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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey

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• (1530)
[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

I call to order the fourth meeting of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today we are on committee business and are in public. The first order of business is to let you know that the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure was working very hard on your behalf on Tuesday, and a summary of their work is in front of you. As you know, everything that happens at the subcommittee is in the form of a recommendation to this committee, so it would be in order to consider their work and to determine whether to adopt, reject or amend it.

The floor is open.

Ms. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Chair, as the official opposition, we had a discussion yesterday. We are satisfied with the work and the decisions of the subcommittee. We hope that stands for the government as well as the other opposition parties.

Thank you.

The Chair: There is one thing that I neglected to do.

We have with us, Brittany Collier, an analyst who works with the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. The Senate has studied the issue of indigenous housing quite extensively, and Ms. Collier prepared a draft work plan that was examined by the subcommittee.

I would ask for your indulgence to perhaps allow her tell us a bit about the work that was done in the Senate to set the stage. We will then come back to the work of the subcommittee.

Ms. Collier.

Ms. Brittany Collier (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Essentially, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples did two major studies, one on first nations housing and infrastructure, and another on housing within the region of Inuit Nunangat. The housing and infrastructure study was done over a year and a half, with the committee hearing from a significant number of

witnesses. The committee released an interim report in February 2015, as well as a final report in June 2015.

In terms of housing in Inuit Nunangat, which as I mentioned are the Inuit regions of Canada, the committee studied that issue for four months and released the report in 2017.

• (1535)

The Chair: Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.): The policy gap we're trying to study is actually separate and distinct from those two reports. It's separate and distinct in a couple of very important ways.

The three national indigenous organizations, and specifically the ITK, have dedicated funding through indigenous infrastructure. The challenge we're facing in this country is that there is no specific funding stream for jurisdictions outside the ITK, the Métis Nation and the Assembly of First Nations reserve and band council governance.

For the issue that has been brought to the attention of housing providers in cities and activists around this file right across the country, we're looking to focus on studying those areas that are not funded, not the areas that are funded. There is a clear indication that we need to increase funding in the three NIOs, but there is absolutely no dedicated funding and support structure or funding mechanism, nor a national organization yet around urban, rural and northern housing strategies outside the treaty system.

The treaties in the north are modern treaties and their members are not voting members as part of the AFN. Inuit people living in Ottawa are not part of the ITK or part of the governance for the funding stream for the ITK. People living in rural communities outside of urban centres are often challenged in terms of accessing infrastructure programs because of the way in which they're built. There is no indigenous-led and indigenous-designed or delivered housing program in these three spaces. That is why the motion is sculpted specifically the way it is. It's why it's directed specifically the way it is. While there are some very good names on the list—I've vetted them with indigenous caucus members in the House—bringing in the AFN to talk about a housing program where it doesn't serve its members is, quite frankly, going to perpetuate the problem that we're trying to solve with this study.

When we say urban, rural, and northern, we are explicitly saying non-ITK, non-Métis Nation, and non-AFN-led housing programs. Those have been studied, and properly studied in the Senate. We're talking about a fourth direction—a fourth stream clearly identified in the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association's study on this and clearly enunciated through a group of housing providers in the homeless sector at a recent meeting in Ottawa.

That's the group we need to study. Those are the housing providers. Those are the people with lived experience. Those are the people with expertise who we need to hear from, so we can design a new fourth program to serve a population that is not being currently served by any government program deliberately, beyond a \$225 million fund over the next three years, which we put in the last budget.

We need a much bigger program. We need to understand how it works in those three spaces. We need to understand what the scope of this problem is and what the principle should be around serving this population. We need to hear from urban, rural and northern housing providers about the difficulties they're having accessing established programs and why they don't serve us well.

Listening to the AFN, quite frankly, would be like talking to somebody from Prince Edward Island about a challenge they're having in B.C. with a local municipal issue. It's outside its jurisdiction, its scope or its experience. We need to focus in on those housing providers. They are ample across the country. There are good names we can all provide together.

The Chair: Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I certainly appreciate MP Vaughan's intervention here and for citing his particular desire to make sure that there is a special focus within this study. I will say, though, that there are more views on this than simply that.

While I appreciate his raising it for those who feel that a fourth stream is important, I also will say that there are some areas that may not neatly fit within the parameters he's set out.

