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Chair: Mr. Kelly McCauley



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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC)):** Good morning, everyone, and welcome back.

I call this meeting to order.

**Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC):** Mr. Chair...

**The Chair:** Can I get to you after I do my preamble, please?

**Mr. Scot Davidson:** Okay. Canadians and small businesses are waiting. Thank you.

**The Chair:** I'll go through my preamble first.

Welcome to meeting number 99 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. The committee is meeting to consider matters related to committee business.

This is just a reminder to please not put your earpieces next to the microphone, as this causes feedback and potential injury to our very valued interpreters.

Before we start, I want to welcome Mr. Taylor Bachrach to OGGO.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** We've had the pleasure of working over the years with many of your colleagues, Mr. Johns being one of them. We will miss him, but welcome to OGGO.

Mr. Davidson, did you have something?

I'm sorry. Very quickly, we will go in camera to discuss the letter that was received and distributed. Then we have to get through a couple of the budgets very quickly, with a quick conversation regarding travel and whether or not we wish to try to revive the ship-building tour.

Go ahead, Mr. Davidson.

**Mr. Scot Davidson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning, colleagues.

Mr. Chair, given that it is Red Tape Awareness Week, I would like to urgently move the following motion. I will read it in full this morning for the benefit of my colleagues and Canadians, especially small businesses, watching these proceedings:

Given that government regulation and red tape impose higher costs on Canadians, making the cost-of-living crisis worse, and that excessive regulation and red tape are felt by small businesses, entrepreneurs and throughout the entire economy, including housing, health care, energy and more, the committee recognize

the following negative impacts caused by government red tape and regulation and report to the House that:

i. The 2024 red tape report card, the federal government received a "C-" on the regulatory burden it places on businesses, according to the CFIB,

ii. 92% of small businesses want the government to reduce regulation and red tape, according to the CFIB,

The CFIB is the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

iii. Canada ranks 34 out of 35 OECD countries in time it takes to approve a building project, while the United States and the United Kingdom approve projects three times faster than Canada, according to the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force,

iv. The Canadian Home Builders' Association says the average development approval timelines in some of Canada's most unaffordable cities have continued to worsen, with Toronto increasing from 21 months in 2020 to 32 months in 2022, and Vancouver increasing from 13 months in 2020 to 15 months in 2022,

v. 54% of foreign trained doctors and 64% of foreign trained nurses do not work in health care, according to Statistics Canada,

vi. The Government of Canada says it takes up to 25 years—

You can work an entire lifetime.

—to build a mine in Canada,

In order to lower costs, and improve services for Canadians, the committee call on the government to immediately reduce the regulatory burden and red tape across all sectors in the economy and table a plan within 30 days of this motion being adopted showing reductions in red tape and regulation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

I'll start a speaking list. I have Mrs. Kusie and Mr. Jowhari.

I understand that you have sent in a translated copy already, Mr. Davidson. We'll distribute that. We'll suspend for a couple of seconds while it gets sent out and everyone has a chance to read it.

It has been sent out electronically to your P9s, colleagues.

We'll start with Mrs. Kusie and then we'll go to Mr. Jowhari.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for entertaining this motion.

I very much thank MP Davidson, who is our shadow minister for red tape, for being here today and for bringing forward this important motion at such an important time. It's at a time when so many Canadians and businesses—small businesses in particular—are suffering. I truly appreciate his being here today at the government operations committee and bringing forward this motion.

I want to provide some statistics in support of this motion. The 2024 Fraser Institute energy sector competitiveness report says, "Overall, the US performs better than Canada in 13 out of the 16 policy factors." Also, more than half of investors "indicated that uncertainty concerning environmental regulations, regulatory duplication and inconsistencies...were more concerning in Canadian provinces than in US states."

Mr. Chair, I know that you come from the great province of Alberta, as I do. This province has suffered greatly in its production capacity as a result of this government's red tape initiatives. Thank you for being here today, MP Davidson, on behalf of Albertans as well, to bring this motion forward.

The July 12, 2023, Toronto Sun says, "almost 90% of federal managers received bonuses averaging \$17,000 a year [since 2020], even though under half of federal departments and agencies achieve their annual production targets." One of the targets should be to reduce red tape. We have individuals receiving compensation bonuses when they are not achieving their objectives, and that's another struggle we see against the abundance of red tape.

This is from the January 13, 2024, Toronto Sun:

When Trudeau came to power in 2015, 43,424 federal bureaucrats were collecting a six-figure salary. By 2022, that number more than doubled to 102,761.

The Trudeau government also dished out more than \$1 billion in bonuses, despite government departments tripping over themselves while attempting to deliver services.

Next I'm going to bring up a very concerning anecdote regarding children's adoption:

Backlogs within Canada's immigration bureaucracy are creating what one observer calls an "impossible situation" for families adopting children from outside of the country, with processing delays now far outlasting their children's visas and rendering the kids ineligible for provincial health coverage...

Children adopted overseas are usually granted a six-month temporary residence permit, essentially a tourist visa, upon entering Canada. That used to be sufficient to allow IRCC to finish processing their citizenship applications. But delays for processing citizenship for adopted kids are now running close to two years, well past the expiry of temporary visas. That is leaving parents scrambling to get extensions and the children ineligible for basic social programs.

Once again we see the government struggling to deliver on the most basic services for Canadians, and for new Canadians in particular, which is no doubt a result of red tape.

Service Canada's passport delays netted CFIB's worst red tape award. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business awarded the 2023 Paperweight Award for worst red tape service to Service Canada's passport mess, something I just alluded to in the example that I indicated regarding adoption. A public opinion poll by the CFIB found that 80% of passport applicants experienced some level of frustration as they applied for or tried to renew a passport in this past year. I know that my NDP colleague will appreciate this statistic given their recent work with CFIB on the CEBA extension.

