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Standing Committee on Finance

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 001

Monday, December 6, 2021

Chair: Mr. Peter Fonseca



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• (1540)

[*English*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Alexandre Roger): Honourable members, I see a quorum.

I must inform the members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair. The clerk cannot receive any other type of motion and cannot entertain points of order or participate in debate.

We can now proceed to the election of the chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the government party.

I am ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): I'd like to nominate Peter Fonseca as chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Baker that Mr. Fonseca be elected as chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Fonseca duly elected chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Mr. Fonseca, you can come to the head of the table.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.)): Let me first take a moment, Mr. Clerk, to thank my colleagues.

Thanks for your support. It's wonderful to be here. I know that this is a very important committee on the Hill. Some have sat on this committee in the past—some “veterans”, I'll call them. I know that Julie and Pierre sometimes in the past, and of course Gabriel, have been on the committee. We have the critics from all three parties. I don't know if I'm missing anybody.

It is really an honour to be able to preside over this committee. Thank you very much, everybody, for your support. I look forward to the work we will be doing here on behalf of Canada and Canadians.

Go ahead, Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Chair, congratulations.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I want to know whether we are ready to discuss and go through routine motions.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Dzerowicz. I just have to go through some notes that the clerk has provided to me. I'll commence with them, and then I will bring you in.

If the committee is in agreement, I will invite the clerk to proceed with the election of the vice-chairs.

We will go to the vice-chairs right now, Ms. Dzerowicz, and then we will get to routine motions.

The Clerk: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. First—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): With your permission, Mr. Chair, I would like to nominate Greg McLean as vice-chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Poilievre that Mr. McLean be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any other motions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Mr. McLean duly elected as first vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of the opposition party other than that of the official opposition.

I am now prepared to receive motions for the second vice-chair.

Go ahead, Madame Chatel.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations on your election.

I would like to nominate as second vice-chair Monsieur Gabriel Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mrs. Chatel that Mr. Ste-Marie be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

The Clerk: I declare the motion carried and Mr. Ste-Marie duly elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you very much, Clerk. Congratulations to our vice-chairs. We also have our parliamentary secretary, as Terry Beech is also a member of the committee.

Welcome to meeting number one of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. For your awareness, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

Today's meeting is also taking place using the webinar format. Webinars are for public committee meetings and are available only to members, their staff, and witnesses.

Members enter immediately as active participants. All functionalities for active participants remain the same. Staff will be non-active participants and can therefore only view the meeting in gallery view.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants at this meeting that taking screenshots or photos of your screen is not permitted.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation, in light of the recommendations from health authorities as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain two-metre physical distancing and must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when members are seated. Members must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the room entrance.

As the chair, I will enforce these measures for the duration of the meeting. I thank members in advance for their co-operation.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

One, for members participating on Zoom, you may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either "floor", "English" or "French". If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately, and I will ensure that interpretation is promptly restored before resuming the proceedings. The "raise hand" feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or to alert the chair.

Number two, members participating in person may proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in the committee room. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on Zoom, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For the members in the room, your microphone will be controlled, as usual, by the proceedings and verification officer.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, please ensure that your microphone is on mute.

I remind everyone that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

Regarding the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

I would now suggest that for the next order of business, the committee proceed to consideration of routine motions. In preparation for this, the committee clerk has circulated a list of routine motions that the committee adopted in the last parliamentary session. The committee clerk can also answer any questions that you may have about the routine motions.

I'm going to recognize Ms. Dzerowicz.

Oh, I apologize; I did see Mr. Beech's hand go up. Go ahead, Mr. Beech.

● (1545)

Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.): I'm sorry. I got excited. I have a motion, but I can't do it without routine motions. If you could just add my name to that list for whenever the appropriate time is, I'd like to be on that list. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll recognize you as soon as we're done with the routine motions. Thank you.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I will read into the record the routine motions.

The first one is as follows:

That the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist in its work.

Do we need to vote on each one or do we vote at the very end, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: It's the committee's choice, the clerk says. I guess I will look for agreement from everybody. Could I just see a nodding of heads? Yes, it looks as though we're good.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I'll continue reading the motions.

Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five (5) members; the Chair, one member from each recognized party; and that the subcommittee work in a spirit of collaboration.

Meeting Without a Quorum

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence published when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including two members of the opposition parties and two members of the government party, but when travelling outside the Parliamentary Precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present.

Time for Opening Remarks and Questioning of Witnesses

That witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statement; that whenever possible, witnesses provide the committee with their opening statement 72 hours in advance; that at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows for the first round:

Conservative Party

Liberal Party

Bloc Québécois

New Democratic Party

For the second and subsequent rounds, the order and time for questioning be as follows:

Conservative Party, five minutes

Liberal Party, five minutes

Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes

New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes

Conservative Party, five minutes

Liberal Party, five minutes.

Document Distribution

That only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the Committee provided the documents are in both official languages, and that the witnesses be advised accordingly.

Working Meals

That the clerk of the committee, at the discretion of the Chair, be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

Travel, Accommodation and Living Expenses of Witnesses

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two representatives per organization; and that in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the Chair.

Access to In Camera Meetings

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff member at in camera meetings and that one additional person from each House officer's office be allowed to be present.

Transcripts of In Camera Meetings

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee or by their staff; and that the analysts assigned to the committee also have access to the in camera transcripts.

Notice of Motion

That a 48-hour notice, interpreted as two nights, be required for any substantive motion to be moved in committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that: (a) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee no later than 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday; (b) the motion be distributed to Members and the offices of the whips of each recognized party in both official languages by the clerk on the same day the said notice was transmitted if it was received no later than the deadline hour; (c) notices received after the deadline hour or on non-business days be deemed to have been received during the next business day; and that when the committee is holding meetings outside the Parliamentary Precinct, no substantive motion may be moved.

Orders of Reference from the House Respecting Bills

That in relation to orders of reference from the House respecting Bills,

(a) The clerk of the committee shall, upon the committee receiving such an order of reference, write to each member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee to invite those members to file with the clerk of the committee, in both official languages, any amendments to the bill, which is the subject of the said Order, which they would suggest that the committee consider;

(b) Suggested amendments filed, pursuant to paragraph (a), at least 48 hours prior to the start of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill to which the amendments relate shall be deemed to be proposed during the said consideration, provided that the committee may, by motion, vary this deadline in respect of a given bill; and

(c) During the clause-by-clause consideration of a bill, the Chair shall allow a member who filed suggested amendments, pursuant to paragraph (a), an opportunity to make brief representations in support of them.

Technical tests for witnesses

That the clerk inform each witness who is to appear before the committee that the House administration support team must conduct technical tests to check the connectivity and the equipment used to ensure the best possible sound quality; and that the Chair advise the committee, at the start of each meeting, of any witness who did not perform the required technical tests.

Linguistic Review

That all documents submitted for committee business that do not come from a federal department, members' offices, or that have not been translated by the Translation Bureau be sent for prior linguistic review by the Translation Bureau before being distributed by members.

● (1550)

That completes the routine motions, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz.

I think we are all in favour. I saw everybody nodding favourably. Am I right?

(Motions agreed to)

The Chair: Great. We are done with those routine motions, Clerk.

I believe Mr. Beech wanted the floor.

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Chair, just for clarification, now that we're in committee business, I have submitted a motion in French and English to the clerk. Has that been distributed?

The Chair: The clerk has not received it yet.

Do we have copies that can be distributed?

Mr. Terry Beech: If it pleases everyone, I can read it out while it's being distributed. Does that work?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Terry Beech: Mr. Chair, I move:

That, pursuant to the motion adopted in the House on Thursday, December 2, the Standing Committee on Finance proceed to the consideration of Bill C-2, an act to provide further support in response to COVID-19, and that

- a) The committee direct the chair to, resources permitting, schedule extended meetings for the purpose of studying the bill
- b) The committee invite departmental officials from relevant departments to appear on Tuesday, December 7
- c) That further witnesses be submitted to the Clerk in an ordered list by 10:00 AM on Tuesday, December 7
- d) That the committee invite the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to appear for two hours, in addition to the length of her opening remarks on Thursday, December 9th
- e) That all amendments to the bill be submitted to the Clerk of the Committee before 3:00 PM on Thursday, December 9th
- f) That the committee commence clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-2 no later than Friday, December 10th.

That is the full motion, Mr. Chair.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beech.

Is there discussion?

Go ahead, Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I think (f) is problematic. December 10 does not leave us a lot of time to properly do our work. This is another \$7 billion of expenditures. The December 10 is Friday, so we basically get less than a week.

