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

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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey





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

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• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 21 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. The proceedings today are televised and will be made available via the House of Commons website. The webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Thursday, March 11, the committee will commence its consideration of Bill C-24, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act in regard to additional regular benefits, the Canada Recovery Benefits Act, regarding restriction on eligibility, and another act in response to COVID-19.

I welcome our witnesses to begin our discussion with five minutes of opening remarks, followed by questions.

We're pleased to have here with us the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion; Lori MacDonald, the senior associate deputy minister of Employment and Social Development Canada and chief operating officer for Service Canada; and Graham Flack, the deputy minister of Employment and Social Development Canada.

I understand they're in the process of logging in. Although I've welcomed them, there might be a short delay before they are actually with us.

With that, we are going to start with the sponsor of the bill, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion.

Minister, you have the floor. Welcome to the committee.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion):** Thank you, and hello, everyone. Thanks for having me here today to speak to Bill C-24.

I acknowledge that I'm joining you from the traditional territory of the Tsawwassen and Musqueam first nations.

I am joined here today—or will be joined, as the chair pointed out—by officials from ESDC and Service Canada.

[Translation]

This bill would make important amendments to the Employment Insurance Act, the Canada Recovery Benefits Act and the Customs Act...

[English]

I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but I'm getting massive feedback.

**The Chair:** Minister, I'd like you to hold off for a second.

This is something that happens from time to time. We'll get it resolved and restart the clock.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Widmer):** Minister Qualtrough, could you resume your introduction, your opening statement?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Sure.

[Translation]

This bill would make important amendments to the Employment Insurance Act, the Canada Recovery Benefits Act and the Customs Act that would allow us to continue to support Canadians.

• (1540)

[English]

Last summer and fall, we laid out a plan to continue to support Canada's workforce through the ongoing pandemic. We transitioned from the CERB to a simplified employment insurance program and introduced a suite of recovery benefits to provide income support to workers whose employment continues to be impacted by COVID-19.

At that time, we said we'd monitor labour market changes and make adjustments as needed. We've done that and are following through on our commitment to continue providing certainty for workers.

The bill being proposed is to increase the maximum number of available weeks of EI regular benefits and make sure that Canadians don't face a gap in receiving the support they continue to need right now.

If this bill does not get passed and receive royal assent before the end of March, tens of thousands of Canadians will be notified as early as March 26 that they have exhausted their EI regular benefits, so we need to get this done.

Parallel to this bill, we are making increases, through regulations, to the number of weeks available under the Canada recovery benefit, the Canada recovery caregiving benefit and the Canada recovery sickness benefit, and to secure job-protected leave under the Canada Labour Code.

Let me now discuss the amendments to the EI Act in more detail.

Bill C-24 amends the Employment Insurance Act to increase the number of weeks that workers can claim in EI regular benefits. Workers will now be eligible for up to a maximum of 50 weeks for claims established between September 27, 2020, and September 25, 2021.

[Translation]

It would enable millions of Canadians to continue to receive support while still having access to the essential employment insurance system resources and tools for them to be able to re-enter the labour market.

[English]

Such resources include working while on claim, where workers can keep part of their EI benefits and all earnings from their job. The work-sharing program allows companies to redistribute available work through a voluntary reduction in hours worked by all employees within one or more work units. It also allows employers to retain a full workforce on a reduced workweek, rather than laying off part of their workforce. This keeps workers on the job, which is key to Canada's successful economic recovery.

[Translation]

Our country's labour market is also changing rapidly because of the pandemic. This new reality requires additional skills and training for more workers. It is another good reason to broaden access to the employment insurance system. Out-of-work Canadians would have access to courses and training programs while receiving employment insurance benefits.

[English]

We know that Canadians want to work. Evidence from last year's labour market data clearly shows that when there is work available, Canadians take these jobs.

I also highlight that, as part of this legislation, self-employed workers participating in the EI program would be able to temporarily access EI special benefits with an earning threshold of \$5,000, compared to the previously set threshold of \$7,555. Self-employed workers have also been hard-hit by the pandemic and need this extra support.

[Translation]

I'd also like to speak about travellers returning to Canada and their access to Canada recovery benefits. We have also said clearly that these benefits, and in particular the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, were established to allow Canadians to have paid sick leave when it is not available from their employer.

[English]

The amendments to the Canada Recovery Benefits Act and the Customs Act that are proposed in Bill C-24 would make Canadians

who travel for non-essential reasons ineligible for recovery benefits. However, Canadians who travel internationally for medical treatment that is considered by a medical practitioner to be necessary, or to accompany such a person as an attendant, will remain eligible for recovery benefits, as will Canadians who travel internationally for essential reasons and must self-isolate upon their return to Canada.

[Translation]

The application of these eligibility rules will be retroactive to October 2, 2020, which is when the recovery benefits were introduced after the Canada Recovery Benefits Act received royal assent.

As I mentioned earlier, we are still in a crisis. We'll continue to monitor the labour market and will be there for workers during this difficult period.

[English]

Let me close by restating the importance of passing this legislation in a timely manner. The bill has been in the hands of all members since February 23. All parties have said the bill is straightforward and necessary. I urge all parties to move this bill along as quickly as possible. Let's listen to workers who are relying on EI to pay their bills and support their families.

Thank you.

• (1545)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We're now going to proceed with rounds of questions, beginning with the Conservatives.

Ms. Dancho, please. You have six minutes.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Chair, if you'll allow me before you start my time, could the minister confirm that her officials are with us now? I have a few technical questions to start.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Yes, can you please confirm that?

**The Clerk:** We are still working to get all the officials online right now.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Are any of them available to answer technical questions now?

**The Clerk:** Currently, we have Mr. Andrew Brown.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Okay. Is Mr. Brown able to answer technical questions about the legislation?

**Mr. Andrew Brown (Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Dispute Resolution and International Affairs, Department of Employment and Social Development):** Yes.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to start my time now.

Minister, thank you for being with us today, and thank you, Mr. Brown, for being with us as well.

My technical question concerns clause 2 of the bill.

My understanding is that this is the self-employed clause. It essentially acknowledges that the income of self-employed workers was negatively impacted in 2020, so it lowers their qualifying income threshold from \$7,555 to \$5,000. However, it does so only until September 25, 2021. That is, the EI special benefit program will continue, of course, after September 25, as it's an existing benefit, but only for those who made \$7,555.

Can you explain why that is? Why not just carry that clause 2 up until the end of the year?

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** Ms. Dancho, thanks for that question.

The logic for that date is that it aligns to when the other temporary measures with respect to the EI program would be in place, including the proposed extension of the number of weeks of regular benefits. New claimants after that date would have to meet the threshold of \$7,555, but for any self-employed participant who made a claim before that date, their claim would be established and would continue. They would not see their claims cut off on that date.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Okay—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt, Ms. Dancho. The bells are ringing in the House, so we are obligated to suspend the meeting unless we have unanimous consent to continue.

I would ask if unanimous consent exists to continue until there's 10 minutes before the vote, which will allow us time to pull away. If not, we'll have to suspend right away.

Do we have unanimous consent to continue until 10 minutes before the vote?

We do.

Please go ahead, Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Chair, I am at one minute and 32 seconds, so I'm going to start from there.

I'll just confirm again. Anyone who is qualifying for that benefit now won't automatically get kicked off on September 25 because they only made \$5,000 or less, not \$7,500 plus or less. Is that what you're saying, Mr. Brown?

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** That's correct. If they qualified before that date, they will continue to be eligible to be paid those benefits.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** It's just new applicants after the 25th.

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** That's right.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** I understand it's neat and tidy altogether. I appreciate what you're saying and I'm glad to hear that. I still feel it's a bit of an arbitrary distinction, but I appreciate your explanation.

Can you tell me how many leisure travellers or just travellers in general claimed the CERB before January 11?

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** We know that the total number of claimants at that point would have been something like 1.5 million Canadians. In terms of the number of travellers, we don't have information on the number of people who travelled and applied for the benefit prior to January. At that time, we were not asking people to provide information with respect to whether they had travelled outside of the country.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** You're not sure.

I asked the minister this during our bill briefing and she mentioned that it has to go through CRA and there's this whole process to talk to customs and the border service agents and the like to work that out. It sounds almost like an audit process.

Can you estimate how long it's going to take to root out who's been travelling for leisure purposes after January 11?

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** The after January 11 part is now part of the application process.

People actually have to indicate that when they apply for the benefit, so we have that information as to whether they've indicated that they were travelling or not. Prior to January 11, that was not part of the form—

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** That's because the announcement had not been made.

