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Chair

The Honourable Judy A. Sgro

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)): I'm calling to order the 138th meeting of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are doing a study of the subject matter of the supplementary estimates (B) 2018-19, votes 1b, 5b, 10b and 15b under Department of Transport; vote 10b under Office of Infrastructure of Canada; vote 1b under the Jacques-Cartier and Champlain Bridges Inc.; and vote 1b under VIA Rail Inc.

Appearing today, we have the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities.

We're very pleased to have you and Ms. Gillis, from the Office of Infrastructure Canada.

Are the bells ringing yet? I need permission from the committee to continue until five minutes before the vote. Do I have permission from the members to continue?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you. I'll turn it over to Minister Champagne.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities): Madam Chair, thank you very much for inviting me this morning. If it's okay with you and the members of the committee, I will start with a brief statement, and then, obviously, I'd be delighted to take your questions.

Good morning to all of the committee members and thank you for inviting me to speak with you today about infrastructure and our plan for Canada.

I am joined today by deputy minister Kelly Gillis, who I want to thank on the record for her extraordinary work under accelerated circumstances. We have a lot to deliver, and I think she and every civil servant in the department have been doing an outstanding job serving Canadians, to make sure that we can deliver the infrastructure they deserve.

[Translation]

I'm here today to speak with you about Infrastructure Canada's interim estimates and supplementary estimates (B).

More specifically, to support the Government of Canada's priorities in investing in public infrastructure, Infrastructure Canada

is seeking \$1.8 billion through interim estimates and \$150,000 through supplementary estimates (B).

• (1105)

[English]

This funding will ensure that communities across Canada have the money they need when they need it.

I would also like to provide you with an update on the progress we are making in delivering the investing in Canada plan. Since I was last before you, I have been continuing my travels across Canada to make critical investments in our communities and, obviously, to see the results. I have heard from Canadians about how their lives have improved through public infrastructure being built in their communities, thanks to federal support.

For example, I visited the town of Drumheller in Alberta, where new dikes are being built on the banks of the Red Deer River, and a flood mitigation system is being put in place to alert the 8,000 residents when the water levels in the dam are rising.

Together, these investments are helping to protect the community against the impacts of flooding for years to come, and I would say, Madam Chair, they're protecting families, businesses and communities from extreme weather events. I spent a bit of time in Drumheller, and one of the reasons I'm here today is to share with you these very real examples of what happens on the ground when we work together to make these investments.

I will give you another example.

[Translation]

In Rivière Rouge, a fibre optic network is being installed that will bring high-speed Internet to over 16,000 households and businesses in 17 Antoine-Labelle municipalities. For people like myself and my colleague the member for Trois-Rivières, Mr. Aubin, access to high-speed Internet in the regions makes distance work, distance medicine and distance education possible. It allows everyone to take part in today's life and tomorrow's economy.

And in Sainte-Eulalie, Quebec, a new wastewater treatment system and pumping station are being built, protecting the health of residents and preserving the waterways of the Centre-du-Québec Region.

[English]

I have seen first-hand how our investments are benefiting Canadians across the country, in every region and every community. I have had the privilege of meeting thousands of workers on sites across the country. I can tell you, dear committee members, colleagues and friends, they are the true heroes of our plans. Meeting them continues to be the highlight of my time as minister. They are dedicated, professional and passionate about what they're doing to build a future for Canadians.

Having a diverse workforce on our construction sites is also critically important, which is why I'm pleased that we have included the community employment benefits initiative in our bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories.

[Translation]

It is vital to the success of our country and our workforce to incorporate those groups that are underrepresented in the construction and related industries.

I would now like to talk about the progress we have made to date in delivering our Investing in Canada plan. This plan, as you all know, is investing over \$180 billion through five major funding streams: \$28.7 billion in public transit infrastructure; \$26.9 billion in green infrastructure; \$25.3 billion in social infrastructure; \$10.1 billion in trade and transportation infrastructure to allow us to get goods to market; and \$2 billion for rural and northern communities infrastructure. It's very important, because as Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, people talk to me about mobility when I am in cities, and about connectivity when I am in rural areas.