Today is gone, so we're getting three days for \$7 billion of new spending—this after it has come to light that organized criminals profited off the CERB, that wealthy executives and shareholders inadvertently profited off subsidies that were intended for wage earners, that prisoners received CERB payments, that ESDC officials got instructions from ministers to keep paying out the CERB even in cases where they suspected fraud, and also that when there are a million vacant jobs, the government has been paying people not to work. That is while there are a million jobs unfilled.

Conservatives are not prepared to simply ram through another \$7 billion of expenditures. If this were such an urgent matter, then the Prime Minister wouldn't have shut down Parliament for half a year.

This is our first finance committee meeting since June. It's now December. The government's bad planning is not everyone else's emergency. They shut down Parliament for the whole summer. They didn't need to do that. They prorogued earlier on and didn't need to do that. They called an unnecessary election. They didn't need to do that. Then they waited another two months after getting back to reconvene Parliament. They didn't need to do that.

Now they say they're in a rush. Well, when you show up to work for the first time after a six-month break, say that you're behind schedule and expect all your co-workers to scramble to clean up your mess, don't be surprised if they say, "Whoa. Wait a minute here." Let's look into the details, especially given how many mistakes this government has made with our tax dollars in the last year and a half.

I would propose that we simply remove (f) and allow the committee to decide when its study is concluded. Once we have heard enough witnesses and have done enough scrutiny and the majority of committee members are happy to proceed to a decision, then we could move to conclude testimony and begin clause-by-clause study in order to send the legislation back to the House.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Poilievre.

I do have a speaking order here. I have Monsieur Ste-Marie next. Then I have Mr. McLean, Mr. Baker and Ms. Dzerowicz speaking to the motion that is before us on Bill C-2.

Go ahead, Monsieur Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Actually, let me congratulate you on your appointment to this important role.

For the time being, we are discussing the motion itself, not Mr. Poilievre's amendment, aren't we?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, did you put that forward as an amendment, or was it just as a statement, a comment? What were you doing there?

• (1600)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It was just a statement. I would like to be back on the list to formally move the amendment.

The Chair: You did not move an amendment.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I did not move an amendment, yes. I want to get back on the list.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: That was my understanding. Thank you.

First, I would like to say that I am very concerned about my colleague Mr. Poilievre's arguments with respect to urgent action. Many businesses, particularly those in the tourism and cultural sectors, are depending on public support measures and wage subsidies.

At the same time, we, in our role as lawmakers, have an extremely important duty to address this and to study it in depth, as my colleague mentioned in his arguments. It is disappointing that it took two months after the election for Parliament to be reconvened and that the committee was called back only today to study Bill C-2. I hope that the study will go smoothly.

First, I would like to admonish the government, if I may use that expression, for being so slow in dealing with the business in the House. Second, I see the urgency to act for the businesses that need the programs that are in place. So it's going to be quite a challenge for us. We will have to sort of make up for the government's laxity. I'll come back to that in more detail once the amendment is introduced.

I'd like to raise a few points and ask a few questions. Perhaps Mr. Beech can answer them.

First, would it have been possible to have the Minister of Finance appear as early as tomorrow, Tuesday, instead of just Thursday? Why would she not be available tomorrow?

Normally, when we consider a bill proposed by a minister, the minister is there right at the outset of the study to introduce their bill. This allows us to have our questions answered before we question witnesses.

I have told some members of the committee who represent the government that I would also like to meet with the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Pablo Rodriguez. The Bloc Québécois is very concerned about self-employed workers in the cultural sector. It seems that something is on the table, so I would like to get some confirmation from Minister Rodriguez. I wonder whether he could appear before the committee. He could appear at the same time as the Minister of Finance, for example.

In addition, the list of witnesses is an important part of the committee's study. The Bloc Québécois would like to be able to propose at least two witnesses. For us, that would be the bare minimum. Clearly, if we had the opportunity to propose more, we would certainly accept it. I'd like to have that confirmed before we vote on the motion.

Let me recap. Would it be possible to have the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Canadian Heritage appear on Tuesday instead of Thursday? Can I have the guarantee that the Bloc Québécois will be able to propose at least two witnesses?

Those are the two questions I wanted to ask first; I have combined them in the same comment. I will wait for the answers to my questions.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Ste-Marie.

I know Mr. Beech is on the list, but next we have Mr. McLean, Mr. Baker, Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. Blaikie, Mr. Poilievre again, and then Mr. Beech.

Mr. McLean, the floor is yours.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations.

The Chair: The same to you, Mr. McLean.

Mr. Greg McLean: I haven't met many of my colleagues here face to face because we've only been in Parliament for two years, and for three-quarters of that time we've been meeting virtually. It's nice to meet all of you. Thanks for the introductions, and congratulations again.

I'm going to support some of the words said by my colleague Mr. Poilievre. Logistically what we're being asked to do here is to come up with a list of people whom we want to hear from on this matter. Some on that list we want to hear tomorrow already, and our list isn't even going to be prepared until tomorrow. The relevant departments, of course, are going to be determined in our discussions here.

I think we're really jamming this logistically in order to meet an end goal, which is too pressed. We have to go through the actual process here. The public expects us to go through this process of actually looking at this bill, hearing from people who are impacted by this bill and hearing what the minister has to say first and foremost, as my colleague Mr. Ste-Marie has said, about why we need to move on this bill as quickly as we do. There are some good reasons that we need to move quickly, but there are also some good reasons, I suppose, while we've sat and waited so long to look at it

in the first place, to bring Parliament back to address what might be missing.

I do think that we are logistically pressed here. I would agree that we have to make sure that December 10 is not the end here, that we actually do look at the full spectrum of what we need to do here and stretch that so we can actually have some people come here, with the appropriate warning and with the appropriate presentation materials, so we can ask them the questions that are required to be answered here.

Thank you.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going now to Mr. Baker.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Congratulations on your election, and congratulations, Mr. McLean and Monsieur Ste-Marie, on your elections.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Beech's proposal is very responsible. He has proposed December 10 as the date for the start of the clause-by-clause consideration of the bill. I think it's important that we be ready to work on it on December 10.

[*English*]

I say this because if we don't set a timeline for this committee to work, to get to the clause-by-clause process, then we risk not getting this legislation passed in a timely manner or, at the very least, not getting the consideration done in a timely manner. Certainly when we get to clause-by-clause consideration, any member can choose to propose amendments and can choose to vote for or against certain clauses. That's their right, of course, but it's important that we get to that stage in time so that the committee can consider the bill and pass it, in whatever form the committee chooses to pass it, and we can get these programs out to folks who need them.

I think these benefits are critical to those who are struggling or who will be struggling in the future, whether that be individuals or businesses. As you can see from the legislation, the supports for individuals and businesses that are proposed here are for those who are really facing tremendous hardship, with significant revenue declines for business or for people who are under public health orders and the like. I think it would be unfortunate if this committee couldn't set an expeditious timeline to ensure that the legislation is considered quickly and that a decision by this committee, whatever that decision may happen to be, is made in a timeline that allows folks to get the help they need when they need it.

I would hate to go back to people in my community in Etobicoke Centre or to Canadians in other parts of the country and have to say that we weren't willing to work at the most expeditious pace reasonably possible to consider this legislation. I think December 10 is an expedited timeline—there's no question—but I think it's needed, given that there are so many folks out there who are struggling.

Those are my thoughts, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Ms. Dzerowicz next, and then Mr. Blaikie.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To address Mr. Poilievre's comments, I agree it's not ideal that we pass these types of legislation in a short period of time. I don't think that anybody would prefer this type of short timeline. The reality that we've seen over the last almost two years is that we've had to do so because of the urgency and the unpredictability of this pandemic.

I also do not agree that we are trying to ram through this legislation, and with the greatest respect to my colleague from the Bloc Québécois, we are not lazy in any way.

What I think we would be willing to propose is that we take every opportunity for committee time this week to make sure we have the right witnesses, we have the time to ask the questions, we have the time to meet with officials, we have the time to meet with the minister, and we have the time to actually go through this bill in as deep a manner as possible and as quickly as possible.

I agree with my colleague Mr. Baker that it is important for us to have a timeline. It is important for us to pass this bill before we rise for the winter session. As everyone knows, or as most of us know, existing supports ended November 20. We also know that the recovery has been uneven. We know that the hardest-hit industries need our support. We also know that the public health situation remains uncertain and unpredictable, particularly now that we have omicron.

I think it's very, very important for us to be considering this excellent bill. There are a series of measures whereby, if certain parts of our country have to go into lockdown, both businesses and individuals would have access to lockdown support. It is urgent that we see if we can reach an agreement on a timeline that would allow us to properly study this bill and properly ask the questions in an expedited manner, but that would also allow us, before we rise for the winter session, to pass this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz.

We now go to Mr. Blaikie.

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

I have just a few thoughts that I'd like to put on the record for the benefit of the committee.