For example, CMHC does fund different parts and touches upon different programs on reserve that don't often get studied by any group in Parliament. I would also simply suggest that for us not to be talking about urban indigenous housing on reserve.... Because there are many different permutations in British Columbia, I think there are special considerations that may not be captured under an individual housing program.

I have Westbank First Nation in my riding. In B.C., there are many other unique cases where there is a mix of different housing and housing policy. With full respect, I would hope that the witnesses MP Vaughan brings are able to bring out those aspects that he thinks are lacking in our current policy. I also want to reiterate this for people who I serve directly or who are in from British Columbia who are in urban indigenous reserves, which I think is important.

I just want to make sure that we are not scoping out because if we bring witnesses and suddenly analysts start saying that we can't

count any of that testimony, as meaningful as it is.... Especially if we are planning on flying people out, to disregard their testimony on either CMHC or some of the existing programs or somehow how some rules don't align....

I will give you a good example, Mr. Chair. Sometimes a first nation will be given other lands that are not part of the reserve, yet they will have housing on the reserve. I think that we need to understand how those situations and different regulations line up when you have those cases.

I see some nodding here. I do appreciate that he is receptive to that. I just don't want to have it where the analysts says that it's great testimony, but we can't use a word of it. That would disempower my constituents.

• (1540)

The Chair: Ms. Gazan, and then Mr. Vaughan.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): I agree with many of Adam Vaughan's comments. I think we have to be careful not to make the study too broad.

I also appreciate the comments about urban reserves. That's certainly a reality in Winnipeg and they're certainly looking at developing housing in urban areas. Some of the communities, including Peguis, have talked about developing housing. But I think we still need to be careful to clarify that. If we're talking about urban indigenous housing, maybe one specific stream in the study could be urban indigenous housing, including housing on urban reserves, but I think if we're just going to open it up to reserves, it would become an insurmountable study.

Certainly there are programs on reserve that are not available off reserve, and, although hugely underfunded, there already is a funding allocation for housing on reserve. I think Adam makes some really valid points, keeping in mind that I do want to acknowledge the gross lack of funding on reserve. I just think that because we are looking at a limited number of meetings, if we make it too broad we'll end up studying nothing. I think that could be a potential compromise. I don't know how people feel about that.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I agree with both speakers. There are grey areas, especially in B.C., where you have modern treaties that don't necessarily capture a land mass and are configured differently from some of the treaties as you move east. In those situations I look forward to hearing from the areas that straddle policy, and how they get disqualified or included in different programs. That is absolutely fundamental to our understanding.

My very particular point was that the national indigenous organizations have a much different constituency than those not represented by the AFN. We need to hear from people who are not represented by AFN because AFN has a separate negotiation and funding stream established with the government. There is no national organization that speaks for these three areas of programming. It is those housing providers that are asking for this program to be established and we're responding to that with the study. It's why the City of London has asked for it. It's certainly why the Lu'ma Native Housing Society in Vancouver has asked for this study, amongst others, and it's why even the Inuit here in Ottawa have said they need a separate program. Of course, there are places that straddle this, and I look forward to your expertise in bringing those voices forward from your constituency.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Again, I do respect that if we don't have some sense of priority or scope, then everything is...and we can go into 100 different directions. But, again, I just want to reiterate that we will certainly be mindful of witnesses. I don't want to see testimony excluded later just because it didn't neatly fit into someone's box. Therefore, there are going to be some grey zones that we will all be respectful of, and those people can still come and have their say. If it doesn't pertain to the usefulness of the study, well, then, at least someone felt they were heard and listened to and it's a permanent record in the committee evidence. I'm just glad to make sure that we're not necessarily cutting out people who may not have a voice otherwise.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, the floor is yours.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): I quite agree with the objective of restricting the scope of the testimony so that it can be useful for our study, although I would not be able to say at the moment which witnesses we should include or exclude. But we also have to ensure that the witnesses are somewhat representative of an indigenous group living in the three regions we want to study: urban, northern and rural.

I did not understand why we would exclude the First Nations. It is true that our motion was not very precise. So it is up to us to define its limits. I do not feel that we have to expand the list of witnesses from whom we will be hearing. It will be better if the testimony is very focused and relevant. However, we can call for briefs and anyone can submit one. Not all groups will come to testify, but some may be able to submit a brief.

I agree with restricting the list of witnesses, but we will make our final choice only on March 20. At our end, based on what we know about the different band councils, we will see which group in Quebec territory would be most appropriate for the present study. The housing problems they are experiencing are universal, but the funding programs differ.