Thanks to the investment plan, we've been able to see progress in green infrastructure, public transit, social and recreational infrastructure, and, of course, address the needs of our rural and northern communities. The plan includes over 70 new programs and initiatives, all of which have launched. More than 33,500 infrastructure projects under those programs and initiatives have been approved to date. Nearly all are underway.

[English]

Since my last appearance at this committee in December, I am pleased to note some milestones we have achieved.

First, we have announced the first projects funded through the \$2-billion disaster mitigation and adaptation fund, and planning is under way in communities across Canada. I am particularly proud of this program, because this is about making sure we invest in disaster adaptation so that we don't have to invest that much in disaster mitigation. We are making sure that communities like Drumheller and Springbank in Alberta, for example, can see a better future, and will be more resilient. We're protecting families, businesses and, obviously, a way of life. For example, we recently announced \$150 million to protect more than 170,000 residents in a number of communities in the greater Toronto area who have been negatively impacted by flash floods and storms.

The Samuel De Champlain Bridge is nearly complete and will open permanently to traffic no later than June 2019. I would like to extend my thanks to the more than 1,600 workers who have worked so hard on this landmark project and to acknowledge their

contribution to building our country. We issued a certificate to each and every worker who has worked on the bridge to express the thanks of this nation for their work. I can tell you, Madam Chair, thanks to the deputy minister and colleagues at the department, that we were able to deliver that just in time for Christmas. It was just a token to say, on behalf of all parliamentarians, thank you for what they are doing for the country.

We have announced the BMO Centre expansion project in Calgary, Alberta. The project is expected to create more than 1,800 jobs during construction and 500 new full-time positions once it is completed. This will allow the BMO Centre to be a tier one facility to attract worldwide conventions to Calgary. This will be in addition to Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto. I think this will certainly change the nature of tourism in the city. Being able to have a tier one facility is really transformative for a city like Calgary.

● (1110)

[Translation]

We are also continuing to work with Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority on the Gordie Howe International Bridge. Significant work is underway on the design, foundation, and other construction which will create up to 2,500 jobs over the course of the project, which is one of the largest, not only in Ontario and Canada, but also in North America. Thanks to the hard work of Canadians, Canada's economy is strong and growing. Our historic investments in infrastructure are playing a key role by creating lasting economic and social benefits for Canadians in communities of all sizes.

[English]

Since we took office, 900,000 jobs have been created across Canada. The unemployment rate has been at its lowest since Statistics Canada began tracking unemployment rates more than 40 years ago.

[Translation]

Budget 2019 demonstrates our continued commitment to investing in infrastructure and our communities. It includes, notably, a one-time municipal top-up of \$2.2 billion through the federal Gas Tax Fund to address priorities in municipalities and first nation communities.

[English]

There's \$60 million in 2018-19 to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to help small communities get the training they need to better manage their infrastructure assets.

There's also \$300 million for a new housing supply challenge that will invite municipalities and other stakeholder groups across Canada to propose new ways to break down barriers that limit the creation of new housing.

The Chair: We're at 10 minutes. Could you do fast closing remarks?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I have just one page left, if that's okay. I'm almost there, Madam Chair.

The Canada Infrastructure Bank will seek to invest \$1 billion over the next 10 years and leverage at least \$2 billion in additional private sector investments to increase broadband access for Canadians.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the members of the committee for the opportunity to update you on the important work we are doing to build modern, resilient and green infrastructure to benefit Canadians throughout the country.

I will, of course, be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Champagne.

I would like to acknowledge the parliamentary secretaries, Marco Mendicino and Marc Serré. We have both of them with us today.

Welcome to the committee.

We'll go to Mr. Jeneroux, for six minutes.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, since you highlighted it in your speech today with the one-time doubling of the gas tax fund for municipalities, under the previous Conservative government we introduced, as you know, the new building Canada plan, which was dedicated funding for first nations infrastructure under the gas tax fund national infrastructure component. The funding was being delivered and managed by INAC at the time.

How are indigenous communities currently receiving the gas tax fund, and how will they receive the doubling of the gas tax fund? Is it through municipalities, or is it still directly through INAC or what is now called Indigenous Services? Is the allocation of funding for bands determined on a per capita basis similar to how the provinces deliver the gas tax to municipalities?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, the doubling of the gas tax is really going to make a difference in communities across Canada, municipalities and first nations. This one-time top-up is to make sure that we don't waste one construction season. I think as a nation we cannot afford to do that, in order to make sure that people will get to work.