That's an incredible number—80% of passport applicants had dissatisfaction as a result of red tape.

It would be nice to say goodbye to red tape and hello to green, but as the Financial Post notes:

"No fewer than four times on a single page...of her fall economic statement, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, or the anonymous finance...scribe writing for her, says the federal government is intent on cutting red tape." It's unbelievable.

It goes on:

Only one problem. There are deals with nine cities and one province. The cities have a combined population of just over four million people. So that's about 10 per cent of the country's population....

And a second problem: federal-municipal agreements, even to cut red tape, are themselves a form of red tape.

That's unbelievable.

• (1110)

The feds won't just give the cities an opportunity to cut the red tape. We are seeing, time and time again, problems with red tape under this government.

I mentioned the problems this government is causing for our home province, Mr. Chair, of Alberta. I'd also like to point to something positive that's going on in the Confederation regarding red tape. It is that in Alberta, the United Conservative Party has tabled a sweeping red tape bill. Isn't that a beacon of light for the nation? Wouldn't you say so, MP Davidson?

They have introduced a series of new measures that will reduce red tape through an omnibus bill. Wait a minute. Isn't it like the omnibus Bill S-6, which is still with this government and has yet to pass? We are still waiting for Bill S-6 to pass. It's the most simple of red tape cutting, not even innovative red tape cutting, MP Davidson. It's only red tape for low-hanging fruit, simple measures that need to be adjusted to eliminate the most burdensome of the smallest pieces of red tape. They can't even seem to get this through or make it a priority to get it through the government. Now we have the Government of Alberta providing this omnibus bill—which should be an example for this government—that "will change 14 pieces of legislation across nine different ministries", per the Calgary Herald. My goodness. I think there are more departments involved in the ArriveCAN scandal than there are here that will be affected by this change from the United Conservative government in Alberta.

The article goes on: “Among the most prominent changes”—and I want to continue to provide some ideas for the government here, MP Davidson—“is legislation that includes federal employees under trespassing rules, something...[that] is wanted and necessary”. It notes push-back on “virtue signalling” because it is “clarifying that trespass legislation applies to everyone”. That’s the main one listed there, but it also talks about changes to transport funding and to firefighter support. Firefighters have been in to see me on several occasions to talk about different pieces of legislation.

This is Bill 9 that I’m referring to. I really think this government should perhaps take a look at what the provincial government has done in Alberta as just a follow-up to the motion that MP Davidson has suggested here today. An omnibus bill would be wonderful in addition to the request that MP Davidson has made. So would passing Bill S-6. It would be a great little start if they could do this.

Again, I’d like to thank MP Davidson for being here today to present this motion to the committee for its consideration. I hope Canadians across the country will be inspired this week to contact their representatives and ask them to cut just one small piece of red tape, one small bit.

• (1115)

**Mr. Scot Davidson:** Cut one piece. Get out a chainsaw.

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** That’s right. Get a chainsaw and let’s cut a piece of red tape across this nation, MP Davidson.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Kusie.

Mr. Jowhari, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to request a 10-minute recess or suspension for us to review the motion and have a discussion.

**The Chair:** How about five minutes?

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I’d like 10 minutes, please.

**The Chair:** We’ll start with five and we’ll see.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I can guarantee that we won’t be back in five.

**The Chair:** We will suspend.

• (1115)

(Pause)

• (1125)

**The Chair:** We are back.

Mr. Jowhari, the floor is still yours.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is red tape reduction week, and our government has been committed to working with all parties across all jurisdictions to ensure that we support small businesses. All of the players and stakeholders in this want to make sure that we reduce the red tape to be able to move forward.

We worked with all levels of government effectively during COVID. That’s the best testimony. We managed to work effectively

and protect the lives of many Canadians. We had the backs of businesses and relaxed a lot of constraints to ensure that small businesses, which seem to be the focus of this motion, were given the support they needed. Also, there was the extension of the CEBA loan and how effectively we worked with other institutions to support them, and even the reduction of the small business tax at the outset when this government came in.

Very much in the true spirit of this motion, or what should have been the spirit of it, we support the reduction of red tape. However, in general, I’ll make two or three points that I want highlighted.

One, I think the intent of this is a mix of politics and a bit of promotion on social media. I think the intent of getting a motion like this to the committee and reporting to the House is to bring in a concurrence motion and hold the government back from doing what we are all here to do.

Naturally, as to the preamble about the 2024 red tape report and 92% of small businesses, a lot of this is old data from way back in 2021 and 2022, or it is not in our jurisdiction. I’m not going to get much into the preamble and the relevance of the preamble, because that, to me, is just a social media clip.

The real motion is:

In order to lower costs, and improve services for Canadians, the committee call on the government to immediately reduce the regulatory burden and red tape across all sectors in the economy...within 30 days of this motion...

The scope of this motion is going to warrant a lot of conversation. My colleagues are going to address some of the points that have been made here. As part of the preamble, I believe there’s a lot of room to set the story straight.

On that note, I think the scope of this motion and the intent of this motion are misaligned. I look forward to hearing the true scope and the real intent of this motion as we continue our conversation.

Thank you.

• (1130)

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

I have Mr. Powlowski and then Mr. Sousa.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Personally, I am not totally averse to this and to the issue of addressing red tape. Red tape is an issue all over the world and at every level of government. It’s not like you’re dealing with a municipality and suddenly there’s no red tape there, or dealing with a province and there’s no red tape there. It’s not like the federal Liberals invented red tape in the red tape act of 1934. It’s been around. It affects every country.

I remember that in law school in administrative law, there was one chapter on regulations. The professor said something to the effect that we have many laws, but in our everyday lives as Canadians, the very rules that affect us most are in regulations. There is such a plethora of regulations all across society, at every level of society, and certainly in Canada we have a lot of them. I remember going to a WHO conference on health legislation where a presenter from Switzerland said that one jurisdiction actually had 35 laws applying to health. Guess where that was: It was Ontario.