• (1545)

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Young.

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): I agree with MP Gazan that we do want to be focused in this study, because I'm not sure of how many meetings we will have. I was just adding them up and it looks like there may be seven, maybe eight meetings, or maybe six, so we need to be focused. Of course, I have had my concerns about the homeless indigenous population in the city of London. I have since talked to the mayor of Brantford who has the Six Nations of the Grand River reserve in that community.

I think there is more than enough to study on the off-reserve housing, knowing full well that some urban communities have reserves incorporated into them and that it will be a part of our discussion.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): I appreciate all of the comments and the discussion. I think this is really healthy for us to frame this kind of a study, which is clearly important to everybody here.

I think my colleague Mr. Vaughan makes really good points about targeting this study on a specific gap. However, I also appreciate the other comments to have some flexibility.

I wonder if reviewing the stakeholder list and the way the study is structured might be helpful. I think that's what we're talking about here—what witnesses can be called under what themes and topics. I appreciate the work done by the analyst who is here with us. I can see the general structure that was proposed originally, and I know we're not tied to that. We're basically talking about reframing this, which I think is good and I'm fully in support of it.

It looks to me as if there may be additional groups that we could consider having on the list. Individuals with lived experience have always been extremely important in the national housing work, and being guided by those individuals and their lived experience is certainly helpful.

The other one I would suggest could be on the list would be other service providers who have a view on housing insecurity in indigenous communities. I think from a systems perspective, they'll actually lend a slightly different perspective from housing providers or individuals with lived experience. I think they're part of the system that could be brought together around a comprehensive solution.

What I'm saying is that, if we review the bulleted list in the original document... I think we were saying first nations housing on reserve might be excluded from the list, or maybe included in certain cases where we deem appropriate.

Mr. Albas, I'm sorry if I misspoke, but I was trying to be appealing to your comments as well, but maybe I didn't put that well.

Anyway, I think if we revise that list, it might be helpful to review the overall structure of the study and how we pace out and theme the different meetings that we're going to have.

• (1550)

The Chair: Mr. Albas

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you.

I'm certainly mindful that everyone seems to be considering there are going to be some situations where we have to fit people in.

I have two quick points. Number one is that trying to build themes on specific days can be a bit of a thankless task, because not everyone is available and can come in to speak to a specific theme. So, I would just ask that if someone comes in who is on a different note from the majority of witnesses, we just accept that that is going to be part of the broader report.

The second thing is that CMHC is under the purview of this committee and, as I've said, there are some questions on some of its programs in regard to housing that have an indigenous angle that often isn't heard.

And, lived experience—I agree 100%, Mr. Turnbull, that it may be helpful for us to hear, because people don't always have voice, especially when there are multiple.... Someone told me one time very early on that joint accountability is no accountability. So, if multiple groups share responsibility, it seems that no one catches the ball when something goes wrong. I just think it would be helpful for us to make sure that there is some accountability, and it starts with our committee.

The Chair: Ms. Young.

Ms. Kate Young: I have just one quick question about the Senate indigenous study. Could we be given information on how to access that? I'd like to read it over prior to our meetings.

The Chair: That shouldn't be a problem. It will be distributed to all the members.

I'd like to come back to the report of the subcommittee. It seems as though we delved right into item number one of the subcommittee report.

I'm in your hands as to how to proceed here. Is there any other discussion on the subcommittee report? I would entertain a motion to pass it en bloc unless there's a will to go through it and discuss each item there.

Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I'll move it with the understanding that there are six meetings and then two to draft the report. Is that what's proposed?

The Chair: Item number three indicates that there will be six meetings where we hear from witnesses and one meeting for drafting instructions.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: If we need a second meeting, we can amend that, I assume.

The Chair: Yes, we can—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I have no problem moving the report in its entirety, with this note. I remember all of us talking about it, that if you can't properly stream a theme, that we accommodate them in off days, but we try to balance it out to one-third, one-third, and one-third over the six meetings, trying to get to that schedule, meaning the first report.

The Chair: We have a motion to adopt the report of the subcommittee.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Just on point six, the press release, I would hope, would come through you to committee members so we can know about it, and if there any graphics, we can put them on social media to encourage people to consider applying. I know it's not a large bursary, but by the same token, we want to make sure that anyone who's interested has the ability to do that.