Maybe I'll start by responding to Ms. Dzerowicz, who said that because of the pandemic, we've often had to pass legislation in an expedited fashion. I would submit that while that might have been true at the very beginning of the pandemic, in fact Parliament has been called to pass legislation expeditiously normally to protect the government from scrutiny. The government often has waited until the last minute to present their bills, when they could have been sharing information and having conversations with other parties

well in advance of tabling the legislation. Also, in many cases, it could have been convening Parliament much earlier.

We've often heard a united cry from opposition parties to convene Parliament, whether that was in the fall of 2020, when the Prime Minister instead chose to prorogue, or whether it was this fall, when the Prime Minister chose first to have an unnecessary election and then chose to wait a long time to recall Parliament. That's not because of the pandemic. That's because of decisions made by the Prime Minister, decisions which I think the evidence suggests he made in order to account for his own personal interests and his party's political interests rather than the interests of Canadians, who have been depending on support from the government in order to make it through the pandemic and who would have been much better served if Parliament had been able to spend more time on these issues.

I would start with that as a cautionary note to Canadians who are listening, for them to understand that in fact there have been a lot of choices made at the top by the government that have limited Parliament's time to be able to deliberate these things, and for considerations that were quite separate from the exigencies of the pandemic.

Then I'd just like to offer up that I appreciate the sense of urgency that a lot of people are feeling, particularly in the hardest-hit sectors. We recognize, of course, that there are a lot of people who don't work in those sectors who have not been able to maintain their employment or get back into the workforce in ways that allow them to put food on that table and who are not considered in this legislation.

We also recognize that there are people in the industries that the government will admit are still hard hit, whether that's tourism, hospitality, or arts and culture, who also are not well served by this bill. Talk to any of them who have been getting by on the CRB as opposed to the wage subsidy, such as independent travel agents, for instance. In an association representing about 90,000 people who work in just one small part of the travel industry, only about half of them were receiving help through the wage subsidy throughout the pandemic. The other half of them, in an industry that's predominantly made up of women—I think the Independent Travel Association's membership is about 85% women—were getting help through the CRB. There's nothing in this legislation that foresees any ongoing help for them, so let's not kid ourselves that somehow swiftly passing this legislation is going to answer the legitimate needs of people in those hardest-hit sectors.

That's part of what we're called upon to discuss here at this committee. If we do it too quickly and we pass the bill in its current form, we're going to be hanging a lot of those workers out to dry.

Also, when we talk about related issues, our Conservative colleague talked earlier about issues of fraud around the CRB and the CERB, and those are of concern, of course, and there is some responsibility for Parliament to get to the bottom of what happened there. We also know that there are a lot of really financially vulnerable people who did avail themselves of those programs at the behest of government and who are now being told to pay it back with money that they simply don't have and never had. They were never in a position to be able to pay that money back.

I think, for instance, of kids who graduated out of foster care in Manitoba and were told by the provincial government that they couldn't apply for social assistance in an economic context in the summer of 2020 when there were no jobs for these 18-year-olds who were transitioning out of care and don't have a family network to support themselves. They were told that they couldn't apply for the normal provincial supports unless they applied for CERB, knowing full well that it was a no-fail application process and they would receive that money, and now the federal government is asking them to pay it back. Well, the provincial government sure isn't going to back-pay any social assistance for those kids, and it wouldn't be enough to cover the tab anyway. They're getting left behind, and they're part of why many folks are calling for a low-income CERB repayment amnesty in Canada. The NDP has been proud to support that call. That's left completely out of the bill, and it's something that I think it would behoove us to speak about here at committee.

I think of families on the Canada child benefit who have found out that in fact they weren't receiving pandemic financial assistance; they were getting an advance on next year's benefits that are part of their normal budgets. We haven't seen that the government is prepared to do anything about that yet.

• (1615)

I think of all the many seniors we've been hearing from across the country. It started first with seniors in my riding, and over the last number of months I've been hearing from seniors from every corner of this country. They were eligible to apply for CERB to top up their GIS, because they worked and they had lost that income, so they did what they were told to do if they needed financial help, which was to apply for CERB. They did that. Now it turns out that again they weren't actually getting pandemic financial support; they were getting an advance on their next year's guaranteed income supplement, but they weren't told that by the government. That money got spent on dental work, on car repairs, on paying late bills. They're left out of this legislation.

This is legislation that purports to support people, to leave nobody behind, but it certainly does. In fact, it's a long list of people who are getting left behind by a government and a bill that says that's not what they want to do.

There's a lot to discuss. We need to find a way to do that in a timely way, but we're only having our first meeting. We've just elected our chair. That is why I think it would make sense to hold off on setting deadlines for the conclusion of the study. It may be that we can come to an expeditious end. I think a lot will depend upon the government's willingness to acknowledge some of the real problems with its recovery plan, which I've just highlighted, and its

willingness to address some of those things that so far aren't addressed in this legislation will have a lot to do with the timetable upon which we can pass this legislation.

I would encourage government members on the committee, and any members of the government who may be listening, to think hard about that and how many more people they're prepared to help in order to make sure that their legislation passes quickly. We're here to make sure that no one gets left behind. As it stands, we're not there yet.

It's premature to be setting deadlines about the passage of the bill.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

Monsieur Ste-Marie has a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Yes, I am raising a point of order, Mr. Chair. I would like to point out that the interpreters had difficulty keeping up with my honourable colleague's pace. It might be a good idea if he could speak more slowly, but with the same passion.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I apologize, Mr. Chair. I was, of course, just trying to be expeditious.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie and Monsieur Ste-Marie.

Of course, we do have a lot of work. We thank our interpreters for the magnificent work they do, and the analysts and the clerk.

Just before we go to Mr. Poilievre and Mr. Beech, because we've talked a lot about a lot of the work, I want to get some idea from the clerk, Alexandre Roger—thank you, Clerk—of the resources available to us over the next two weeks with the House. Can you give us some kind of understanding?

I'm sure Mr. Beech will also want to speak to this aspect.

The Clerk: We have time slots available on Tuesday, from 11:00 to 1:00, and then again from 3:30 to 5:30. On Wednesday afternoon, we have availability from 3:30 to 5:30, and then on Thursday as well. Tuesdays and Thursdays would be at the same times, as well as on Fridays.

It's harder to get the meetings in the morning, just because there are some MPs who might be on Zoom from the west coast. Those times can be flexible as well. We might be able to go a little later in the evening or group them together to have them go longer, but we'd have to check with the services first.

I know that those time slots are given.

The Chair: Then we do have some opportunities in terms of the days and hours that we're trying to get.

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, great.

I'm going to go to Mr. Poilievre. You have the floor.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you.

I'd like to move an amendment to Mr. Beech's motion. It would strike paragraph (f), removing the words "That the committee commence clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-2 no later than Friday, December 10th." By consequence, it would remove paragraph (e) as well, which reads "That all amendments to the bill be submitted to the Clerk of the Committee before 3:00 PM on Thursday, December 9th".

Can I speak to that?

• (1620)

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I would point out here—just to show how unreasonable the time frame is—that we have the minister here on December 9, according to this motion. Then we're somehow supposed to scramble and write amendments, based on her testimony, by three o'clock on the same day. I don't even know how that's possible. In fact, if I'm not mistaken, the committee is meeting after three o'clock. We might hear things from her at that meeting.

I'm looking at the schedule here. I think we're on at 3:30 on Thursday. Do I have that right?

The Chair: Mr. Beech, do you have the times in your motion?

Mr. Terry Beech: Yes. Paragraph (e) states—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It's (d).

Mr. Terry Beech: Sorry. Paragraph (d) states:

That the committee invite the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to appear for two hours, in addition to the length of her opening remarks on Thursday, December 9th

It doesn't qualify the time. It would be whatever the minister—

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Either way, even if it's in the morning, to then have us try to turn around amendments to her bill less than a day after we've heard the testimony is very unreasonable. We'd have to go back to our own policy analysts, talk with drafters and consult on how best to rectify any flaws with her implementing legislation that we might find during her testimony on that very same day.

That's just one problem. The obvious other problem is that we're at end of day on Monday. We have three days to figure out how we're going to amend this new legislation. If there's testimony that makes a compelling case on the flaws in the legislation, we could be down to hours to scramble and fix them.

I saw during the pandemic the number of times the government made drafting errors or tried to slip in things that we didn't expect would be there and had nothing to do with the pandemic, things we caught at the last minute. Well, that's difficult if you're rushing legislation through. Let me give you some examples.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, I'm going to interject. The clerk has just made me aware that there are spots through the evening. I understand that the minister would be in the morning.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Right. Again, that's on the same day. Even if we identified mistakes from her that morning, we'd be expected to run off and try to fix them in hours. That's completely unreasonable.

