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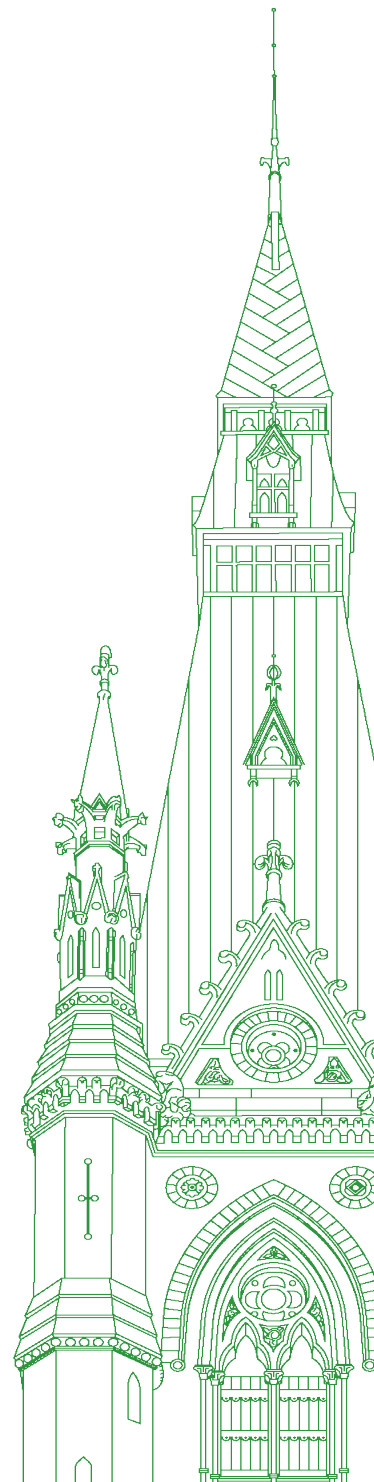
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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

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

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• (0820)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting 114 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

I remind members, please, to avoid feedback from your microphone when you're not using it, keep it in the appropriate area so that the interpreters will not hear sound interruptions, which is harmful to them.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Members are appearing virtually as well as here in the committee room.

You have the option of choosing to speak in the official language of your choice. In the room, interpretation is available through the headset. If you're appearing virtually, please click on the globe icon at the bottom of your screen to choose the official language of your choice. If there is an interruption in translation services, please get my attention. We will suspend while it is being corrected.

I remind members to please always direct your questions or comments through me, the chair, and wait until I recognize you by name.

Today, as the committee is aware, pursuant to the order of reference of December 6, 2023, the committee is commencing its study of Bill C-322, an act to develop a national framework to establish a school food program.

I would like to welcome our first witness.

[Translation]

I welcome Mr. Cormier, member for Acadie—Bathurst.

Mr. Cormier, we will begin with your opening remarks. The floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I would like to apologize to my colleagues that I am not able to be with them in the meeting room today. I am dealing with a particularly difficult situation in my riding in connection with the fishery. I would have liked to be with you, but I decided to stay here with my constituents.

I have the honour of speaking before your committee today on the subject of my Bill C-322, An Act to develop a national framework to establish a school food program.

The objective of this bill is stated clearly in its title: to create a national framework to establish a school food program, to ensure that all children in Canada have access to healthy food. I sincerely believe that this is one of the most important pieces of legislation we will be debating during this parliamentary session.

Too many children in Canada go to bed on an empty stomach or start the school day without a nutritious breakfast that would enable them to concentrate on their schoolwork. Do you have an idea of what it is like to try to follow a lesson or do your schoolwork when you are wracked with hunger that prevents you from thinking about anything else?

[English]

Unfortunately, this is the sad reality for far too many children. Studies, including the health behaviour in school-aged children survey, have shown that up to one in five young people reports going to school or to bed hungry, often because there is not enough food at home.

The 2021 first nations food, nutrition and environment study by the Assembly of First Nations, the University of Ottawa and the Université de Montréal found that approximately 50% of first nations households have difficulty putting food on the table. Think of that number, 50%.

[Translation]

Those figures break my heart, but we have an opportunity to do something to remedy this situation: by creating a school food program.

Canada is one of the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development that does not have a national school food program. We have the power to change that, the power to make sure that fewer children in Canada are hungry and that they have access to healthy food so they have more opportunities to succeed.

[English]

The number of children without access to nutritious food in some communities is very disturbing. In my home province of New Brunswick, there is great regional disparity in the number of school breakfast programs, which creates an unacceptable social inequity. Why should some schools have breakfast programs and not others?

[Translation]

We know that students who do not have access to nutritious food are at a significant disadvantage. School meal programs can improve attendance, promote better academic performance, improve health outcomes, and help students achieve their life goals and their full potential.

I want to congratulate all the dedicated volunteers, private sector donors and community organizations that are mobilizing for change. There are many people and organizations sponsoring or supporting school breakfast programs, not just in communities in New Brunswick, but throughout Canada. They cannot do it alone, however, because demand far exceeds supply.

[English]

A comprehensive national framework geared at a school food program would make a huge difference. This framework could be a road map for corporations to bring many stakeholders together in pursuit of this common objective. Although many provinces and territories are providing funding for school food programs, they lack the fiscal capacity to ensure that the program reaches every child in need.

[Translation]

We cannot have a program that does not benefit all schools. Every child who needs nutritious food must be able to access it in their school. Bill C-322 has to support the development of a framework that will provide a basis for the discussions to be held all across Canada, be it with provinces, territories, municipalities, first nations, Inuit and Métis, with parents, volunteers, charitable organizations, teachers, students and school administrators, or with experts in the field.

People from the agriculture and agri-food sector will also be involved in developing this framework. We can imagine a program that will not only fully achieve its goal in order to ensure that every child has access to healthy food, but also provide a creative master plan to support farmers and agricultural producers in working toward that goal.

In closing, Mr. Chair, we are not going to achieve the objective of a national school food program overnight. Nonetheless, we will all have mapped out the path to follow in order to get there. We all have an opportunity to make a real improvement in people's lives by adopting this bill and ensuring that every child in Canada has access to healthy food in all regions of the country.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, and I am ready to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

• (0825)

[English]

Mrs. Falk will begin.

You have six minutes, please.

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

As we know, access to safe and nutritious food is critical to the health and well-being of people, and it's even more so for growing children. The reality is that after nine years of your government, food insecurity is on the rise in Canada, and there are more and more moms and dads who are struggling to put food on the table to feed their children and their families.

Have you been hearing from your constituents about how expensive groceries have become?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you for your question.

I think families in all regions of Canada are having trouble making ends meet. However, doing nothing but blaming one government or one set of factors amounts to avoiding the problem. In my opinion, when it comes to creating a program like the one I spoke about, a program whose aim is to help children and families, especially in schools, all parties should set politics aside a bit and—

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, Mr. Cormier. I was just asking if you had heard that groceries have become more expensive for your constituents.

We know we are in an affordability crisis. In the midst of this affordability crisis, your government chose to increase the carbon tax by another 23%. If you're serious about addressing the food insecurity that's happening right now in our country and is growing, how do you justify supporting a carbon tax that is contributing to the rising cost of groceries?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: I see that the Conservative Party probably worked all night on this kind of question. Saying that the carbon tax is the only factor raising the price—

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Honestly, sitting here as a member of Parliament who works hard all the time, I take issue with an attack that I stayed up all night to formulate my questions. This is pertinent to the bill that we are studying. This is about food for children and the affordability crisis.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Falk. I'm not sure that was a point of order. It was good commentary.

Mr. Cormier.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In 1981, I was attending elementary school. I was in grade one. There was no gas tax at that time, and there were times when my friends had nothing in their lunch boxes to eat. So constantly saying that the carbon tax is the only thing to blame for the rising cost of goods and services, and even of groceries, is totally unacceptable.

The school food program we want to create right now and the framework I want to put in place are intended precisely to help children achieve their full potential in school. It is not reasonable, in 2024, for Canada to be one of the few countries that has not established a school food program—

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you for that.

I absolutely think the carbon tax is contributing to food insecurity in this country. We have to realize, as legislators—

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: You are probably the only one, too.

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: —in this place, that our farmers in Canada grow safe, nutritious food not only to feed Canadians, but also to feed the world. They are also an integral part of helping with food insecurity abroad. I think that's very important to note.

We know the Trudeau carbon tax is particularly punishing for our farmers, and it jeopardizes the long-term viability of farms in Canada, which is where we get our food from.

We know Canadian farmers, as I said, provide safe, nutritious food not only to Canadians, but also to those around the world. Why, then, did you vote against Bill C-234, which would have removed the carbon tax for farmers and made food more affordable for families to purchase?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Farmers are very well aware that climate change is probably what is going to affect them the most over the coming years. It is exactly for that reason that we are taking measures to protect them. In fact, my bill expressly states that farmers and our communities as a whole will benefit from a program like this one.

In fact, last week I was making an announcement with the Prime Minister in my riding, where a farmer in my region supplies fruit and vegetables to a school for school meals. Farmers are very aware that they have a role to play in a program like this one, and—

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Absolutely. They do know that they have a role to play, and they want government to get out of the way so they can do that and fulfill that role to feed Canadians.

I just want to be clear. Bill C-322 does not actually put any food in the bellies of children. What it does do is feed an already bloated bureaucracy. Your government is running the most expensive government in Canadian history, and it's Canadians, unfortunately, who are paying for it, Canadians who cannot afford it and are in such desperation for relief.