We do have a lot of rules. We do have a lot of laws. However, I would point out that in your motion you're combining apples, oranges, bananas and mangoes, and you're throwing in some turnips and potatoes. There are all kinds of stuff in there. You want to look at red tape that's impeding how quickly building projects get approved, red tape involving getting foreign-trained doctors and nurses approved and red tape involving mines. Really, are we going to do this in a month?

Again, it's not like this was the invention of the Liberal Party. I'm sure that under Harper there were various kinds of red tape. This is ubiquitous all across government in general.

I think if you're going to make a good study, you have to narrow down a bit what kind of red tape you're addressing.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Mr. Sousa and then to Ms. Vignola.

**Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This discussion is relevant on a number of points.

In many jurisdictions across Canada.... With the way it's presented, I get it; you guys are trying to get your clip, but the preamble is just that. It's not necessarily relevant to this committee. It is relevant to businesses that are operating and to the economic sustainability of Canada.

We want to be competitive; hence there having been a lot of red tape reduction measures taking place over a number of years. It's part of the annual review to do so. Being red tape week, for us, it's a consequence of every day maintaining Canada's competitiveness in the international market so that we are one of the top destinations for FDI. Canada still attracts foreign direct investment like no other across the world. That's very telling.

It's also very telling that we've taken measures to reduce red tape, yet the Conservatives voted against those very measures, like the accelerator fund. Here we have an opportunity to accelerate, by its very name, the building of new developments. The Conservatives don't see that as worthy, yet that is a measure by which we reduce red tape.

We have had many discussions with provinces to try to facilitate their reduction measures as well. We have aboriginal communities. We have municipal governments that also have consequences of red tape. The collaboration among these different levels of government is crucial to going forward.

Your motion, in essence, is just the last paragraph. I have to read it for those watching on TV so they can appreciate how frankly ridiculous it is. It reads, "In order to lower costs, and improve services for Canadians, the committee call on the government to im-

mediately reduce the regulatory burden and red tape across all sectors in the economy".

The Canadian government doesn't have jurisdiction over the Alberta government or the Ontario government, which, in collaboration with the federal government, are taking measures to reduce red tape. They want that plan developed and tabled within 30 days of this motion. Well, a plan is already in place. What is happening here, for those who are watching, is the Conservatives are trying to play with the regulatory burden that all of us feel and get frustrated by. We want to take measures to reduce it to improve our competitiveness. That is always the case—not just this week—and it's being done already. They're just duplicating that which is already under way.

Furthermore, you have independent regulatory bodies out there that are at arm's length of government for a reason, like the Ontario Securities Commission. One of the things we wanted to do was bring forward a national co-operative securities commission across Canada. What would that do? It would reduce red tape, lower costs and be competitive for Canadians and foreign investors coming to Canada.

Who voted against that? Conservative provincial governments did. They were opposed to it because they were afraid of losing jurisdictional power, yet what was at stake? It was the competitiveness of Canada and businesses doing work in Canada, including in Alberta and the oil industry.

They had an opportunity to be much more competitive by having a collaborative securities regulator across the country reducing red tape, reducing regulations and reducing government, yet it was the Conservatives who wanted that government to have dual status. Why? It was to create greater burden.

They're speaking from both sides of their mouth. On the one hand, they don't want red tape. On the other hand, they want their little domain protected and they want us to continue to regulate those respective industries. That is a dichotomy.

We will continue, on this side of the House, to look at ways to reduce red tape in a collaborative and efficient manner, and here's why: We already have a number of measures under way to modernize our regulatory process. We have made changes over time and there have been amendments to try to find ways to simplify the process. It is a huge undertaking because there is so much activity across this country with regard to regulatory issues and, for that matter, economic activity. It's a very vibrant country and jurisdiction in the world that competes with other nationalities and other nations, and Canada is winning in many of those cases.

However, I agree we need to be more efficient and reduce some of the burden. We need to find ways to be more competitive. That is always a priority.

• (1135)

They mentioned that there was nothing in the economic statement, but my goodness, there have been red tape discussions in budgets 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021. Every time we talk about the competitiveness with which Canada can attract investment, we talk about red tape reduction and finding ways to be more efficient. We need to be, and it's not just Canada. It's the provinces and the municipalities as well.

We will continue to collaborate, but let's be practical. What's being proposed here is just a show. What needs to be done is something more practical for Canadians and businesses. We also need to protect the very measures for which red tape exists. There are some regulatory matters that pertain to the environment and to people's social well-being and they enable us to protect the lives of Canadians as well.

We have to balance those measures, but you should have accepted the accelerator fund. You should accept measures that are taken to try to speed up some of the process and reduce costs. We have to try to find a way to maintain a better process for supply chain costs so that we can get into the marketplace and be competitive.

Listen, during the 2008 recession, there was a national crisis and a financial crisis across the globe. At that time, a lot of manufacturing was hit and was hit very hard, and a lot of jobs were lost. If it weren't for some of the regulatory engagement that existed with our Canadian banking institutions, we would have been in real trouble. Because of those measures, Canada responded and reacted much more quickly than any other nation. In fact, some of the very holdings and assets that Canadians held were protected as a result of some of those regulatory issues.

We also took steps to support the auto sector. We took steps to further enhance our industry. The federal government at the time stepped up, and so did the Province of Ontario, which was under a Liberal government at the time. We took those steps, contrary to the Conservatives in the province, who said, no, they didn't want to do those kinds of things because we were increasing supports for this industry and were bailing out companies where they didn't feel that should be the case. In the end, we had over a million net new jobs throughout that time. All those jobs that were lost, plus a million more, were brought in because of some of the measures we did to expedite the industry, to stimulate economic growth and to enhance activity, and we did it by being more efficient with less burdensome aspects around the regulatory system.

