Chair: I understand that the clerk now has a copy of Mr. Gerretsen's motion in both official languages and is circulating it.

Mr. Coteau, while we're waiting for that, on the motion...?

I'm sorry. Just give me a moment. I'll wait until the motion is properly received.

Okay. The clerk has advised me that the motion has been circulated in both official languages.

With that, I'm going to Mr. Coteau.

• (1630)

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

The Chair: Go ahead on a point of order, Ms. Gray.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Chair, could we have a brief adjournment so that we could actually read this before we start discussions?

The Chair: You would like a suspension.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Yes. I would like a suspension for five minutes.

The Chair: I'll grant that. We're suspended for five minutes.

• (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1636)

• (1635)

The Chair: Committee members, thank you.

We had a suspension at the request of Madam Gray. I will give the floor back to her.

Also, then, Mr. Coteau had his hand up. I'll go to him after Ms. Gray.

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

What we have here is a motion that was not put on notice. I know that the person who moved this motion isn't normally a mem-

ber of this committee, so he may not be aware, but this committee had agreed to notices of motion.

What we have here right now is the minister talking about main estimates. That's the purpose. As well, in just a few minutes, another minister will be coming in to talk about main estimates.

With respect to notices of motion, I'll read what we agreed to as a committee. We said:

That a 48-hour notice, interpreted as two nights, be required for any substantive motion to be moved in committee, unless a substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that:

(a) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee no later than 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday;

(b) the motion be distributed to Members and the offices of the whips of each recognized party in both official languages by the clerk on the same day the said notice was transmitted if it was received no later than the deadline hour; [and]

(c) notices received after the deadline hour or on non-business days be deemed to have been received during the next business day;

and that [when] the committee is holding meetings outside the Parliamentary Precinct, no substantive motion may be moved.

Again, we are here on main estimates and we are meeting with ministers, so this motion does not appear to be in order at this time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gray.

Before I get to that, I also am aware that the motion is relevant to the ministry at hand that is appearing before the committee, and I will take that into perspective. I will allow that it is relevant for the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion. It falls within that spectrum.

I take your point of order as valid, Mrs. Gray, but at this stage, I'll allow the debate to continue.

I'm going to Mr. Coteau, and then—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Chair, I'd challenge that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On that same point of order, if I could, that's what I was trying to get in. May I?

The Chair: I will accept a comment from you, and then Ms. Gray has challenged my ruling, so...

No. Actually, I'm going to stop it there. Ms. Gray has challenged my ruling when I ruled that the motion is relevant because of the ministry that is involved, but Ms. Gray has the right to challenge.

With that, it's left to the committee to uphold the decision of the chair or opine on the decision of the chair.

Clerk, please take a recorded vote. Shall the decision of the chair to allow the motion to proceed be sustained?

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

The Chair: With that, I take it the chair's decision has been upheld.

We'll go to Ms. Ferreri, who had—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's Mr. Coteau.

The Chair: Actually, you're correct. It's Mr. Coteau. I didn't see that.

I'm going to Mr. Coteau. Then I'm going to Mr. Gerretsen.

• (1640)

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

I will be supporting this motion. I think that in this day and age in this country, when we have politicians—but not only politicians, leaders of specific parties—getting involved with relationships and encounters with extreme far-right organizations, to not stand up to make an actual claim to denounce it is unacceptable.

You know, I can understand. I'd give the Leader of the Opposition the benefit of the doubt that he goes.... You know, he made a silly mistake. He pulled over and didn't know, perhaps, who the folks were, and saw some signs that attracted him to that specific spot. Then he gets there and realizes what he's gotten himself into. The fact that the Leader of the Opposition has not spoken of or denounced this issue—and this is the guy who wants to be prime minister of this country—is completely unacceptable.

As someone who has fought racism and hate for my entire political career, and also as someone who's been a victim of racism and hate, to have the Leader of the Opposition not take a position on this and to act as though it's just another day on the job is completely unacceptable. I would say that not only does he have to denounce what he's done, but he has to apologize to Canadians for what he's done, because it is completely unacceptable.

We're living in a world today where we see hate increasing. When we look around the world, we see the growth of far-right extremism. It is important that the Leader of the Opposition take a strong position and denounce hate and this specific incident and apologize to Canadians.

I would like to thank the member for introducing this motion at our committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

It was Mr. Gerretsen that I'm going.... I believe Ms. Ferreri gave her speaking time to Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Okay. If she's going to lose her spot, then she can go ahead, but....

The Chair: I have Ms. Ferreri and then Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Then it's Mr. Seeback, right? I'm still on the list.

The Chair: You can, any time.... Then I have Ms. Gray.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Wonderful.

The Chair: It is a motion that's on the floor. Whoever wants to speak can speak.

Go ahead, Ms. Ferreri.

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

A motion has been put forward here to T-bone a really important discussion with ministers, one that is particularly important for the disability community.

This is what happens. We're here and we're doing this and we're playing this game, and guess who loses? Canadians do, disability folks, whom we've talked about already, who were given, through this budget 2024 of “fairness” for all generations, \$6 a day. These same disability advocates are requesting MAID because they can't afford to live, because under this Prime Minister housing costs have doubled, food bank usage is the highest in history and the country is in complete chaos and disarray.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, about relevance—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: To the motion—

The Chair: Ms. Ferreri, I have a point of order. I have to—

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: The point of order is on relevance, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I was getting there, Tony.