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** That's correct.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Minister Qualtrough, I'm not going to leave you out. This one is for you. Thank you again for being here today.

I want to just touch on this issue. I know it's a very touchy subject. Over the last week we've been back and forth like a ping-pong ball, saying who's to blame for any delays

The debate day for the bill or the first day that we actually talked about this in the House of Commons was Monday. I'm sure you can understand that this is progressing at lightning speed. Of course, legislation has been doing that for over a year now. I think it was understandable at the beginning. I'm a little more hesitant to say that's an excuse we can use now, a year in.

Can you provide more of an understanding for committee members about why we didn't get this bill in January, for example?

• (1550)

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Thank you. I'm happy to elaborate.

As you said, one of the realities of the situation is that we are constantly monitoring the labour market. We were watching the unemployment rate go up in January. We were watching the labour market participation go down in January. We were watching the second wave of coronavirus hit the country and also result in sporadic regional shutdowns, particularly in eastern Canada.

We gave the bill to the parties around February 23, I think. We put it on the notice paper on February 25, knowing that it was only 11 clauses and a very straightforward and surgical bill aimed at addressing two brief very particular things. We figured that, working together as we had in the past, we'd be able to get this through the House quickly, understanding that we'd already gotten agreement from other parties to move forward on half of the bill, with the international travellers piece.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** My only concern is... Well, I have a few concerns. When we spoke to the Canadian Labour Congress, which was a witness here earlier this week, they mentioned that they spoke to you in early January about their concerns that the 26 weeks would not be substantive enough.

In Manitoba, we were in very strict lockdowns again in mid-November. A number of other provinces were entering them at the same time. I felt like we knew this was coming. I feel all of the blame is being put on the opposition Conservatives, but I do feel that this bill should have been brought forward much sooner. I'm a little bit disappointed that it was not. You're saying you went as fast as you could. I appreciate that.

The other day in committee, Mr. Vaughan said that because of the process it has to go to the Treasury Board, finance and ultimately to cabinet. Did that process take quite a long time on your end? Is it the bureaucracy of the Liberal government machine that perhaps held this up?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** No, quite frankly not.

In fact the nice thing about how—

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Was Mr. Vaughan wrong in that regard?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** No, but I would like to explain the process side.

The piece that was more difficult to navigate—and officials can elaborate—was the EI side. We had built in the ability to add additional weeks to recovery benefits through regulation, anticipating that we very well may have to. That process is very efficient. We knew that we had a certain amount of time before benefits ran out to be able to assess real-time labour market conditions.

On the EI side, we had to make changes to the legislation itself because, of course, employment insurance law isn't meant to address a pandemic. We've lived that for the past year. As Andrew said, it's not simply a matter of just.... It's a very complicated process, and they can do better justice to the complications than I.

With the EI amendments that are before you today, we wanted to make sure that we only had to open up this law once. How many exact weeks of extension could we afford to make sure it was equitable with the recovery benefits, but also to make sure that we weren't constantly having to go back to Parliament to open up this law and add weeks?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

Next we're going to Ms. Young please, for six minutes.

**Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you Minister Qualtrough for joining us today.

It's sometimes easy to forget that we are here in service to Canadians who are directly impacted by the decisions we make.

Since Bill C-24 was introduced, I've heard almost daily from my constituents in London West, concerned about their EI benefits running out and asking if the targeted changes in this bill were already in effect so that they could breathe a little easier.

On Tuesday we heard from labour leaders about how important it was that this legislation be passed. I wonder if we could get your thoughts on the importance of getting this bill through the House this week.

• (1555)

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Thank you.

Actually, the importance cannot be understated. We face a reality where the 1.7 million Canadians who access recovery benefits will have no disruption in their benefits in order for them to be extended, whereas EI recipients don't have that certainty.

Canadians will start exhausting their benefits the week before the 21st. They'll be looking to apply for benefits on March 26, I believe. Officials can clarify, but March 21 allows us time to make the system changes that we need to put in place in order for the system to be ready to receive those applications on March 26.

Can you confirm that, Andrew? I babbled a little there.

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** That's correct. To have the ability to make those changes to the EI system in a seamless way, we would be looking to have royal assent of those proposed changes to the legislation by that weekend. I believe it's Friday, March 19.

**Ms. Kate Young:** Minister Qualtrough, what would be the impact for Canadians if we don't get this legislation through this committee until the House sits again? I guess that would be the week of March 21.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** It would be really difficult for EI recipients, because they would try to apply for another two weeks and they would be unsuccessful. They may in fact then call Service Canada to see what's going on and find out that their benefits have been exhausted. They may then try to apply for the CRB, but of course they would be told that because they had an open EI claim it wasn't possible.

It would create real chaos for Canadians. Also, our back-end systems would really be messed up. I guess that's the layperson's way of putting it. It really isn't an option for Canadians. If we want to continue with EI, we need to make this change before.

**Ms. Kate Young:** I wanted to talk about how our EI system turned 80 years old last summer. My understanding is that some of the programming language dates back to the 1960s. It's not necessarily in sync with modern Canada.

Last fall, we committed to modernizing the EI system. In a letter to you, the EI commission expressed hope that the government would launch an independent commission soon to do a more thorough review.

We've made some changes over the last few months, but I'm sure your experiences going through the COVID pandemic and C-24 revealed some of the problems with the system. There's clearly more to be done.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Absolutely. To say that our existing system is clunky and complicated is probably an understatement. Successive governments have built and rebuilt and changed and modified different components, and it has been a Herculean effort on the part of officials to keep this system going and paying Canadians every two weeks through all of this.

There are two tracks going on right now around EI. There is the immediate track to make the changes needed to pivot during COVID—the law before you is one of those examples—and to determine what comes immediately next. As was explained, on September 25 all the temporary flexibilities within the system expire and the system goes back to the way it was pre-COVID. What in that batch of temporary changes should we keep as permanent, if any? Should we extend their temporariness? What would that look like?

Then the broader conversation that this pandemic has afforded us is to really dig in and modernize EI so that it works for all workers, because we clearly learned from this pandemic that it hasn't kept up with the way Canadians work.

**Ms. Kate Young:** Is the department looking at an independent commission to review the EI system?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** We have been working with different stakeholder groups, including the commissioner for employers, the commissioner for workers, the Canadian Labour Congress and other union groups. The plan is not to have a full-blown commission but to do consultations to allow us the flexibility of moving quickly on the things on which there is consensus now—things that have been talked about and studied forever that we can move on more quickly—and to not get those immediate advancements bogged down in the more complicated, longer-term conversations that need to happen, for example, around a benefit for the self-employed.

• (1600)

**Ms. Kate Young:** For now, our focus is on Bill C-24 and getting it passed as quickly as possible.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Today, yes, it is. However, I know that you are studying EI at HUMA, and I am happy to come back and have the broader systemic conversation with you all because there are some really exciting opportunities.

**Ms. Kate Young:** We appreciate that. Thank you.

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

Thank you, Ms. Qualtrough. Yes, I think we have a date for your appearance on that.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Do you? That's excellent.

**The Chair:** Yes.

[*Translation*]

We will now move on to a round of questions, beginning with Ms. Chabot, and will suspend the meeting afterwards.

Ms. Chabot, you have the floor.

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

Good afternoon, Minister.

I'd like to thank you, Minister, and the representatives of your department, for attending our meeting.

To begin with a compliment, we all agree that you were never unemployed this year, with a pandemic that hit everyone hard. You had to respond to the needs of nine million workers who, one year ago in March, found themselves unemployed from one day to the next.

I don't really have any technical questions for you about this bill. When all is said and done, its purpose is twofold: to extend regular employment insurance benefits to 50 weeks, which is until September 25, and to correct the situation with respect to the \$1,000 benefit paid under the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit to people travelling for non-essential reasons.

It's urgent to take action, but what we have condemned from the very outset is not the fact that no action was taken, but rather not having shown more foresight. That was what I was worrying about last September in connection with Bill C-4 and that is still my concern today.

You said that you were monitoring the labour market with a view to adapting your programs, but over the past year, one thing has become clear, and that is that the status quo is not the answer. What will happen on September 25, 2021? The employment insurance system as we know it will be unable to meet needs during crises—there have in fact been others in our history—and it's not meeting them in normal unemployment circumstances.

So how do you plan to govern over the coming months to make sure that on September 25, 2021, a permanent program will be in place?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Thank you for your question, Ms. Chabot.