We need to continue to be that way. We need to continue to be nimble and vibrant. What we don't need are measures and steps that would only create havoc in the system. When I look at the preamble, we get all that stuff and have those discussions, but what you're suggesting by this motion is to get rid of regulatory aspects completely. The idea is, well, which ones? How do you do it and under what conditions? What do you do to protect those individuals?

Alberta wants to be protected as well. When we were trying to reduce the regulatory burden, they were the ones that fought it, and now they're saying, "My gosh, we need to reduce red tape." Well, of course we need to reduce red tape, but we need to collaborate and we need to work in conjunction with one another to make it effective.

I just find the motion, which is really only the last paragraph, undoable. The plan that exists is the plan we have, so it can be provided in no time, but with regard to adopting certain reductions in regulations, that's an ongoing matter. That will continue to be the case, and we'll continue to make Canada much more competitive as we go forward. Also, it is more appropriate for this to be at the industry and small business committee, where they're dealing with these issues constantly. I would move that we cancel this motion.

Let's continue to fight for a reduction in red tape and continue to be competitive, and let's put the proper committee in place to review this as we go forward.

Thank you.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Are you moving to adjourn, Mr. Sousa? You've said that you want to cancel this motion. Is that a move to adjourn or is that just rhetoric?

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** No, I'm saying so far as I'm concerned, it's ridiculous. It's a figure of speech.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mrs. Vignola, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If there is one thing I completely approve of, it is indeed cutting red tape. I was elected four years ago and we've been talking about it for four years.

The Red Tape Reduction Act makes no sense. Removing a piece of paper from one department's forms doesn't mean any kind of change for the other departments. I agree there's a lot of red tape in some sectors, and it needs to be cut down. I recognize we didn't finish our study of the act when Parliament was prorogued in 2020, which put the brakes on our conversations and recommendations on the matter. That's a real shame.

I am having some trouble correctly understanding the French version of the act. The way the sentences are drafted makes no sense. Some of them are incomplete. For example, certain expressions denote a cause, but there is no consequence afterwards. Two or three sentences are drafted this way, meaning without linking words, as we call them in French grammar, to correctly understand the links between sentences.

This motion refers to jurisdictions that belong to Canadian provinces and Quebec, as well as municipalities. However, as an MP and a citizen of democracy, I'm not comfortable inviting the federal government to meddle with provincial, Quebecois and municipal democracy. It's as though citizens who voted for the people in place have no voice or importance. This interference is a problem for me. It comes down to saying that federal democracy is more important than provincial democracy or municipal democracy. I am seriously uncomfortable with it.

I fully agree that our role as MPs involves making sure that all the taxes we and taxpayers pay are used sensibly and rationally, not wastefully. I also think it is up to MPs, regardless of their political stripe, to make sure the money is well spent and constantly improve services. I therefore approve part of the motion.

However, another part of this motion makes me seriously uncomfortable, because it means interfering with other levels of democracy, which I cannot approve. So, I will probably follow up later with an amendment or suggestion for an amendment. I can't do it right now, specifically for translation reasons, but also because discussions have to happen between all colleagues so that everyone can come to an understanding.

I would have liked to get the motion ahead of time, if only by 24 hours. We could have discussed it right away. We could also have avoided some of the debate we're having now. However, since we were surprised by the motion, we weren't able to discuss it amongst ourselves, amongst people who are, all in all, civilized. We could have moved the debate forward in a way to completely represent the views of each party, the people of Quebec and the people of Canada.

• (1145)

Don't forget that a minority government is the most democratic government that can exist, because we have no choice but to talk and negotiate. By doing so, we represent not only those who elected us as MPs for a certain party, but also all those who did not vote for us and nonetheless expect us to represent them fairly and equitably. This can only happen under a minority government.

Instead, we unfortunately find ourselves with a motion which came as a surprise and that we weren't able to discuss thoroughly. We are talking about it now, but it involves longer conversations and possible amendments, which aren't necessarily ready the second we get the famous motion.

So, in a few moments, you can expect that I will speak again and suggest changes regarding all of the points I just raised.

Thank you for giving me the floor, Mr. Chair.

• (1150)

[English]

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

Go ahead, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

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

I really do appreciate hearing all the comments from my colleagues around the table. I very much welcome this discussion and debate. I think it's an important one.

I've been reading a book by Cass Sunstein, who was inside the first Obama administration. The name of the book is *Simpler*. I would recommend that all members pick it up because of what it's about. How do we make government and the economy simpler? How do we streamline things? How do we make them more effective? How do we make them more efficient? It's really interesting, because I think that is absolutely the goal of Liberal members of

this government, as it was a priority in the Obama administration, a democratic government in the United States as well.

It's important to recognize that this is a priority, really, for all governments, so I welcome this discussion. I welcome this debate. I think it's an important debate to have. However, this motion, as it is currently crafted, is lazy and dim, and the only purpose it serves is as a slogan to gather clips. That's all it is. Let's just put all our cards on the table. Let's call a spade a spade and let's say what this motion is about. This is an important issue, but this motion is just poor. It doesn't meet the standard of what should be a very important conversation.

Our government is committed to cutting red tape. Let me give you one example of that. The most important issue right now facing our country is the housing shortage, the shortage of affordable housing, and the very purpose of our housing accelerator fund is to partner with municipalities directly to cut red tape and to make different types of housing legal again. A perfect example of that is working with our municipalities to provide funding to encourage municipalities that want to get more housing built to eliminate some of the red tape at the local level—specifically, rules that made it illegal to build four units “as of right” across cities. Twenty-eight municipalities have signed up to our housing accelerator fund plan. Twenty-eight communities have adopted four units “as of right” across their cities. They're cutting red tape, with our support, to help build more housing. Those twenty-eight communities have committed to building 400,000 new housing units in the next few years.