The Chair: Ms. Ferreri, please keep to relevancy.

You have the floor.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: The problem is that now we have this motion that's been put forward that is going to push back the ministers' testimony. We know, and Canadians who pay their taxes know, that accountability comes back to the ministers. This opportunity here at committee is a chance for Canadians at home who are suffering, who are living in the hardest times that they've lived in, who are losing their homes on a daily basis, who can't afford to eat and who can't take care of their children. They want answers from the ministers. The member opposite, the Liberal member, has put forward a motion so that we don't have to hear from these ministers.

I also am going to look at this motion, and I would love to know if the member opposite, who is so concerned about extremists and courting extreme behaviour, is willing to have the Prime Minister come here to talk about how many times he's worn blackface. Is he willing to have all of these conversations as well? Why do we want to open that can of worms? I'm happy to do that if that's where he wants to go. I just don't think that's what Canadian taxpayers care about right now, when we have all of this information that we need to be getting out to people to get answers to a budget that has deeply disappointed people who are suffering. This is just a waste of everyone's time, as the last nine years have been.

That's all I have to say.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you.

I believe next up is Mrs. Gray, then Mr. Seeback—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I thought you said I was next.

The Chair: Yes, I forgot about you.

It's Mr. Gerretsen on the motion, and then Mrs. Gray.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm easy to forget.

On the motion, with all due respect to the comments made by Ms. Ferreri, if we had just voted on my motion after I tabled it, the minister would probably have already answered all of our questions and left by this point.

The reality is that Conservatives don't want to vote on this motion. It's why they're putting up roadblocks. It's why they're preventing us from even trying to entertain the motion. It's why they now have to face a difficult decision. The difficult decision is to either vote in favour of this motion—which is the right thing to do—or to vote against it.

However, to my Conservative colleagues, the absolute worst decision you could make is to try to filibuster on this motion. If you try to filibuster this and just sit there and talk endlessly—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Mrs. Gray.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I'm asking that the member opposite speak through the chair and not directly at us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

Mrs. Rosemary Falk: It's Mrs. Falk.

The Chair: It's Mrs. Falk. I'm sorry.

That's a valid point. Mr. Gerretsen, direct your commentary through me, the chair.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, in my opinion, the worst thing Conservatives could do right now is filibuster this, because they'll drag out the inevitable and show Canadians they are not willing to stand up for what is right. What is right is very clear in this case, Mr. Chair: Conservatives should vote in favour of this. Had they done that right after I introduced it, this issue would have been put to bed already.

Better yet, if the Conservatives ask their leader to do the right thing and apologize, I'll withdraw my motion. On social media, put out a post saying, "I made an error."

Mr. Coteau is absolutely correct. If he just made an error and it was a case of bad judgment, why is it so hard to say it's a case of bad judgment and he shouldn't have done that, Mr. Chair? That's what he should have done. The reason he won't do that is that he's afraid of the political outcome of trying to distance himself from these extreme groups.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, I would respectfully ask my Conservative colleagues to vote on this matter. Vote yea or vote nay, but don't filibuster. If they filibuster, Mr. Chair, all they're doing is showing they are willing to not do what's right in the interest of trying to save their leader's reputation from the actions he took last week.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

I'll go to Mr. Seeback and then Madame Chabot.

I'm sorry; it's Mrs. Falk and then Madame Chabot.

Which one is it? Is it Mr. Seeback or Mrs. Falk?

I'm sorry. I haven't been calling you "Mrs. Falk".

Go ahead, Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The problem with most of what that member just said is that it's just not accurate. That's actually not what's before the committee.

What he's put before the committee is something completely different. He did it while his minister is here to testify on her deplorable record of supporting people with disabilities and their terrible decision to insult Canadians with disabilities by giving them \$6 a day. She could be speaking about that, trying to defend that indefensible position—

• (1650)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: I have a point of order again, Mr. Chair, and again it's on relevance.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: —but instead the member brought—

The Chair: State your point of order.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: It's relevance to the motion.

The Chair: You were speaking on the commentary, Mr. Seeback—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I get to respond to the commentary by Mr. Gerretsen. I know the member is new and doesn't know the rules, but that's how it happens.

The Chair: Mr. Seeback, keep your comments on the motion before the committee.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I get to respond to the comments by Mr. Gerretsen.

Rather than dealing with the minister, who came to give us her time to defend her indefensible decision to give \$6 a day as income support to people suffering from disabilities, he used his time to bring this motion. We're here and doing this because he chose to waste the minister's and committee's time by moving this motion, which has nothing to do with people with disabilities.

Remember, we're here to talk about how we're supposed to support people with disabilities, and this is—

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

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Coteau, was that you with the point of order?

Mr. Michael Coteau: Yes. I want to add that the minister is responsible for many files, including anti-racism, so it is quite relevant for us to have this conversation. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. I would remind all members to keep their comments to the motion that was adopted by the committee by majority vote for discussion until it is dispensed with.

Mr. Seeback, go ahead on the motion.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Part of speaking to the motion is to speak to what happens when someone brings a motion with no notice to the committee in the middle of a committee meeting to hear what a minister has to say. We get to speak on that as well.

The Chair: Mr. Seeback, the motion is in order. The committee accepted the motion.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I understand that, Mr. Chair, but we get to speak on the effects of bringing a motion in committee. That's part of what has happened here today.