It worries me too. On September 25, we should have a system in place for all workers because, to put it bluntly, the economic crisis won't be over. We know that. Will there be a third wave? We don't know and we also don't know much about the situation awaiting us or what the unemployment rate will be. One thing is certain, and that is that we will still be in a difficult economic situation here in Canada. However, we will continue to be there for workers and to invest in their training.

Some of the changes to make our employment insurance system more flexible were welcomed by many partners and unions. They don't want to return to the system in place before the pandemic. We're working closely with employers and workers to determine which of the temporary changes to make things more flexible should be left in place. They might be only temporary or they could become permanent. The outcome will depend on several factors, of course.

In September 2021, we wanted to introduce a better system than the one we had in March 2020. That will be the legacy of this pandemic for workers.

[English]

Graham or Andrew, do you have anything to add?

• (1605)

[Translation]

**Mr. Graham Flack (Deputy Minister, Employment and Social Development, Department of Employment and Social Development):** I'd like to add a comment, Minister.

Making policy changes gives us hope, but the limitations of the system also need to be factored in.

As Ms. Young mentioned, the regulatory process that established the employment insurance system we have today is now 49 years old, I believe. It will take more than a year, probably a year and a half, to make some of the major changes. One of the limitations of the system is that it isn't flexible enough to allow permanent major changes to be made quickly by September. That's why the minister had to fall back on an assortment of temporary changes and to look into what could be done to make the system more flexible.

The committee is studying the future of employment insurance. It will have to consider the possibility that technical changes could endanger the system and take the time required to make the changes safely so as not to destroy it.

[English]

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Graham, is it fair to say that not only will it be a matter of what we do but the sequencing of what we do will matter in terms of how we impact the systems?

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** It's this pace of change that worries me. I know that there are formalities to comply with and that the system's functionalities need to be taken into account.

My greatest worry is that the status quo could remain, and require us to work with the current system when it kicks back in on September 25. Barely 38% of women, certain immigrants for example, would be covered because they often perform atypical jobs. There is also the fact that employment insurance special benefits and sickness benefits will be inadequate and fail to meet needs. It's important to adopt permanent measures, and we should address this problem.

**The Chair:** There are only 10 minutes left.

Were going to suspend the meeting to vote.

[English]

Ms. Chabot, you will get another turn, but there are 10 minutes before we vote.

Madam Minister, and to your officials, please ensure that you're back after the vote.

The same goes for you, colleagues. Once we vote, let's get back and we'll be able to continue at that time.

The committee stands suspended.

• (1605)

(Pause)

• (1635)

**The Chair:** We are now back in session.

We have now been joined by Cliff Groen, senior assistant deputy minister, benefits and integrated services branch with Service Canada; and Elisha Ram, associate assistant deputy minister, skills and employment branch. We have Andrew Brown, who was with us before we suspended and is back. He's the assistant deputy minister, policy, dispute resolution and international affairs. We also have Michael MacPhee, director general, employment insurance benefits processing, benefit and integrated services branch, Service Canada. Also, the witnesses who were with us and were introduced prior to the suspension are back.

We're in session and ready to resume with questions, beginning with Mr. Blaikie, please, for six minutes.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Thank you very much.

Madam Minister, you said the other day in the House debate that this bill was meant to address some urgent and simple needs in respect of the employment insurance system.

I'm wondering if you can explain to people who are suffering from long COVID, cancer and other kinds of conditions and who have run out of their EI sickness benefits, why their situation isn't urgent in your opinion and the opinion of your government.



**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** I think that's an unfair characteristic of our compassion for people who are sick or injured and ill.

As I've said, this particular piece of legislation is very straightforward, time limited, surgical, as I've described it. It's related to COVID, to extend EI regular benefits and to address international non-essential travellers' eligibility. There are very important conversations to be had around EI sickness benefits, which will be had in the context of the broader EI modernization conversation.

Sick leave has been a core public health measure for us since the beginning. You could get CERB if you were ill or self-isolating or quarantined from COVID. We created a specific sickness benefit—recovery sickness benefit—and we are doubling the weeks. People who have COVID can access up to four weeks now of sickness benefits.

The first thing we did in COVID was to waive the one-week period in the EI sickness benefit and say that you don't need a note to claim these benefits. They're not mutually exclusive.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** People's 15 weeks of sickness benefit have run out now, and in some cases they are still sick because there have been delays in their treatment as a result of the effects of the pandemic, even though they're not necessarily sick with COVID.

In other cases, people are getting sick with what's becoming known as “long COVID”, something that in other countries there's been more action on. It's not something we've seen a lot of targeted action on here in Canada to the extent that we've seen in other places, and because their condition is new, they're falling through the cracks. They're falling through the cracks in respect to government support, and they're also falling through the cracks in respect of private insurers who aren't recognizing the condition and they've run out of financial support. It is urgent and it is related to the pandemic, yet it's not happening.

The other criterion you mentioned in the House the other day—and you just mentioned it again—was that you wanted to have surgical, simple legislative reforms. To change the sickness benefit from 15 to 50 weeks, all you have to do is change a two-digit number in the act.

Could you provide an example of a more simple legislative change?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** A legislative change, with all due respect, has to be deliverable, and one of the things I've tried to explain as best I could is how precarious our EI systems are. Moving forward with the one commitment to change the number of weeks for EI regular benefits means that we can guarantee its delivery without compromising our systems.

Doing these changes successively, not at the same time, to give us the time to work towards a broader modernization where we understand exactly where sickness benefits fit in, and committing to increasing the weeks of sickness benefits, feels like the more prudent course of action, so that we don't in any way jeopardize, bi-weekly, the payment of regular benefits too.

I'm happy to have someone explain the technical side of it. That's the best I can do.

• (1640)

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** With all due respect, Minister, it has been over a year since the House of Commons passed a motion calling for an extension of the EI sickness benefits. Your government committed to an extension of the EI sickness benefits in the last election.

How much more time do you need? It's starting to have a serious impact on people in the pandemic context who have experienced delays in medical treatment as a result of the pandemic and who are suffering from a new condition as a result of the pandemic.

How much more time do you need? Going back to when the House of Commons first passed this motion, before the pandemic struck, and which has since had a unanimous consent motion... I take it you weren't in the House that day, when the House unanimously called on the government to extend the sickness benefit to 50 weeks.

How much more time do you need?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** I can't give you the number of weeks or months it will take to make this particular change, but it will be part of the broader comprehensive changes we make to the system. We are not in a position to do this right now, but that doesn't mean we won't do it. We are as committed as ever to doing it.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** How much correspondence have you received in opposition to extending the EI sickness benefit, and would you be willing to anonymize those letters and share them with the committee? I as an MP haven't received any correspondence from anyone. We have a unanimous decision of the House of Commons, and there have been petitions on this going back years. In fact one of the largest petitions in Canadian history is on the EI sickness benefit.

I'm wondering where the opposition to extending the EI sickness benefit is coming from. In whose interest are you acting when you rag the puck on this and fail to get it done?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** As I said, Mr. Blaikie, we are committed to doing this. This will be done. It has to be part of the broader conversation around EI. We are not in a position to do it right now, which doesn't mean we're not doing it. We have to focus on the bill before us today, which does two things, and we need it to do those two things so that EI recipients of regular benefits don't see any disruptions in their benefit in the coming weeks. That's my priority and that's what I'm focused on with this piece of law.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** With all due respect, Minister, I wish you would give the same consideration to people whose EI sickness benefits have already run out and who are in the very position that you're saying we need to, and I agree with you, avoid—having people whose regular benefits are going to run out at the end of the month and who will find themselves in a position where they don't have financial support.

We already know of people whose EI sickness benefit has run out because it's for only 15 weeks. They're in that position already and you don't seem to feel that it's a priority to respond to that very real need. I can't for the life of me figure out the difference between somebody who's on EI regular benefits and can't get back to work and needs financial support and somebody who's really sick, whose benefits have run out and who can't support themselves financially.

It seems to me that this change meets all of your criteria and that we are good to go. I'm going to be presenting an amendment to that effect later. I'm hoping, with the co-operation of members who have already voted for this extension in the House, that we'll be able to get it into the legislation and that you'll provide the royal recommendation it needs to proceed.

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

Next we're going to go to Ms. Dancho.

Go ahead, please, for five minutes.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I actually have a similar question to the one our Bloc colleague asked you previously. The sunset date for these benefits in Bill C-24 is, as you know, September 25, 2021—about seven months away.