During the pandemic, the Prime Minister said he needed unlimited powers to raise taxes to any level, at any time, for any reason, for two years. Well, that was completely unnecessary, as it turned out, but he tried to sneak it in. We saw, with a rushed Liberal budget, they snuck in an amendment to the Criminal Code, allowing the government to grant immunity to corporate criminals. That led us to the SNC-Lavalin scandal. Then we saw the WE scandal—

Mr. Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, is this part of the motion discussion or is this something different?

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre, we'd ask that you stick to the motion or to your amendment.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Right. I'm building the case for my amendment. We saw, for example, that with the rushed approach the government took to legislation during the pandemic, they gave themselves unlimited powers to spend and grant sums to individual groups. Well, what did we get? We got a half-billion dollars for the WE Charity, money that never should have gone out to a group that had paid the Prime Minister's family a half-million dollars.

I admit that during the pandemic it was necessary to push legislation through with unusual haste, but here we are, a year and a half after the first COVID lockdown and after nearly six months of this government closing Parliament, and they're now all of a sudden saying they're in a big rush and we have to scramble. Well, when you don't show up for work for six months, don't be surprised if you're behind on your projects and don't expect your colleagues to clean up the mess for you.

Our view is this: Let's study this legislation and make sure there's no opportunity for abuse and that we don't waste another \$100 million, \$200 million, \$1 billion on mismanagement or fraud. Let's go through it with a fine-tooth comb and make sure that the legislation actually does what the politicians say it does.

I encourage you to support my amendment to remove paragraphs (e) and (f) from the text of the motion.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Poilievre.

I have Mr. Beech next, and then Ms. Dzerowicz.

Mr. Beech, will you be speaking to the original motion?

Mr. Terry Beech: I could probably speak to what I need to speak to through the amendment as well.

While I appreciate the comments made by my friend opposite, I will be speaking against this proposed amendment. I think the urgency of this particular legislation is there. Certainly the businesses and the people who are currently without support due to the expiration of particular benefits are counting on us to do this in an expedited manner.

Given what the clerk has just advised us that there are two meetings available on Tuesday, one meeting available on Wednesday, two on Thursday and one on Friday, and citing point (a) from the motion as proposed—that we are willing to have extended meetings—that is the equivalent of more than three weeks of review, although compressed to the time period of a week.

With regard to a question from my colleague on the other side with regard to witnesses, witnesses are determined by this committee, but I can certainly share that I think two witnesses are more than appropriate. Personally, I would be happy to support that, but it's up to the committee.

With regard to the minister of heritage, I do not have access to the schedule of the minister of heritage, but I can check with the Minister of Finance, of course, with regard to the availability of the Minister of Finance. I would suggest, through my previous work on other committees, that there is actually a sincere argument for having departmental officials come in first and for having everyone get on the same page with the witnesses coming in before the minister is here so that committee members can refer to witness testimony and have that opportunity with the minister. If the minister is here right up front, that ability doesn't exist.

I've found that approach quite useful in previous committee interventions in terms of finding ways to improve the bill. I know now for certain that the minister is available on Thursday. I would have to check availability for any other times before that.

Colleagues, I think we have the ability, since we have several sophisticated members around this table, to get through this legislation in the time that we've outlined. I would urge you to vote against this amendment and support the motion as it stands.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beech.

We have Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. Baker and Mr. Blaikie.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thanks so much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate my colleague's motion. I agree with all of the comments that my colleague Mr. Beech made. I was going to make the same comments. Over 12 hours of meetings are being proposed this week to properly take the time to meet with witnesses to ensure that we are going through this legislation in a proper way and that there's nothing being hidden in this legislation.

I also want to remind everyone that this legislation actually was made available on November 24. It has been available, so if there were motions that were going to be proposed or would have been proposed, I think that won't come necessarily when our minister is here, but I think there are probably already some thoughts in the minds of my colleagues on the opposition benches right now.

This draft bill has been made available for a couple of weeks now. Yes, it is quick. It is not meant in any way to fool anyone. We

are going to make ourselves available as much as possible this week to make sure that we are properly looking through this bill.

I want to address a number of the comments that my NDP colleague mentioned, but I'm going to wait until we get out of this motion to address them, because I'd like to stay on point on the proposed amendment to the motion at hand.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz.

We have Mr. Baker and then Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Chair.

It's important to underline something that Mr. Beech spoke to, which is the amount of time that's available to us to meet if we so choose as a committee. It's important to remember that. I know it seems like a short period of time, because it's a week, but the reality is that the amount of sitting time and the amount of working time are the equivalent of weeks of a committee's schedule under normal circumstances. That's the first thought. There's adequate time for us to do the work we need to do, to ask the questions we need to ask and to hear from the minister for two hours, in addition to her opening remarks.

As Ms. Dzerowicz pointed out, the bill's been available for several weeks.

The other thing to point out is that from past experience in observing this committee, some of the members' work on this committee and other committees, and the legislative process here in the House of Commons on legislation that wasn't expedited, we've seen that many of the amendments are prepared, thought about, considered and drafted, in many cases, before the minister presents.

Speaking to Mr. Poilievre's point that we need to wait for the minister before amendments can be drafted, in my view and in practice, that's not how the committees typically work. Typically, the minister's input is important, of course, and it's important to consider it, but much of the work on those amendments is done well in advance. There's adequate time for the minister's input to be considered and for the final tweaks to those amendments to be made, whatever those happen to be, if there are any at all.

The other thing that I want to address is a point that Mr. Poilievre made around the fact that he appreciated that during the pandemic, we had to act with haste. I think those were his words, or something along those lines. He appreciated that we needed to act with haste then. Presumably that's because people needed supports and they needed them urgently. Where we are in the pandemic today is that a smaller group of people need those supports urgently. This legislation is meant to help that group of people. If we felt that it was important to act with haste in the past, I would suggest that it's important to act with haste now as well.

Those are my thoughts, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'll start by reassuring Mr. Baker that I don't know how things work on his side of the aisle, but typically, for New Democrats, the study that we do and the witnesses we hear do inform our work on bills. We're looking forward to the benefit of witness testimony in order to help craft the solutions that we think would be most appropriate in the case of this bill.

On the case of timing, I want to emphasize that I appreciate the sense of urgency for those who will be helped by this bill, but it's obviously a much smaller number than it should be. Even within the affected industries, the lack of any kind of CRB-style benefit for people in the hospitality and tourism industries leaves a lot of people behind.

[*Translation*]

This is also the case for people who work in the arts and culture sector. If there is no financial support for the self-employed, there will be a real problem, because this bill will let a lot of people down.

[*English*]

When it comes to the Canada worker lockdown benefit, the committee should probably know that I had the opportunity to ask the associate minister of finance, when he led the debate on this bill, if there was anywhere in Canada between October 23—the date that this bill is retroactive to—and now that would meet the criteria for the Canada worker lockdown benefit. His answer was, quite clearly, no. Unless something really significant changes, the government has designed a benefit that applies to no one. No one is currently waiting for help under the criteria for the Canada worker lockdown benefit. It doesn't apply anywhere in the country at the moment. It has not applied anywhere in the country since October 23. Members of the committee ought to know that.

What I said earlier, and I maintain this, is simply that I think it's premature to set a deadline. We don't have to set one today in order to set a stringent deadline tomorrow. The extent to which the government is willing to make some changes to its approach to the recovery, as it's currently put in Bill C-2, will have a lot to do with how quickly the bill can move forward.

I'm not in favour of setting a deadline today. That's why I'll support the Conservative amendment to strike paragraphs (e) and (f) from the motion.

• (1635)

The Chair: I will go to Madame Chatel and then Monsieur Ste-Marie.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In fact, I don't think this bill brings a lot of new legislative provisions. It's mostly amendments to existing legislation, the structure of which should be fairly familiar to the members of this committee by now.

I think it is important to discuss the amendments as soon as possible. I am in favour of a fairly ambitious schedule. Canadians should not be allowed to suffer because we are not able to provide

them with adequate assistance. Regardless of what got us to where we are today, we must act with ambition and determination.

I also understand that the objective of the bill is not at issue here. From what I have heard from my colleagues around the table, we support the objective of providing help to Canadians in need before the next parliamentary break.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Chatel.

Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is our first meeting and we already have some crucial choices to make. I've heard a lot of good arguments from all the members who have spoken on the motion. We all recognize the need for urgent action. Yes, the government has been dragging its feet. Yes, it took two months after the election for the House of Commons to reconvene. The Standing Committee on Finance is only now beginning to sit, yet this has to all be voted on and passed at third reading in the House by next Friday, for the sake of the businesses and the people who are depending on these subsidies.