Actually, what's happened is worse than that. The minister for labour is supposed to be here now. We're at 4:50. It was supposed to start at 4:30, but instead, at the last minute, Mr. Gerretsen has now interrupted the appearance of two ministers with his motion, whereas we wanted to actually speak to the minister of labour about many things—for example, about how they spent \$600 million on outside contracting when those jobs could have gone to good union-paid public servants.

The Chair: Mr. Seeback, bring your comments to the relevancy of the motion.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: The relevancy of the motion is that he has brought a motion to disrupt the committee, and therefore I get to speak on what's been disrupted as a result of bringing a motion.

The fact of the matter is that the minister of labour was supposed to appear to answer questions just like the minister here right now, who has not had the opportunity to answer questions because a motion was brought by this Liberal government. Let me tell you: There are lots of questions to ask of the minister of labour, but unfortunately we're stuck here discussing and debating this motion right now.

I mean, we just had a letter from Canada's Building Trades Unions talking about how terrible the Stellantis deal is for unionized workers.

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

The Chair: Mr. Seeback, please—I would ask all those who are speaking to speak with relevancy to the motion.

This is not the first time. Both sides have introduced motions in the middle of having ministers or other witnesses appear here. As you know, that is the right of committee members to do in their time. Mr. Gerretsen moved a motion, and it was adopted by the committee. Doing that is certainly within the rules of the committee, and I would ask you to keep your comments to the motion that was adopted by the committee.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Well, the motion hasn't been adopted by the committee. We're debating whether or not it's going to be adopted.

The Chair: The committee adopted the motion to be debated.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: That's correct. We're debating the motion. That's correct, and I am—

The Chair: That's correct, so it's relevance to the motion that was accepted by the committee for debate.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Well, Mr. Chair, I disagree with your decision to say that I can't talk about the effects of introducing a motion during the questioning of ministers. There's a consequence as a result of that. This goes on at many committees. I've served on many, and when someone brings a motion, people get to talk about the effects of that motion. It's happened at every single committee I've been on.

I'm talking about the effects of bringing a motion in the middle of the time when two ministers were supposed to appear. The government members brought this motion—

• (1655)

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

The Chair: What is your point of order, Mr. Coteau?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I want to go back to relevance.

You know, it's very simple. The member opposite has a very simple choice: to condemn the actions of his leader and to ask his party to recognize that hate has no place in this country and that we have to call it out. He's not speaking to the issue. He's going into the technicalities now.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Chair, that's not relevant. The motion before the committee is not for me to do anything, so I think the member should just retire his comments.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau. I will return the floor to Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

This is a Liberal government member. We have Liberal ministers here to defend their records on the estimates, on people with disabilities and on how they're representing labour. They chose to interrupt the meeting to bring this motion. There are consequences to that, as I've talked about. Look at what we could be talking about right now.

However, Mr. Gerretsen chose to do this. He knew Conservatives would want to speak about this. He knew his ministers would be interrupted. In fact, that's what this tactic is. The tactic of this motion is to disrupt this committee so that we can't hear from the minister defending this paltry \$6 a day they're giving to people with disabilities. My colleague was asking great questions on that, and the minister was clearly unable to answer those questions. In a desperate attempt to protect the minister, Mr. Gerretsen brought this motion. It would appear he's desperately trying to protect the Minister of Labour, whose appearance was also disrupted because we're debating this motion.

As I said before, there are a lot of things we could be talking about with the ministers. Instead, we're stuck talking about why this meeting was interrupted by this motion. It could have been brought at any point. The ministers weren't going to be here on Thursday. However, this is clearly designed by a government that has a lot to hide. They're trying to hide their ministers when they come to this committee to answer for the decisions they've made.

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

The Chair: Go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: It seems to me that the people trying to hide are the people who are stalling this vote.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen. That's very marginal.

Continue, Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the interjections by my colleagues from the Liberal government, who chose to bring a motion when their ministers are appearing before our committee. I can assure you that it's not something that would happen when there's a change of government. We would respect our ministers coming to committee to give evidence. We wouldn't interrupt their appearance with a motion. What we're missing out on....

I'm guessing we now have a long speaking list on this motion. I know there are other members on this side who want to speak on this motion. I know there are members of the Liberal Party who keep putting their hands up, wanting to speak.

We've now interrupted two ministers because you guys thought you'd bring a motion to the committee so we can't hear from them to answer the questions.

I want to go back to what we could be talking to the Minister of Labour about. The letter from the CBTU on April 10, which was literally a week ago—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, this is clearly irrelevant.

The Chair: I agree.

Mr. Seeback—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: They're talking about the displacement of skilled workers on the Stellantis project.

The Chair: Mr. Seeback, on relevancy to the motion, you have the floor.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Chair, there's traditionally wide latitude given on relevance. The relevance of the motion is—

The Chair: I'll ask you again—it's been several times—to make your comments relevant to the motion.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'll give Mr. Seeback a break. I would strongly encourage him not to use a term: Individuals are not “suffering from” disabilities. My nephew, who has Down syndrome, is not suffering from a disability. He has an exceptionality.

Maybe Mr. Seeback can try to at least be respectful when it comes to talking about people with disabilities.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Seeback, go ahead on the motion on the floor, with relevance.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I think I get the opportunity to respond to those comments, actually.