It seemed to me you mentioned there's going to be a new EI system and that this will be the answer. The programs won't get cut off, but there's going to be a new more inclusive EI system. Is my understanding of your response correct?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** There won't be a brand new different EI system at the end of September, so I apologize if that's the impression I gave. What I'm trying to explain is that we need to make decisions about what the EI system will look like at the end of September. Absent that, it will revert to what the EI system looked like before the pandemic.

Right now, in order to determine which ones will remain or which ones will be made permanent or which ones might be modified again, we are looking at the flexibilities and changes that we put in. What I was trying to convey was that there are a couple of waves of conversation about the EI system that are happening at this time.

• (1645)

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Right, so there will be some sort of amended system. Is it going to be like a transition?

My concern is that September 25 will be here before we know it, and as I've mentioned in the House and on several occasions, I don't feel that we've received any sort of strategic or coherent plan for how we're going to get all of these jobs that have been lost.... Almost a million—just over 800,000 jobs—have permanently gone,

and the CFIB estimates that there may be three million jobs eliminated because up to 220,000 small businesses will, tragically, close or could close because of the pandemic.

My concern is that you're saying we might amend the EI system to make up for any differences, but I'm not quite confident that in that answer there's going to be a plan to roll folks off the CERB or CRB and the new EI extension and onto this new haphazard-sounding EI system. I'm just a bit concerned about that.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** I apologize. I don't mean for it to sound haphazard. In fact, throughout this pandemic there have been dates on which our legislative authorities or temporary measures have expired. We had one last September. We have one this coming September. We have one in June around some of the other business measures.

Looking to that date as the date on which these temporary measures end, and in my case for EI, we're already turning our minds to what comes next for the exact reason you mentioned—so that workers don't see any kind of cliff or disruption of benefits. However, it is premature right now, because I don't know what the economy or what the labour market will look like—just like the conversation we had in the previous round—for me to even speculate as to what those changes might look like or where the economy is going to be in July or August.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** I hope the goal is ultimately to get people back to work and to do whatever you can at the federal level to ensure—

**Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.):** Chair, on a point of order, is it my audio or is it the system audio that has reduced both conversations to a very faint echo?

**The Chair:** I think it's yours. I'm hearing them fine.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** We hear you fine.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Okay. I apologize. I'll try to see if there's a resolution.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Chair, I was paused at three minutes and nine seconds, so I'm going to continue from there.

Minister, I think that ultimately we do need a plan to get people back to work in some fashion. I'm really hoping that your government unveils, in the budget or something, some sort of strategic plan to unleash the powerful workforce of 20 million that we have in Canada and really bring back jobs, facilitate that and have government get out of the way so we can get those jobs back.

I don't think any party would like to see people permanently on EI because there are no job opportunities.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** No.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** I appreciate your saying that. It helps the confidence level, I think, to hear that you also don't want up to a million Canadians on EI forever.

Some of my concern with the ability to get a new—and haphazard may not be the word—EI system ready for September is the CRB-EI issue. I talked to you about it during the bill briefing, and I've asked several questions about the folks who can't get on the CRB because they have an open EI claim.

The CRA official who came here mentioned that there was this phone number at ESDC that they could call, and I know that your officials confirmed that there isn't one, which I appreciate, but that there is a task force you're working on.

As you know, there are a number of heartbreaking stories of single moms and parents with newborn babies who are really stuck. They can't get on the CRB because they're stuck in the EI system. Do you have anything new to add to that?

The CRA guy mentioned that it's only a couple of thousand people out of the millions who have been successful, but still, that's a couple of thousand Canadians who are not able to get any of these supports.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** As you have rightfully said, the challenge here is wanting to make sure that we don't have somebody on two different benefits at the same time.

Even if someone has exhausted the EI benefits, they remain with an open claim for quite a significant amount of time, which then prohibits them from accessing the recovery benefits, because the system flags them as having an open EI claim even though they've exhausted their benefits.

I would guess that it would be Cliff or Elisha who could give us the best update on this.

I'll let one of you gentlemen help here.

**Mr. Cliff C. Groen (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Benefits and Integrated Services Branch, Service Canada, Department of Employment and Social Development):** Thanks, Minister.

We certainly are aware of that situation and, as the member indicated, we are working closely with CRA.

We have implemented a new approach in those types of cases. Because we do need to ensure that people do not receive both benefits at the same time, there's an ongoing data match with us and CRA. We have implemented an escalation process in which, when CRA is contacted by a client where there is an inability to apply for the benefit, there's an escalation process between our two organizations to be able to quickly dig into that particular issue, confirm whether or not they are no longer entitled to EI and then quickly, on the CRA side, be able to release that so the person can proceed.

If you are aware of any specific clients who have that issue, by all means, we will be glad to look into it.

• (1650)

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** There are many.

Chair, I know we are over time.

**The Chair:** You are well past.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** I'll just say that we will connect with you, Mr. Groen, and with the minister's office on that, because we have several. Thank you.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Housefather, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was really impressed by Ms. Dancho's ability to know exactly where she was in terms of time. That is very impressive.

Minister, it's great to have you here and the officials. Thank you so much for testifying today.

Minister, you talked about the importance of getting this legislation through committee and through the House this week. Can you tell us how many people's benefits would be disrupted if we were not able to do that?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** I sure can. Let me just grab it so I get it correct.

Immediately at the end of March, it will be tens of thousands. Again, Elisha and Cliff can give the precise numbers, but the number I can give you is that 676,000 people are expected to benefit from these additional weeks of benefits.

Cliff or Elisha, can you give him the reverse number? Mine was the positive number. How many people will start going off benefits in that wave that will happen?

**Mr. Cliff C. Groen:** Sure, Minister.

As of the beginning of April, it would be over 40,000 individuals who would lose their benefits. By the beginning of May, it would be more than 200,000. Then, by the end of June, it would be 600,000 Canadians.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** A substantial number of people would be directly impacted if we didn't do this.

Minister, you talked about a "surgical" bill. I think everyone in the committee, from all parties, is sympathetic to the idea of extending sickness benefits. We all care about people who are sick and on EI and run out of benefits. You've obviously made the determination that, due to technical reasons, combining these two actions in this one bill would be problematic.

Could you or the officials explain what technical issues prevent both changes from being made at the same time?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** I will defer to the officials on the technical issues. I think I did the best I could.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Graham Flack:** Let me start, and then I'll throw it over to Cliff.

Just to give members a sense of this, we've been working since December, anticipating that the committee may decide to extend the number of weeks of benefits. Given the nature of the COBOL-based system we have, it will take a full four months for us to be able to implement an extension in the number of weeks. For something like the sickness benefit that Mr. Blaikie mentioned, to extend the maximum number of weeks is actually a major system change. It's not like the one we're doing right now. It changes the fundamental system logic. A change like that takes a minimum of nine months to do.

The challenge is that with a COBOL-based system, simultaneously processing major changes massively increases the risk that we cause irreparable damage to the system. Part of the issue is that were Parliament to make a decision around a particular change, that would preclude us from being able to do other changes. For example, if there was a decision to extend the sickness benefit beyond the current maximum number of weeks, that would preclude us from being able to do other changes to the system for September. It's a function of the limitations of a system whose code is almost as old as me.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** If I have understood correctly, Mr. Flack and Madam Minister, you are saying that people could be penalized. If we were to decide today to try and do more than what is proposed in Bill C-24, approximately 40,000 people could lose their benefits in the week following the changes, and this number could be much higher if the passage of the bill were to be delayed until April or May.

We can't make these changes simultaneously because we're not sure we can do so without harming a lot of people.

Is that correct?

• (1655)

**Mr. Graham Flack:** In December, we had already done the work required to add the extra weeks of benefits to the bill. With your approval, we'd be able to implement it by March 19

However, for any additional changes, a choice would have to be made between the measures earmarked for the month of September and others that the committee members would like to see. As our system is rather old and limited, it's impossible to simply make a list of desired changes and implement them all at the same time.

I know that you're discussing the future of employment insurance. It's useful for our people to explain these limitations to help you with measures and policies for the future, and also to keep you informed about could be done and how long it would take.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Flack and Mr. Housefather.

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

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

Let's be clear, Minister. We are very much aware of the scope of the bill under discussion and about the fact that it's urgent to take action. You already know that we support the bill, because I said so in the House. However, from my questions and questions from oth-

ers, you have no doubt understood our concerns about predictability.

I also find that the pandemic is taking the blame for a lot of things. You say that we need to monitor the employment market, but that we already know that our economy will not have recovered fully in September. Some employment market sectors will still be in trouble, and the recovery will be slow. We can anticipate that now, and it was predictable when Bill C-4 was introduced after proration.