In the midst of this affordability crisis, when Canadians are struggling to feed themselves, why would you propose feeding the bureaucracy?

• (0830)

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: I hope the witnesses who will be speaking after me are listening to the proceedings right now. The Conservative Party has been opposed to a school food program right out of the box. The Conservatives are telling families and children that they do not want to help them. They do not want children to go to school with full bellies. That is exactly what they are telling Canadian kids and families.

We need to create a school food program like this one to help children so they can achieve their full potential. So say the experts—

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Cormier, that is not what I am saying whatsoever. I have four small children. I know the importance of feeding children, of making sure that they do have full tummies, so that when they go to school they can have the concentration to be able to learn and to socialize.

What Conservatives are saying is that we don't support feeding the bureaucracy. We support moms and dads having money in their pockets to spend on their children and their families in the way that they see they need to, not feeding it to the government, not feeding it to the taxman, and then the government saying, "This is what we're going to use that money for."

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Falk.

Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

We will now move to MP Long for six minutes.

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

Good morning to my colleagues.

MP Cormier, thank you for this initiative. It's wonderful. If I am correct, we're the only country in the G7 that doesn't have a national food program or some sort of national standards.

Mr. Chair, you know that you always hit a nerve with the Conservatives when you come forth with programs. I mean, the member opposite said it very clearly: Get government out of the way.

At times, we believe that government can come forth with transformational programs that help people, that can change lives, whether it's the Canada child benefit, which the Conservatives voted against, the dental program, which the Conservatives voted against, the national child care program, which the Conservatives voted against, or the national housing strategy, which the Conservatives voted against. I think the track record speaks for itself.

Look, I've been fortunate and blessed to participate at some schools in my riding. Ward 3 in my riding, which is basically uptown Saint John, has over 50% child poverty. If those children don't get a good meal—a good breakfast to start their day—at school, they don't eat, because it's not supplied to them at home. We can drill down as to the reasons, but in the end, there's a very chronic problem here, and there's a need.

The program is very worthwhile. Again, I thank you for bringing it forward. I do have some questions for you, though.

Can you talk to me, MP Cormier, about the main health benefits for students who participate in school food programs?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you for your question.

The benefits are huge. As I told you earlier, for a child, going to school with a full belly makes a real change, be it in the child's learning, in their concentration, or even in their well-being, with their classmates. Every study done proves that programs like this in the schools in Canada provide real benefits for kids. The same phenomenon is observed in studies done in other countries. Children also do better in their adult lives when they have been well looked after at school.

The best example I can give you is this. One of the schools my children attend has created a program in which a young farmer in the region was offered a parcel of land. He uses that plot to grow vegetables and fruit, which he supplies to the school cafeteria to make meals for the students, who in turn help to plant the vegetables. This initiative educates the children and provides them with healthy food and, as I said earlier, gives them a good start for their day, and this ensures that they will learn better in the long term.

• (0835)

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

Again, I can speak first-hand about one school's breakfast program that basically had toast and oranges. Another school I went to had a full breakfast. Obviously, the full breakfast was the better program.

Can you speak to the disparity that does happen between schools and how this bill will rectify or help change that?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, as I said in my introduction, there are, for example, some schools in New Brunswick that the government funds with some money to have a breakfast like that, but there are also some other schools in New Brunswick that don't get that money. The federal government coming in with more money to help more schools, providing breakfast and lunch and snacks to those schools, will be very beneficial for not only New Brunswick but all the schools in Canada.

If we want to have something that will benefit all the children in Canada, we need to have some kind of universal program so that all schools and all children have the same access across Canada. This is why we are coming in with \$1 billion over five years. This will be done in collaboration with the provinces and territories. A bilateral agreement will be done. We're not asking for a dollar for dollar, for the provinces to put in. We're asking the provinces to tell us what their needs are and how we can help more kids have breakfast, lunch and snacks in our schools.

Mr. Wayne Long: Is there data showing that school food programs influence academic performance? Is there a correlation there?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Yes, there have been a number of studies on the subject. The witnesses you will be hearing later will tell you more about that, I believe. Studies have shown that putting programs like this in place in the schools would improve children's learning and well-being as well as their relationships with their classmates.

Those benefits have a knock-on effect in their adult lives. These kids do better in life because they have had a good start in school. Studies have proven this for several years now. It is time for Canada to set up a program like this in all schools in the country.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have four seconds, Mr. Long.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Long.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, the floor is yours for six minutes.

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

Hello, everyone.

Hello, Mr. Cormier. We completely understand why you are participating in the meeting virtually and we forgive you, especially if there is an emergency in your region. As we know, seasonal industries play a very important role in the economy of your region. Seasonal workers would very much like to make their demands heard regarding the low incomes they earn because of an employment insurance program that is completely outdated in today's world. On their behalf, thank you for working on that.

Mr. Cormier, I listened to what you said about the importance of establishing a food program in schools to support children, and about the benefits of a program like this for their learning. I think we are all going to agree, essentially. As well, I am sure the witnesses are going to say the same thing.

However, I wonder about the fact that you are talking about school, and our schools. Do you acknowledge that education is under the exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you for the question.

Yes, education is under exclusive provincial jurisdiction. I am pleased to see that for several years the Quebec government has had school food programs in place. If I am not mistaken, it is the Breakfast Club that has been doing extraordinary work for many years in your province. I would have liked my province, New Brunswick, to do the same thing.

We want to work with the provinces and territories, including Quebec, to set up a program like that. If Quebec has other opinions on the subject, we will be at the table and we will certainly listen to it, as we have done for other programs.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Mr. Cormier, it is more than listening and working together.

Quebec does more than support two big not-for-profit organizations. Yes, there is the Breakfast Club, but there is also La Cantine pour tous. Quebec's ministère de l'Éducation dedicates public funding to school food programs by supporting those two big organizations, but also supports school services centres, which distribute the food in the schools.

I know it could work better in Manitoba, and I regret that it is not working so well in New Brunswick. That is not the question, however. If you acknowledge that education is under the exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec and the other provinces, why did you not provide a right to withdraw, in your bill, with full, unconditional compensation for provinces that are already investing in programs like this? The federal government has done that in the past for implementing its universal early learning child care program. Quebec has had this kind of program, which falls exclusively under the heading of education, for 25 years. Why did you not provide a comparable right in your bill?

• (0840)

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you.

The bill states that we will hold negotiations and discussions with the provinces and territories. We all agree that education falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories, but that does not mean that because of that, we cannot work on this issue, in partnership with Quebec or with the other provinces.

As I said in my remarks, it does not call for equal funding to the provinces or territories. Discussions will certainly be held with the Government of Quebec to see what it wants to do, as was the case for the child care program.

Once again, we should be looking further ahead. We have to keep in mind that this is a program to help students. If Quebec already has a program in place that is sufficient and cannot be improved, who knows? Maybe the federal government will use the example of Quebec to improve the national framework or the program itself in Canada. We want to work with the Government of Quebec. If there are adjustments to be made, we will make them, as we have done with other universal programs we have created in Canada.

Ms. Louise Chabot: Federal intrusions into the provinces' exclusive fields of jurisdiction is actually a problematic trend. We know this does not bother you. You have said that it made no difference to people.

What is the connection between your bill and the announcement of \$1 billion over five years, or \$200 million a year, in the last budget?

Mr. Serge Cormier: My bill was introduced well before the budget announcement. As you know, our government has been promising a program of this kind since 2001. I am glad that my bill

may have provided a stimulus for various groups that were calling for a program like this for years. I am also glad that my government recognizes that we need to have a program like this.

My bill is about a framework. Even though money was announced in the budget, there has to be a framework for establishing a school food program. We will have to monitor how a program like that develops, but first we have to define its bases. We have to know how this kind of program is going to work. We have a lot of things to discuss with groups that are going to be involved in a program like this. What kind of food is going to be provided for students? How will farmers be able to participate in the program? There is a whole host of questions we will have to answer.

I think that in this way—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier and Ms. Chabot.

[*English*]

Ms. Gazan, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

It's nice to be in committee today to talk about what I feel is a really important program. I know that the government, with pressure from the NDP, has introduced a school food program, which was long overdue.

One of the things I've found peculiar since this whole debate began is there are discussions about food insecurity being a new phenomenon. I've mentioned many times in the House that I'm a long-time educator. In fact, when I finished high school, one of my first jobs was as an early childhood educator.

Under consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments, kids have been going to early childhood education and school hungry. When I became a teacher, I actually had my own food program that I paid for out-of-pocket because kids were coming to school hungry under the Conservative federal government.

What motivated you to introduce this bill? I know that it has a framework. With the food program now in the budget, is it still a relevant bill?

• (0845)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her question. I also thank her for her speech at the second reading of my bill.

I believe we need to create a framework like this. The government has announced funds for a school food program, and those funds will be distributed to the provinces and territories to give students more help. But we need a framework. We have to determine how to put the program in place from one end of Canada to the other. We have to talk to various people, including the provinces and territories. We are also going to have to talk to experts in nutrition to find out what kinds of meals to provide, and talk to farmers to figure out how they can participate in a program like this. There will also be a lot of work to do to determine how the schools and infrastructure are going to administer the program.

So I think we need a bill in order to look more broadly at this important program that is to be implemented everywhere in Canada.