This is what a federal government that is collaborative and that understands partnerships looks like. It's working directly with municipalities to cut red tape to get more affordable housing built faster in our communities. It's odd that the Conservatives, who are so interested in cutting red tape and so interested in building more houses, voted against the housing accelerator fund and voted against Bill C-56. When we introduced a bill to cut GST from the construction of rental housing, they voted against it. You have a government that's committed to doing the right thing, to making sure we get houses built and to making sure we work with our provincial and municipal counterparts to get more houses built, in part by cutting red tape. That's what we're doing. Conservatives are against.

Let me give you another recent example: renewable energy and the Atlantic accords. Bill C-49 would extend the Atlantic accords to build offshore wind farms in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. There's already a project being built. It's a billion-dollar project. There are billions of dollars waiting to be invested in offshore wind farms and clean energy in the Atlantic provinces right now.



• (1155)

We introduced Bill C-49 to streamline that process to make it easier for investment in clean technology and wind farms across the Atlantic provinces. We're talking about billions of dollars to create tens of thousands of jobs in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. One of the foundations of that bill is to cut red tape and streamline the process.

By the way, the provinces all supported it. The premiers of those provinces signed on. Who voted against those accords? Who voted against streamlining the process to build offshore wind farms in the Atlantic? It was the Conservatives. They are the ones who are bringing forward a dim, lazy motion to cut red tape at this committee.

It's appalling. Enough with the politics. Let's talk a bit more about this preamble and some of the things contained in the colourful preamble that was introduced here today.

Let's talk about the economy. In the last year, Canada was the number one destination for foreign direct investment in the entire world, per capita. What does that mean? It means that more international companies invested more money in our country than in any other country in the world, per capita.

Businesses see Canada as the place to put their money because they know that it's a good investment. They know that this is where you have the best workforce in the world. This is where you have the best investment climate in the world.

Let's talk facts. That's Canada. It's the number one destination for foreign direct investment. That is businesses voting with their feet and with their money to come here. There's Stellantis in Windsor, which we know the Conservatives don't support. There's Volkswagen in St. Thomas. We know the Conservatives don't support it, even though their own member represents that entire community. There's Northvolt in Montreal. They don't support that. They don't support investments in clean technology.

There are 1.1 million more workers working in this country now than before the pandemic. That is a federal government working hand in hand with business to grow and strengthen our economy. That's a partnership. We have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio of any major developed country. We have a AAA rating from the credit agency. We were able to attract this investment. We were able to create jobs. We're on a sound fiscal footing as well.

Wages have been higher than inflation in the last year. In my community, we've seen unions negotiate historic deals with the Big Three, which are putting more money in the pockets of Canadians and workers. We're seeing workers earning more money today than in the past.

Let's talk about unions and red tape for a second. The Conservatives wanted to drown unions in red tape. They forget that. They introduced Bill C-377. My colleague across the way from the NDP remembers that. When they were in government, they wanted to drown unions in red tape with all sorts of different accounting paperwork that unions would have been forced to submit. It would have crippled them. It would have undermined unions' work by drowning them in red tape. These are the very same unions that

have fought for higher wages and better work conditions for Canadians over the last number of months.

You talk about the economy. We are a trading nation. We export. Most of our GDP is created because we have companies that export goods to the United States and around the world. In my hometown, 80% to 90% of what we manufacture is for export. In Windsor—Essex, 90% of what we grow is for export.

• (1200)

This government has signed more trade deals than pretty much anyone. We have trade deals with just about every country on this planet. We wanted to sign a free trade agreement with Ukraine, which Ukraine herself asked for, that would not only support Ukraine in her time of need but support farmers in Canada and support Canadian businesses looking to do business in Ukraine to help in the future reconstruction of Ukraine. The Conservatives voted against that free trade agreement for the very same game of politics they're playing here today: slogans, politics, videos—yay.

Try governing. Try working with us to govern this country. That's what we're asking for: real policies, real ideas, real programs, real partnerships—none of these lazy, dim slogans.

The other thing I would say, on the issue of foreign doctors and nurses, is that the training of doctors and nurses takes place at the provincial level. The training of foreign international health care workers takes place at the provincial level. We know that. We understand that. We also understand that we have a role to play in that as well. That's why, literally four weeks ago, we announced, for example, that we are spending an additional \$86 million to help 15 provincial organizations and associations speed up the credentialing of internationally trained health care workers. The credentialing of 6,600 health care workers will be sped up.

I want to quote what the minister texted just a few weeks ago. This is the Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities—she herself a nurse—on the issue of foreign credential recognition. Here is what she tweeted out literally two days ago: “@PierrePoilievre, take it from me, a nurse: actions speak louder than words. You voted against the work we’re doing that’s speeding up foreign credential recognition. Your slogans won’t fool nurses, we know the only thing happening to healthcare under Conservatives is cuts.” Ouch.

It's the same thing, guys. We know your shtick. It's just slogans—empty slogans. There is nothing behind them, and there's nothing behind this motion. It's just slogans.

I'm begging you. Do the work that Canadians sent us to Parliament Hill to do. Work with us. Get serious. Cut the videos. Cut the slogans. Cut the politics. Do the damn work. Get things done.

With that, Mr. Chair, I thank you for this opportunity to talk about what I think is an important issue. There are many different aspects to this issue, but let's be serious about it. Let's toss this motion in the garbage bin where it belongs. Let's talk about this issue seriously and approach it from the many different avenues it deserves.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bains, you have the floor.

**Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's hard to follow my colleague, who outlined a tremendous number of initiatives already under way that ultimately need collaboration. We talk about collaboration to get things done. I think we've seen here in this committee, and in other committees that I'm involved in, the constant delays from the members opposite, who like to bring forward motions to ultimately not get things done.