Do we have to tie our hands today by agreeing to have clause-by-clause consideration completed by Friday?

My NDP colleague Mr. Blaikie made some good points. Often, we adjust our amendments or assess the bill based on what we hear from the witnesses who appear before this committee. That's what committees are for: we look at bills in more detail, we ask ourselves whether or not what they propose is good, and we assess how they will affect various groups.

I find it quite restricting to agree to a motion that says we'll wrap everything up by Friday, when we haven't even heard from witnesses or started the work.

That is why I support my colleague Mr. Poilievre's amendment. However, I want to remind the committee that it is very important that we proceed expeditiously with this bill. As my Liberal colleague Ms. Dzerowicz said, our committee has a number of hours this week that it can spend on this bill. So I am confident that we will be able to complete the bulk of the work. However, I find that imposing a time constraint on us, by setting the deadline for Friday before we start, is like writing the conclusion before the bulk of the work.

Finally, I know we are discussing the amendment, but I want to thank Mr. Beech for his answers to my questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: I have Ms. Dzerowicz next, and then Mr. Baker. I'm not sure if I see any other hands after that.

Go ahead, Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

You know, there's at least a desire on my part to be able to say, "Oh, let's take the time that we need." The reality is that part of the reason we set these timelines is that the House is set to rise by the end of next week. You have to set some timelines if there are going to be some amendments so that we can bring the bill back to the House, follow the proper procedure and allow the bill to pass in the House. That is the reason that we have to set a timeline.

I want to put this on record and then I want to propose a subamendment.

Look, the emergency measures were always designed to be temporary. They were always designed to be temporary. If you look at the courses as we've been trying to move out of COVID, you see that we've been targeting our supports even more specifically as we've been moving through the different stages of COVID. We know that our economy has shown some positive progress with the number of jobs that have come back. Canada has now recovered over 100% of the jobs lost during the pandemic. GDP growth in 2021 is projected to be 5.7%. Just in the last quarter it was 5.4%. We see a lot of businesses coming back on stream. More and more Canadians are being vaccinated. We see a lot of positive signs.

I say all of this because I think the reality is that we have to pivot into more specific supports. I think we also understand the need to be prudent and to carefully manage government spending. I'd also say, though, as someone who has a large arts and culture community in my Davenport riding, that I care a lot about continuing support for them and that I am looking for that type of support, as we promised in our last election.

I do appreciate that there are some Canadians.... We've learned through the pandemic that some of our supports haven't been as supportive to some Canadians as they are to others. I do think there are a number of measures that our government is currently taking in order to address those issues, such as the EI reform that we're looking at right now. As well, the issue with the GIS and seniors being asked to pay back the CERB is very well recognized, and I think our Minister of Seniors has committed to addressing this issue.

Saying all that, I do believe it is important for us to have some sort of a timeline and a time frame so that we can pass these supports. As my colleague Ms. Chatel mentioned, we all appreciate the urgency of getting this bill passed before we rise for the winter break, due to the unpredictable nature of the current public health situation and the unpredictability of COVID.

The subamendment that I would like to propose is that we would eliminate (f) and that (e) would say that proposed amendments must be submitted to the clerk at the end of the day on Thursday, December 9.

It gives us more time than the 3 p.m. on Thursday. It gives us right to the end of the day. It provides us more flexibility.

Again, this subamendment would eliminate paragraph (f) and rewrite paragraph (e) to say that proposed amendments would be submitted to the clerk at end of day on Thursday, December 9.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz. This is a subamendment to the amendment.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. It's an amendment to the amendment.

Next is Mr. Baker, and then Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Chair. I'll speak to Ms. Dzerowicz's subamendment.

I think what Ms. Dzerowicz has proposed is very thoughtful. Basically, she is incorporating part of what Mr. Poilievre proposed, which is basically eliminating the deadline for clause-by-clause study, but is still trying to make sure that we get to clause-by-clause consideration in a reasonable period of time, in an expeditious period of time. I think that gives us the flexibility as a committee to address something Mr. Poilievre raised, which is the importance of not having to rush to clause-by-clause consideration and of ensuring that we as MPs do our work as quickly as possible to prepare for that clause-by-clause study.

I think that's a reasonable ask of all of us here. It gives us enough time. It allows us to hear from the minister. It allows us to hear from other witnesses.

[*Translation*]

On that note, I would like to mention that I completely agree with Mr. Ste-Marie on the number of witnesses. What he said is very reasonable.

However, it's important that we strike a balance in our work. It would not be reasonable for the committee to decide to work at the speed that we normally work when we are not in a pandemic. I cannot go back to Etobicoke Centre and tell my constituents that the process will take a number of weeks or months and that there will be no help for them during that time. That is not reasonable.

At the same time, I understand the arguments of my colleagues who say that they need to look at the bill and hear the views of the ministers and the witnesses affected by it. Ms. Dzerowicz's proposal is a compromise that considers what Mr. Poilievre and his colleagues have said.

Furthermore, in response to Mr. Blaikie, let me clarify one thing. I did not say that it is not important to consider what the ministers and witnesses have to say. It's just that, in the process of preparing amendments, we often start with drafts and then, after hearing from witnesses and ministers, we make small changes. I just wanted to say that there is time in the schedule to do that. The change that Ms. Dzerowicz is proposing would give us even more time. I don't want to speak for her, but I think she is taking into account what Mr. Ste-Marie and Mr. Poilievre have said about the importance of having time to prepare amendments while working on behalf of our constituents who need that help.

• (1645)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baker.

Next up are Mr. Stewart, Mr. Chambers and Mr. McLean.

Mr. Jake Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I supported Mr. Poilievre's amendment, but the subamendment is really only adding a few extra hours.

One of the issues that has been important to my constituents and to the people of the country is that a lot of the money from these pandemic benefits bled into prisoners and criminal enterprises, which was noted at this committee in July of 2020. For some time, it was known that money potentially went into those groups, and then eventually that was basically all but proven. As an opposition, we requested in writing that the government do a full audit and investigation. There has been no agreement from the government to do that, and now they're trying to shovel this through as fast as they can, when the whole country is wondering where those pandemic benefits went.

It's not fair to Canadians to spend a few short days on billions of dollars of money when there are already potentially hundreds of millions that actually bled into criminals, and I don't think the government is very serious about finding out where that money went. The last thing we need in this country is to have criminal organizations benefiting from free money from the Government of Canada, so I don't support the subamendment. I think it's another example of the current government trying to get away from oversight. We've seen that from this government through and through for the last couple of years. This is yet another example of it. I'm not in favour of the subamendment. I am in favour of the amendment, though, from Mr. Poilievre.

The Chair: Mr. Chambers is next.

Mr. Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleagues, who acknowledged that paragraph (f) may be problematic and that we may be able to dispense with it.

However, on the subamendment, we at least must acknowledge that we're adding not a couple of hours but one hour to the opportunity to make amendments. The committee orders suggest that the end of the day is 4 p.m., so I'm not really sure that would count as much of an extension. When we're discussing amendments, it takes sometimes weeks or longer to identify challenges with pieces of legislation, so I don't think adding an extra hour would solve any of those challenges.

Also, I remain relatively unpersuaded by some of the arguments with respect to the ministers' schedules. You know what? If the ministers and the government would like to see this bill pass, I think the ministers would make themselves available at any time, not just when we seem to understand they are available this week.

I respectfully would not support the subamendment and would revert to the amendment of Mr. Poilievre. Thank you.

• (1650)

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt—

The Chair: I was actually going to go to you, Ms. Dzerowicz, just so you can clarify “end of day” for everyone.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: End of day, for me, would be midnight. It would not be four o'clock. We would have the rest of Thursday to be able to entertain any motions, meet with any witnesses, deliberate, debate, dialogue, question, or do whatever we need to. End of day Thursday, December 9, means midnight.

The Chair: It's midnight. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. McLean.

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've listened to all of my colleagues around the table here, particularly Ms. Dzerowicz and Mr. Baker, about why we need to move forward with what might be a slightly elongated schedule.

I'll go back to what I've repeated here. I don't think anybody has actually drawn out a schedule of what we have to go through. Nobody's actually blocked off “Here's where we do this. Here's what we go through.” In my opinion, from everything I've heard today, it should be, “Here's when we need to have this done, so forget about everything that's going to transpire in the meantime. Let's just get this done by this date. We'll fudge that as we go through the process here.”

This is not a process you just arrive at in the end. You have to go through listening to the witnesses and considering their input, and then do the clause-by-clause study once you have considered what they've said. Right now we don't even have a list of the witnesses we're going to consider, let alone any idea of what the minister is going to say. The minister has known about this, I should point out, for quite some time. The minister could have scheduled to move this very quickly a long time ago and didn't do so. This committee should have been set up quite some time ago as well.