The question is on “Respectfully submitted”. Could it not be “Submitted with love”? It's totally up to you, Mr. Chair. If you want to maintain the stiff upper lip when you send us these things, I understand that.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Are there any other interventions?

A voice: That's parliamentary language.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Are you ready for the question?

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

Ms. Elizabeth Cahill (Committee Researcher): May the analysts distribute this now?

The Chair: Yes.

Now that it has been adopted, the analysts have prepared a draft work plan based on the subcommittee's work. It will now be circulated.

The first item on the subcommittee report was that today's meeting include a discussion of the scope and objectives. We have delved into that. Are there any further interventions with respect to the scope and objectives? Do you want a few minutes to review the document in front of you and then come back to that?

Why don't we do that? Let's suspend, take some time to have a look through this, and then I'll ask that question again.

● (1550)

(Pause)

● (1600)

The Chair: All right, we're back in session.

The draft work plan that you have in front of you has some suggestions with respect to witnesses. The subcommittee report you just adopted indicated that we've set a deadline for March 20 for all parties to submit witness lists. The witnesses will come from the witness lists provided by the parties. You can take this advice, leave this advice, or amend this advice, but that's what it is, advice.

Is there any further discussion with respect to the scope and objectives of the report?

Ms. Kusie, please.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm happy to hear you indicate that. It's frankly impossible for us to approve a work plan that does not indicate the witnesses who will be present, considering that all parties have not had an opportunity to submit their witness lists. Certainly, while we are in agreement with the meeting distribution as discussed in both the subcommittee and here today, we couldn't possibly confirm the witness outlay considering, as I've said, that we have yet to submit our witness lists. We need an opportunity to submit witness lists for this study.

I'll also take this time, Mr. Chair, to note, certainly with the threat of the COVID-19 virus, that there exists the very real possibility that we may not return to the House the week after next. Of utmost priority for us would be to have the ministers come before the committee. I think we also need to consider that, with the timing of the meeting scheduling and the witnesses, this external situation could apply to the House and therefore to our committee. We need to consider that for the planning of the meetings, because it is our expectation that, should we not sit on the 24th and 26th, the ministers will be scheduled at the next possible instance for their appearance before this committee. That could affect the work plan as well.

While we are, I think, supportive of the outlay for the meetings, as we have indicated several times through our approval of the subcommittee report, we have to consider the scheduling of the ministers as well as who the witnesses will be and their scheduling.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: I concur with my colleague. I just want to say that I can only imagine the anxiety that a clerk and analyst would have trying to fill individual blocks. I would just want to reiterate that if you could clump certain groups in, it would be advantageous, in my mind, although I would like to hear from whoever sets up the work plan eventually that, when you send in a witness list, you may make a suggestion in brackets under what category. I may have some categories that will just say "other", because they may not neatly fit into it. Then we can expect them to try to clump them as best they can.

Some witnesses are just not available. I do think, further to MP Kusie's comments about external forces and whatnot, some may decide that they do not want to come to Ottawa but would prefer to do it by teleconference. Even those facilities may not be as easily accessible. I just have to bear in mind that I'm going to give a lot of latitude to the chair, the clerk and analysts as they try to populate a schedule in any kind of cohesive thematic fashion.

• (1605)

The Chair: Madame Chabot.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: First, let me in turn thank the analysts for the documents they provide to us. They inspire us and they will guide us. I learn a lot from them myself.

Before us, we have a list of suggested names. However, we also have given ourselves until March 20 for each party to be able to submit suggestions for witnesses. I imagine that each party will do so. We may be able to draw on some of the organizations that the analysts have suggested, and we will be able to propose other orga-

nizations. We know that we are not obliged to stick to that list and we have to be flexible. It may actually be possible for one group to cover two regions, urban and rural, for example. However, we will not be able to divide them all up like that. But still, we will go through the exercise and give ourselves the opportunity to do our job.

In this situation, we can see the glass half full or half empty. I prefer to see it half full.

As I said at the last meeting, if we have enough witnesses for the six meetings we have scheduled, we should not restrict ourselves. Instead, we should make it possible for us to extend the length of our meetings in preference to increasing the number of them. Other committees do that. Instead of two hours, for example, our meetings could perhaps last three hours. That would give us more time for our study, while still sticking to the number of meeting days we have.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Young.