Mr. Chair, I apologize if I used the wrong term. Yes, it should be persons “with” disabilities. I meant no disrespect when I was using that terminology. What I do think is disrespectful is what the member for Kingston and the Islands has done in the middle of a meeting specifically designed to hear from the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities about how people with disabilities are getting \$6 per day. Instead of allowing that to happen—that's what should have been happening at this meeting—if the member wants to talk about disrespect, the disrespect is bringing a motion that interrupted the evidence of the minister and interrupted questions from committee members, including members from the Bloc and the NDP. They were asking very good questions of the minister, and I'm sure that they wanted to ask more questions of the minister. I know that they also think that giving \$6 per day to help persons with disabilities cope with the current affordability crisis—a crisis that has been caused by the inflationary spending of this Liberal government that is making life unaffordable and includes the carbon tax.... All of these things are having a massive impact on affordability for Canadians, and the minister has offered \$6 per day to help with that.

Misusing a word or misspeaking accidentally, as I did.... I do want to say that I apologize if I've offended anyone with the words that I used. I did not mean to do that; it absolutely was not my intention. However, I wonder if the member for Kingston and the Islands is going to apologize for interrupting the appearance of the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities when there were members of the committee who had questions for the minister, questions about how \$6 per day is going to actually make life more affordable for them, questions about how they are going to deal with the affordability crisis that all Canadians are dealing with. I know that my colleagues from the Bloc and the NDP had good questions. They were asking very tough questions of the minister, and we had more rounds of questioning to actually go forward on.

I wonder if the member for Kingston and the Islands wants to apologize to the members from the Bloc and the member from the NDP for taking away their time to question the minister today by bringing a motion. Now I wonder if he wants to apologize to the member for the NDP, because it would appear that we're not going to get to the Minister of Labour and Seniors. I bet you she has questions for the Minister of Labour and Seniors on all of these things.

I think perhaps I've said enough.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'll not be a judge of that. Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

Mrs. Falk, you have the floor. Then we'll go to Madam Chabot, Mr. Gerretsen and Madam Zarrillo.

Go ahead, Mrs. Falk.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm absolutely disappointed that we are at this point. I'm very disappointed that the NDP is doing the Liberals' bidding once again.

As has been said, the Minister of Labour and Seniors was supposed to start a while ago. We also have the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities here. The regular members of this committee know how difficult it is to actually get a minister here to be accountable for the decisions that they, as well as their departments, make. I absolutely cannot believe that the NDP once again is in the back pockets of this Liberal government when I know that MP Zarrillo has been a champion for those with disabilities. They are always first and foremost when we are doing studies or when we have a minister. I am shocked—very, very shocked—that she wants to take away time from both ministers. I would hope that this will not happen in the future.

Mr. Chair, I move that the committee proceed to the appearance of the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities to address the failure of the Liberal government so that she can address her government's failure to deliver the Canada disability benefit.

• (1705)

The Chair: Madame Falk, could you repeat your motion? If there's a condition attached to it, it's not dilatory. It has to be specific.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I move that the committee proceed to the appearance of the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities to address the failure of the Liberal government so that she can address her government's failure to deliver the Canada disability benefit.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It is not dilatory.

The Chair: The clerk has advised me there's no condition to it.

I'm putting the motion by Mrs. Falk on the floor.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order.

In my opinion, the part at the end of the motion that talked about the failure of government—and I would encourage you to review this with the clerk—is what makes this not a dilatory motion.

The Chair: I will go with my original position. I view it as dilatory and I'm putting it to a vote.

Madam Clerk, can we have a vote on whether the committee chooses to return to the minister as a witness and adjourn debate on the motion?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The committee has made a decision. We will end with this.

Committee members, order.

I am returning to the witness, Ms. Khera. There is one question for the Bloc and one question for the NDP.

For her 2.5 minutes, Madame Chabot—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I'll give my time to my colleague from the Green Party.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Chabot is going to give her time to Mr. Morrice, I understand.

You have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

I want to start with a series of questions for the minister with respect to expectations set about the Canada disability benefit.

The first is in the Liberal party platform of 2021, which said:

...this new benefit will reduce poverty among persons with disabilities in the same manner as the Guaranteed Income Supplement and the Canada Child Benefit.

Can the minister table, for this committee, the number of people who are expected to be raised above the poverty line by the Canada disability benefit?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, I think it's important, again, to first and foremost recognize, as we push forward—

Mr. Mike Morrice: I have such limited time, Chair. Can I just get an answer about whether or not it will be tabled?

The Chair: You can ask the question. The minister can answer it.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Will it be tabled?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Yes, we're happy to bring that information to you.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Thank you.

Next, we've been told for many years that a lot of time is needed to consult with persons with disabilities on the Canada disability benefit. My concern is that there's nothing in what's being proposed that actually came from the disability community.

Therefore, I'd like the minister to table a list of people and organizations requesting a benefit of \$200 a month, accessed only through the disability tax credit and not until July 2025. Will the minister table a list of people and organizations asking for this?

• (1710)

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, through you, if I may, I think it's important to recognize that since the Canada disability benefit got royal assent, we have been actively consulting with the disability community.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Chair, I have about 35 seconds left. Can I ask the minister whether they will or will not table that list?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, that is information I'm happy to provide to the honourable member.

Mr. Mike Morrice: Thank you.

My last question for the minister is on paragraph 11(1)(f).

That is an amendment I was successful in getting added to the bill, which is now the act. It requires regulations providing for an application process that is without barriers. What has been proposed in budget 2024 regarding access to the disability tax credit is an 18-page application process that has significant barriers attached to it.