Jamming us in because we have a sudden and self-imposed deadline when we haven't blocked off who's going to be doing what and when, I think, is a charade. With all due respect, for everything we hear in this committee, this is democracy. We're here to listen to what people say and consider what is going to happen with this bill and how this bill can be better when it comes out the other end, when we refer it to the Senate, which is also going to go through its own process with it at that point in time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLean.

Is there anybody else on the speakers list? No.

We have right now, Mr. Clerk, a motion, an amendment and a subamendment.

Is there any clarification in terms of the timeline? Was it structured into the motion what was happening on what day and how long that would take? I didn't get a copy, actually, of the motion. Mr. McLean had some—

Oh, thank you very much.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Chair, perhaps I could humbly suggest that we have a vote on the subamendment while you read the motion.

The Chair: Sure, Mr. Blaikie, we could do that.

We'll go to the subamendment and call the vote.

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

The Chair: The subamendment is defeated. Now we will go to the amendment.

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

The Chair: The amendment passes. Now we go to the motion. Who had their hand up first?

Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

• (1655)

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

I wonder if the committee has a preference as to whether or not we invite the minister to appear in person.

In the last Parliament, many of us served, prior to the vaccination campaign, in the context of a hybrid Parliament and missed the opportunity to be able to pose questions to ministers in person. We have a hybrid Parliament available again for when we need it, but the context is clearly different, as we can see just by today's in-person attendance at the meeting.

For my part, anyway, I would like to suggest that the committee express a preference that the minister appear in person by amending paragraph (d) to add, after the word “appear”, the words “in person”, so that it would read, “That the committee invite the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to appear in person for two hours, in addition to the length of her opening remarks on Thursday, December 9th”.

The Chair: There's an amendment on the floor to change paragraph (d) to add “in person” after the words “Minister of Finance to appear”.

Is there any discussion?

Go ahead, Mr. Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: I think we can do this. My concern, of course, would be if some sort of circumstance required the minister to isolate or the like. I wouldn't want this to stop her from being able to appear at committee. Certainly if the committee prefers to have the minister in person, it's something we can put forward. We just don't want to have a case that she's not able to visit the committee.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I think we're agreed.

Mr. Chair, if I might have the floor, I would come back to a point I made earlier, which is that it is our first day. We're having preliminary conversations. Whether it's about a deadline for amendments or a deadline for the passage of the bill, or the very good point that Mr. Beech has raised about it being absolutely impossible for the minister to appear in person but nevertheless being able to appear through the hybrid format, these are all things that we can discuss as they come up.

I don't think the onus is on the committee today to answer all of the potential possibilities that may come up. We're obviously trying to study a bill as quickly as we can. Everybody has recognized that there is some pressure, even if we may disagree on the reasons for that pressure, to get the legislation passed quickly.

We're on our first day. There are a lot of variables that have yet to be defined. For the moment, expressing a preference that the minister come in person is the beginning of that conversation. It sounds to me like we'll be meeting frequently over the course of this week and would have the opportunity to reconsider this decision in the event that the minister were completely unable to appear here in person.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaikie.

I've just been informed by the clerk that in the House rules for the business we are conducting today, witnesses are not to appear in person. Even though the minister is a member of Parliament, she would be appearing as a witness. That would not abide by the House rules.

That's my understanding.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Just to make sure that I understand clearly, the motion that was passed in the House for the hybrid Parliament would prohibit ministers from appearing in person at committee, and it's not within the power of the committee to make any alteration to that or to suggest to the minister that if she wanted to appear in person, she could do so.

The Chair: My understanding from the clerk is that it is any witness. If somebody is appearing as a witness, as the minister would be, they would be captured under those rules.

Go ahead, Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: On a point of order, committees are their own masters. Committees can set any rule they want. As a result, I will be supporting Mr. Blaikie's motion, which is in order.

• (1700)

The Chair: Even though committees are the masters of their own proceedings, they cannot override what has happened in the House. The House rules, the standing procedures, as the clerk has explained, do override the committees, so yes, all witnesses cannot appear before the committee in person.

Go ahead, Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Unless Mr. Blaikie wants to go on further—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: It's all right. Go ahead, Pierre. I'll see if there is anything....

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I had another consideration, and I don't know if Mr. Chambers wants to pursue this as well. It is to ask the Minister of Finance to defend the \$7-billion bill that's being pushed through this committee. We're being given a compressed timeline. For her to do that in two hours, I think, is asking a lot. There are going to be many questions about this bill and its impact on inflation, the financial risks of adding another \$7 billion to our already \$1.2-trillion debt, and the tax increases that the minister is considering to pay for all this spending. These questions all require answers before parliamentarians can vote on it. I don't think two hours is enough time to get those answers.

I would like to open up a possibility. Perhaps Mr. Chambers, whose idea this was, would like to address it if he could have the floor.

I would just conclude my remarks by saying that from those to whom much is given, much is asked.

The Chair: We had Mr. Blaikie, and then we had a point of order. Did we have anybody else before Mr. Chambers?

Mr. Baker, were you up?

We have Mr. Chambers and then Mr. Baker.

Mr. Adam Chambers: Thank you, Chair.

As Mr. Poilievre rightly pointed out, I think there's a lot of material to get through and some very big questions we would like answers for. Perhaps we would move a subamendment to go from two hours to four hours for consideration of Mr. Blaikie's proposal. Thank you.

The Chair: It's a subamendment for four hours for the minister.

Now I have Mr. Baker and Ms. Dzerowicz.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Chair.

I want to make a couple of points in response to this proposal by Mr. Poilievre and Mr. Chambers.

The first one is that I think two hours provides a significant amount of time to answer those questions and cover those topics that Mr. Poilievre spoke to. When you think about the routine motions we just passed and how much time each member of the committee will have, I think two hours is pretty substantial. I've been an MP for only two years, but I have watched and I've participated in other committees. It was felt that two hours was a significant time for the minister. I'm talking about how not just government members felt about it but how opposition members felt about it. Two hours is significant. The input that Monsieur Ste-Marie, Mr. Blaikie and others have said they would want to hear from the minister could be obtained in that two-hour period.

The second thing is that my understanding was that the time period of two hours allocated to the minister's appearance was agreed to by all parties in the House. This was passed as part of a House motion. Just correct me if I'm wrong about that. It was something that all members agreed to in the House itself. Obviously, when that motion was passed, after agreement and presumably discussion about various aspects of that motion, it was something that all parties felt was reasonable.

My question would be this: Why did we think it was reasonable then and we don't think it's reasonable now?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Dzerowicz is next, and then Mr. Beech.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I'll just continue along with my colleague's excellent comments.

I'll also mention, as I think has been pointed out a number of times, that we have a bill before us, a piece of legislation before us, that I think we all agree is important for us to pass as expeditiously as possible and as responsibly as possible. It is important for the minister to come here. It is important for the minister to address questions related to this piece of legislation.

I would say to you that while inflation and a number of other items that we could be speaking to the minister about are super-important, I think it's important for us to stay focused on this bill for all the reasons we're talking about: the need to ensure that we are asking the right questions, taking the time for this legislation, and focusing on this legislation. Going beyond the scope of this legislation is not advisable at this moment.

I think there will be other opportunities to address some of the bigger questions around our finances and our economy in the coming weeks and months. It's important for us to stay focused on this legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Beech, you have the floor.

Mr. Terry Beech: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, colleagues, for those points.

I would just emphasize again how important it is going to be for the sake of our businesses right across this country and for people right across the country who are going to rely on these benefits. It was with haste that a unanimous motion came from the House to get this particular piece of legislation in front of this committee so that we could operate expeditiously.

It sounds like we have agreement to meet as often as necessary to get this done, but as my colleague mentioned, there is also a Senate process that the bill has to get through. I'm unwilling to go away at Christmas without having these benefits in place, given the fact that we have another variant. We don't know exactly what's going to happen between the rising of the House over Christmas and our coming back.

I think it's essential that the minister come in. If we're well organized, the two hours will be enough to get the substantive information that all colleagues around this table deserve. Then we can move on to whatever amendments are appropriate at that time.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The motion passed in the House states that the minister must appear before the Standing Committee on Finance for at least two hours. In the usual jargon, that suggests that she would be there for two hours, but depending on the wording, it could be for a longer period.

The committee and the House have two weeks left to pass Bill C-2, so time is limited. My thanks to the Clerk of the Committee, Mr. Roger, for showing us the time slots available for the committee this week. As far as I know, the other committees will be sitting next week, so we must consider the issue of time.

I agree with my colleagues Mr. Chambers and Mr. Poilievre that there are a great deal of concerns and that we have a lot of questions for the minister. However, at this point, I would prefer that we limit ourselves to two hours for questions. If we then find that the two hours are not enough, we could invite the minister to a subsequent meeting to answer our questions.