What worries us is taking ad hoc temporary measures. Were not challenging the fact that they are necessary, but one day we will have to have something both permanent and predictable for our regular system and for the special sickness benefits.

What's your timeline for us to get there?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** I fully agree that it's urgent to make immediate changes and on the issue of temporary measures. We also need a modern system that will enable us to make changes without having to deal with technical problems like the ones we were just speaking about. Take the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) for example. We had to make decisions on a month-to-month basis. We didn't have a lot of latitude. We didn't know what the pandemic had in store for us.

As for Canada recovery benefits, I wanted more latitude for Canadians for a year. That's why we passed an act last September allowing the introduction of a number of temporary recovery measures.

[*English*]

This was to create predictability and certainty for Canadians. We also built in, and we all agreed about the necessity to build in, additional weeks. We then had to make sure there was equity within the EI system. We had to make sure nobody got less than 26 weeks, because that's what somebody on the recovery benefit was going to get. We had to make sure nobody on EI got less than \$500, because that's what somebody on the recovery benefit was going to get.

Now that we've decided people need more support, more weeks, we need to make sure there's equity between these two systems, in particular given that Canadians pay into the system of EI and not into the recovery benefit system. For me, this runway of a year was a lot easier to manage in terms of predictability and certainty for Canadians. We weren't telling them the week before that this was going to change or this was coming up. I think we've managed it well. I think Canadians were happy when they found out that we intended to add benefits on. I don't feel as though, and they didn't tell me, they were rushed. They may have shared that with you all.

Again, I appreciate your support, because we have to get this through today.

Thank you very much.

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Mr. Blaikie, go ahead, please, for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Thank you.

I'm going to tell you why I don't accept the answer on the EI sickness benefit. The fact of the matter is that these people's benefits have already run out. This is not a new issue. It's something that has been raised many times before, and the job search requirement in the CRB excluded sick Canadians who were having ongoing problems with a chronic condition, whether cancer, long COVID or something else. That was something that the NDP raised with you, Minister, at the time in terms of the effect of that job search requirement.

What I can't accept is that the Canadian government, in this time of crisis, would throw up its hands and say, "Well, the 15-week benefit for people who are chronically ill in one way or another during the pandemic has expired and there's nothing we can do about it." That's effectively the position we're in. There are already people who are not getting the financial assistance they need. I don't think it's acceptable for the government to quit on them, which is what's happening. They already can't pay their bills.

If the people on EI regular benefits deserve a solution by the end of the month—and they do—so too do the people with EI sickness benefits, which were far less to begin with. They deserve a similar solution. I'm not hearing any solutions from you. I'm just hearing about why you can't move ahead, rather than what you propose to do for these people who already don't have income support.

When it comes to issues about the CERB, the other thing that I think is missing from this bill, if legislation is required, is anything to do with a low-income CERB repayment amnesty.

One of the issues across the country but especially here in Manitoba is the situation of kids who are coming out of foster care during the pandemic. They were told, in some cases, by government authorities at various levels that they should apply for CERB instead of social assistance, which is what they might normally have done if they didn't have a job. Finding employment in the current circumstances is very difficult. They did that, in good faith, thinking they were eligible. These are some of the people who are now being asked to repay the CERB.

Has your department quantified how much money you actually think you're going to get back from any of these people? What is the number?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** I'll defer the quantum to officials for accuracy, but I can assure you that we remain committed to not putting people in a position of having to repay when they don't

have the money to pay. That's why we have given people an interest-free year to pay any taxes they owe. We haven't asked people to repay.

What we're trying to do is to get as many people as possible to meet the eligibility criteria. We are working with them, getting their taxes filed and figuring out how we can put them in the best position to not have to repay. If they do have to repay, no one is required to do it at the time. We'll work with them to have very flexible payments. I understand those will necessarily have to be low amounts. There won't be penalties. There won't be interest for anybody who erred in good faith, but I can—

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** That debt hanging over their head is not—

**The Chair:** Mr. Blaikie, your time is well past. You took two minutes to ask the question. The least you can do is let her answer it, even though we are out of time.

Are you finished, Minister?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Yes. I don't know if the officials have a number, but I think that's a CRA question.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Flack.

**Mr. Graham Flack:** The reason there isn't a number is that the way Parliament designed the benefit wasn't just looking at the 2019 tax income to determine eligibility. People could also use the first three months of the year, so it could be any 12 consecutive months.

That's what's taking CRA time, in terms of giving people the chance to explain whether they had additional income that would put them over the income threshold. They're working with them, as you indicated, Minister, on flexibility on the repayment side.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Flack and Mr. Blaikie.

Next we have Ms. Falk, please, for five minutes.

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

Minister, I want to thank you as well for coming to committee. I appreciate when ministers are willing to come and especially take questions from the opposition.

Something I want to touch on quickly are the exemptions. I noticed in the bill, but also in your opening remarks, the exemptions when it comes to medical travel internationally and people being able to access this benefit. I totally understand that, because in Canada there are some treatments that are not available for whatever reason—it could be bureaucracy or whatnot—or have not been approved yet, so people go elsewhere. I appreciate that the government has acknowledged that sometimes people travel with people as well.

If someone leaves the country for compassionate reasons, whether that is taking care of an ailing parent, grandparent or child, a spouse even, in another country, or maybe they could be attending a funeral—and I think we have to be very careful not to assume that every other country is in the same status that we are, with restrictions and lockdowns and that type of thing, as we've seen with the U.K.—are those people excluded from accessing these benefits?

• (1705)

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Thank you for this really important question.

What we've done with this process is leaned on the existing quarantine system of the Canada Border Services Agency and the Public Health Agency. There are lists of types of travel and types of work that upon re-entry into Canada, depending on where you fit, you have to quarantine or not. The vast majority of Canadians have to quarantine.

If you are required to quarantine under the Quarantine Act then, no, you will not be eligible for benefits for those two weeks. That would likely cover the examples you have given, not the ones at the beginning—

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** You're saying that it was intentional to leave out people travelling for compassionate reasons.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** The intent was to use the quarantine system that existed and not to create yet another system for Canadians, and another set of lists and rules on quarantine for decision-makers, when the public had become used to this system and understood they had to quarantine.

If you have to quarantine, if you're ordered to quarantine upon re-entry into Canada, you will not, unless you meet one of the exemptions you mentioned at the beginning, be eligible for these benefits for two weeks.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you, Minister.

Chair, I'd like to pass the rest of my time to Ms. Dancho.

**The Chair:** Ms. Dancho, please.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Mr. Chair, could you tell me how much time there is?

**The Chair:** You have just under two minutes.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Okay.

Minister, if you'll allow me, I'd really appreciate the opportunity, since I was expecting supplementaries and mains today and what I'm going to ask about is coming down the pipe in two weeks, to ask about CELA and NNELS.

Would you grant me that opportunity?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Yes.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

As you know, three million Canadians who have print and visual impairments, like blindness, cerebral palsy and the like, are provided with accessible learning material from these national non-profits, CELA and NNELS.

I first learned about this program in my former job with the province. CELA and NNELS help provide these resources to rural communities, which, as you know, have very limited resources with their libraries being much smaller.

When they approached me to say that the government is planning to phase out this very small amount of money, which is \$4 million of funding over the next four years, I was very concerned. I have a lot of MPs telling me that they're getting complaints from their constituents about this.

I would ask that you consider in the next two weeks ensuring that this funding does not get cut, and I'd love for you to respond. It would be great if you could confirm that you will keep this funding. Could you let me and the committee know if you're planning to cut...?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** The bottom line is that we are not going to let these organizations flounder because of COVID. We have worked very hard as a government on accessible publishing. It started four years ago with the Marrakesh treaty. We put in place this working group with the publishing industry and NNELS and CELA. Everybody was going to work together with the common goal of making publishing accessible by creating books accessible at birth, so we wouldn't need organizations to convert these books into accessible formats. We all agreed on a work plan. CELA and NNELS were at the table. In the fall economic statement, we announced the next three years in this transition, but it has become....

We've been working with these organizations. I'm meeting with them on Monday. We are not going to let people not have access to books. I wish they hadn't publicly raised quite such an alarm. I have already apologized to them that they felt they had to do that. They are going to be fine. Their funding is going to be stable. COVID has changed so many of our timelines around these kinds of journeys. I'm totally on top of this, and we have conveyed that. I'm meeting with them on Monday.