To the member's point, I would say that the funds will be delivered as they used to be delivered traditionally, which is through INAC or what is called today Indigenous Services Canada.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Okay. Perfect.

Madam Chair, we all think this is a very important issue. According to Infrastructure Canada's website, over \$7 billion is being delivered to Crown- Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous Services Canada. Most of that funding is being delivered through Indigenous Services, almost \$7 billion, in fact. The Prime Minister himself has stated that nothing is

more important than the relationship with indigenous peoples, and in fact, he would like reconciliation to be the legacy of this government.

With that being said, I would like to move the following motion, and I hope the time will pause:

That the Committee invite the Minister of Indigenous Services to appear, no later than Friday, May 17, 2019, to update the committee on the status of delivering Infrastructure directly to Indigenous communities, including the doubling of the Gas Tax Fund, announced in Budget 2019.

We would like a recorded vote on that, Madam Chair, knowing that each vote on this is a vote on reconciliation with indigenous communities.

● (1115)

The Chair: Is there any debate on the motion as presented by Mr. Jeneroux?

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): It's a good idea. The date may be problematic just because of other things in the cycle. I wonder if we can remove that date and just say by a certain date, mid-June, whatever. That would give a bit more flexibility just because of everything that's going on right now.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: I hesitate to remove the date, Madam Chair, only because it's a major commitment of this plan, and I think the sooner the better, realistically. However, if that's a friendly amendment at the time, let's do it, just knowing that this is important to do.

The committee did have 48 hours to consider this, as we all know here at committee.

I was hoping we could have a recorded vote on this.

The Chair: Monsieur Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The study of this matter has been postponed many times. I see in the agenda you sent us that the committee has some time left before June. Consequently I would also agree to support this motion if the date were removed.

[English]

The Chair: We'll go back to Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: I would suggest then that we set an absolute hard end date, "no later than", but again, May 17 itself may be problematic just because of everything else that's going on.

We could say June 15, or May 30, or something like that, but it's just that one particular time slot. We may have a bunch of dog-piling going on.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Madam Chair, we're more than happy to provide an extra meeting for this. I know on our side we're happy to take this issue seriously. Reconciliation is important to the Conservative Party of Canada and we want to make sure that we have adequate time. If we take an extra day for another meeting, we take an extra day.

The Chair: I don't know if the committee would be satisfied with leaving it in my hands to work with the clerk to come up with a date prior to the rising of the House. Would that work?

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: That's fair, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Is that all right with everybody?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay.

It's a recorded vote, but we have to vote first on the amendment moved by Mr. Hardie.

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

An hon. member: Let's have a recorded vote.

The Chair: Do you want it recorded?

A voice: On the amendment?

The Chair: No, it's a recorded vote on the motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 9; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Mr. Jeneroux, you still have three and a half minutes left.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Just to be clear, we paused the time, correct?

The Chair: Yes, we did.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Okay, wonderful.

Minister, in 2015, the now Prime Minister campaigned on running modest short-term deficits of less than \$10 billion in each of the first three years, and then a balanced budget by 2019—this year, which I think we can all agree isn't happening, as we've just seen the budget. However, beyond the Prime Minister breaking his promise to balance the budget by 2019, these modest deficits were indeed, according to the Liberal Party, to double spending on infrastructure to stimulate economic growth.

The PBO reported that your government is well behind what you had promised to spend in the investing in Canada plan. It hasn't grown the economy as predicted or created the jobs it was set out to do. This is concerning, because according to public accounts, as of January 2019, only 13% of that \$188 billion had been spent, while your government's deficits have in fact been almost double what was promised every year since you've formed government.

If the government has only spent 13% in three years on infrastructure, yet the deficit is well over double the \$10 billion campaigned on, what is the money being spent on if not on infrastructure?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'll address the member's question now, but if ever you want to come back to the previous question, I have some numbers for you on the gas tax and other things.

Investing in infrastructure is investing in the future of Canadians. As I was saying in my testimony, I am pretty proud to see that we've done a lot.

One of the first things to do when I became minister was to discuss with federal, provincial and territorial colleagues. Two things came to mind, which I've tried to work with the deputy minister to put in place. First, we would adapt our processes to the construction season; and second, we would introduce progress billing.