I want to thank my colleague again for supporting my bill.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Building on that, I know there's an affordability crisis. Our party has been pushing for an excess profit tax on big grocery chains that are gouging families who are trying to feed their kids. I don't think it's one or the other.

Do you think that, even with inflation and the fact that grocery chains are gouging people across Canada, we still would need a school food program? I ask that question because that seems to be the rhetoric.

Even prior to the inflation crisis—as I said, I was a long-time educator—a lot of kids were coming to school hungry. They could not learn and had behavioural issues as a result. They couldn't concentrate. That's why I paid out-of-pocket.

Even with the inflation crisis and even if things went back closer to the old normal—although I don't think anything will—do you think we still would need a breakfast program?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Yes, I think we will still need a breakfast program or a food program in schools.

As I said earlier, in 1981, I was in the first grade. I think you know that there was no price on pollution back then. Maybe life was a bit easier for some families, but on certain days, my friends still didn't have anything to eat in their lunch boxes.

There are a lot of reasons families sometimes cannot put food in their kids' lunch boxes. Maybe it's because they don't have any money. Maybe it's because something happened at home in the morning or maybe it's because of a mental health issue.

Even if the price of food doesn't go up like that, of course I will want to have a school food program. We live in one of the only countries that doesn't have a school food program. It's time that Canada stepped up and put some kind of program in place.

I'm glad that my government.... Again, I thank the NDP for supporting a school food program. It's time to make sure our children are successful in life.

• (0850)

Ms. Leah Gazan: I have to say that I find it bizarre that people would vote against kids getting food in the classroom. I find it shocking, in fact, that there's such an aggressive response to feed-

ing kids in schools, especially because we know that it's been an ongoing problem, as you shared.

I want to thank you for your work and thank you for putting your framework forward.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan.

Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

We'll now go to Mrs. Gray for five minutes.

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

Through you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Cormier, the first line of your legislation in the preamble reads, “Whereas too many families in Canada cannot reliably obtain enough nutritious food”.

Based on this, would you agree that the cost of healthy, nutritious food has increased to the point where it's out of reach for many families?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: I thank the member for her question.

As I said, we are currently facing enormous pressure, not just in Canada, but all around the world, when it comes to rising prices more or less everywhere. However, regardless of the challenges we are facing right now, we cannot simply say that we are not going to help children in school, because there are effects—

[*English*]

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

In rural communities like yours, would you agree that costs are often higher for things like fuel and nutritious food?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Once again, it depends on certain sectors. We have goods and services that are much less expensive than in other regions, such as Toronto and Montreal, for example. It is false to say that everything is more expensive in our rural areas.

Things may be more expensive in certain sectors of our economy because we are in a more remote region. However, it is ultimately, here again, a question of helping schoolchildren and families by putting a program like this one in place. Even if—

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you. I want to move on to my next question here. Thank you very much.

Would you agree that the carbon tax is adding to the cost of food?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: All studies to date show that this is not the case. The Conservatives' main argument is that putting a price on pollution raises the cost of living in all regions of our country, and that is false. Unfortunately, the Conservatives do not want to admit it.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you. It was a yes or no question. Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

You signed a press release on September 28, 2023, with your Liberal colleagues, Mr. Long, who's on this committee, and Mr. Arseneault, criticizing the imposition of your Liberal government's carbon tax on residents in the province where you live, New Brunswick. You said the carbon tax puts the province and its residents at a disadvantage because it does not take into account its strongly rural character.

Mr. Cormier, do you agree that the carbon tax disadvantages rural families by increasing the cost to grow, ship, warehouse and, ultimately, buy food?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: First, I would like to say I am glad to have sent out that press release with my colleagues Wayne Long and René Arseneault.

As I told you, unfortunately, we live in rural regions where public transit or alternative transportation is not as widely available as compared to big cities like Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. We therefore asked for an additional 20% adjustment for people in these rural regions.

All of the experts who saw our press release in which we asked for those adjustments agree with us. Each region in Canada must be treated fairly and equitably. That is exactly what our government has done.

[*English*]

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

Based on that, what you were asking for was that the carbon tax be removed because of the high costs—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: No, I never asked for that.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: —for families. Would you also not agree then that the carbon tax is adding to other costs such as the cost of food?

Mr. Serge Cormier: We never asked for the carbon tax to be removed. We asked for an adjustment for rural regions, because we don't have the infrastructure that big cities have, like public transportation. Look, the government realized that this was the case. I think we have to treat every region in Canada fairly.

Again, saying that the carbon tax is the only reason that everything is going up in Canada is a message that I think the Conserva-

tives need to stop saying, because people are starting to not believe them anymore.

● (0855)

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Mr. Cormier, going back to the premise of your bill, we know that the Liberal carbon tax does add to the cost of transportation. It adds to the cost of farmers. "Canada's Food Price Report" predicted that the average family will spend \$700 more this year on food.

Would you support taking the carbon tax off of all food and all transportation costs for any food that may be grown, transported and purchased to be used in a school food program?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, inflation went down again in Canada this past month.

Again, I know that the Conservatives don't want to talk about the school food program, because they voted against it. Their leader voted against it—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Perhaps you haven't seen the Food Banks Canada poverty report or the Salvation Army report that just came out.

Mr. Wayne Long: I have a point of order.

The Chair: What is your point of order?

Mr. Wayne Long: Chair, I do believe that if a question is asked.... The question that was asked took roughly 30 seconds. I think the member should be allowed the same time.

The Chair: Mr. Long, that's not a point of order.

Mrs. Gray, conclude your comments, and then we'll move on to the next one.

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

Obviously, the member hasn't seen some of the reports that have come out literally over the last 24 hours talking about how people can't afford to feed themselves. Almost 50% of Canadians say they are having a tougher time than they were even just a year ago.

The Chair: Give a short answer, Mr. Cormier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: The only solution the Conservatives are proposing is to eliminate the carbon tax. They do not want children to have breakfast, lunch and snacks in our schools, to help families get through difficult times.

Our government will always be there to help families, thanks to the various social programs we have put in place since 2015 that the Conservatives have always voted against.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

Mr. Van Bynen, you have five minutes.

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

First of all, Serge, let me applaud you for having the courage and the intuition to pursue this very important issue.

I grew up in a family of 15. I grew up on a farm, and there were days when I and my brothers and sisters did go to school without food, so forgive me if I get impatient with the self-righteous indignation of some of the members who'd rather send cheques to millionaires and who lack the compassion to understand the intentions of this bill.

I'd like to get past the politics and this one-trick pony of the carbon tax, and talk about what you're proposing in this legislation. What are the observed long-term benefits on students who have benefited from the school food programs throughout their education?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you for your question.

Your parents must have had their hands full, with 15 children in the house. You certainly have a wonderful family and wonderful memories.

As I said earlier, a program like this has numerous benefits, particularly for students' health. It will provide a better diet, a balanced diet of healthy food, and it will reduce malnutrition problems. It has been proven that school food programs could even reduce the risk of obesity, raise attendance rates, since children are less embarrassed to go to school, and improve students' concentration in class—because how can you concentrate in school if you have nothing to eat in the morning?

A program like this will help students, but it will also help their families, by alleviating the stress that results from their inability to feed their children properly, for various reasons. This is not a program we can live without. I hope we will manage to put a framework and guidelines in place, working with various stakeholders, in order to produce a strong and binding law in the next few years.

[English]

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you.

My wife is a retired teacher. My daughter is a current teacher. They've seen the impact and disparity in these marginalized communities. One of the concerns is that there are schools that have really good food programs and the marginalized communities don't have these resources. I'm glad to see that the intent of this legislation is to address these issues.

Can you tell me how school food programs can benefit from partnerships with local producers and community organizations?

• (0900)

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, just like I said, the perfect example is right in my backyard at the school behind me where my kids go. They put in a wonderful program where they gave a piece of land to a local farmer. This farmer is growing food—vegetables and fruit—right now. Kids are doing the planting. All those vegetables and the food are going to the cafeteria. It feeds the children at breakfast and lunch.

This is why we need to talk to all those stakeholders. A lot of consultation was already done to see how we can put a school food program in every school in Canada.

This is pretty big, as you can imagine. There are a lot of schools in Canada. We need to know what kind of infrastructure we have. The witnesses who will come after will tell you that there's already some structure in place. There are already some groups. For example, in my area, a group called Fondation des petits déjeuners de la Péninsule acadienne helps schools provide meals to the children.

This is why we need a framework. What the government did was put \$1 billion in place for the next five years, which will give money to provinces with bilateral agreement. We will be able to fit in a little bit more schools.

In the meantime, let's work on the framework for the future so we can have a school food program for years to come in Canada that will help families and, most importantly, the children who are our future.

The Chair: You have time for a short question, Mr. Van Bynen.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Can you tell me if there are any models of collaboration where the private sector or NGOs have shown positive results?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Yes, and there are a lot. I'm sure that the witnesses after me will tell you about the work they're doing right now. In my riding, there's only one or two, but they're doing tremendous work. They raised \$1.3 million in the last five years to feed 21 schools in my riding.

Those stakeholders will be key partners to help achieve this framework.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Van Bynen.

[Translation]

Ms. Chabot, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

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

I know I have only two minutes, but I will begin by saying that no one around the table is opposed to the objective of healthy school food and its benefits for children, and yet we are hearing the Liberals and New Democrats saying that people are voting against that goal.

In fact, we are not voting against the principle, we are voting against the method.