• (1710)

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Dancho and Minister.

The last questioner is Mr. Vaughan, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Thank you.

Just to be clear, compassionate grounds is a grounds for exemption under the program if CBSA agrees. Is that not right?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Yes, but then they wouldn't have been put into quarantine. I guess what I'm saying is—

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** But there are compassionate grounds.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** There are for sure, yes. I guess what I was saying was that, for us, the system looks at who's been told they have to quarantine. If you've been told you have to quarantine, you're not eligible for those two weeks, but if you have been told you don't have to—

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Got it. I just wanted to establish that there are compassionate grounds.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Thank you for clarifying that. You're right.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Okay.

In terms of Ms. Dancho's comments regarding the paraphrasing of my words, I wish she was as precise with my words as she is with the time and had put them all in there. It is not just the issue of pulling funding through to make these programs work.

There is also the laborious task of making sure the legislation is drafted to execute these plans. That also takes time to get through the various approval bodies before you land it on the floor of Parliament. Is that not true?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Absolutely. There's also building consensus among stakeholders and partners and employers, and understanding the impact on the seven-year funding cycle of EI. There's just a lot to this.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** In opposition, if we go too fast then we didn't consult, and if we go too slow then we've taken too long. We have to land it perfectly and then hope it gets better through the committee process.

Speaking of the committee process, I realize that, next to the chair, I'm the longest-serving member of Parliament—it makes me feel very strange, because I think I just arrived, quite frankly—in terms of this committee. I've been here for maternity benefit changes to EI, bereavement changes to EI, sickness changes to EI, seasonal work changes to EI, longer support period proposals to change EI, easier access and standardized access changes to EI, temporary workers being included in the EI program as well as gig workers being accommodated in the EI program. Those are all motions that have passed Parliament.

If I heard you correctly, Mr. Flack, if we made any of those changes, we'd have to wait nine months before we got to the next one on the list. A comprehensive overhaul is what's required, not a piece-by-piece one, because that could take us 20 years. Is that roughly the challenge we're facing with the computer system?

**Mr. Graham Flack:** Not all the changes are the same. For example, extending the number of weeks, which we're doing now, is a four-month change that we've been working on.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** But you can't change the other ones until that one's done.

**Mr. Graham Flack:** Some we can do simultaneously if they don't.... It's more complicated than that. Some you can safely do together, but some of the major changes that have been proposed are 18 to 24 months with the current system. The reason we—

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** If we did all of those together—I'm sorry, but I have only so much time here—would there not be an impact on the rates that employers pay, the rates that employees pay or the draw on the general revenues and the general budget?

To accommodate all of those changes simultaneously, there is an economic impact that generates either government debt or government rates being increased, because EI is a self-funded program.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Yes.

**Mr. Graham Flack:** As a self-funded program...yes.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** If we did that, the Conservatives would have the choice to fund it through either tax revenue or the fees that employers and employees pay, the premiums they pay into the system, in order to protect the integrity of the whole system for everybody. We can't just make these changes and snap our fingers and hope there isn't an economic impact. There is a budget that has to be approached on this issue.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Absolutely. We have to understand the impact on premiums for both employers and employees. We also have to understand the consequences to the overall EI account, which has to self-replenish every seven years, legally, under law. There is absolutely an economic component to this.

Then there's the strategic sequencing of all the different changes we may want to do. Some we could do without impacting the system. Some we may want to sequence differently. It's a bit of a Tetris game, I would say. It's one that we are working hard to plow through, but it is not as easy, no.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Do you ever wish you were the captain in *Star Trek* and could just say, "Make it so", as the opposition seems to think you can?

The other question I have is this. We've seen that when we do wholesale computer changes at the government, we either get Phoenix—the Conservatives thought they could just go to a private vendor and have them rewire the computers—or get the NDP's response, which is just to hire thousands of public servants to process these and computer be damned.

We have to land the changes to EI at the same time we change the computer system. That's a large budget item that can't simply be done through a private member's motion. We need to attach a budget to the changes and we need to effectively transition between the risk of Phoenix and the risk of sustaining a system that's run on COBOL. That's the challenge we have to manage as we fix EI. That's what's taking so long. It's not a question of whether or not we can get it to Parliament sooner or later.

• (1715)

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** The most important investment we will make in EI will be in our systems, absolutely, 100%.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** If you're going to make the comprehensive changes, you need comprehensive funding.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** Thank you.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being with us and for sticking it out through the suspension and the vote. That concludes our rounds of questions.

Minister, you're welcome to stay but you're free to leave. We're going to move now to clause-by-clause.

To the officials who are here, I understand you will be staying with us in case there are some questions on the technical or policy side as we consider the bill line by line, so I thank you for that.

Minister, you have graciously agreed to come before us on the supplementary estimates, the main estimates and EI, so we know we'll be seeing you again soon and we look forward to it.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Yes, I'll see you soon. Take care. Thank you.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Mr. Chair, if I may just do a really quick positive point of order, I just want to thank the minister for staying throughout the votes and the 30 minutes. We really appreciate her giving us her time today.

Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that, Ms. Dancho.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We are meeting to consider Bill C-24, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, additional regular benefits, the Canada Recovery Benefits Act, restriction on eligibility, and another act in response to COVID-19.

I want to welcome the officials who are here to help us with policy questions and I think the next order of business is to call clause one.

Colleagues, please use the raise hand function so we can keep a speaking order.

(On clause 1)

**The Chair:** Is there any discussion?

Mr. Blaikie.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I believe I gave notice of an amendment to clause 1, so I'd like to proceed to move that amendment.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Blaikie, and yes, we have your amendment.

Bill C-24 seeks to amend the Employment Insurance Act by increasing the number of weeks paid under part 1 of that act under certain circumstances.

This amendment attempts to increase the number of weeks of payments to a claimant, in the case of prescribed illness, injury or quarantine, from 15 to 50 weeks, therefore allowing people to have access to these payments for longer than they can currently under the Employment Insurance Act.

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

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

In the opinion of the chair, the amendment as proposed requires a royal recommendation since it imposes a new charge on the public treasury, and I therefore rule the amendment inadmissible.

Mr. Blaikie, you have your hand up. Is there something else you want to say?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I do. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to challenge your ruling, and I'm happy to motivate that challenge if it's all right with you to proceed to that now.

**The Chair:** I understand that a challenge to the chair's ruling is not debatable, so I now hand it over to the clerk to see if the chair's ruling will be sustained.

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

● (1720)

Thank you, colleagues.

Mr. Blaikie, did you have your hand up?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Yes, thank you. I'd just like to speak to the clause, Mr. Chair.

It's a clause that I think, frankly, would have been much better had the committee provided us the opportunity to consider the amendment I was proposing, for some of the reasons that we discussed earlier in the debate.

[*Translation*]

I must say that it's somewhat surprising and disappointing to see a Bloc Québécois member decide to vote in favour of compliance with the prerogatives of the Crown rather than for a study on extending sickness benefits to Quebecers during the pandemic. It would have been a good opportunity to encourage the government to comply with its commitment to extend the sickness benefits provided under the employment insurance system to help people who are sick. As I said, it's surprising and disappointing to see that a decision by the chair about the prerogatives of the Crown was the deciding factor for the Bloc Québécois.

I believe that it's important in this Parliament to put as much pressure as possible on the minority government to adopt the changes under discussion. It's obvious that we need to do so, because today, we saw that the government is in no hurry to act.

This is not the first time we are making changes to employment insurance benefit bills. However, the government has been consistently causing delays, for example by failing to suggest other solutions for those who are sick and have already used up their 15 weeks of benefits. It's really important for us to find a solution.



This amendment may not be the perfect solution, but we do need one. We're not finding it here, and not for a long time. We've been dealing with the pandemic for a year now. People are still sick and, having used up the 15 weeks of benefits, still have not received any financial assistance from the government. We need to find a solution, and I would have liked at the very least for the opposition parties to get together today to lean on the government to take action on this problem. It's a missed opportunity.

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

Over to you, Ms. Chabot.

• (1725)

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

I'd like to thank my NDP colleague for his arguments about the importance of enhancing the special sickness benefits by extending the number of weeks to 50. That's what we've been asking the government to do ever since we were elected.

Mr. Blaikie, the motion you mentioned to the minister, and which was adopted by a majority of votes and not unanimously—I'm just setting the record straight—is a motion that I myself had introduced. We held press conferences. We even compelled the Prime Minister to meet with two women who had been battling for years, Ms. Émilie Sansfaçon and Ms. Marie-Hélène Dubé.