I appreciate greatly the work of the PBO. It's helpful for us in government to make sure we can do things better. However, what the PBO is focusing on is project accounting. What I'm focusing on is impact.

I'll just give an example to the member to illustrate this concept.

Recently I went with the Prime Minister to the Côte-Vertu construction site in Montreal, a huge construction site where actually the tram cars will be hosted in tunnels very close to the location they're needed in for the morning rush hour.

I am not an engineer, but if you go to the site—

• (1120)

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, maybe we can talk a little more about that offline. It sounds interesting. I just want to get the last question in before my time is up, if that's okay with you.

There was a request for \$14.6 million for the deconstruction of the Champlain Bridge in Quebec. From my understanding, the total costs will be approximately \$400 million. Is that correct, yes or no?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: The estimated cost we have at this time from JCCBI, the professionals who are managing the bridge and will be responsible for the deconstruction, is \$400 million.

You would appreciate today that you don't deconstruct as you used to do in the early days. There are a lot of issues about the environment and about making sure it's safe, because it's over the St. Lawrence Seaway. Therefore, we're going to do it in a responsible fashion, and in a way that is, first, healthy and safe for the workers. That implies a lot of work very high off the ground, and obviously over the St. Lawrence Seaway.

That's the current estimate.

The Chair: You have 60 seconds left.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Madam Chair, I think in the spirit that infrastructure isn't partisan, as the minister just recently stated in a Hill Times article, I will cede my time to my colleagues on the other side.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jeneroux.

We are at five minutes to the vote time, so I'm going to suspend the meeting. We look forward to everyone returning promptly following the vote so we can continue our meeting.

• (1120)

(Pause)

• (1140)

The Chair: Mr. Aubin, I'm going to go to you for your six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Forgive me, I'm going to steal a minute from our guest because I'd like to table the motion I sent.

Given the fact that our agenda is quite disrupted this morning and that there may be other changes, I will read it again. I spoke about it before at the last meeting of the committee.

That, given the significant amount of work accomplished by the committee in advance of what will soon become the Canadian air passenger bill of rights, the committee undertake a study consisting of no more than two meetings to give feedback to the minister on the draft regulations that he is preparing to table concerning this bill of rights.

We also need a certain leeway with the calendar to attempt to find room for that topic as well.

Perhaps we could sit during the summer, that would solve all of our problems.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right, thank you, Mr. Aubin. You've moved it and it was rightfully before us. We can discuss further just how we're going to do all this when we get into committee business a little bit later on.

Is there any debate on the motion by Mr. Aubin to undertake a study consisting of no more than two meetings to give the minister feedback on draft regulations concerning his bill of rights? Is there any comment or discussion?

Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Madam Chair, I'll make a friendly amendment—I believe you said it with the last motion that was passed—to just make sure that we put a time on this for before we rise. If Mr. Aubin wants to go in the summer, I'd be happy to go in the summer too, so long as the committee does its work on this particular motion.

The Chair: If we adopt it for the two meetings, are you also suggesting that we do this before the House rises?

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: That would be my friendly suggestion.

The Chair: As long as the committee is interested in working through the summer, it's just fine with me.

Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: The proposed regulations were published in part I of the Canada Gazette. That calls for a 60-day comment period that actually ended on February 20, 2019. The CTA probably has quite a wealth of background input from Canadians across the country. They're in the process of reviewing that right now, and I don't know that this would add much to what they've already received.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: About the date, I want to remind you that the implementation of this new passenger bill of rights is planned for July 1. If the committee wanted to hold this study—and I think it's still relevant to do so—we have to be able to provide feedback to the Minister of Transport since after all, we are in a way his advisory

committee. We've experienced that on several occasions—this should be done before July 1.

[*English*]

The Chair: All right, we'll vote on Mr. Aubin's motion.

(Motion negated)

The Chair: Mr. Aubin, this is your six minutes. Please go ahead.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here with us. It's always a pleasure to have you, all the more so since we often don't share the same ideas. However, the conversation is always interesting, and as is often said, truth emerges when ideas collide. Let's hope that this is what happens.