Ms. Kate Young: To comment on MP Kusie's concern about meeting with the ministers, I know we are going through some uncharted territory here, if I can use that word, so we understand that concern.

That said, we should try to get the witness list together for March 20, no matter what happens.

I'm not sure this is the right time to question this, but number 5 on the list talks about a blessing ceremony. I wonder if that is in fact a smudging ceremony that we're discussing and if that would be at the very beginning of the committee report. Would we be able to suggest possible people for the smudging, such as elders and people who could help us with that? Could that be a part of the list of witnesses?

The Chair: I think that would be appropriate. Certainly Ms. Gazan had a suggestion at the subcommittee. Yes, it would make sense if that could be included.

Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I have a few comments on some of the bullet points on page 2. These are just some thoughts, so do with them as you will. I'm wondering whether adding a bit of detail to those, maybe an extra bullet or two, might be helpful. Others can weigh in and say if they think that's inappropriate.

It says, "identify best practices, innovative solutions, and technologies". I want to add "culturally relevant housing models". I've been reading stuff from the "For Indigenous, By Indigenous National Housing Strategy" report that's been developed, and I think what we're looking at is a distinction-based, culturally appropriate response. We have to stay open and attentive to how some of our presuppositions on this might not be true in the context of indigenous peoples in communities. That's one comment.

My other comment is about a stakeholder group that I think should be included, the service providers. As we know, the best-practice model in much of the supportive housing is about integrating lots of other services into housing. Housing doesn't stand alone, so looking at those perspectives is going to be important.

I know from my work in social innovation for many years that mapping stakeholder groups throughout this process.... Maybe out of this study there could be a list of partners that could be drafted or collected. That contact information could potentially be utilized in the future when we implement something that comes out of this.

The other thought I have is about financing models and whether there are any opportunities for innovative financing within indigenous communities.

The only other comment, which I think we talked about in the subcommittee, is maybe we should be getting a briefing early on, on any relevant data that's out there. I've been reading, and something that stands out to me in this report is that 87% of indigenous people do not live on first nation reserve land, which highlights the real importance of the work we're undertaking here. Data like that is really useful, and it would be great to have a briefing, or whatever could be provided for all of us to get up to speed on this issue and start together.

• (1610)

The Chair: Mr. Albas, then Ms. Gazan.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you. Following up on MP Turnbull's note that we might want some data and other things, it might be helpful for us to launch the study with the people who run the programs so we can ask them for an overview. That might be a good way for us to then start with some of the programs. We could clearly ask questions. MP Vaughan might want to say "Why this, not that?" It would be part of the committee record, and we'll all be able to ask questions. It might be a good way for all of us to get a little more up to speed on exactly some of the challenges and shortcomings of current programming.

The Chair: Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'll go back to the topic of the elders. Then I want to make a comment about interesting funding models. By having an elder here—from first nations, Inuit, and Métis, because they're very different—people would feel more represented at the same ceremony. It might be something we want to look at.

The other thing is that when we're looking at interesting financing, and Mr. Albas brought this up.... I know in Winnipeg there's a lot of urban reserve development, and part of the urban reserve development they're looking at is housing in urban areas. That's something we might want to look at. It's being looked at on the Prairies, and it's something that overlaps in B.C. as well.

The Chair: Okay. Thanks everyone for that guidance. I think we're ready to move on. I don't see any other interventions. If we can speak briefly about—

Yes, Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Just going back to it, though, I made a suggestion that perhaps we should have agencies that have skin in the game or could play a role in the development of this study. It would

not be fair to say that we would have to bring them forward as witnesses and then not be able to have people, for example, from my riding come out instead. If we broadly agree, as MP Turnbull said, that we should have some background to start us off, to me that would be the logical start. I'll just start by saying that CMHC would be a natural one for me.

Are there any other government officials or government agencies that people would like to see?

The Chair: Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: There are three very specific programs, one of which is housed at CMHC. Another one is a fund that is managed by an indigenous board of directors under CMHC's guidance, which was set up under the Harper government. There's a third one within Indigenous Services. There are additional supports around youth, seniors and people coming in and out of custody. There are also provisional housing programs, but those ones are largely within the health ministry.

I would suggest that CMHC is the most important and that Minister Miller's department have staff come forward. Those are the two major programs. Then we can probably also pull in, from CMHC, the reaching home program, which deals specifically with indigenous homelessness, a stream under CMHC that is managed by local community entities, some of which I assume will end up appearing on the list. So we should get CMHC and Minister Miller's department.