We fully agree. You must have heard us in the House, even today, condemning the fact that the government had not acted earlier.

There is the motion you were referring to, but I would say that it's still possible to act. Bill C-265 proposed by my colleague from the riding of Salaberry—Suroît will be studied in the House in mid-April. I hope that everyone will be there to adopt this bill, which is designed to make the sickness benefits permanent, and extend them from 15 to 50 weeks. That's the goal of the bill.

We agree with your arguments about the fact that there are sick people, people with episodic disabilities and the aftereffects of COVID-19. That's why we've been arguing for it since the beginning of our term. Thank you for supporting this position.

The purpose of the bill is to ensure that within a few weeks there will no longer be a regulatory gap. Thousands of unemployed workers have been calling our riding offices and major union organizations like the Canadian Labour Congress—the CLC—and the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec—the FTQ—have been pushing to extend the number of weeks from 15 to 50. Some people will no longer be receiving anything by tomorrow.

I have one concern about your amendment and that is that it's not really connected to the matter of the Crown. The fact that we are in an emergency is not ideal. However, your amendment, which in principle would be easy to implement, would lead to another debate, lengthen the procedure, and deprive us of what is essentially needed, by using temporary measures. I think that we definitely need permanent amendments for special sickness benefits. It's urgent and we would be able to do it in a month.

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

Mr. Housefather, you have the floor.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Thank you Mr. Chair. I'll be brief.

First of all, voting to support the chair's decision is not a vote on the substance of the amendment. It's a procedural vote in accordance with a parliamentary tradition, ruled upon by the chair.

We all agree that solutions are needed for people receiving sickness benefits. Very respectfully, however, I must say to my colleague that Ms. Chabot has been defending this position from the outset. It's the reason for our current study of employment insurance. It's totally false to say that Ms. Chabot does not defend this idea. She's the one who has been defending it in committee from the start.

Thus far, we have always worked in a non-partisan way and been very respectful on all sides. I hope that this will continue. It wasn't a decision about the substance of the amendment.

The bottom line, Mr. Chair, is that I am grateful you gave us an opportunity to debate an amendment that had already been deemed inadmissible. I would imagine that we should, as of now, only debate the clause, and not an amendment that we are not entitled to debate.

**The Chair:** That's right. The debate is about the clause.

I know that the discussion went somewhat beyond it, but I don't think it's serious. It's your right.

Over to you, Mr. Blaikie.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to reassure all the committee members. We can't delay the adoption of this bill. A House of Commons order states that the bill will go back to the House tomorrow.

So it's not a matter of a deadline. A House of Commons order tells us to do our work in committee and to include any amendments as required, but at the end of the day tomorrow, the bill will have been adopted. We don't even have the power to delay its adoption. That happened today by unanimous consent in the House of Commons.

• (1730)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Dancho, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Chair, did you call on me? For some reason, I couldn't hear you.

[Translation]

I'm not sure I have properly understood Ms. Chabot's comments. It would appear that she did not support the amendment because she wanted a debate on the substance. I find that very disappointing. The opposition parties are sometimes expected to work together. I don't know why she doesn't want to work with the New Democrats on this issue. The Bloc Québécois and the NDP have the same goal here, and I don't understand why the Bloc Québécois votes with the Liberals every time. The Bloc Québécois is an opposition party.

I believe that if we adopt the amendment, it would be beneficial for people who are sick. For us, the Conservatives, it's a no-brainer. I don't understand what the Bloc Québécois is doing today.

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

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** The Bloc Québécois is being very calm and collected about things today. Its position in the House of Commons is clear. Members of the Bloc Québécois vote in the interests of Quebecers, and vote for what is good for them. This bill is not perfect for one reason, and we could have spotted it much earlier. What we're doing now is still debating a matter of procedure.

Not long ago, I voted on a procedural matter. You know what my position is on the substance, and I could go on about it for another 10 minutes. I could tell you about the importance of sickness benefits. People are suffering.

I would go so far as to say that the revision of the employment insurance system is among the commitments set out in the mandate letters, along with other commitments made by the government following the elections. It was also included in the 2015 commitments. Today, we're talking about technical details that make it difficult to implement certain measures. Some of the arguments are unacceptable.

The unacceptable situation—that's my reading of the procedure—is having delayed the adoption of the bill, thereby depriving millions of people, men, women and sick people, from the right to regular benefits, all because of a deadline. That's what I condemned in the study of Bill C-4. We were obliged to adopt new measures, which replaced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, not at midnight minus one, but at midnight plus one, because the deadline had expired.

I wouldn't want us to find ourselves in the same situation. That's why I have been talking about predictability. I commented on a procedure and not the substance. As for the substance of the issue, I'm in favour of expanding sickness benefits by increasing the number of weeks from 15 to 50.

And let's not forget that we voted on a temporary measure that would remain in effect until the month of September, and it needs royal assent as soon as possible. My understanding of the admissibility issue is that if we had adopted what was being proposed, it would have led to further delays.

The Bloc Québécois votes in favour of whatever is the best option under the circumstances, in a non-partisan manner.

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Perhaps Mr. Blaikie can clarify. Is there a deadline on this amendment?

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We have Mr. Housefather on a point of order.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** The amendment has already been ruled non-receivable, and the chair's ruling on that has been sustained. There should not be any further discussion or debate about the amendment or clarifications on an amendment that's already been rejected.

● (1735)

**The Chair:** We're not going to let this go on much longer. I take your point.

Ms. Dancho has posed a question, Mr. Blaikie, do you want to answer it? Then we're going to go to Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Sure.

It's to amend the legislation, so there's no deadline on the change proposed in the amendment. There is a deadline on passage in the House, which is guaranteed by the order of the House that passed today. Whatever we do here, the bill, in some form, is going to be passed by the end of the day tomorrow.

**The Chair:** Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** I'm glad we have clarified that the Conservatives see their job on this committee as only ever to oppose the government. That's their job and that's their choice, and I appreciate that we have other parties in the House and other members of the House who are prepared to collaborate in the best interests of Canadians.

That being said—

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'll inform Mr. Vaughan, because I guess he doesn't understand how our Westminster-style democracy works, that the job of the opposition is to oppose. I'm not sure if he's aware of that.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** No.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** He'll be in opposition one day, hopefully soon, and he'll understand that.

**The Chair:** Ms. Dancho, that is not a point of order. That is a point of debate. Thank you.

Do we have another point of order?

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** No. I would just ask the chair that we get back to the clause-by-clause, so that we can review this legislation.

**The Chair:** All right. I see no further hands raised, so I presume we are now ready for the question. Do we have consensus?

(Clause 1 agreed to)

(Clauses 2 and 3 agreed to)

Next we have proposed new clause 3.1. Is there any discussion with respect to proposed new clause 3.1?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but is that the amendment that was proposed?

**The Chair:** That's you. You have the floor, Mr. Blaikie.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** The arguments for this amendment are effectively the same as those for the one we were discussing previously, so I don't think we need to revisit that discussion. I think we've had it and we've had a vote. I don't think that, in the absence of the original amendment, amending this particular clause would make sense. It would create a dog's breakfast in the legislation.

I don't know whether or not your ruling would be the same for this amendment, that it is out of order. If it is, it would not be my intention to challenge that ruling at this time given that we've already considered that question on the previous clause.

**The Chair:** You've exactly anticipated what was next, Mr. Blaikie. The amendment proposed is inadmissible for the precise reasons that were contained in my ruling in connection with your first amendment.

That being the case, if you're moving the amendment, I'll issue the ruling. If you're withdrawing the amendment, we can move on.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** I'll withdraw it for the sake of time.

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

(Clauses 4 to 8 inclusive agreed to)

(On clause 9)

• (1740)

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Chair, I have just a quick question. I'm not opposing the clause, but I just noticed this.

Could the staff from ESDC explain the attestation exceptions throughout the bill if the application is made before January 11, 2021? I just want some clarification on that, if they could provide it for me. I'm not opposing anything. I just need some clarification.

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** Sure. I can answer that question for the member.

The reason there are these references to the attestation is that the provisions of the bill would come into force retroactively, back until when the benefits were created. If the attestation were to have applied to those periods from October 2, when it received royal assent, up until January 11, when the CRA started to collect that information from people applying for these benefits, then they would have made incomplete applications.