As to the premise of it, to my colleague across, I understand it. I used to work in the Government of British Columbia. We actually had a ministry of deregulation. Within four years, I think over 75,000 different pieces of legislation were cut. I think Mr. Sousa mentioned at one point during his intervention that certain regulations are there to protect consumers, to protect Canadians.

There was some fallout from some of the regulations that were deregulated. We saw a real estate industry in British Columbia—in my hometown of Richmond, B.C., and in the greater Vancouver area—that got out of control because of it. We had a real estate industry where constant flipping was coming into play. I know we have an anti-flipping measure that's being placed at this point. We are trying to get those measures in place, but again, there are constant delays from the members across, who are continuing to ultimately just play politics and not let us get things done here and move forward the things that Canadians deserve.

Industries were unregulated to the point that we saw, for example, the issue of the housing crisis, which we're talking about right now and trying to work on collaboratively with every municipality across the country. We had a realty industry that was literally writing up contracts and flipping the contracts, with prices going up by \$50,000 a month, creating a false sense of what the market was. Regulation was needed to protect those people.

If we look at some of the other measures we're talking about here, even for Bill S-6 we saw members across during the debate put up speaker after speaker when a simple vote could have taken place.

**An hon. member:** Speaker after speaker...

**Mr. Parm Bains:** Yes. It's an important topic. I think we should hear from everybody, or do you just want to speak?

Again, this is the thing. We're talking about amendments that will help to reduce administrative burden for businesses and facilitate digital interactions with government. We've seen digital adoption take place to find efficiencies. That work needs to be done, and we

all need to collaborate to get things done. We should “simplify regulatory processes, make exemptions from certain regulatory requirements to test new products, and make cross-border trade easier through more consistent and coherent rules across governments.” That's all governments. I know the members opposite. We're talking about working with regulating bodies across provinces.

When I look at the motion being put forward, I go back to what my colleague Mr. Powlowski said: It's all sectors in the economy. We need to pinpoint this down to what we are trying to achieve. If we're talking about deregulation, which industries? Let's break it down. It's a bit tough to say “within 30 days” for “all sectors in the economy”. How are we going to impose some of these things on all of the regulatory bodies that exist out there—for doctors the colleges of physicians, and for engineers the colleges of engineers? Are we once again imposing lower standards, as I talked about in the real estate industry?

• (1210)

When we push deregulation on every industry across the country, we have to do it carefully so as not to lower the standards being set by every industry across Canada. I understand and agree that we need to continue the work and make sure we make the changes necessary to get things moving, but that requires all of us to work together.

**An hon. member:** We don't want to throw it in the garbage.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** No. Collaboration is so important.

When we look at just our parliamentary processes here, we see members trying to delay things, doing 30-hour votes, putting things forward that would move the country forward and then voting against them. Then we come back to them over and over, and now we're discussing them again.

What I'd ultimately like to see is some more clarity on what we're trying to do here because I'm still a bit confused. The motion says, “all sectors in the economy and table a plan within 30 days of this motion”—with no plan being put forward—“being adopted showing reductions in red tape and regulation.” We can go back to Bill S-6. Look the Competition Act. It's an important piece of legislation. We could have already been moving forward on that, but no.

I think right before the break, all of a sudden we were met with over 131 amendments, ultimately. I don't even want to call them amendments. They were political games. I ended up doing 200 push-ups over those 30 hours, though. That was the only benefit I got out of it.

**An hon. member:** It shows.

**Mr. Parm Bains:** As I said, I think—

**An hon. member:** That's not as many as Pierre did.

**The Chair:** Can we just let Mr. Bains have his time?

**Mr. Parm Bains:** I think what we're looking at here is something that needs to be more clear. The motion being put forward needs to have a tremendous amount of clarity added and then it can be brought forward. I don't think this is something we can move forward on as it is.

With that, Mr. Chair, thank you.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Mr. Bachrach, go ahead, please, and then we'll go to Mr. Genuis.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the warm welcome at the start of the meeting. It's a distinct pleasure to join the government operations committee. I know that my colleague Gord Johns did some great work here. I look forward to continuing that legacy.

When it comes to the motion before us, I think what we've heard in the debate so far is that everyone around this table supports the reduction of inefficient and unnecessary regulation. That process needs to be done thoughtfully, not only so we're serving the interests of the small businesses in our community, but also so we're avoiding the pitfalls of deregulation that is ill-informed and improperly constructed.

I'm not sure, given this government's track record, that requiring a plan within 30 days is going to serve anybody. I think a plan covering every sector of our economy that is hastily put together in 30 days to satisfy a motion from the government operations committee isn't going to be a plan at all. I don't think that escapes anyone around this table.

The matter I want to speak to specifically relates to the fact that my Conservative colleagues, in their introductory remarks speaking to this motion, cited several times the work of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, an organization that represents small businesses in all of our communities. I know that folks around this table have probably met with that organization on several occasions over the past number of months, yet in the preamble to this motion there's no mention of the CFIB's number one priority, which for the past year has been the extension of the loan repayment deadline for the CEBA loans, including the partial loan forgiveness portion.

This affects thousands if not hundreds of thousands of businesses across Canada. During the tough times of the pandemic when they were struggling to keep their doors open and when many of them were forced to close their doors due to public health measures, they took out these loans to stay alive. They did so reluctantly. I don't think there's a small business in any of our communities that takes on extra debt with any enthusiasm. They did this in part because the government extended a generous loan forgiveness offer. If they borrowed \$40,000, they could qualify for 25% of that, or \$10,000, to be forgiven if they paid it back by a certain date. If they borrowed \$60,000, they could qualify for \$20,000 to be forgiven. For anyone who's been in business, those are favourable terms for borrowing money. Many businesses, including those in my riding of Skeena—Bulkley Valley, like Grizzly Jim's General Store in Topley and the Tillicum Twin Theatres in Terrace, took out those loans in

order to survive some of the toughest economic times our country had seen.