With all due respect, Mr. Cormier, your bill will duplicate the existing services in the provinces, in community organizations, in practice, or in the schools. Those are the people who have the expertise and are delivering these services. The federal government wanting to provide financial support for the types of programs that exist in Quebec and elsewhere is one thing. Wanting to institute a national framework in a federation where these powers belong to the provinces will create overlap and build a bigger bureaucracy, and solve nothing, because the federal government has no expertise in how to do it.

Mr. Serge Cormier: I don't know whether that was a question, but—

Ms. Louise Chabot: I am going to ask one: Do you acknowledge, in addition to the fact that education is under the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces, that your government has no expertise on the ground in delivering these services to our children in the schools?

Mr. Serge Cormier: I have already answered the question regarding fields of jurisdiction. As well, I do not believe that our government has no expertise in education and health, for example, in Canada.

Regarding the overlap you are talking about, I do not agree. For example, in New Brunswick, there are programs of the same type but, unfortunately, the provincial government decides which school will receive funds and which school will not. My bill—

● (0905)

Ms. Louise Chabot: Do you not think it is precisely the provincial government's responsibility to decide?

Mr. Serge Cormier: In fact—

Ms. Louise Chabot: Answer me seriously.

Mr. Serge Cormier: —as a federation, in my opinion, the role of the Government of Canada is precisely to help the provinces and territories achieve their goals. That is exactly what we are going to do by giving the provinces and territories a bit more money, by collaborating with them, and by ascertaining what their needs are.

In New Brunswick, for example, if the provincial government can help only 50,000 children, but the federal government can contribute—

Ms. Louise Chabot: Are you going to tell the provincial government—

The Chair: Ms. Chabot, you are interrupting.

Ms. Louise Chabot: —to choose one school instead of another? That is ridiculous, Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Serge Cormier: No, that is absolutely not what I am saying. I am kind of seeing the lack of collaboration there might be with any government of Canada for coming up with a program like the one we want to put in place.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Ms. Gazan, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you, Chair.

Again, I am very happy about the bill. We are in an affordability crisis. I want to frame that in a way that I know we will still need a school food program. We know that.

Do you agree that we need to start going after big grocery chains with an excess profit tax to assist with the affordability crisis?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, yes, I agree, and this is why I think the government took steps on this. Maybe it's not going as quickly as everybody wants it to. However, at the end of the day, regarding all of this, we need to put forward this kind of framework. We need to put this school food program in place.

We can work on many files at a time, but if we just say, "Let's deal with that part and not with this part," we're not going to

achieve anything. I agree with my colleague. This is why our government took steps with big grocery chains. I hope we will see results in the near future.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you for that.

Through you, Mr. Chair, we hear a lot about the carbon tax. We don't hear anything about the climate emergency, and the costs of the climate emergency and not dealing with it, including the costs and potential threat to food security.

Do you believe that your government has done enough to deal with corporate greed?

For example, on the price of gas, why aren't we going after the big oil and gas companies that are gouging consumers at the pumps? Why aren't we going after grocery CEOs who are gouging people at the cash register?

Do you believe your government has done enough? I don't think negotiating with corporations gets you anywhere. Do you think your government needs to be forceful to deal with corporate greed?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, to my colleague, even if I am part of a government that does wonderful things for families across Canada, I think we can do more. As I said, we took steps with big grocery chains. We also took steps to make sure that big oil corporations will not receive any more funding in the coming years.

At the end of the day, I want my government and all of us around this table to think about what we can do to help families. What we can do to help families is put in a program like this one, or others that we have put in place—and thanks, again, to the NDP for their support on my bill. However, yes, we need to do more to make sure that families have a bit of relief. This is the kind of example that can give families relief.

We all know the carbon tax is not the only reason that everything is going up in the world. There are other reasons. I think everybody should look at the data, instead of just saying things out loud that are not true.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aitchison, you are next for five minutes, and then Mr. Fragiskatos will have five minutes to conclude the first hour.

Mr. Aitchison, you have five minutes.

● (0910)

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

I've been listening to this discussion with Mr. Cormier, who I have no doubt means very well. I suspect he's quite passionate about his bill and cares a lot about making sure that children in this country are well fed and can learn. To Ms. Chabot's point, I don't think anybody would argue with the goal of making sure that every child in this country doesn't go to school hungry. I think that's just common sense.

However, as I listen to the debate, particularly my good friend and colleague Mr. Long, who rants about how the Conservatives vote against this and vote against that, and to my colleagues here who are talking about the everyday expenses of life and how things are definitely getting more expensive in part because of things like the carbon tax, I keep coming back to this point of all the programs that Mr. Long mentioned. This government announces with great fanfare all these programs.

I'll start with the 2017 national housing strategy as an example. It was going to be life-changing and transformational. Of course, the transformation has been that house prices have doubled, and rent has doubled and you can't find a place to rent. Then they come out with their child care program. It's a really good talking point: It's \$10-a-day child care, and if you don't support that, then you hate children, because "we're Liberals and we're great". We hear about child care centres all over the country that can't afford to deliver the program with this subsidy that the federal government has come up with. "We're going to hire more bureaucrats. We're going to tell provinces how to do things. We're going to help them out by paying half the cost", but they never really do that. Then there's the dental care program. I've talked to dentists who say they can't afford to deliver the service based on what the federal government's telling them they have to do.

To Ms. Chabot's point, this is another situation, this food program in schools, where you have a federal government, an activist Liberal government, that is really, really good at the naming of programs. They're really good at the photo ops and the talking points, and as they meddle in provincial affairs, they get nothing done. This is a framework to come up with a plan to do something in provincial responsibility that probably will never actually occur.

To me, this is one of those examples of a government that yet again is meddling in provincial affairs and is at the same time ignoring their own responsibilities. The federal government has responsibilities to deal with fiscal issues. The fact that interest rates are as high as they are right now is in part because of the excessive borrowing and spending of a government that says they're fixing things, but are actually just making it worse. While we meddle in provincial affairs here at this level and we spend our time talking about this framework, or the plan to make a framework that will ultimately one day maybe feed a kid, we're ignoring the responsibilities at the federal level and trying to tell the provinces how they should do things.

To me, I fundamentally don't understand how a government that after nine years has promised the moon and back on so many different files and delivered so little can be so proud of their new framework on making sure that kids are fed in schools. I suspect quite strongly that Mr. Cormier didn't really plan to put forward a bill that just came up with a plan to make a plan to talk to provinces

about having a plan. I suspect he wanted to do something more meaningful.

If I had one question for you, Mr. Cormier, it would be this: When your time is done here and years later we're still talking about a national food program for schools because we just created a framework that never got anywhere, how are you going to feel about that?

Mr. Serge Cormier: Mr. Chair, I hope that the people and families watching at home will listen carefully to what my colleague just said. It's unfortunate that the Conservatives think that a program like that will not help children and families. For his benefit, and I hope I have the statistics with me, the Canada child benefit probably helps a lot of kids and families in Mr. Aitchison's riding, but he doesn't want to recognize that.

I'm proud of my bill. I'm proud that we're going to help children. I'm proud that this will be one of the most wonderful programs this country will ever see.

By the way, many provinces have already come to the table and said that they want to participate in the program. The only party that doesn't want to be part of this program is the Conservative Party.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Aitchison and Mr. Cormier.

We'll now conclude with Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

I am tempted, to be honest, to give a long preamble here, as my colleague just did and as the Conservatives have done today. I would take them seriously were it not for the fact—and it is a fact—that their signature policy when they were in office from 2006 to 2015 was to send cheques to millionaires.

What did we see in that time? Child poverty went up. In fact, the Canada child benefit that's already been referenced—and should continue to be referenced—is helping thousands of kids across the country. In fact, 750,000 children have been lifted out of poverty since 2015 because of that policy of this government.

I would also take the Conservatives seriously, if they had any alternative to put on the table. If they don't like this program, what do they like? Do they want to go back to giving out cheques to millionaires? It's probably exactly that, and that's why they're silent on this.

I do want to address my colleague.

First of all, I want to thank him for his advocacy. His advocacy is done, first and foremost, on behalf of his constituents. However, in doing so, he has found a way to bring light and attention to a very critical issue that affects every single constituency across the country.

In formulating the private member's bill, I know that Mr. Cormier did a lot of work. I know that he reached out and engaged in a lot of consultation within his constituency and beyond. We are going to hear from witnesses today. I'd love to hear from him about the consultation that he did. As good an MP as he is—and he's very good—I know that the bill reflects the opinion of advocates in the community that are focusing on kids, and that's a big community. I'd love to hear his thoughts on that specific matter.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Again, there are a lot of wonderful groups in this country that do work when it comes to creating such a program.

I had the perfect example in my riding, a group called la Fondation des petits déjeuners de la Péninsule acadienne. This group went from zero and raised \$1.3 million in the last five years to give money to schools. They help 15 out of 21 schools to provide meals to 5,000 children every year. This group is all volunteers. These volunteers are also parents, parents who know what families are going through. It's when you talk to those people, to teachers at school and to the school board that you understand clearly how important this is and how they need help to provide these kids with a better future and to help them achieve their goals.

There are a lot of stakeholders in the country. You will hear from them, I think, right after me. What they did as a consultation process, in making the study and everything that went on from parents to children.... It's wonderful work. We need to engage them. This is why we need them to build this framework. It is not for the government to say what this framework needs to have in it. It's from those stakeholders, those groups, the people who are on the ground seven days a week, taking care of those children and those families.