First, I'd like to have your opinion or your comments on the Infrastructure Bank and its many studies. Between you and your colleague from Transport, I am now used to buckling under the weight of studies that don't often lead to big decisions.

I keep track of all the studies ordered by Infrastructure Bank of Canada or that concern it. \$2,960,000 was spent for 10 consultants whose names remain confidential; \$1,750,000 for 6 consultants to verify leasehold improvements and construction costs; \$876,000 for 3 consultants for external legal advice; \$425,000 for consultants on public relations and media who also provide translation.

It seems to me that we have translation services on Parliament Hill. You could use them, they are very efficient.

That adds up to almost \$8 million in studies, and the least we can say is that there is no transparency—we don't know who is taking part in these studies, nor anything about their topic—in this Infrastructure Bank that has existed for three years and which to date does not seem to have demonstrated the benefits you expected.

Could you explain why you are investing so much money that could be allocated to infrastructure?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First, I want to thank my colleague for his question. Since he represents the riding of Trois-Rivières, we share the City of Trois-Rivières and we do many things together.

The Canada Infrastructure Bank is another tool in our toolbox. It allows us to think long term and ensure that we can build more infrastructure faster for Canadians.

With regard to what my colleague raised, everyone will understand that when we build an institution for the future, there are always inherent costs. We are trying to attract the best talent and the best professionals so that they join a group of professionals we can call on for advice, as well as for projects that will eventually be funded by the bank.

I think the bank is a tool that allows us to see the far horizon and the broader perspective. We have already invested in the REM. I can reassure my colleague by telling him that the directors of the bank—among them CEO Pierre Lavallée and all of his team—have already held more than a hundred meetings with various public and private sector stakeholders. There have been about 60 discussions on projects. About a dozen of them are now being actively considered and they concern green infrastructure, public transit...

Mr. Robert Aubin: If I may, Mr. Champagne, I'll pick up on that comment. Let's talk about innovation and projects.

In your presentation, you referred to \$28.7 billion in infrastructure for public transit. That's a nice envelop to finance an HST or HFT. You spoke about \$26.9 billion in green infrastructure. Imagine if that train were electric. I think it is precisely what we need. You spoke of \$25.3 billion in social infrastructure. If we're talking about transporting workers, students and seniors, that is the situation. You also spoke about \$10.1 billion in trade and transport infrastructure. I think everything is there for this to work.

Let's remember that the bank was supposed to fund—or will fund—only projects of \$100 million or more. If memory serves, one of the biggest projects in Trois-Rivières was the construction of the amphitheatre. That was about \$63 million. However, we don't qualify at all for those projects. Nevertheless, when it comes to a \$4-billion HFT project, now we're talking.

Are you delaying the announcement of the HFT because you want a public infrastructure to be funded by the Infrastructure Bank?

Do you think there will be a direct impact on the cost of a ticket at the end of the process?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I wanted to say to my colleague that the high frequency train is an interesting economic development tool. It would provide an infrastructure to the Trois-Rivière region and the heart of Quebec, obviously. I often refer to it as a socioeconomic engine. This also affects labour mobility. It is a key development project.

My colleague knows that from the beginning, I have supported this project because I think of it as a key development project for Quebec. As he said, we have made historic investments in public transit and green infrastructure. Personally, this is what I say to people: the fact that this did not appear in the last federal budget doesn't mean that everything is at a standstill, quite the opposite. We have already invested \$1 billion in renewing the rolling stock. That was, of course, a prerequisite. You need the rolling stock...

● (1150)

Mr. Robert Aubin: The underlying question, Mr. Champagne, is to find out whether the implementation of the HFT falls in part under the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities or if it belongs entirely to the Minister of Transport. Otherwise, could the two departments co-operate and could all of the budget envelopes be used to fund it?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: The Government of Canada and its institutions are examining that question. For our part, we are in solution mode and have been from the beginning. I draw a lot of attention to that project because it's important. I see it as an economic and socioeconomic driver as well as a motor for labour

mobility. I can tell the people who are listening to us that this project is moving forward. The studies must be done.