What we've been calling for over the past number of months is very much in line with what the CFIB is calling for. The government should extend the repayment deadline for the CEBA loans by an additional year, until the end of 2024, including the partial loan forgiveness offer. This recognizes that no sooner had businesses started to recover—and many of them haven't fully recovered from the challenges of the pandemic—that they were hit with a number of other extremely challenging trends, including rising inflation, the high cost of living and challenges with a tight labour market. This created a perfect storm for many small businesses in our communities.

What they have been asking for is something that's eminently reasonable—a bit more time to pay back the loans. I don't think anyone is suggesting that businesses should be held to the terms of the original agreement, but they're looking for some more time so they can access loan forgiveness, which was one of the reasons they were willing to take on this debt in the first place. My NDP colleagues and I, along with some of our Bloc colleagues, have been raising this repeatedly in the House of Commons over the past year.

● (1215)

It's disappointing, and I don't think lost on many small businesses, that our Conservative colleagues and our Liberal colleagues have been almost entirely silent on this issue. Despite the calls of the CFIB for this loan forgiveness to be extended, there has been no support from the two largest parties in the House of Commons. I think is a real shame, because I believe, working together with our Conservative colleagues in opposition, that if we had presented a unified front on this issue facing businesses in our ridings, we could have pushed the government to provide relief for hundreds of thousands of small businesses across this country that are needing help during extraordinarily challenging times.

Now, of course, the January 18 deadline has passed. I have spoken to many small businesses that have cobbled together the financing in order to pay off their loans and access loan forgiveness, but there are many more that weren't able to and lost the loan forgiveness that was a part of the original offer from this government. Those businesses are now going to continue to struggle with the burden of this debt, and \$60,000 in additional debt is a lot for a small business.

At the same time, I don't think it's too late. I think the government can still do right by these small businesses, these entrepreneurs and these members of our community who want to keep their doors open.

Therefore, Mr. Chair, I am pleased to move an amendment to the Conservative motion before us, which would read as follows. After the words “all sectors in the economy”, I'd like to add a comma and insert the words “extend partial loan forgiveness for the CEBA loans until the end of 2024”.

With that, I'll end my remarks, and I look forward to debating our amendment.

• (1220)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Chair, can I just quickly ask if that's in scope? It's obviously an important issue and we've debated it here previously.

**The Chair:** Let me just take a look at it.

• (1220)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Thank you. We are back. I appreciate the time.

From chatting with our clerk and our analysts, I believe it is outside the scope because it does not refer back to anything generally in the motion.

However, we did have other motions regarding this, and I would recommend that you put in a separate motion altogether for this, Mr. Bachrach.

We are now going over to Mr. Genuis.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be brief because it's clear that we are in the middle of a Liberal filibuster, and I don't want to help them in any way as they seek to draw this out and prevent us from coming to a vote on this important motion on red tape by my colleague Mr. Davidson.

I will point out a few obvious things. We have in front of us a motion by Mr. Davidson on combatting red tape. This is a simple, clear motion that highlights the fact that we have too much red tape in a broad number of sectors in Canada and that we need to address that red tape. The motion calls on the government to present a plan within 30 days to address this growing problem of regulatory burden and red tape.

The Liberal members across the way have said a few things. They've said that, yes, red tape is a problem; it's always a problem. They ask where it's coming from and say they don't know; there's just all this red tape out there.

Well, when we talk about red tape—of course it exists in other institutions as well—we're talking specifically about red tape within the federal government, which is within the purview of the executive to make regulations about. After eight years of NDP-Liberal rule in this country, they can hardly say that this red tape comes from somewhere else. All of these things keep happening to this government that they're not responsible for. Inflation is up. Housing costs are up. Red tape is up. Where is it coming from?

Maybe the people who have been in charge of this country for the last eight years should take responsibility for the problems they're causing, should take responsibility for their failure to address red tape. This is why we brought forward a motion calling on the government to present a plan to reduce red tape.

What else have they said? They've said that they're having meetings on it, that it's just like auto theft, that they're going to have a summit and that they're going to bring in people and talk more about it. Again, that's not an action plan. We want to see the government take action to reduce red tape.

The other thing that a few of the members across the way have said is that they already have a plan, they're already doing it and everything's fine. Well, then they should support the motion because our motion calls on them to table a plan. If they already have a plan, then they should show us the plan. It shouldn't take 30 days. It should take five minutes.

If the NDP-Liberal government actually had a plan to reduce red tape, they would have no problem supporting this motion because, substantially, this motion calls on them to table that plan in the House of Commons. I would say 30 days is generous if they already have a plan and are trying to table it. However, the reality is that they don't have a plan. The reality is that the red tape situation has become much worse under this government.

It's true, as Mr. Powlowski says, that there was red tape in the world prior to Justin Trudeau becoming Prime Minister, but I think he has really perfected red tape. I think he has seen a situation in which there's always an appetite for a reduction of red tape, and he has driven the bus radically in the wrong direction.

When the Conservatives took government, we had a concerted red tape reduction initiative that was very effective. It involved the measurement and reduction of red tape. It was happening under the Conservatives. The red tape regulatory burden is getting worse under this government. They don't have a plan. If they did have a plan, they would stop their filibustering and have no problem supporting this motion and seeing it pass.

If they are serious, then let's vote.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, I'm going to interrupt you on that point. I apologize.

We need to suspend. We're losing Mrs. Vignola because of IT issues. We're going to suspend for a few minutes so she can restart her computer. Then we'll get back to you, sir.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I'm done, though, so you can go to whomever afterwards.

We're ready for a vote. Let's vote.

**The Chair:** Okay, we're going to suspend for Mrs. Vignola. She's lost her camera.

Why don't you reboot, Mrs. Vignola, and we'll see you back in a couple of minutes.