I commend them for all their great work. Of course, I learned a lot through that process, going to meetings with them and making sure that my bill reflects what they need for kids in the future.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much to my colleague again, Mr. Chair.

I represent a community that has seen very difficult economic times throughout its history. What it has going for it is resilience. What it has going for it are wonderful teachers in schools who have raised this point specifically to me and said how excited they are about the possibility of a national school food program.

One in particular who pays very close attention to this teaches grade 1 and has been following this matter for a very long time. She wanted me to thank Mr. Cormier for the work that he's done. She was aware of his private member's bill and has been for a long time. It's helped to push the government in this direction. It's also done a lot to raise attention on this vital issue.

Thank you to our colleague for his very hard work.

● (0920)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

[*English*]

You are quite welcome to stay as an observer for the next hour, if you choose.

That concludes our first hour.

Committee members, we'll suspend for a few moments while we bring in the witnesses for the last hour.

● (0920)

(Pause)

● (0925)

The Chair: Committee members, we will resume for the second hour.

We have witnesses with us. As an individual and in the room with us we have Brent Mansfield, elementary school teacher and co-founder of LunchLAB and the B.C. chapter of the Coalition for Healthy School Food. From Kids Against Hunger Canada, we have Carl Nabein, president and founder, by video conference. Welcome. From Mission Services of Hamilton, we have Shawn MacKeigan, associate executive director.

Each of you will have five minutes for an opening statement.

Mr. Mansfield, you can begin.

Mr. Brent Mansfield (Elementary School Teacher, Co-Founder of LunchLAB and BC Chapter of Coalition for Healthy School Food, As an Individual): Mr. Chair, in October, I ran 200 laps—over 92 kilometres—around my elementary school to raise awareness for the need for federal investment in school food, calling on the Government of Canada to invest the \$200 million for five years they committed towards a national school food program. Then in November, five weeks later, I ran 200 laps, nearly 30 kilometres, around the lawn of Parliament to once again draw attention to the issue.

It is a real honour to be invited here today. I would like to express my strong support for Bill C-322, which is even more important now than it was when it was first tabled in March 2023 because of the federal government's recent investment of \$1 billion over five years in budget 2024.

Bill C-322 would provide a necessary framework for how the federal government can work in partnership with the provinces, territories and indigenous communities to ensure the health and well-being of all Canadian children.

I urge you to support this bill for the sake of Canada's children as well as school communities and the local food economies that would benefit. I know that supporting school food is a non-partisan issue and one that everyone in a school, neighbourhood and community can get behind.

I am an elementary school teacher at a diverse urban elementary school on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples in what is now known as the west end of Vancouver.

As a teacher, I co-founded LunchLAB, an educational lunch program that empowers grades 6 and 7 students to work with the chef in residence to prepare foods for themselves and their peers. LunchLAB makes lunch an important part of the school day for learning, rather than seeing it as an interruption.

I see the power of school programs as a teacher, which gives me the conviction and drive to advocate for all students to be able to benefit. Every week, I see up close how a school food program supports all students to thrive and learn. LunchLAB demonstrates how school food programs can support students to learn food skills, develop food literacy and improve the quality of what they happily eat at school. School food programs are indeed a social equalizer. I can see this clearly when students from diverse backgrounds sit down and share a meal.

As a passionate school food advocate, I've worked closely with the Coalition for Healthy School Food, which includes nearly 450 member organizations and endorsers in every province and territory.

I had the opportunity to be part of the founding meetings of the coalition in Halifax in 2014. Several years later, I was part of the formation of the B.C. chapter of the coalition which, through years of collective advocacy, contributed to the B.C. government investing \$214 million over three years in school food programs.

The coalition has been advocating for the development of a universal healthy school food program that is cost-shared with provinces and territories, following key guiding principles based on research and best practices to ensure that school food programs live up to their full potential. These guiding principles are what unites this vast network from coast to coast, which includes non-profit school food providers, national health education and indigenous organizations, school boards, cities, municipal health boards and many others. The guiding principles are outlined in the brief submitted by the Coalition for Healthy School Food, and I encourage you to review that.

We need a national framework that is visionary and reflects the broad guiding principles laid out by the coalition and those reflected in the "What We Heard" report from the national school food policy engagements.

I was pleased to see that Bill C-322 includes ensuring that programs are in line with Canada's food guide. The food guide says that healthy eating is more than the foods we eat, which includes focusing on mindful eating, enjoying food, cooking more often and sharing meals together. School food programs are an opportunity to foster a healthy food environment and promote mental health and well-being.

In terms of the rights and priorities of Canada's indigenous peoples, indigenous communities must play key roles in designing and implementing school food programs in their communities as well as other locations where first nations, Métis or Inuit children comprise a significant portion of the student population.

In terms of fostering local and sustainable food systems, encouraging school food programs to set local and sustainably produced food purchasing targets would create jobs for Canadian farmers and support community economic development.

As a teacher, I stress the importance of promoting food education to support new school food programs to be integrated into the curriculum and to enable food literacy and experiential food skills education. Programs aren't just for students but should be conceived, designed and run with meaningful input from students. School food programs provide many opportunities for student involvement in preparation, serving and clean up, all while developing food skills.

I also support a couple of key recommendations from the coalition on what could strengthen Bill C-322.

- (0930)

We need a commitment to ensure there is no marketing to kids. There need to be safeguards against marketing branded or highly processed foods and beverages to children through school food programs.

We need a commitment to Canada-wide program evaluation for consistent reporting. Collecting and sharing data would help measure progress and support program design and implementation.

Last, we need a commitment to a universal program for all children. Aiming at universality is critical so that, progressively, all children in Canada can have access to this program. This bill has recognized the importance of reducing stigma. Aiming towards a universal program does that. As a teacher, I can see the benefit for all students: the opportunity for students to learn and develop the food skills and food literacy they need to thrive in life, while eating delicious and healthy food at school.

I would like to, once again, stress my strong support for this bill. I encourage you to unanimously support it. I encourage you and all political parties in Parliament to vote to pass Bill C-322 as soon as possible.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mansfield. Your enthusiasm and passion were clearly demonstrated in your presentation.

Next is Mr. Nabein for five minutes.

Mr. Carl Nabein (President and Founder, Kids Against Hunger Canada): Congratulations, Brent. Well done.

My name is Carl Nabein. I'm the founder and president of Kids Against Hunger. It's a humanitarian outreach. It was founded in 2003 and became a registered charity under the Canada Revenue Agency in 2009.

Our food is eaten by all cultures and races. It's completely vegan and was scientifically designed by the giants in the food industry not only to feed a stomach but also to provide a complete day's nutrition and help alleviate starvation-related diseases, such as blindness, spina bifida, etc.

The food consists of rice, which is eaten by all cultures around the world and also has a long shelf life. It has six dehydrated vegetables in it. It has textured soy, which has three times the protein of meat and brings the protein up to 52%, and it has a power pack, which is a vegetable seasoning. It tastes much like chicken, but it has 21 vitamins and minerals specifically designed to alleviate starvation-related diseases in health.

The food can also be cooked in water for 20 minutes to boil the rice, making even slightly contaminated water potable. The food is delicious and can be seasoned to meet any cultural taste and needs. The soy rice casserole is received domestically and not seen as a poverty food. It tastes much like rice pilaf. Youth or children initially offered to pack the food to keep the cost down. This is how the name came about. The food is provided not only to children but also to families in need.

Today in Canada, while a school food program provides a wonderful benefit that has been needed for a long time, the underlying issue is that not only are children in need, but families are suffering and in need as well, and they oftentimes are too proud to speak out publicly about that. That "over-embarrassment" has been what we've noted.

Our original goal was to ship two-thirds of our food to developing countries and to countries in need of disaster relief, with a third being distributed to food banks, first nations and first peoples, the Salvation Army and other places in need across Canada. Unfortunately, given the ever-increasing cost of living and of food, fuel, rent and housing, the need is increasing significantly and growing. Forty-one per cent of our food now—not one-third—is staying here domestically to address this ongoing need.

World disaster relief has also never been greater. There are two current wars going on and many other weather-related disasters. We partner with other Canadian charities to get food to where it is needed, including Cuba, Haiti and Ukraine. Other countries and regions served include nine regions in Africa, 9.5%; the Caribbean, 30%; Central America, three regions, 6.8%; South America, Peru, 2.1%; Ukraine, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, 10.2%.

The demand has never been greater, but as people are struggling financially, they also have less to give. Canada is a very generous country for giving. We are one of the few charities that has no

shortage of volunteers, as everyone cares for the hungry. Our biggest hurdle is the shortage of funds. Many people and corporations have less funds for giving, and this is compounded with increased costs of transportation, food inputs and materials.

To quantify our costs, from inception in 2003 to 2011 we were able to keep the cost of a meal to a mere 23¢. In 2014, costs were raised to about 27¢ a meal—still quite well. Then, under recent significant fuel price increases, transportation costs are doubling and a local carrier no longer is able to provide us transportation at no cost because they no longer have the funds to do so. Since 2014, our operating costs have now gone up to 48¢ a meal from the original 23¢ in 2003. We do have enough inventory in stock to maintain that price for this year.

Our charity relies solely on donations. We do not receive funding. Our largest donors have been churches, corporations and service clubs and, believe it or not, schools have been one of our biggest supporters, along with other public events.