There are, of course, environmental issues to consider and indigenous peoples must be consulted. There are geotechnical conditions that remain to be determined. However, since we are talking here about investing public money, may I point out that the more sophisticated our studies, the better we will be able to accurately establish costs and timelines. I can say that things are moving forward well. I understand my colleague from Trois-Rivières' impatience, but I can reassure him by saying that this file is moving forward. We will continue using all of the tools at the disposal of the Government of Canada to make it progress.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Wrzesnewskij.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

I'd like to begin by thanking you, Minister Champagne. You referenced the infrastructure funding for Toronto for flood control. People don't typically think of Toronto and floods, but six years ago in Etobicoke thousands of homes were flooded. The basements flooded, and for days on end there was no electricity. These extreme weather events are happening more regularly, so it shows tremendous foresight, and I thank you for that investment.

Contained in the 2019 federal budget is the one-time top-up that you mention of \$2.2 billion for cities like Toronto. It was very welcomed by our mayor and the city council, and I think it's fair to say that we need to have this gas tax top-up because of the simple fact that Premier Ford's Conservatives in Ontario have decided to play politics with infrastructure funds and dollars, and not work with the federal government to get the funding that's so needed in our communities out the door.

Could you tell us a little bit about the thinking behind this top-up?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As I said, we cannot afford as a country to waste one construction season. I've been talking to unions that are saying they obviously are concerned about making sure their workers will be on site during the coming construction season.

You may have seen a bit of frustration on my part. We signed an integrated bilateral agreement with provinces and territories. In the case of Ontario, we've had about \$12 billion on the table for almost a year. The stream that has been opened recently is the rural and northern stream, which is extremely important. I come from rural Canada. That's only \$250 million out of \$12 billion, so you would understand that there are some concerns as to the speed for the deployment of that money to ensure that communities can build the roads they need, fill the potholes, and to make sure that we invest in recreational centres, make sure we invest in green infrastructure to prevent the severe impact of changing weather.

Clearly, what we saw yesterday is the Ford government opening up a bit on public transit, which obviously seems ambitious. It's interesting, and there are a lot of questions to be asked with respect to the funding of all that. To your point, it's true. I think our colleague Matt Jeneroux said that when it comes to infrastructure, you have to have the long-term vision. This is about building Canada for 10, 20, 30, 50 years ahead, so you will find a bit of an impatient minister. I want to make sure that everyone is playing their role, because under the integrated bilateral agreement, for those who are listening to us, it is the province that has to open the intake, prioritize the project; and then federally we would fund them.

The gas tax top-up, which I call the gas tax rebate, which I said was the one-time top-up of \$2.2 billion added into the system, is a way to make sure that we don't waste a construction season, that we put our workers to work this summer.

For example, I was in Sudbury. I think Marc Serré would know that I even went to fill some potholes myself because they said, "Minister, it's good that you bring the money. Why don't we do some work together?" I called the mayor and we did it together, with Marc and Paul Lefebvre who also were there.

My point is that cities have plans to do a lot of infrastructure for years to come, and we want to give them the means, because we know that they are the first responders to make sure that people get drinking water, that roads function, that waste-water treatment plants would be there. This was our way to partner. We did that with the FCM, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and AMO in Ontario who very pleased because that shows again that we want to be a trusted partner for the municipalities. In addition to the \$12 billion over 10 years, we said, "Why don't we make sure people get to work this summer as we need to get the job done?"

• (1155)

The Chair: Mr. Iacono.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister Champagne, thank you for being here this morning.

In 2017, the government launched the Smart Cities Challenge—in which the City of Laval takes part—which will allow us to see how ingenious our cities are.

What is the government attempting to do through the Smart Cities Challenge? Can you tell us about the various steps and update us on the status of the challenge today?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I'd like to thank my colleague Mr. Iacono for his question. The Smart Cities Challenge is one of the most interesting projects in my opinion. It really allows us to see that we're using technology and innovation to solve problems we find in various large cities throughout Canada.

We launched a national competition. I'm happy to say, as Mr. Jeneroux mentioned earlier, that six first nations were chosen to submit projects with cities. This will, of course, mean that projects will be implemented. The one that comes to mind, to answer more specifically, is the one in Saskatoon.

Saskatoon is one of the cities in Canada where young people from indigenous communities are often homeless, and look for a place to stay at night. We thought about the reasons for that situation in a city like Saskatoon.