I would also suggest Stats Canada. One of the things that the report referenced by my colleague doesn't have is good data. When it says 87%, it divides who is on and off reserve, but there is also the actual calculation of who is off reserve and who self-identifies as indigenous but may not be identified within Stats Canada. Getting a handle on that number is going to be critically important as we try to scale a response. If this study can give us an agreed-to number, it will help all of us that much more to provide the funding that's needed to support this program, so I would add Stats Canada, to come in to talk about the demographic situation. We also need to know the difference between elders and youth and that sort of information.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaughan.

I'm advised that the analysts with the Library of Parliament can certainly pull together the data for us, but if we want someone from StatsCan, someone from CMHC and someone from Indigenous Services to lay out the background at the front, if that's the will of the committee, perhaps we can start with one hour of departmental officials, and then the meeting on the drafting instructions would be the second hour of meeting number seven.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Evelyn Lukyniuk): Is that a motion?

The Chair: It's not yet in the form of a motion.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: The first meeting could include the elders, to give a blessing to begin, departmental officials, with the names and departments to be supplied as part of the submission of March 20, and specifically CMHC program leads on the indigenous housing programs at CMHC, as well as people from Minister Miller's department. His department may have a demographic component to it. I don't know; I've never asked. That may be the way to get it. It may also be in Minister Bennett's department. How do they calculate the 87% and the population numbers? There's a bit of a moving target, from my understanding, in terms of getting good data on that.

The Chair: Are there any thoughts on that? Do we need to put it in the form of a motion? Can we proceed by consensus on the suggestion by Mr. Vaughan that we lead with the departmental and CMHC witnesses immediately after the blessing, as outlined by Mr. Albas? Is there any further discussion on that?

An hon. member: Consensus is fine.

The Chair: Okay, I think we have consensus. We could also include the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations, which has provided housing funding for the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation.

Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): How about Dan Vandal from Northern Affairs, his department?

The Chair: Okay.

In terms of future business....

Before I get to that, I will go to Madame Chabot.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, you submitted a notice of motion. Do you want to introduce it now?

Ms. Louise Chabot: Yes.

The Chair: You may do so officially.

Ms. Louise Chabot: So here is the motion I am making; you received it with the proper notice.

Let me explain the background. You know that there is a pilot project for seasonal workers. The pilot project comes to an end in May 2020. The Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion has the mandate to improve that pilot project with a permanent program that provides seasonal workers with consistent and reliable benefits. In that context, my motion asks the committee to suggest improvements to the pilot project.

Here is the text of my motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study on ways to improve the current pilot project for seasonal workers, which ends in May, and that this study include at least two meetings to hear from witnesses.

As I was saying, the pilot project comes to an end in May. This motion therefore allows our committee, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, to address matters that affect employment and labour, pursuant to our mandate.

Furthermore, I specify "at least two meetings", but we could keep it to two meetings only. The important thing is to make sure that we hear testimony from people, from groups, and from seasonal workers who have experience with the pilot project. We know that it is going to become permanent, but we have to know which improvements are possible. It could be helpful for the Minister to have that testimony.

• (1620)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

The motion is in order.

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: I'm inclined to support the motion. I hope all members would.

I would like to move either a friendly amendment or a formal amendment, however you think it would be best to move this.

Before doing that, Mr. chair, I will share a little rationale because I want to give context to show that I'm not trying to take the committee in a completely different direction. I do support the work that my friend from Quebec here is trying to do for her constituents.

It has been related to me that temporary foreign workers—particularly under the seasonal agricultural worker program—pay not just taxes, but payroll taxes, particularly to the Canada pension plan as well as old age security payments like any other Canadian worker. I think that's probably to make sure there's an even playing field.

The problem is that when they return to Mexico, they can apply to receive some of their taxes back, but they cannot apply to get back their Canada pension or their old age security.

I'm not suggesting that we need to do an intensive study of this. I would simply suggest that we maybe amend the motion to tag this on after "which ends in May" and before "and", so that it would say "which ends in May, as well as to question officials who are knowledgeable of payments made by temporary foreign workers, and that this study include at least two meetings to hear from witnesses."

The reason, Mr. Chair, is that I do think we need to have an explanation as to why they pay into our Canada pension plan and old age security—mainly the Canada pension plan—when there's no expectation that they will ever be able to pull that money out.