The pandemic and resulting lockdowns have affected our growth. We were on the target of about 20% per year, and while we're recovering now, there's greater need, especially domestically. Rising costs of food, materials and transportation have affected us, and there are less community funds available now.

• (0935)

Another thing that I really believe in is a good school feeding program. We'd even like to coordinate with that, and we've offered it to a number of local schools. It's wonderful and would be greatly received. That scratches the surface because that's the end of the chain. Families are struggling as well, and we need to get their costs in line.

Young children work at \$20 an hour, and they have no money for fuel because they're spending their money on rent, food and such, so the need goes beyond the schools, but I think helping with the school program is a good portion as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nabein.

We'll now go to Mr. MacKeigan for five minutes.

Mr. Shawn MacKeigan (Associate Executive Director, Mission Services of Hamilton): Thanks to the committee for having me.

My name is Shawn MacKeigan. I am the associate executive director of Mission Services of Hamilton. Mission Services is a multi-sector, not-for-profit social service agency located in Hamilton, Ontario. There we support individuals navigating some of the most challenging circumstances they may ever face.

For nearly 70 years we have supported individuals and families by offering a host of services and supports, including those for housing and homelessness, gender-based violence, community-based addictions treatment, youth services and, additionally, we operate one of the largest food security programs in our community, where we support thousands of unique individuals and families each year.

At the centre of Mission Services food security initiative is our Good Food Centre program. This program helps ensure that people receive nutritious and culturally appropriate foods and provides a wide range of items, including fresh produce, dairy, proteins and pantry staples, ensuring a balanced diet for those in need. The Good Food Centre operates as part of the broader food network within our community, although the scale of our service is significant, given that our physical resources include a large warehouse and a sizable food staging and customer service area.

While we recognize and understand the importance of sustaining this vital resource, we are not alone in having observed significant year-over-year increases in the demand for that service. In the past year, we have observed a 30% increase in the number of new service users, and nearly 40% of the total individuals supported through our Good Food Centre are children.

Mission Services also delivers after school youth programs, spring and summer break camps and food-specific programming for youth. These footprint youth programs are tailored for students in grades 6 to 9, where our goal is to empower young people to make healthy choices and to pursue post-secondary education after completing high school while recognizing the important connections between hunger and learning.

A collaboration between Mission Services of Hamilton and Mohawk College aims to create positive attitudes about education among kids who may not believe that post-secondary education is an option for them. These programs offer interested youth in our inner-city neighbourhood healthy after-school snacks, nutritious hot meals, cooking and gardening classes, homework help as well as a large recreational component. The program is youth led and strength based, where we focus many of our activities on mental and physical well-being.

Moreover, Mission Services plays a crucial role in advocacy and community partnership. We work collaboratively with other local organizations, government agencies and community stakeholders not only to tackle some of the most immediate needs but also to help create better conditions to coordinate access to the right supports at the right time and, further, to address the root causes of food insecurity such as poverty, social and structural inequities and access to healthy food.

We understand that the positive impacts of meaningful food security programs on families are profound and multi-faceted. For families struggling with food insecurity, these programs provide a

critical safety net that alleviates the stress and anxiety associated with not knowing where the next meal will come from. We understand that this stability allows parents to focus more on other aspects of family life such as maintaining stable housing, pursuing employment and/or educational opportunities and providing a supportive home environment. Children benefit immensely as well, as consistent access to nutritious food supports their physical growth, cognitive development and academic performance. Overall, robust food security programs strengthen families, promote healthier lifestyles and contribute to the social and economic well-being of the entire community.

Together we believe that we can take steps to ensure that everyone in our community has access to the nutritious, healthy food that they need to thrive.

Thank you.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacKeigan.

We will now begin questioning starting with Mrs. Falk for six minutes, please.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank each of you for the work that you are doing for our local communities and especially for helping some of the most vulnerable in our country.

We know that the cost of living has been soaring in Canada and that Canadians are finding it very difficult to make ends meet. Just yesterday, Food Banks Canada came out with a report that they have seen a 50% increase in usage since 2021, which is quite alarming. That's a lot of people.

Mr. Nabein, has your organization seen a similar increase in demand?

Mr. Carl Nabein: Yes. The demand has been going up consistently and pretty much all across the country.

There's enough food to feed everybody, but our limitation is the funding or the donations that we need to get the food to where it's needed. The other thing is that Canadians are all concerned about it, so volunteers are stepping up in droves to help us pack the food, get it distributed and do it at a good cost.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: You said that the food isn't a problem. What about the price of the food? Have you noticed an increase in that?

Mr. Carl Nabein: Yes, dramatically.... It's a bit of a double whammy. Our food prices have gone up. They've pretty much doubled over the last six or seven years. The cost of transportation.... As I said before, transportation companies were providing us with the shipping of the food at no cost, which they can no longer afford to do due to the increase in the price of fuel. Even the cost of our materials has gone up.

At the same time, we've found that companies and individuals have less funds available to support our charity with donations, so it hits us from both ends.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: That would make sense, given that the average Canadian is paying \$700 more on food than they were last year.

I hear from my constituents all the time that the increase in the carbon tax.... On April 1, the Trudeau government raised the tax by an additional 23% in their plan to quadruple it, which ultimately affects the price of groceries and fuel. That falls into transportation when you're transporting any item.

I hear it from farmers a lot when they're transporting their food from the farm, usually by truck, to processing and then to market which, ultimately, the consumer is paying for.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has confirmed that the average Canadian family is paying more in carbon taxes than they receive in rebates.

Do you believe that getting rid of the carbon tax would help your organization be able to transport food?

• (0945)

Mr. Carl Nabein: It definitely would help. Just as an example, where our food comes from, the drying by natural gas and things like that uses a large amount of gas. I don't know that they get rebates. Our charity doesn't receive any carbon tax rebate or anything and our costs have gone up significantly.

I was in the United States on vacation and I was actually shocked. The cost of fuel is about half of what it is in Canada. We have a wonderful supply of it, but yes, definitely the cost of fuel has a big impact on our overall costs.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Definitely, I hear from a lot of my constituents, and actually from those who don't live in my riding, too, about just how much the carbon tax is affecting their day-to-day living.

I would note that our party, the Conservatives, has asked the government to remove the gas tax, excise tax and carbon tax from fuel, which would be about 35¢ a litre that Canadians would be able to save for the summer.

It does make a big impact.

On charitable donations, I know that when government—different levels of government; it doesn't matter what level it is—taxes the taxpayer, Canadians actually have less money to spend on themselves and their families for food, extracurricular activities for kids and transportation sometimes to and from work. They also have less time because they feel they have to work more to make their dollar go farther so that they can have more money because the taxman is taking so much. That takes away time that they would have not only with their families, but also time that they may donate to organizations in the communities, whether that's in the schools or with non-profit charitable organizations. That puts a strain on charitable organizations. The charitable organizations then feel they need to rely on government for funding.

I know that this particular piece of legislation that we're discussing today, Bill C-322, really is legislation that would feed the bureaucracy and not actually feed children.

This is another example, I think, of this government and its excessive spending, with zero result, or maybe a little result, but almost none. As has been said today, we know that inflationary spending is already costing Canadians who are having to stretch their dollars farther and farther.

You mentioned, Mr. Nabein, that your organization depends on donations from Canadians, whether that is dollars, time or both.

Have you seen any changes in the levels of donations that your organization has been receiving?

Mr. Carl Nabein: Yes. The answer is twofold.

The lockdown during the pandemic really restricted us from packing. When we looked into it, we found out that, with social distancing.... It was a necessary and essential service, so we were able to package, but it was a very small amount.

In the meantime, our costs have been affected by everything that's happened recently, with the rising cost of food, fuel, rent, housing, etc.

The donations are coming back. They're growing again, but we're at approximately half of the revenue we were at going into the pandemic. It seems there is no shortage of volunteers, but the number of people able to pay for it has been diminished considerably.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Falk.

Mr. Collins, you have six minutes.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to the witnesses for their attendance today.

Mr. MacKeigan, maybe I could start with you.

Some might wonder why any level of government would contribute to food security-related issues. Historically, those services were provided by the non-profit and charitable sectors, starting decades ago in church basements and gravitating to where they are today.

One thing I learned coming out of the great recession of 2009-10 is that governments are needed to assist with food security issues. When I looked to open a food bank back in 2011-12, there were no government supports to be had. I turned to my city council colleagues to open a food bank in my area, and they provided half a million dollars in capital and operating support to establish a pilot program. Your organization helped with that, and you continue to operate that food bank today. I want to publicly thank you for those efforts.

However, I realized that governments really weren't involved. One thing I've learned over the years since that time is that it requires an all-of-government approach to assist with food security issues. Mr. Mansfield talked about support from his provincial government. I just referenced support from my municipal council colleagues, and today we're now proposing federal assistance for the same issue.

Can you talk about the increasing need for government support, especially coming out of the pandemic? We've heard about declining corporate support. Volunteerism is down across the board. Can you talk about the support required from all levels of government to address food security, especially for children?

• (0950)

Mr. Shawn MacKeigan: When we imagine government support as a not-for-profit provider... One of the challenges sometimes is raising the level of awareness high enough to encourage people to act or respond. I think governments, regardless of party affiliation, have a responsibility to create the conditions where awareness emerges and to create the conditions for people to respond. I think governments lead in these instances. It doesn't necessarily mean governments run, but governments lead. As well, I think that, when governments lead and those conditions exist, it allows us to leverage the resources we have and find efficiencies in operations. However, we certainly don't have the reach as a single organization to communicate as widely and as broadly as a government.