First, we found out that the information was provided between 8 a. m. and 5 p.m. We realized that few people look for shelter between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. So, we understood that the information had to be provided when people need it.

The second consideration is that today, the information must be conveyed using a mobile app so that people can receive the information. We also realized that the city had to have Wi-Fi, because not everyone has access to a phone or a tablet.

Finally, human nature being what it is, if a person turns up at a shelter at 2 a.m. and is told that it is full, he or she won't go back. So, we made sure that the information was available in real time, that is to say that someone who needs shelter at 2 a.m., for instance, will know which shelter to go to that evening.

In my opinion, this really allows people to benefit from the ingenuity of Canadian men and women and work together to mobilize indigenous communities; these communities are involved in several projects to provide better services to Canadians using innovation and technology.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Minister, as a rural member of Parliament, I represent very small communities in my riding of Bonavista—Burin—Trinity. We often hear from these municipalities about infrastructure upgrades. Sometimes they can't afford large infrastructure projects. How is government supporting rural and remote communities with their unique infrastructure challenges and needs?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I am very pleased to answer the question, Madam Chair.

You know, Churence, I also come from rural Canada. My riding is 37,000 square kilometres. You and I share a passion, in terms of making sure our smaller, rural communities will have services.

We've done a couple of things. First of all, we've made sure that as we look at infrastructure, we have a dedicated stream for northern and rural communities. There's a good reason for that. We understood that we needed to be more flexible. I'll give you an example. In northern Saskatchewan, they were saying, "Minister, if you allow us to use those funds to extend the runway by a few hundred metres, we would reduce greenhouse gas emissions, facilitate transportation and reduce the cost of food in northern communities." That, for example, would be admissible. That's why we left the program very flexible. .

The other thing we said, in recognition of the fiscal capacity of smaller communities—those below 500,000 residents—was that the federal government would go up to 60% in the funding, which would leave the province with 33%, and smaller communities with 7%. For me, this is really transformational. You would know that, historically, we have this rule of one-third, one-third and one-third. We heard from small communities across Canada that this is not sustainable. When you are a small community of a few hundred people, sometimes there's no way you can finance a \$12-million project, for example, to replace the pipes necessary to provide drinking water.

Not only did we listen, but we decided to act, provide more flexibility and increase the funding in smaller communities to allow these projects to go through.

• (1200)

Mr. Churence Rogers: A follow-up question to that is around Internet connectivity and cell service across rural Canada. It's been a topic of major discussion among rural caucus and Atlantic caucus, which represent many small communities.

Internet connectivity is so important for these rural communities, to allow for business development and business expansion, such as in the tourism industry and others. I know in my riding, it's a major challenge. On the Bay de Verde peninsula, for example, we have some great small businesses. However, they are not connected to the Internet. They have a very difficult time trying to promote, develop and expand their businesses.

What are we doing about trying to improve on that?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Again, I come from a rural community. When I go to urban communities, they talk about mobility. When I go to rural Canada, they talk about connectivity. Probably half of my own riding, just like yours, has no Internet and no cellphone coverage.

For me, broadband Internet is the lifeblood of the future. If you want to allow for remote education, remote medicine and remote telework, allow people to innovate, participate in commerce and get a better education, connectivity is obviously essential.

That's why, in the last budget, we decided to add more money to make sure that every Canadian would be connected to broadband by 2030. I think this is a great message to rural Canada. Rural Canada matters. We want to provide the same opportunity for people who live in Saint-Adelphe, in my own riding. Like the people in your

riding, they want to be connected, to be able to work from home, get an education from home and even to get medical care remotely, in some cases.

I think this is essential to build a better Canada, and a better life for Canadians.

Mr. Churence Rogers: I know the gas tax fund bumped up the extra \$2.2 billion, which leaves \$32.9 million for small communities in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly. We truly appreciate that extra funding.

I know that you've been on the road a lot across the country. What are some of the things you've learned on the ground, and some things that may have surprised you about the challenges small rural communities face?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: When we announced the top-up to the gas tax rebate, I was very pleased to meet with small community mayors. This funding, which is direct funding, allows them to really go on with projects that they had in their plan but they could not finance. What I realized is that this is one of the best ways to support municipalities, because this goes to them directly. As I said, mayors in smaller communities would understand what is needed from their community. I always say mayors know best, because they have to deal on a daily basis with the primary services that need to be provided to citizens. Everywhere I've been travelling, they could tell me about the road extensions that they needed and the drinking water that will make a difference to rec centres.