Is the minister aware of paragraph 11(1)(f) in the act, which requires the benefit to be accessed barrier-free?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Yes, I am.

Mr. Chair, if I may, I think it's also important to recognize that in the budget, we have put in a significant amount of funding to particularly ensure that we make the DTC, the disability tax credit, barrier-free.

We actually expect more people to apply for the DTC. The funding in the budget is to ensure that we will pay for the DTC costs, so the costs won't be to the individuals with disabilities.

There are also navigator supports we have put forward that will help community organizations that are helping individuals with disabilities get that extra support. At the same time, we're ensuring that we work with community members who have been doing this work at the forefront. There's been the work that's been happening—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Morrice, thank you.

We'll now go to Madam Zarrillo to conclude for two and a half minutes.

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

I certainly wish there were more women elected and sitting around this table, because we can actually do two things at once: We can denounce white supremacy and look out for persons with disabilities. That's not possible between the Cons and the Liberals, who had their little debate today. It's also why, after Conservative governments and Liberal governments, over a million Canadians with disabilities are still living in poverty.

To the minister, I would say that this is such a large breach of trust that has come out of this \$200 per month through the DTC. It's not what advocates asked for. It's not what the disability community asked for. Even worse, it's not what the lowest-income persons with disabilities asked for.

I'm going to go back to the comments about the CRA having a committee. The minister talked about a committee. Advocates have told this government that automatic eligibility to the CDB is as easy as an addition to the mandatory T5007 statement, and then the CRA can facilitate automatic enrolment in the Canada disability benefit.

Why didn't the government act on this?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, as I mentioned in my earlier comment, we absolutely want to ensure that more individuals can actually apply for the DTC. As I mentioned earlier, it isn't just there for individuals who have employment; it's actually a gateway for other federal benefits that are out there.

We have put forward—

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I'm sorry, Minister. I'm going to have to cut you off on that, because the disability tax credit is an institutionalized credit that requires someone to go to a medical professional to have somebody tell them whether or not they have a disability. It's not in the labour code to do that. If someone is in employment, they can self-identify that they have a disability, whether it's physical or mental.

What this government is legislating and imposing is that they have to go through an institutional process to get access to the Canada disability benefit. I'm not talking about whether they have income or not; I'm saying that the disability tax credit is not freely accessible by everyone. free access for everyone.

Why won't this government just go ahead and add some sort of an addition to the T5007 or to another mechanism so that we can understand that a person with a disability has identified that they have a disability and that they could potentially be entitled to the disability benefit? Why can't the government do that?

Hon. Kamal Khera: Mr. Chair, if I may, I want to clarify two things for my colleague.

The CRA has a disability advisory committee that works in tandem with the work of the disability tax credit, ensuring that people with lived experiences.... It's actually doing the work to ensure that we can make the DTC as barrier-free as we can.

With the investments we're making, we expect that more people will actually apply for the disability tax credit. With the investments we're making in this budget, there will be costs that the Government of Canada will pay for, the costs associated with the DTC.

At the same time, we are putting in significant funding so that organizations on the ground—and many of them have been part of the work that has gotten us to this point—will be able to help with in their own communities, will be able to help support individuals with disabilities.

I think we all have a role and responsibility. We can all play a bigger role in making sure that more people can apply for the DTC, which also is a gateway to other federal and some provincial benefits that exist.

Thank you.

• (1715)

The Chair: Minister and Ms. Zarrillo, that concludes the first hour of this committee meeting.

I will suspend for just two minutes while Minister O'Regan takes his seat.

Thank you, Minister, for your appearance today. Thank you to your staff with you.

We'll suspend for two minutes.

• (1716)

(Pause)

• (1718)

The Chair: Committee members, we are now resuming what's left of the committee's two hours.

We have with us Mr. O'Regan, Minister of Labour and Seniors; Sandra Hassan, deputy minister of labour and associate deputy minister of employment and social development; and Brian Leonard, director general and deputy chief financial officer, corporate financial planning.

Minister, you have the floor for five minutes or less, as it is my intention to allow the committee one round of six minutes each. That should take us to about 5:40 or 5:45. It depends on how long you are.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Labour and Seniors): In the interest of time and perhaps discretion, Mr. Chair, I've read my opening remarks and they're not that inspiring. Why don't we cut right to the questions?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

I wasn't going there, but you did.

With that, thank you, Mr. Minister. That is good.

Mr. Seeback, you have six minutes.

• (1720)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much.

Minister, I'm sure you've seen the letter from the CBTU with respect to the job situation at Stellantis. I could read it to you, but I'm not going to. One of their key things is that NextStar is refusing to sign a memorandum of understanding with the CBTU guaranteeing the hiring of local Canadian contractors. The unemployment rate in the Windsor area is 8.1%.

In your role as Minister of Labour, which is to protect unionized workers, have you demanded that NextStar sign a memorandum of understanding with the CBTU to guarantee the hiring of local Canadian contractors for the Stellantis plant? If you haven't, why not?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I just came from the CBTU conference. The Prime Minister was in a fireside chat with the executive director of the CBTU, Sean Strickland. I believe it's already on the news. He said he's going to do absolutely everything he can. There's no reason why all those jobs aren't Canadian jobs.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Okay.

Everything you've asked for, or everything you could do, was not my question. My question was very specific. I'm asking what you've done.