We'll suspend for a couple of minutes.

• (1225) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1235)

**The Chair:** We are back. Thank you for your patience, everyone.

We have completed our speaking list.

Does anyone else wish to speak, or can we go to a vote, please?

**Mr. Scot Davidson:** Don't filibuster, guys.

**The Chair:** We'll go to a vote.

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski:** What happened with the amendment?

**The Chair:** We ruled it out of order.

Go ahead with a recorded vote, please.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I think it passes on division.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Mr. Chair, I misunderstood what we are voting on. The amendment was ruled out of order.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Are we going to vote on adjourning the debate or on the motion? I remind you that I missed parts of the conversation. What are we going to vote on?

[English]

**The Chair:** Can you say it again? I'm not getting the interpretation, Mrs. Vignola.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Before we proceed, I'd like to know what we are voting on. Are we voting on adjourning the debate, or are we voting directly on the motion, in all of its imperfection and all of the interference it represents?

[English]

**The Chair:** We exhausted our speakers list. I called for the vote, and no one put their hand up. I asked a second time, and we called the vote. We cannot go back after we've called the vote, I'm afraid.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. There was a bit of confusion. I think you rushed to the vote very quickly and—

**The Chair:** No, I asked.

Finish your point of order and I'll address it.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** I was ready to speak to this issue. I misunderstood where we're at right now. I thought we were discussing the amendment. I didn't quite hear that it was ruled out of order or out of scope.

I do want to speak to this issue, so I would ask the chair for a bit of leeway on this matter.

**The Chair:** I'll let Mrs. Vignola speak.

Go ahead, please.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I just received the answer to the question I asked previously about what we were going to vote on; either adjourning the debate or Mr. Davidson's motion, as imperfect as it is, since it dips into municipal and provincial interference.

My understanding is we are going to vote on the original motion in its current form. Is that correct?

[English]

**The Chair:** That is correct.

To address your comments, I had ruled that Mr. Bachrach's amendment was out of order. We continued debate for about 35 minutes on the original motion, including going back to the speaking list. Mr. Genuis finished. We suspended. We came back, and I asked twice if anyone else wanted to speak to it. Then I said recorded vote, and now we're into the vote.

If people are not paying attention or missed it, I cannot change that. We have started the vote, and we can't suspend once we've started the vote. If we've called the vote, we've called the vote, and that is that. We will continue with the vote.

• (1240)

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, if I may, it appears that we've been having technical difficulty throughout this period of time. We suspended in order to allow the Bloc to—

**The Chair:** Mr. Sousa, I asked twice specifically.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** I'm not sure she understood, because she's not clear as a consequence. I think we need to—

**The Chair:** She asked and I explained to her we were voting on the motion. I asked twice. If members don't wish to throw their names up....

Mr. Genuis was speaking for 20 minutes. Anyone could have simply put up their hand and added themselves to the list. No one did. He finished his time. He stated he was done. We suspended and came back in. I asked if anyone else wanted to speak, twice, and that will show on the blues. No one said anything. There's no one else on the list. We exhausted the list.

We called the vote, and we have now started the vote. We can't go back after we've started the vote. We can't interrupt the vote and say we're going to go back to speaking. The vote has been called, and we're going to continue with the vote.

I am sorry, but I asked twice. We started the vote, and we'll continue the vote.

Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

**Mr. Charles Sousa:** Can we confirm what we're voting on? The Bloc is asking the same question.

**The Chair:** No. She asked and she was answered. We're voting on the original motion. We're going to continue the vote. We're not going to entertain any more interruptions.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 4)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Mr. Chair....

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, please be brief. I'd like to finish up so we can get in camera to discuss something of importance that we have to address.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There was a request for documents discussed at one of the previous ArriveCAN hearings. I think there was agreement expressed at the time that people wanted to see it in writing. This pertains to the preliminary statement of fact that CBSA sent around regarding Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano's suspensions. I think the committee is seized with trying to understand the circumstances around their suspensions.

We discussed this motion. There was agreement, I think, but people wanted to see the text of it. I hope we can get this done now. Again, it was distributed on Thursday, January 18.

The motion says:

That the clerk inform Erin O'Gorman that the committee sends for the preliminary statement of fact regarding CBSA's investigation, which was sent to the supervisors of Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Utano.

This was the statement of fact regarding the investigation that appears to have led to the suspension without pay of these individuals shortly after they testified before the committee. I think this information is critical for the committee's hearing. Because there was agreement at the time and people have now seen the text of this in both official languages, I hope we can get it through.

I would like to move this now. I hope this is brief.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thanks.

Is that the one Mr. Johns put through, or is it yours? I think there was one from Mr. Johns as well.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** No, I put it through on January 18.

**The Chair:** Okay. It was distributed.

Are we fine with that?

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Great.

Mrs. Vignola, you had your hand up at the very beginning, but we got to the motion. Do you wish to go ahead?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** I don't even know if you're hearing me correctly, because I'm starting to have connection problems again with both the sound and video. I think I have no other choice but to ask for someone to quickly replace me. Given the technical problems I'm having, I cannot contribute positively to any kind of debate, which puts me in a state I have no words for.

• (1245)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** It must be on your side, because you're coming through loud and clear. There's no video lag at all from our side.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** It's probably on my end. My Internet connection—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I need you to listen in. Perhaps we can just finish this up, then go in camera. I have to read something in and I'm hoping you can stay for that. We can suspend to have someone come down from the House for you, if you wish, but I need to take care of one thing today in camera.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Let's try.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Can you hear that okay, or do you wish to leave and we'll bring in someone from upstairs?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Someone will have to replace me, because there is a two-minute delay, Mr. Chair. You started moving like Charlie Chaplin again and you're very comical.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm going to suspend quickly.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]









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