Mr. Chad Collins: I had the opportunity to read Hamilton Food Share's annual report. It said in the report that on any given day in Hamilton, there are approximately 426 children utilizing the services of a food bank.

You talked about the root causes of food insecurity, one of them being housing. We heard some questions about and critique of the national housing strategy today.

Can you talk about the correlation between the need for housing supports and government assistance for this program as it relates to addressing food security?

Mr. Shawn MacKeigan: To answer that question in the best way possible, I would describe it as an act of coordinating access among the various supports that are required and the providers that are providing those supports.

I'll give you an example. Food security programs often provide headlights, if you will, to housing needs that may have emerged, or may not yet have emerged. When we're engaged with individuals experiencing food insecurity, it allows us to better understand the situation they are experiencing and why they're there.

I can speak in terms of coordinating that access. I think it's very important to understand there are a number of benefits available to individuals and families. Oftentimes, we think about awareness. They are not aware those benefits are available to them. One thing we work hard to do as a not-for-profit provider is ensure people who have benefits available to them understand that those benefits can be accessed and how to access them. We help them understand where those benefits exist. They are there to help ensure housing stability, food security and social cohesion.

Mr. Chad Collins: Shawn, you heard, unfortunately, the nonsensical narrative that this is about building bureaucracy. You know that we have bilateral agreements with provinces that assist with health care, housing and all kinds of social supports for residents to try to improve their quality of life.

This is one of those instances when we'll look to the provinces and turn to experts like you, Mr. Mansfield and other witnesses who have appeared to ask about how this program should be oper-

ated and how the monies should flow through provinces to the experts and service providers that provide and have provided these services for decades.

Can you provide recommendations, very briefly, on how the government should provide that financial support to organizations like yours and others?

• (0955)

Mr. Shawn MacKeigan: As I listened to the conversation this morning, one thing that came to mind is that food in schools can be easier than we're describing it. In the way that textbooks and computers are very common in schools, imagine for a moment a day when food is as commonplace in a school setting.

Agencies like ours are involved with schools in the neighbourhoods we work and operate in. I can give you an example of one particular program and one particular cohort.

As I said, we support individuals from grade 6 to grade 9. We're only able to support a limited number of students. That program supports anywhere from 12 to 15 students at any given time. The first cohort, or group, of grade 6 students participated in the food security program for the full three years. Each one of the students, who had to navigate some challenging circumstances, graduated from grade 8 with either honours, a scholarship or an award.

Again, it was an inner-city program in a lower socio-economic class, with individuals struggling with self esteem and other individual issues.

I see those outside supportive programs really being able to create those conditions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Collins.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Chabot, the floor is yours for six minutes.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for your testimony and your dedication to combatting food insecurity, which is bigger than the issue of school food programs. We appreciate all your expertise and your work, which improves our children's quality of life.

I am a nurse by profession, but I was the leader of a large labour organization in Quebec whose members were mainly education workers. The social policies that the trade union movement put forward included equal opportunities for children. We are not all born equal, but I think that guaranteeing that children have the right to healthy food creates greater equality of opportunity. We can see that this is the case in the schools as well: Healthy food also has effects on learning, on academic success, and on drop-out rates. These benefits have been proven. I therefore want to thank you for what you are doing.

Mr. Mansfield, there are groups in Quebec at present like the Chantier pour un programme d'alimentation scolaire universel au Québec, which is part of the Coalition pour une saine alimentation scolaire. There is also the Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques, which has done studies to justify going even further and having a universal school food program that would not stigmatize children. You have pointed out how important that is. There are a number of possible formulas. The cost of this has been estimated to be \$18 billion a year. We understand that it would be a very expensive program.

Apart from that, I have some questions about the bill we have before us. Essentially, you understand that no one can be opposed to healthy food in schools. However, Canada is a vast country and expertise in this area lies at the provincial government level, at least in Quebec, where there is significant public funding, since healthy food in schools is not just supported by community organizations.

How can a national framework law support efforts in connection with healthy school food, which must be the role of the provinces in the first instance, without creating overlaps?

[English]

Mr. Brent Mansfield: I'm sorry, but I didn't get that last little bit. I'm going to answer, and you can tell me whether you need a correction.

Amazing work is happening in Quebec and in every province and territory in Canada. That work is happening with a lot of passion from community organizations and support from municipalities.

What I believe this framework can do, in combination with the funding we now have in place, is to create a truly cost-shared program. You're right that working towards its being universal is going to cost a lot of money. The vision of the Coalition for Healthy School Food has always been for it to be cost-shared among the federal government; provincial and territorial governments; municipal governments—a lot of regional and municipal money has been put into school food programs—the community sector, through such things as the charitable sector and donations; and families. There's a role for families to play. We see that when families contribute, they have an investment in it. It is a broad piece.

The coalition has always been very clear that it needs to be flexible and locally adapted. Every province and every community knows what's best for its community. School food programs in rural Quebec are going to look different from those in Newfoundland or in Vancouver or in Tofino. That is the strength of what Canada is.

I think part of this is bringing communities together to figure out how best to feed and engage their children and how to link in local farmers, fishers and food businesses, because the economic benefits go far beyond the investment. The return on investment in children's health alone pays back those costs. If we look at how we support local food economies and how we integrate all these different pieces, that's a different kind of accounting. I think we need to have a bold vision, like what we have with this framework and like what we have matched with the budget, to really see that the benefits truly go beyond just those for children to include those in the form of thriving school communities and local food economies.

• (1000)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot: Thank you.

A distinction has to be made between the framework law that is being presented to us here and the investment of \$1 billion over five years, or \$200 million a year, that was announced in the budget and will be from coast to coast. You were talking about the federal government, and that is what it announced. We were told that there was no connection between the two when I asked the question this morning.

The bill concerns the development of a national framework for establishing a school food program. However, we know that education is the exclusive responsibility of Quebec and the provinces, not only in constitutional terms, but also in practice.

Mr. Mansfield, my question is simple: What amendments would you propose be made to this bill?

[English]

The Chair: Give a short answer.

Mr. Brent Mansfield: I think I spoke directly to the specific amendments.

This is a partnership, and I will trust all of you to work out how provinces and territories work with the federal government. We need to do this. As a teacher who is in school on the ground, I can say that we are failing our children. It would be a massive missed opportunity to not catch up to all of the other G7 countries by providing an opportunity for students to access healthy food at school and not to learn about that.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chabot.

[English]

Ms. Gazan, you have six minutes. Go ahead.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Mansfield.

You indicated that you felt that school food programs were a non-partisan issue. Can you expand on that, please?

Mr. Brent Mansfield: I've heard the idea that we need to make sure that students are fed well in school, and we've heard about the benefits that has. I would hope that transcends any political party.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

I ask that question because it actually, in fact, doesn't.

Do you find it troubling that there are certain members of Parliament who are going to vote against or who have voted against school food programs, and if so, why?

Mr. Brent Mansfield: I think I finished my statement with this. I hope this would be something all political parties could work towards. A framework is an opportunity to have these conversations around how to make sure this works for all provinces, territories and communities across Canada. This is something I hope all elected officials would see as an important issue to ensure the health and well-being of all children in Canada.

• (1005)

Ms. Leah Gazan: I agree with you. I think it is a non-partisan issue; it should be, especially when we're talking about making sure kids have what they need to be able to learn.

I believe in supporting families, and I believe in ensuring that families, children and all people have what they need to live in dignity. One of the things I've proposed is putting in place a framework for a guaranteed livable basic income with Bill C-223. Would you be supportive of that idea, and if so, why?

Mr. Brent Mansfield: I think we often conflate issues when we talk about school food programs. There are many students who go to school hungry for many different reasons. I think a national school food program that is universal would benefit all students. There are many reasons why students might not be eating well at school and might not be successful.

I think, separately, we also need to look at how we address food insecurity and why children are food insecure. Policies like a guaranteed annual income and the Canada child benefit, and even conversations around the groceries and essentials benefit, are things that are going to benefit children and the families that will send them to school so that they can also benefit from these programs. They have different goals, and I think they are both very important.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I want to build on that. You said we often conflate issues, and I agree with you, especially when we're talking about school food programs.

As I indicated in the last panel, I was a teacher for a long time, and I used to just put food out for kids to eat. They didn't have to be hungry or indicate they hadn't eaten. I would just have food out, so if they were hungry, they could get food and there was no stigma attached to it. It became a normal part of our classroom.

With something like your program, where everybody's fed whether it's needed for financial reasons or not, why is it important to provide food without qualification?

Mr. Brent Mansfield: The language in the bill I do really like is about food as a social equalizer. It's also an opportunity for connection. I challenge all of you around this room to think of some of the best memories you have with family and friends. You were probably eating and maybe even drinking and enjoying that together. The opportunity to provide that for children, to model those environments in line with Canada's food guide and to develop a healthy relationship with food is important in this era for all students.

I think it's really important that we look at the opportunities we're providing as part of education. To me, lunch and breakfast and eating are things we can no longer leave out of conversations around what education is for and what role it plays. I think we're missing out on massive opportunities if we're not looking at that.

Not to talk just about my own program, because there are many great programs across Canada, but I wish I could invite you all into the lunchroom at Lord Roberts when we have LunchLAB. If we could do that, you would see that it works. You would see children laughing and talking and serving themselves generously from the salad bar and eating delicious food.