At this point, given the limited time we have to tackle all the work we have to do, I think I'm going to vote against the proposed amendment, but leave the door open. So I would suggest that the minister appear to make her remarks and answer our questions for two hours. Afterwards, if we find that's not enough, we can discuss whether we should invite her to another two-hour meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I see no other speakers, so we will call the vote.

The Clerk: The vote is on the subamendment to bring the minister in for four hours.

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

• (1710)

The Chair: We have Mr. Poilievre.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, do we have the count on that? Is it a tie? I heard Ms. Dzerowicz say it was a tie. I was just going to see if you wanted any advice on your tie-breaking vote.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I suppose not.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

We're on the motion. We'll call the vote. The vote is on the main motion, as amended.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Pardon me, Chair. On a point of order before the vote starts, my impression was that we had just voted on a

Conservative subamendment to my original amendment, which would mean that we would have a vote on the amendment before having a vote on the main motion.

The Chair: Clerk, could you just drill down on that? We just voted on the amendment for the minister to appear for four hours.

The Clerk: Yes, that was Mr. Blaikie's amendment.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: No, my amendment was to add "in person" following the word "attend", and then there was a Conservative subamendment to my amendment. We haven't yet had a vote on the amendment.

The Clerk: If I can just clarify, Mr. Chair, the amendment from Mr. Blaikie was ruled out of order by the chair, so it wasn't an amendment. Therefore the amendment—

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: It wasn't clear to me that the amendment was ruled out of order. Those are magic words that we need to hear. I would have gladly challenged the chair on that had I known that it was the appropriate time to do so—

The Chair: It was out of order, yes, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: —but I thought that the question had been superseded by the Conservative subamendment and that it was being left until now, which is why I raise the issue.

The Chair: I did confer with the clerk. That's how I saw it—that it was out of order.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I would take this moment to respectfully challenge the chair. Notwithstanding the content of the motion and this committee's powers to supersede that, or lack thereof, I do think that the committee ought to be able to express its preferences, that it's not out of order for the committee to express a preference, and that it's important for the government to hear that preference. There may well be future negotiations or modifications to the nature of the hybrid Parliament. My desire for this committee would be that it would reinforce the idea that, going forward, when ministers are called to testify at committee, we would see them appear in person whenever possible. This is an opportunity to begin that work of making that impression on the government. It's in that spirit, Mr. Chair, that I challenge your ruling.

The Chair: It's a fair point. Your remarks were captured, but the House has ruled that witnesses would not appear before the committee in person.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Shall we have a vote on the challenge to the chair, then? It is within my prerogative to do that as a member.

The Chair: We can have that vote.

Mr. Terry Beech: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, just as a question of clarification, the question on the main motion had been called and was proceeding. Then this point of order was interjected as the question was already being called. I just pass it over to you whether these points of order are in order or if we're supposed to complete the question and then move on to business.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: On that note, I would also like to raise a point of order.

• (1715)

[*English*]

The Chair: My understanding, and what I thought members understood, was that the question had been called at the time.

Mr. Blaikie, we've captured your sentiment on record, but I feel that it had been called.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: A point of order, Mr. Chair. I challenge your ruling. That was not my understanding. I thought we were on my colleague Mr. Blaikie's amendment and that was the subject of the next vote. As I said earlier, I would like to make an amendment to the main motion to invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage to the committee. So I was waiting for my colleague's amendment to be voted on before I moved my amendment. It was not clear to me that we were voting on the main motion. Therefore, I challenge your ruling.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm going to confer with the clerk again.

We are going to let the vote go forward on the challenge. This will allow for the House to clarify its rules.

Call the vote.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Chair, can you be clear on the question we're voting on?

The Chair: Clerk, can you clarify?

The Clerk: My understanding is that there was a question to go against what the chair had ruled. The chair said that the question was put by the comment of Mr. Beech, and Mr. Ste-Marie wanted to overturn that decision so that Mr. Blaikie could then overturn the original decision of the chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Exactly.

Some hon. members: Ha, ha!

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: In other words, I believe what we're about to vote on is a challenge to the chair's ruling that my amendment was out of order. If you agree that it's out of order, you would vote to sustain the chair's ruling. If you disagree that my amendment was out of order, you would vote to overturn the chair's ruling.

Does that sound right to you, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: I'll again look to the clerk to bring clarity to all of this.

The Clerk: Mr. Blaikie is correct. The question is, shall the decision of the chair be sustained? If you are in agreement with the chair's decision, you vote "yes". If you don't agree with the chair's decision, you vote "no".

Are we ready to vote?

The Chair : We're ready to vote.

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

• (1720)

The Chair: Okay. What do we have before us now? Is it just the...?

We will now move to the main motion.

Members, now we have the main motion before us.

Mr. Greg McLean: It's the main amendment.

The Chair: Is it the main amendment, Clerk, or the main motion?

The Clerk: It's the four hours instead of two.

Mr. Greg McLean: No. The four hours were already voted against. It's the amendment on "in person".

The Clerk: It's on "in person"? Okay.

The Chair: Okay. Call the vote—

Mr. Terry Beech: No, Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Beech.

Mr. Terry Beech: I'm sorry. Can we have the language for the preference restated?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: The language that I moved earlier was to add the words "in person" after the word "appear" in paragraph (d).

Mr. Terry Beech: Then, through discussion, there was a friendly amendment: "the preference of in person".

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I'm open to that change for the committee to express its preference so that a less flexible reading of the amended paragraph wouldn't prevent the minister from appearing.

The Chair: Again, just as a clarification, Clerk, how does this override the House rules—or will it? What will happen now?

The Clerk: The motion that was adopted on November 25 about meetings on Zoom for committees and the House states specifically that witnesses have to appear via teleconference, so the committee would be going against the House rules at this point.

The Chair: The committee would be going against those House rules. It doesn't mean that a witness would be.

The Clerk: No.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: In the spirit of a friendly amendment, one thing I would suggest, which I think would only be possible with the unanimous consent of the committee, would be to strike the wording of my original amendment, given the discussion and the advice from the clerk that we've had, and replace it by adding instead, at the end of paragraph (d), "and that the committee express its preference for the minister to appear in person."

That way there's no question that it could be read in a way that would prevent her from appearing. Otherwise, given the content of the motion that the House has passed for a hybrid Parliament... I think it would meet the objections of my Liberal colleagues and also allow us to have an important precedent in terms of how Parliament ought to conduct itself in this new space where circumstances are a bit different from what they were at the beginning of the pandemic. We're still trying to navigate our way through the balance of the pandemic. We're clearly going to learn some things as we go.

The Chair: Good. Thank you for that friendly amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. McLean.

Mr. Greg McLean: Well, I have read the witness list and I appreciate Mr. Blaikie's intervention to make sure that the minister is invited to appear in person, but it does say that members may participate "either in person", and I'm sure the Minister of Finance is a member.

The Chair: The minister is a member. My understanding from the clerk is that yes, as a member the minister would be able to appear, but as a witness, I guess once the—

Mr. Greg McLean: Then could we say that in this case there's some grey area, and that the minister, appearing as a member of the House of Commons, where she appears most days so far, should also be appearing here as a member, as a witness, whom we're seeing in the House of Commons on a daily basis as well?

The Chair: It's the terminology, right? The point is that members do wear different hats at different times—MP, minister, witness....

Yes, Mr. Beech?

• (1725)

Mr. Terry Beech: I just asked that we call the question.

The Chair: We'll call the question. Yes.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Before we do that, I want to ensure that we have unanimous consent for the change to the amendment that I proposed, just so we're clear on what we're voting on.

The Chair: Do you want to repeat what you said about the wording at the end of paragraph (d)?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Yes. The initial language that I proposed would be struck. Then we would add this at the end, "and that the committee express its preference for the minister to appear in person".

The Chair: Everybody's clear?

We'll call the question.

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Ste-Marie.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to propose another amendment to the main motion. The purpose is to have the Minister of Canadian Heritage appear before the committee, as I explained earlier.

In terms of the exact wording, I'm open to friendly suggestions, but here's what I would suggest. We could add new wording that would be preceded by the letter (e) and that would reproduce what is written in item (d), for example: "That the committee invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage to appear for two hours in addition to the length of his opening remarks", after which we could leave the same date, "Thursday, 9 December". He could appear at the same time as the Minister of Finance.

[English]

The Chair: The amendment is to have the heritage minister also appear.

Is there any discussion?

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: What is the language? Is it that we are inviting the minister?

The Chair: Monsieur Ste-Marie, what is the language?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: It would be the same text as in item (d). After "That the committee invite", it would be "the Minister of Canadian Heritage", and then the sentence would continue in the same way with "to appear for two hours in addition to the length of his opening remarks on Thursday, 9 December." The wording would end there. I would add that he could appear for the same two hours as the Minister of Finance.