The CBTU is very clear in their letter. They are saying there are 180 local skilled trades workers in the Kent-Essex region, “millwrights and ironworkers [who] are unemployed and available to perform” this work. In fact, “Canadian workers are now being replaced by international workers at an increasing pace”. It goes on. This was on April 10. They're demanding that a memorandum of understanding be signed by NextStar with the CBTU on hiring Canadian workers, not foreign replacement workers.

My question to you was this: Have you demanded this? Have you, in your role as the Minister of Labour, gone to NextStar and said, “You need to sign a memorandum of understanding with the CBTU”?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I think the honourable member would agree that—I'm somebody who worked in provincial government in my early years—there's nothing worse than a federal government swinging around in areas of provincial jurisdiction. This is, in fact, provincial jurisdiction.

Now, having said that, this is something I am very interested in as somebody who advocates for labour and unions to make sure we have good Canadian jobs.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: How is requiring hiring Canadian workers provincial jurisdiction? That's absolutely not the case. There's federal—

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: It's provincial jurisdiction.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: —money going into it. There's a federal contract that this government signed with Stellantis for the building and construction of this plant.

The local trade union is saying that far too many jobs are going to outside foreign contractors. You could demand that they sign it. You could stand up right now, walk out of this room, go to the microphones and say, “I demand that Stellantis sign a memorandum of understanding like the one being requested by the construction building trades unions.” You could do it to protect good Canadian labour jobs in an area where there's 8.1% unemployment.

Why aren't you doing that?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: We have, as of today, 1,975 construction workers hired on that site. I think the company committed to 2,300 construction workers. We're well on target. There is a process in place for the company and the union to come to an agreement on that. About less than 4% of that workforce is TFW.

However, I would still argue, as the Prime Minister just said, that this is too many. Every one of those jobs, where they can be Canadian, should be Canadian. I mean, this just happened. The CBTU is meeting across the river over there right now. The PM could still be with them for all I know, but I left to come over here. This is very much in motion—very much in play—and I think everybody, frankly, is—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: It took a letter from the CBTU to get you to have a conversation with them.

Their letter goes on to say that after a meeting with the Prime Minister on March 15, the outside hiring got even worse.

However, I'm going back to your role. Your role as the Minister of Labour is to protect labour and good, unionized jobs in this country. Have you—

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: That's a very broad interpretation. My job is within federal jurisdiction, among private actors. It's not even public servants. That is my job.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Are you saying that if you went out to demand it, it's not worth anything?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: No, of course not. Look—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Why aren't you doing it, then?

Why aren't you going out and saying, "Look, I've had enough. Stellantis needs to sign the memorandum of understanding being asked for by Canada's Building Trades Unions." You could go out right now and say, "I've had enough. I'm going to stand up for Canadian jobs. I want these jobs to go to Canadians in an area where unemployment is at 8.1%."

Why aren't you doing it?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Seeback, I could go out there and say and do many things, but we don't. It is where it is useful that I should be doing things. Also, frankly, I am very guarded about getting into areas of provincial jurisdiction. My job as Minister of Labour is within federal jurisdiction between private actors, private unions, private companies—

• (1725)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: So protecting Canadians jobs is provincial jurisdiction.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: —and there's a lot I can do within that role and a lot I can say. That's why I was over there at the CBTU listening to them just now. I'm very happy to say that they are working on a memorandum of agreement with Honda right now so that this catch-up won't have to take place—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I don't have time to get to Honda. Stellantis is happening right now.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Honda's happening right now.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Well, Honda is going to be built at some point, but the actual construction is going on with Stellantis right

now. Why will you not demand that they sign the memorandum of understanding that the CBTU is asking? They're asking them to sign it to guarantee Canadian jobs. You're a minister of the Crown. Your word actually carries weight. Why are you not going and saying, "Stellantis, sign a memorandum of understanding, and I want it done in two weeks"?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Seeback, I believe that when private actors, whether they be unions or companies, can do that job, they will do it themselves. They are at the table. They are negotiating that agreement. Leave them be.

I am not, perhaps like others around this table—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Except the CBTU said that after the March 15 meeting—

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: —in favour of big governments going around swinging their weight around. I think the government should stay out—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: After the March 15 meeting with the Prime Minister—

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: —and allow them to come to that agreement.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: —they say that the contracting actually got worse.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: They are at the table negotiating that agreement. I'm a big believer in that table.

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

I'm going to hold everybody to six minutes. Your time is over.

Mr. Long, you have six minutes.

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

Minister, thank you for coming.

I will say that it's shocking but great to see this newfound support for Canadian unions and workers from the Conservative Party. It's shocking, but I'm glad to see it.

I want to talk to you, Minister, about Bill C-58. As you know, we just studied Bill C-58. We did hear a lot of great testimony from witnesses that I think really cut through the smoke, if you will, and brought clarity to a lot of myths, particularly the misconception that unions and workers want to strike, that it's what they want to do and that this legislation would potentially impact that.

We had Sean Strickland in from Canada's Building Trades Unions. He said that anybody who suggests that unions want to strike, that it's what they want to do and that they can't wait to get on the picket line, is "not in touch". They're not in touch with today's economy and labour realities.

We know that this legislation will actually bring people to the bargaining table. You've always said, through many strikes, that the best deals are done at the bargaining table. We know that these are the best deals that happen for workers. I'm wondering if you can expand just a bit on Bill C-58 and why it is so important, and then, in contrast, how right-to-work legislation, which seems to be favoured by the Leader of the Opposition, could be detrimental to workers.