I think many people would simply suggest that it seems wrong and unfair that someone's efforts end up paying for someone else's benefit down the road, noting that the temporary foreign worker program—particularly the seasonal agriculture worker program—is not an immigration program. It is a work program.

I would ask members that if they can squeak that in or perhaps you can just ask that officials will come. I want to be able to ask a few questions and see why this program is set up like that.

The Chair: We'll take that as an amendment to the motion.

We have Mr. Vaughan and then Madam Chabot on the amendment.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I think that...

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I have no—

The Chair: Oh, it's Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I have no problem, obviously, exploring the full scope of the program as it relates to the pilot project. That's one of the characteristics of the pilot project. What I will say is that the timing of this is important, because I've just confirmed with the department that they will be doing a review. That's why they're doing a pilot project, so they can understand the impact. If we do it too close to May, they won't have done the review, and they won't have the statistics, the impacts, the numbers and the experiences catalogued to share with us, so just make sure that the timing of this be tied to when that review is done so they can present that review and we can test it with the full information required.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, the floor is yours.

Ms. Louise Chabot: I want to come back to my colleague's comment. As I understand it, the temporary foreign worker program and the pilot project on seasonal work are two completely different things.

I see no problem with studying the temporary foreign workers program. It is another committee's responsibility, but they could transfer it to us, according to what I have heard. However, the current pilot project for seasonal workers deals with employment insurance and applies to seasonal work, like fishing, in certain parts of the country.

I feel that we must distinguish between seasonal work and the situation for temporary foreign workers, even if they also come for seasonal work, as they often do. However, today's matter is about workers in a given region whose work is seasonal. Those are two different situations. So we would first have to decide whether our committee is the right place to study the issue of temporary foreign workers, and then decide if we need another motion.

I understand that the calendar will have to be revised. The department is currently asking how to improve the program we have now. If we want to make sure that the program does not become permanent in its present form, I feel that we must help the department with its study.

So we could meet with people who have current experience of the pilot project and who want it to be renewed, but not until it is amended. The groups and companies involved certainly have suggestions about it and it would be our way of contributing to the department's study.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Albas, please.

Mr. Dan Albas: I can appreciate that. Really, “temporary foreign worker” is the lexicon everyone seems to recognize. The seasonal agricultural workers program is no longer part of that umbrella, but, again, people have been continually asking, particularly both workers and people in my area, both in the Similkameen Valley as well as the Okanagan Valley.... One of the things I literally said is that it would be interesting to find out from someone.... The officials we would call can speak to this project. It would be very easy for us to tag it on just to simply ask for an official to come in to give an explanation. The last thing I want to do is launch a full-on study about something that may have a very simple explanation. This way we can deal with it rather than having to try to launch a whole studied affair.

My intervention here today is not to prolong or take away from the motion here but just to simply to say that perhaps we can get a few answers by simply tagging this on, and then we can take it from there.

The Chair: Ms. Young.

Ms. Kate Young: I'm just wondering if that's not a question for the minister when the minister is here.

Mr. Dan Albas: What I'm worried about is that we will have officials come who have no idea about this, because we didn't elaborate that this is what we were looking for. To be fair to a minister, to know how the tail end of this program is, when someone has been paying into it through their payroll taxes and whatnot and are unable to remit.... Again, having someone from the same department that specializes in it.... This is just a very unique set of information. Again, as I said, I just want to ask a couple of questions, ask the government to say why it is that someone who travels from, let's say Jamaica or Mexico, is contributing to CPP when they never stand any chance to benefit from it.

The Chair: Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Just a thought—I know that in my riding, temporary foreign workers and migrant workers are a huge issue. It probably warrants more than just a small part of study given certain human rights matters and issues around that. I'm wondering if that might be better as a study on its own, just out of respect for the difficulties many workers face when they're either temporary foreign workers or migrant workers.

• (1630)

The Chair: Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: I may not be on this committee six months from now, and if we are going to be doing this work, I just want to be effective for my constituents. I do recognize that the member has been very kind to let me pop this in there.

I'm asking members if we could simply allow this. If the rationale doesn't make sense or if perhaps MP Gazan takes issue with the answer, then that might deserve a full study, but whenever there is an opportunity for us to be able to deal with the concerns of Canadians and to find out why this practice is done....