[English]

The Chair: I have Ms. Dzerowicz, who might have some comments. Then I have Mr. Blaikie.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I have just one comment. I hear the language. I just wonder why it would be the same amount of time as the Minister of Finance. Is it just for simplicity's sake that you're trying to do that and just get that in? It seems a little extraordinary to have two hours with the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

That's the only question I have.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

[Translation]

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

I'm open to the idea of having the Minister of Canadian Heritage, perhaps even the Minister of Tourism as well, but I don't want it to be at the same time as the Minister of Finance's appearance. We have just had a conversation about what would be more appropriate for the Minister of Finance: a two-hour period or a four-hour period. If we had both ministers at the same time and the time was split evenly, we would only have one hour with the Minister of Finance. So I cannot support a motion that both ministers appear here at the same time. If the motion were that they be invited on two different occasions, it would be easier for me to support it.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Go ahead, Mr. Baker.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask Mr. Ste-Marie for clarification. If he provided it earlier, I'm sorry I missed it. Can he explain again why it is important that the Minister of Canadian Heritage appear before the committee at this time?

I would also like to ask a question about the time, as Ms. Dzerowicz did. In fact, I'm sharing my thoughts with the committee on this issue, reflecting on the discussion we just had about the importance of having time to work on the bill. I realize that the testimony of the Minister of Canadian Heritage would take some of that time.

In short, simply put, why is this so important and urgent?

• (1730)

The Chair: Mr. Ste-Marie, you have the floor.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Dzerowicz, Mr. Baker and Mr. Blaikie, for your comments.

Actually, I used the same wording as in (d), but that could be different. I'll get to that in a moment.

Why does the minister have to come and testify? Because Bill C-2 extends the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy as well as the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy, and provides specific support for sectors like tourism and culture. Most workers in the cultural sector are self-employed; they are freelancers. Because the Canada Recovery Benefit is not being extended, these individuals are left without support.

During the first negotiations we had with the minister, we told her that we should not forget these people. For us in Quebec, culture is paramount. We don't want cultural workers to end up taking training in other sectors and for the cultural sector to be weakened. What I understand is that the government would have a solution for these people. So I would like the Minister of Canadian Heritage to come and explain it to us here, since this falls under his department. We could then submit his suggestion to the self-employed in the cultural sector and make sure that it fits their needs.

As a friendly amendment that would suit everyone, I would be prepared to ask for a one-hour appearance rather than two hours. Then we could remove the date of December 9 to give the minister more latitude. Also, this was not in the original wording, but given Mr. Blaikie's point, I want to make it very clear that the minister should not appear at the same time as Minister Freeland, because that would take away from our discussion time with her. I would not want the committee to interpret from the wording that the appearance time would be split in half.

So I will reword it. It's still modelled on point (d), but I'll make some changes. It would say, quite simply, "That the committee invite the Minister of Canadian Heritage to appear for one hour, in addition to the length of his opening remarks." It is understood that this would not be at the same time as the Minister of Finance and would not take away from her appearance time.

I hope I have answered everyone's questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there further discussion on this amendment, Mr. Poilievre?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: I only have one thing to propose. We would like to receive the two ministers at different times. In other words, we would have two hours with the Minister of Finance, and at another time, an hour with the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

[*English*]

The Chair: This is a subamendment to the amendment.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: It's a friendly amendment.

The Chair: Yes, it's a friendly amendment.

Did I see other hands go up?

I have Mr. Baker and Ms. Dzerowicz.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you for your explanation, Mr. Ste-Marie. I understand the importance of the subject you've raised and I know it is important for you to ask questions about it. I respect that. There are also, however, people from other sectors who are affected by the bill or who are left out. So we could invite witnesses from the different affected sectors. I think it was Mr. Blaikie who suggested this idea.

That said, it is the Minister of Finance who is responsible for this bill. I think that in her testimony she will be able to answer the questions that you have raised about it. So we can accomplish what you want by having the person responsible for this bill, the Minister of Finance, appear before the committee.

• (1735)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Ste-Marie, Mr. Blaikie, Ms. Chatel and then Ms. Dzerowicz.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I thank Mr. Baker for the points he has made. Unfortunately, I do not agree with him.

The support program that would be proposed for self-employed workers in the cultural sector would come from the Department of Canadian Heritage. For us in the Bloc Québécois, this is so important that it will determine whether or not we give our support to Bill C-2 at the committee stage as well as at the report and third reading stages in the House. Since it is the Minister of Canadian Heritage who has negotiated with the organizations representing the people affected, and since we are talking about a program or a bill that would come from him, it is essential that he be the one to come and explain it publicly to all the members of the committee and to the entire population.

We want to ask for clear and specific commitments on this and then get confirmation from the organizations representing those affected that this is acceptable to them, before we support Bill C-2 at the next stages. We feel this is essential, and it will have a direct impact on our vote.

[English]

The Chair: Next we have Mr. Blaikie, Ms. Chatel and Ms. Dzerowicz.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I would like to expand on that. This question has already been asked a few times in the House of Commons. I myself have raised the shortcomings of this bill with regard to the cultural sector. In her responses, the Minister of Finance said that it was up to the Minister of Canadian Heritage to set up a new program for self-employed cultural workers. Given that the Minister of Finance has said she will ask the Minister of Canadian Heritage to respond to these questions, it would make sense for us to invite the minister directly to come and talk to us here. That is why I support the amendment brought forward by my Bloc Québécois colleague.

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

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks for the clarification. It answers a question I was about to ask. Indeed, any changes to the Income Tax Act are really the responsibility of the Department of Finance. I did not understand how the Minister of Canadian Heritage's proposals were related to the bill that the committee must vote on. It seems to me that the positions of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP on Bill C-2 are more akin to a political argument. In any case, this is outside the scope of the bill.

I just want confirmation that this will not change what the committee has to analyze.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: No, this does not change Bill C-2.

May I answer the question, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: Right now the floor is Ms. Chatel's.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Is this going to be quick, Mr. Ste-Marie?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Yes.

The government is telling us that they are not able to include what we were asking for in Bill C-2, but that they will put it in another bill. So, we want to make sure that this will be the case when we vote on Bill C-2. Otherwise, the bill will be missing a part, from our perspective. So we would like some reassurance on that.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the conversation. Those who have been committee members before know that I talk a lot about arts and culture in my own community. I care a lot about that.

When I look at this bill, I see that there are already elements in here around emergency supports for the arts and culture sector, particularly around live performances and exhibits and around museums and historic sites. There are a number of emergency supports. It's not that it's completely missing, because a lot of our arts and culture actually fit within the tourism and hospitality recovery program. I want to mention that.

When I heard the response of our Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in the House of Commons about supports for individual artists, my understanding was that it is going to be a separate bill. I feel confident that there is a separate bill and a separate solution being worked on right now for individual artists and those working within the cultural sector.

It is important for us to stay focused on this bill. If we start going down the track of who's missing from this bill, we get a little bit off track.

I agree that the Minister of Finance will be able to respond to questions around what is included in supports for the arts and cultural sector, as well as what isn't included and why it's not included. That discussion would be possible when we have the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance come before us.

I encourage us to stay focused on the bill and to stay focused on moving forward. As mentioned, we have a lot to do this week to make sure that we study this bill appropriately, to make sure that we have the right witnesses and to make sure that we are evaluating the bill in the right fashion so that we can move forward with it as soon as possible.

Mr. Chair, am I able to call the question for us to do the vote right now?

• (1740)

The Chair: We can call the question, but there is an amendment, and then there was a friendly amendment by Monsieur Poilievre.

We'll call the question.

The Clerk: The question is on the amendment of Mr. Ste-Marie to have the Minister of Canadian Heritage come before the committee for an hour, not at the same time as the Minister of Finance.

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Blaikie.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I have just a quick procedural point, if I may, Mr. Chair. I know there have been a lot of them already in this meeting.

On the calling of the question, I sat on PROC in the last Parliament, as you may recall. I believe you had the good fortune to visit us. There were members who were trying to call the question at that time and there were a lot of Liberals who really wanted to speak. It is important in our initial meeting that we get off on the right foot, just so that there is no misunderstanding that in fact the question can't be called in committee debates. When all members have said their piece, you can proceed to a vote.

Certainly some meetings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs would have ended much earlier in the last Parliament if members did indeed have the ability to call questions at committee.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I did ask if there was any further discussion, but I didn't see anybody, so we did move forward.

Mr. Clerk, what is left is the motion as amended.

The question is on the motion as amended.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: Is there any further business from the committee?
No.

The meeting is adjourned.

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