We have a short film that's seven minutes long and was produced for CBC. Search for "LunchLAB" in YouTube and you'll see it. We're not talking about the lowest common denominator of just making sure kids are fed. We're talking about kids who are thriving and who are learning new skills. I think that if you watch it, you will ask, "How would all students not benefit from a program like this?"

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

Mr. MacKeigan, I'm going to ask you a question.

We're talking about food security and also about providing nutritious food for kids in schools. One of the things I've put forward is putting in place a framework for a guaranteed livable basic income. Do you feel that would help the folks you service?

Mr. Shawn MacKeigan: This might be the easiest question I've ever been asked. Yes, it would.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

Given that we don't have livable income guarantees right now, do you feel that has resulted in an increase in the number of people who require your services?

• (1010)

Mr. Shawn MacKeigan: Yes, I do.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Okay.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gazan. That's your six minutes.

We'll now begin with Mrs. Gray for five minutes.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today, and thank you for all of the work that you do in your communities.

I'll start with Mr. Nabein, please.

I want to inquire about some of the information you provided to the committee before the meeting. Today, we're talking about the cost of food and how so many families can't afford to feed themselves in Canada.

You outlined the cost of your organization, which gets food to people in need. I see that, between 2019 and 2024, the cost of your meals has consistently been going up. It's also the length of time the carbon tax has been going up, and of course, we have had record high inflation. Over this time, how have the impacts of the high inflation and the carbon tax impacted your organization's ability to provide the meals that you provide to Canadians?

Mr. Carl Nabein: With the same amount of revenue, we're basically able to provide about half of the meals that we were able to provide before. Even with 48¢, it's still pretty incredible what we can provide. It definitely has been a factor.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

I noted in the information as well that fuel prices per litre have gone up. You outlined in detail some of those numbers.

I see that the fuel prices that you've noted went up 21.5% between January and April of this year alone. We know that the Liberals hiked the carbon tax by 23% on April 1. How has the cost of fuel impacted your costs, how your organization operates and how you serve your community?

Mr. Carl Nabein: We no longer get product shipped to us for free because of the cost. They are no longer able to do it. We've had to increase our cost of transportation when it's shipped to a remote area in Canada. It definitely has had an impact.

Thankfully, with donations, the money is there, but it doesn't go as far as it did. I guess that's the bottom line.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you.

Two very damning reports were just released that show how bad the Liberal policies are on high taxes and high spending and how it's affecting people. First, "Salvation Army Spring 2024 Research" said "3 in 4 Canadians continue to face food security challenges" and that more people "have skipped or reduced the size of at least one meal because they couldn't afford groceries." The Food Banks Canada poverty report stated that almost half of people nationally felt worse off than they did a year ago. It gave an F rating in the poverty measures index, which includes poverty rate, unemployment, and food insecurity. Of course, we know that food bank usage is at a record high after nine years of this government.

Mr. Nabein, based on your experience serving people who can't afford to feed themselves, what do you attribute this to?

Mr. Carl Nabein: Well, there are a number of factors. I think the pandemic did bring that about. Likewise, the war in Ukraine has caused other issues. There are other world issues. Certainly, our costs have gone up due to the cost of fuel and other things.

I have a big concern with the school feeding program. I think it's a wonderful idea. The big concern I have is that they need food now. I think what's been tabled before.... I think the solution is partnering. Ask people what will work in your local community and have the local, municipal and federal governments work together towards a solution. For instance, for 48¢, we can provide an oat-meal and apple-based breakfast that will provide not just a full belly but also full nutrition for a day. For lunch, we have a whole wheat macaroni that's nutrient-based, again, for 48¢.

Schools are very good at raising money for this. As I say, they're one of our biggest supporters. They know about it, and they care about it. Like that lunch program Brent was speaking to, it would work wonderfully. I think that if we can work together, we can overcome the difficulties, even in this ever-increasing inflationary environment.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you very much.

In the spirit and good faith of trying to help improve food security for Canadians, I would like to move the following motion that has been put on notice:

Given that:

- a. Food insecurity is a serious and growing issue in Canada;
- b. In Toronto alone, the Daily Bread Food Bank served 301,354 clients in February 2024, up from 215,848 in February, 2023 and from 52,522 in 2015;
- c. All members of the House should work together to address this issue;

The committee recommend that the House expeditiously pass Bill C-234 amended in order to exempt farms from the carbon tax and lower the cost of groceries for Canadians.

● (1015)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gray.

For committee members, Mrs. Gray has used her prerogative to move a motion that is in order. This motion must be dealt with.

I had Mrs. Falk and then Mr. Fragiskatos.

Go ahead, Mrs. Falk, on the motion.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you very much, Chair.

To committee members, we've heard today the importance of food, especially for children and developing minds. We know that food insecurity is not a new phenomenon, but it has risen drastically within the last nine years. We know that our farmers are the ones paying the carbon tax and, ultimately, that gets passed down to the consumer.

It's imperative that we pass this. It's important that our farmers are able to feed Canadians and also feed the world. I believe that this motion should pass.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Falk.

Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos, on the motion.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I found it interesting, Mr. Chair, that nothing was mentioned about rebates. The fact is that Canadian families in the affected provinces do receive rebates in excess of what they put in, and we know that from the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

I don't want to belabour the point, Mr. Chair. We should move immediately to a vote.

The Chair: There's a call for a vote, so I'll move directly to a recorded vote on the motion by Mrs. Gray.

(Motion negatived: nays 7; yeas 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Mrs. Gray your time has gone.

We still have time left.

Mr. Coteau, you have a couple of minutes to conclude.

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

The work you do to support families and children is probably the most important work that can be done in our society today. It is absolutely true that if we invest in young people and provide them with the opportunity to get an early start and have a balanced approach, it produces a better child, a better adult, a better citizen and a better country.

It's astonishing to me that we are talking about children here, and still Conservatives.... This bill is a very simple piece of legislation. All it's asking is to develop a coordinated strategy between the provinces and territories. That's it. It's saying, "Let's work together."

Mr. Mansfield, I think there were \$230 million dedicated in your province of B.C. to student nutrition programs. This is a huge amount of money. It really does complement well the federal initiative, and we can work together, the federal, provincial and municipal governments and school boards, to do something important here.

I was a trustee for eight years at the Toronto District School Board. I led the task force on student nutrition. One of the recommendations back in 2007 was for a national food program. I remember visiting different jurisdictions, and I heard over and over again that we need a national program.

I taught in South Korea, and they had a national food program. The United States, a country that sometimes is not considered the most supportive of social services, has a national program. Canada is one of the only countries in the G20 that doesn't have one, so I think this is a huge move for Canadians.

The Conservatives talk a lot about carbon pricing. They say that carbon pricing is the way forward—

• (1020)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: We don't say that.

Mr. Michael Coteau: —that it's the way forward in regard to countering the whole argument against Bill C-322.

I heard the same arguments back in my time at the provincial government when we closed the coal plants. The Conservatives said that it would be disastrous. It was all about children from my perspective, because when we closed the coal plants and we mitigated pollution, we saw a 50% reduction in asthma cases in kids in the GTA.

We're talking about carbon pricing here. We're talking about putting in place a system that reduces pollution by penalizing those who pollute the most. We're putting in place mitigating penalties for those who pollute the most and reducing it by creating an incentive not to pollute. We're talking about children here in Bill C-322.

This is a proposed piece of legislation that I see as a game-changer for this country, and it's a shame that the Conservatives can think of carbon pricing only when it comes to a very simple framework that's being proposed by one of the members.

Mr. Mansfield, you ran 200 times around the school to raise awareness. That was 90 kilometres, I believe. How long did it take you?

Mr. Brent Mansfield: It took 11 hours and 20 minutes, with a pause for a press conference, a few bathroom breaks and a couple of snacks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

Mr. Michael Coteau: That's it? That's my five minutes?

The Chair: Well, we're running out of time.

Mr. Michael Coteau: That wasn't five minutes, though.

The Chair: You can sum up with a quick question.

Mr. Michael Coteau: What did that do for your community, raising awareness around this issue?

Mr. Brent Mansfield: It was fantastic. My students were with me for most of the day. I finished at about five o'clock. I had about 200 people still there. Families and parents mobilized.

This has been a major part of my teaching. My students would probably be watching this right now if it weren't so early. I will go back and show them. They believe in this. My school board believes in this. My province believes in this. Part of the reason I ran was that I saw leadership from my province. I'm now looking for leadership from this federal government.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Thank you for running, and thank you for leading.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Coteau.

Committee members, as it relates to....

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: I'm listening.

The Chair: Good. Thank you. Nobody else is.

As it relates to Bill C-322, as you know, as chair I've always taken the prerogative to allow the promoter of the bill or motions to present in the House. Since the promoter of this bill is Mr. Cormier, who is not a standing member of the committee, I need the committee to consider, after we do clause-by-clause on Monday, is it the will of the committee that a 30-sitting-day extension be requested to the House to ensure that the report can be presented the week of June 3?

It's a routine proceeding that the committee would have to adopt to allow Mr. Cormier to table it when the committee dispenses of the bill.

Do I have agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you, committee members.

Finally, with regard to the committee study on the federal housing investment, is it the will of the committee to have a press release prepared to inform the public about briefs and the deadline to submit briefs?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Good. Thank you, committee members.

With that, thank you for your time, and thank you to the witnesses.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The committee is adjourned. Thank you.

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