The Chair: Madame Chabot.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: It is appropriate, as I see it, but it would need another study.

I am not sure that it is my role to explain how the employment insurance program applies to workers in seasonal industries. At most, I could talk about it for five minutes. However, that does not address the relevant question my Conservative colleague asked. The two things are different.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Vaughan.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Just to remind those who weren't on the committee last time, we did an extensive study on temporary foreign workers in the last term of Parliament. I think were 10 sessions of study on that, and there's a report that triggered a reform of that whole system.

What the member opposite is asking for is a very particular study about a very particular program, the pilot program dealing with seasonal workers in seasonal industries, which is a new program that was launched last year in response to a long-standing challenge we have, which is often referred to as "the black hole". That's why I think she's moving it, because it is that specific, and it is brand new.

I would be shocked if the people that come to explain that to us can't answer the question that the member opposite is raising. I think it's easiest to allow him to ask the question. My guess is that it will be a pretty quick answer, and that we can go home from there. I don't think we're asking for a day to study that issue. I think we're asking for an explanation, and when the department gives it, he'll get it.

Mr. Dan Albas: My intention with the motion is to make sure there's a person there who can answer the question. If the government actually says, "We will make someone available"—

Mr. Adam Vaughan: I might want to get you a briefing note in between.

Mr. Dan Albas: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: In there anything further?

Mr. Dong.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): I'm a new member. I thought I'd try to offer an option.

Is it possible for the committee to ask the minister whatever the question might be in writing and ask him to present an answer in writing? Would that be good enough as an option?

Mr. Dan Albas: My suggestion would be that, if we have someone here, I may ask a question, and the answer may stimulate another question. I'll have five minutes, and sometimes a five-minute conversation is worth well more than any letter, email or series of emails. That's why I think having someone identified....

MP Vaughan said that he's pretty sure someone will be there, so either I can have some assurance that someone will be able to answer intelligent questions.... I promise not to be vexatious but simply to satisfy...so that I can look my constituents in the eye and say that this has been raised, and maybe, if there is a bigger issue, I can work with other members of Parliament like MP Gazan to have a look at that.

Mr. Han Dong: I speak for myself. I'm convinced. Albas is very persuasive, and I admire his commitment to represent his constituents, so I'm okay with it.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the amendment?

All right. We're ready for the question then.

The amendment is to add, after the word "may," the following: "as well as to question officials with knowledge of payments made of payroll taxes by temporary foreign workers".

Is that it?

Mr. Dan Albas: Yes, "temporary foreign workers program" or "seasonal agricultural workers program", whichever one—

The Chair: Under "the seasonal agricultural worker program", and "as well as to ask questions of officials with knowledge of payments made of payroll taxes under the seasonal agricultural worker program."

• (1635)

Mr. Dan Albas: That would be fantastic, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate members' support.

The Chair: Madam Chabot.

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: I am not opposed to what my colleague wants. However, it should not be done by means of an amendment to my motion because the two things are completely different.

That amendment has no place in a motion that deals with the employment insurance program for workers in specific areas doing seasonal work. They have a gap, the "black hole" as it is called, in their employment insurance benefits. The department has established a pilot project in those regions, based on the current unemployment rate, which is designed to give those workers additional weeks of employment insurance benefits. That pilot project is coming to an end in May and it has to be improved for those groups going forward.

However, my colleague's amendment has nothing to do with that project and I really do not know how to include it in the motion I made. Could the member not make a separate motion about his concern instead of trying to include it with mine? We are not talking about the same thing. His amendment is valid in itself, but it not relevant to my motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, the vote is on the amendment that was just read.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

In terms of future business, on March 24, which will be our first meeting after the constituency week, we will have the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, the Honourable Carla Qualtrough; and the Minister of Labour, the Honourable Filomena Tassi.

On Thursday, March 26, we will have the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the Honourable Ahmed Hussen; and the Minister of Seniors, the Honourable Deb Schulte.

Those will be the next two orders of business.

On your witness lists, please rank your witnesses when you submit your lists for March 20. We will commence that study with witnesses from the CHMC and departmental officials, as indicated earlier, and, of course, the blessing on March 31.

Is there any other business to come before the meeting? Am I forgetting anything?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Did you say March 31, then?

The Chair: Yes. We will start to hear witnesses for this study on March 31.

[*English*]

Is there any other business?

If the committee is in agreement that we adjourn, we are adjourned.

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