Thanks, Minister.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: None of this is very easy. I'd come back to B.C. last summer for two weeks—frankly, two weeks too long—where, again, we're talking about the BCMEA, representing the employers, private actors, and we're talking about the longshoremen's union, and again, private actors. We entrust these private actors with our supply chains, particularly out west, from Ontario westward. This had a huge effect on the economy. Every day I would go down and check into the hotel for one more night, thinking it would be the last, but that went on for two weeks.

Just to build on that, we have started a process. I was never happy with just getting a deal. There was something fundamentally wrong with what happened there. Frankly, if you're going to trust people with something as important as the supply chains of this country, then you'd better make sure it's working well. Clearly it wasn't. I wasn't convinced that the fundamental issues behind that dispute had been resolved. We are now starting an industrial inquiry commission. This is something that has been called for. We just announced the commissioners. This is big news. This is going to be big news. They will diligently go about their work over the course of the next year. They will talk to people.

Look, one of the things that you find is that it's not just the idea of banning replacement workers; part of that legislation is also coming to an agreement on what a maintenance of activities agreement would look like. What are the things that have to remain whole? What can we all agree on that have to be maintained? Using replacement workers just adds to the instability. It adds to the insecurity of so many workers. It adds to a feeling of just complete and utter disrespect.

Can you imagine, Mr. Long, going to work one day, and a dispute happens, and then somebody just walks by you and goes about your job?

I get the feeling that you want to ask a follow-up.

• (1730)

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

Thanks for that. I know you could talk at length about it, as I could too.

I want to also talk about what happened yesterday across the country. I was very thankful that I had a late flight so that I could attend the national day of mourning in Saint John at the Frank and Ella Hatheway Centre. It was an amazing turnout. There were probably 300-plus people there, obviously mainly members of unions. It was a wonderful, heartfelt ceremony.

As you have said in regard to setting the bar for workers' rights, when Canada raises the bar, countries around the world follow. Can

you speak to how we have worked and continue to work to improve the rights of workers in Canada?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Where to begin?

I think one of the most important things we have done is to include mental health in occupational health and safety. It sounds like it should have been done a long time ago, but we're doing it.

The day of mourning causes you to reflect on a lot of things. I attended two, one with the CBTU here in Ottawa and also with the Canadian Labour Congress. There are too many people who have died due to work-related incidents in this country. There were about a thousand in 2022, which is the last year that we have full records for.

If you work with the provinces.... Provinces are responsible for roughly 94% of the workforce in this country, while 6% are with the federal government, and we continue to sit down and work with unions and union membership on the ways we can protect the workers of this country in each workplace. It is not for a lack of diligence on anybody's part, to be honest with you, but we continue to have to do better. We continue to have to move each other along.

Mr. Wayne Long: I'll end with this, Minister.

It was my ninth ceremony. I've been fortunate to be a member of Parliament for nine years now. I will say this: The support and the appreciation from union members towards our government on Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, the anti-scab legislation which we reversed, are deep. Members are very appreciative of what you've done and what we've done as a government.

Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Long. Your time is up.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Good morning, Mr. Minister. Thank you for being here. I would have liked to hear your opening remarks, but you can send it to us in writing.

During the study of Bill C-58, we had the pleasure of hearing from representatives of the Canada Industrial Relations Board, the CIRB. They told us about their staff. I found that quite troubling, personally. I found that the team was quite weak, not in terms of quality, but in terms of the number of employees.

Have you set aside the necessary resources to make Bill C-58, which is ambitious and which we hope to be able to improve and pass, enforceable?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Thank you for your question.

[English]

Yes, we will give whatever resources it takes. We have a very clear understanding of the new responsibilities and the breadth of work that we will be giving the Canada industrial review board and we understand that the success of a replacement worker ban is dependent on the CIRB's ability to do its job.

I fully expect that in the weeks and months ahead, you will continue to hold our feet to the fire, and I'm happy for that, because the success of this will depend on the CIRB. We are committed to making sure that it has the resources it needs in order to do that job.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I asked you this question, Mr. Minister, because I couldn't find these amounts in either the budget or the estimates, which will be significant. You have regularly and firmly argued in favour of the 18-month coming-into-force period after royal assent. You told us that it was the CIRB that suggested it, but the CIRB didn't confirm it, and the vast majority of the labour movement stakeholders who have come to testify called for the bill to come into force as soon as it receives royal assent.

How can we justify to people who are on strike or locked out during that time that we would have to wait another 18 months after royal assent before this act comes into force?

• (1735)

[English]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: It's not for me to justify. I would say that it is for me to listen extremely attentively to those people I just described, those same people we are dependent on for success, those being the CIRB. When they tell us that they need 18 months, I will listen to them. That is what they have told us. They need time. The deputy was just reminding me that their chair, I believe, said in front of this committee that this time was needed.

As I've said before at this committee, it isn't.... I understand that everybody is interested in having this in place as soon as possible—

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I know it takes a while, but the CIRB has never confirmed the 18 months.

[English]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: If you would just allow me to answer, I would say and reinforce that it is the chair and it is the CIRB that have asked for that 18 months, and I believe them to be experts in the field. We depend on them. We have granted that 18 months and we felt that this is a sufficient amount of time and an appropriate amount of time.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Minister, will you and your government representatives on the committee be open to the idea of significantly reducing that time frame?