In other words, those people who applied for the benefits back at that point would then become ineligible for the benefits, not having answered this additional question with respect to international travel. That's the reason it indicates that for this one particular criterion—one each for the Canada recovery benefit, Canada recovery sickness benefit and Canada recovery caregiving benefit—they do not have to have attested to that criterion that would come into effect retroactively.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you for the clarification, Mr. Brown.

**The Chair:** Are there any further interventions or questions with respect to clause 9? I see none.

(Clause 9 agreed to)

(Clause 10 agreed to)

(On clause 11)

Go ahead, Mr. Vis.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** On the Customs Act, can Mr. Brown give us a quick explanation of the impacts of clause 11 and how it relates to the Canada recovery benefit in conjunction with the Customs Act?

Thank you. I just need a little more clarification on what it's actually doing.

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** Thanks again for the question.

In this case, in clause 11 and the change to the Customs Act, the purpose here is to provide an enabling authority so that the Canada Border Services Agency, which collects information when people enter and exit the country, would be able to share certain information with the department, simply and solely for the purpose of administering or enforcing the Canada Recovery Benefits Act. This is really for that purpose of being able to confirm and check for compliance with the criterion that the person has not been travelling on non-essential international travel.

Again, the primary way in which this will be applied is that CRA will be asking applicants to attest to the fact that they meet the criterion, that they have not travelled internationally, but this would provide an enabling authority so that if there is a concern, it's possible to check. It would provide the ability for CBSA to then share that information, which is collected under the Customs Act, with ESDC or CRA for the purpose of administering these benefits.

• (1745)

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I have just one more quick point of clarification, Mr. Brown. What would lead to someone having a concern about someone not following this rule? How would a concern be raised?

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** Thanks again for that question. I think there probably could be a number of different situations. One of them, certainly, is that the CRA has its own line that people can connect with for the purpose of providing information. That's something they routinely use in terms of leads for investigation, if you will. Otherwise, there could be some other information that would lead to that sort of a check.

Without this sort of enabling authority, there wouldn't be a way for CRA, when they are administering the act, to be able to get at that information. This is an important enabling authority, so that when information comes to their attention, they have a way to check that with CBSA, and subsequently they would need to follow up with the individual to further investigate that situation.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you. That's very helpful. I can receive confirmation that it's not a real exchange of information between Canada Border Services Agency and the Canada Revenue Agency.

**Mr. Andrew Brown:** That's correct.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Do we have any further questions or discussion with respect to clause 11? I see none.

(Clause 11 agreed to)

(Clause 12 agreed to)

Shall the title carry?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Shall the chair report the bill to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Mr. Chair, you should tell everyone in the House about how well all the parties worked together to get Bill C-24 passed to help Canadians.

**The Chair:** It would be my profound honour to do exactly that, Mr. Vis.

Thank you.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Mr. Chairman, what about the reprint of the bill? I think we still have one more vote.

**The Chair:** It's not on my list.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Can you ask the clerk?

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, do we need one more motion?

**Ms. Émilie Thivierge (Legislative Clerk):** No, you don't. The bill was not amended.

**The Chair:** There we go. There's no need to reprint an unamended bill.

I learned something new today. In fact, I learned a lot new today.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** That's unless you'd like to revisit the amendment, Anthony. I'm game for that.

**Mr. Anthony Housefather:** Dan, you can call me afterwards and we can chat about it all you want.

[*Translation*]

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

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

The committee's work is indeed to return this bill rapidly, tomorrow, to the House. Thousands of workers will thank us for it.

I'd like to conclude by asking the opposition parties to consider Bill C-265, which will be tabled and debated in less than a month, and in which we will be requesting a permanent amendment to the special sickness benefits, an amendment which would increase the number of weeks from 15 to 50. It would be a wonderful opportunity for the opposition parties and the government to vote in favour of the bill.

• (1750)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Dancho, please.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** You mentioned that we could talk a bit about committee business, just quickly, since our agenda changed today and we didn't have Minister Qualtrough come to talk about supplementary and main estimates. I just wanted you to address that and let us know when that will be happening or how we're going to fix that to make sure she comes here before we vote on that.

**The Chair:** Sure. I think that's in order, Ms. Dancho. Thanks for raising it.

Let's excuse the witnesses first.

To our colleagues from ESDC, thank you so much for being with us. Thanks for your patience as we worked through the interruptions, and thanks for the work you have done on this bill and, more generally, in the pandemic. I really don't think we can say enough about the outstanding work that's been done right across the public service, but most especially within your department. We appreciate what you are doing for Canadians, and we appreciate what you are doing to help support us in our work. We thank you for being with us.

As I like to say, you're welcome to stay, but you're free to leave. Thank you so much.

Ms. Dancho raised a good point. Our subcommittee report has been sideswiped by the unanimous consent motion that resulted in the work we did here today. We adopted that subcommittee report, and we have mains and supplementaries that we have committed to deal with. I am going to suggest that we inquire of the ministers with respect to their availability and get them before the committee as soon as possible.

It is entirely possible that the date for the supplementaries will pass us by, but it's unlikely that will happen with respect to the mains.

I think the spirit of the committee motions was that we want ministers before us to speak to the supplementaries and the mains, so I would suggest that we extend an invitation and bring them in at the first available opportunity. That would be my two cents on it, because I don't know the ministers' schedules.

The floor is open for any further discussion on the topic of future business.

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To clarify, what would be the deadline for us to report on the supplementaries and the mains?

**The Chair:** I believe for the mains, it is the end of May. The supplementaries I believe are the end of next week, depending on when allotted days are scheduled. It could even be sooner than that.

I know that we have the Minister of Seniors committed for our next meeting, but the commitments from Minister Hussen and Minister Qualtrough have been wiped aside by the business of the House that we just dealt with. That's where we are on that.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Chair, I believe that the 23rd or the 25th would be the target dates, if I'm not mistaken, to have Minister Qualtrough appear on the supplementaries.

**The Chair:** I think you are right.

Madam Clerk.

**The Clerk:** Currently Minister Schulte has agreed to appear on the 23rd.

**The Chair:** Right, and we had pencilled in consideration of the draft report on housing on the 25th.

**The Clerk:** That is correct.

**The Chair:** Those are the only two meetings that we have scheduled before the two-week break at Easter. That's where we are.

As it stands now, I don't think we have a confirmed date with Minister Qualtrough.

Am I right on that, Madam Clerk?

**The Clerk:** We have not at this point in time, but we can reach out to Minister Qualtrough.

**The Chair:** Okay.

We have Mr. Vaughan and Ms. Dancho with their hands raised.

I will recognize Mr. Vaughan.

• (1755)

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** I would suggest that we have two meetings, effectively.

For the 23rd, we will find out in short order which ministers, if they are available, will be available, and we have made a commitment to get that done. If we don't get ministers, the EI study will I assume take up those spots. However, we recognize the opposition's right to have the ministers appear on supplementaries and we'll do what we can to effectively recognize that.

The 25th housing report drafting date may also be affected by this, but I think we made a solid commitment there.

What I would propose as the way forward, which I hope will be found acceptable, is that the chair get back to us based on the ministers' responses to the invitations, which have been sent as requested by the opposition, and between now and the 23rd, update members as to what is likely to happen, with the commitment that the EI study will move forward if we don't get ministers—although it seems likely we will. I also suggest we stick to the 25th for the

drafting instructions to get that work off our desks once and for all and move on, and to make sure we have a clear runway to finish the EI study and honour our commitment to Madame Chabot.

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

Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** I just have a question and a comment, Mr. Chair.

My understanding is that we can still have ministers come for supplementary estimates even if we've had to pass them because of deadline and committee constraints. Is that correct?

**The Chair:** I think you're right. That's called a subject matter study or something of the sort. They would be deemed to have been adopted, but it's still fair game to ask some questions about them.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** I would prefer not, but I understand that we're under scheduling constraints.

I would also ask that the chair just consider, perhaps, evening meetings. I know that I've mentioned this before, but Conservatives are always happy to add another meeting during break week or another one in the evening throughout the week. I'd ask the chair to consider doing that because of the time constraints that we're under.

**The Chair:** The biggest challenge with that, of course, is the competition for available meeting rooms and resources within the House, but thank you for indicating your willingness to put in the extra time. Where we can find it, we'll take advantage of it. Thank you.

Mr. Vaughan.

**Mr. Adam Vaughan:** No, that was it. I should have taken my hand down.

**The Chair:** Is there any further business to come before the committee? Very well.

Do we have consensus to adjourn? I believe we do.

Well done, everyone. Thank you very much for being able to get that through and to have it reported back to the House.

Have a good evening. We'll see you at the votes.

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