[English]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I will always listen to the CIRB and I will always listen to our officials, but again—and I can't reinforce this enough—the people who we have all agreed that this legislation's success will depend upon have said to us they need 18

months. Until I hear something different, 18 months is the amount of time that they will get.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Minister, I do want to express our concerns to you.

Let's look at the current situation at the Port of Quebec. There's a lockout, with replacement workers, for more than 18 months. That leads me to ask you two questions.

First, what is the government currently doing to try to resolve this impasse?

My second question has to do with timelines. Let's say that everything goes well, that the anti-scab bill is passed, that it receives royal assent this fall, and that it comes into force 18 months later. This gives those who are going to be in conflict plenty of time to organize themselves, lock out workers and hire replacements. This gives the runners the chance to deviate from this very important bill while they can. That's the impact of the delay.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Give a short answer, please, Mr. O'Regan.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: The alternative you allude to would be a system that would be gummed up with caseloads, and officials wouldn't have the time or the resources to be able to render or deliver decisions. That, to me, is not an alternative that I'm willing to entertain. Again, these are the people who know best, and they've said 18 months. I will stay with 18.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Madame Chabot.

It's Madam Zarrillo for six minutes to conclude.

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

Thank you to the minister and the staff who have come here today.

Yesterday was the national day of mourning, which honours workers who have died, have been injured or who fall ill due to their work.

In that backdrop, and as my colleague Rachel Blaney has asked, when will the government stop punishing over 100,000 injured workers who have faced GIS clawbacks and denials in the past year? What actions are you and your department taking to end this injustice to injured workers?

We don't see it in the budget. Other provincial payments are exempted. Will you move to add payments from workers' compensation programs to be exempted or to be added to the exempted list, and when?

• (1740)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I don't believe, Madam Zarrillo, that I am in a position right now to make a significant change to that. I'm willing to entertain it.

I don't know if my deputy minister has anything that she would like to add.

Ms. Sandra Hassan (Deputy Minister of Labour and Associate Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Development, Department of Employment and Social Development): We can look into that and get back to the committee.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you. I would very much appreciate it, as would my colleague Rachel Blaney.

Minister, you spoke about your extended time in Vancouver. I want to thank you for the time you gave me on a different topic when you were in Vancouver. You made time to have a talk about the—

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I was happy for the distraction.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Yes.

It was about the care workers, the care economy and the gendered nature of that work, and how it's time that the care economy receives the respect and attention it deserves. These workers, as I mentioned, are mostly immigrant women and gender-diverse people.

I was pleased to see in the budget a proposal to launch a sectoral table on the care economy, as well as the intention to launch consultations on the development of a national caregiving strategy.

I wonder if you could expand on those two pieces. Give us some information about what each piece is, what timelines you have in place and how you see them rolling out.

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I'm particularly pleased that we were successful in getting that into the budget. I also pay heed to those who have criticized us, at least initially, for not putting a substantial amount of money on it just yet. This is an excellent opportunity right now for us to sit down at the table, understand how so many of these parts of the care economy intersect and intermingle, and then come up with a plan of action.

This is all because of COVID. That's where the vulnerabilities that you and I first spoke of in Vancouver really.... By that time, we knew what had come to light, particularly with care workers who move within that care economy. It obviously covers child care, senior care and other parts of disability care. That's what we're talking about. It's the people who do that work and making sure that we look after them properly.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Minister.

It may have been highlighted during COVID, but for four or five decades, there's been a lot of amazing research. People have been doing this work, and their voices just haven't been heard for four decades. I think about the women economists who have continually tried to push this issue.

My question is about the advocates who have recently started their journey to support the care economy and to highlight those workers, as well as the advocates who have decades of research. How can they reach you? How can they get involved in the sectoral table, and how can their voices be heard about this national caregiving strategy?

Ms. Sandra Hassan: Thank you for the question.

We're at the beginning of looking at the terms of reference and who to invite to that table. We have been receiving interest from union groups and other members. Certainly, if they want to signal their interest to the department, we will make sure, as the minister pointed out, that all of the actors in the care economy are represented at the table and that we have a wide range of perspectives presented. They can come forward to us.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you so much.

I just want to add one point, because I heard a story of a palliative care worker who worked in homes. Their work was looking after someone who's dying. Immigrant care workers who are working in palliative care get no time for any grieving. They get no time to transition from one working home to another. That is one point that I really want to make sure of. All of them are so important, but I don't want this one around palliative care to get missed.

I also want to very quickly talk about persons with disabilities. We've heard at this committee before about the Canada disability benefit and working-age Canadians. I saw you sitting there today when we were talking about the labour code and the ability to self-identify for accommodation as a worker. If you're in a working situation, you can self-identify as having a disability, whether it's physical or mental, and receive accommodation.

I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts on how that could transition over to a Canada disability benefit that is an income supplement for the working age. Is there some kind of equity solution that would be equal to what people in the labour force receive?

● (1745)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: I have not considered that yet, but I appreciate the suggestion. I also particularly appreciate the suggestion on palliative care workers.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Zarrillo.

Thank you, Mr. Minister. We'll let you go from the committee. We are now beyond our time. It was 5:40 when we began.

Could I have agreement? We have a draft press release prepared to invite the public to submit briefs for the study on Bill C-322. It has been circulated. Do the members approve of the draft? It's not controversial. Do I see consensus to release that?

Madam Clerk, I'm sensing a consensus.

Thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Minister and staff, for appearing in an abbreviated format, which spared you from speaking for five minutes.

The meeting is adjourned.

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