In small communities, the recreational centre or the sports centre is everything; that's where you bring people together. This is true in my riding, and it's true across rural Canada. Having a rural land and making sure we're there.... I used to say we have a lot of ambition for our regions, and there's a reason for that. Through the funding we have now, whether it's broadband or the northern and rural stream, whether it's the recreational centre or whether it's providing more federal money to finance them, I think we're really making a difference in rural Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Iacono, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't want to seem like a broken record and keep raising the same topic over and over again, but as a member from the greater Montreal and Laval area, this issue is primordial.

Could we have a brief update on the Champlain Bridge?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Absolutely. It's an important issue. I should mention that the Samuel-De Champlain Bridge is one of the largest infrastructure projects, not only in Quebec and Canada, but also in North America.

In the summer, there were up to 1,600 workers on that site. They are truly the heroes of this story. These are people who worked 24-7, rain, sleet or shine.

This is what they managed to do. In December 2018, the structure of the bridge was basically complete, and I was able to cross the bridge with some journalists. So the structure was ready. However, there was still some waterproofing to be done and asphalt to be laid down, but that could not really be done during the winter.

My priority has always been the health and safety of the workers on the site, the sustainability of the work, and, of course, respecting the time line.

I can tell you that the Samuel-De Champlain Bridge will be permanently open to traffic in June 2019 at the latest. It is a piece of work that all Montreal men and women will be proud of for generations to come.

• (1205)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Champagne.

I will yield the rest of my time to Mr. Hardie.

[English]

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Minister Champagne, this is kind of a philosophical question.

Normally we're used to seeing federal government infrastructure support really roll out when times are tough. It's a stimulus. The previous government did that, and I think a lot of people agreed that it was a good thing to do and that going into deficit to do it was a reasonable thing to do. Here we're going into deficit, maybe not specifically aligned with the infrastructure program but certainly, if we weren't doing it, we wouldn't be running deficits or maybe the deficits would not be quite as large.

What is the philosophy between a short-term stimulus versus the long-term program that we've rolled out? What is the difference in thinking here?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: It's long term. I used to say, and I always say to the Minister of Finance, that I don't spend, I invest, and that's the difference. When you're talking about infrastructure, by definition you're looking at more than one financial cycle. You're looking at five, 10, 20, 30, or 50 years. When you're looking at bridges, you're talking 125 years of useful asset. When you look at the life cycle of assets, you realize that, when you invest in infrastructure, you invest in both current prosperity and in future prosperity. I always say that the best way to attract talent and investment in Canada is to have modern, resilient and green infrastructure.

We have all travelled around the world, and we know cities and communities that function well attract talent. That's what we really need to do. I would say I'm pretty proud.

Take the \$2-billion disaster mitigation adaption fund. If you're not going to invest in disaster adaption, you're just going to invest in disaster remediation more often. I think not only about the economic costs but the social costs.

I was in Calgary, for example, at Springbank for the announcement. People have been flooded there for generations, and people have lost their lives. We invested hundreds of millions of dollars to make sure that we would prevent, not a one in a hundred years event, but a one in two hundred years event. This is where we are now.

There's a real cost of inaction to climate change. I keep repeating that. If there are people who doubt that, go speak to the people in Drumheller. Go speak to the people whose family members were victims in Springbank. They'll tell you that this is real and that this is today. Extreme weather events are more frequent and more severe.

I think it is a smart thing to do to make sure that we invest in adaptation. Whether we're building things like the Gordie Howe International Bridge, which is about 25% of all merchandise trade between Canada and the U.S. to secure a second link so that our goods are going to market, whether it's about securing the tourism industry in Drumheller, whether it's about securing Springbank in Calgary, or whether it's about doing the Samuel de Champlain Bridge, which has \$20 billion of trade every year that goes to the United States, for me, this is investing in Canadians. This is investing in our future.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Very quickly, then, you mentioned there's \$12 billion sitting on the table, waiting for Ontario to come forward. Do you have similar statistics for Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: The agreements were concluded with all provinces in 2018, the 10 provinces and three territories. We all know there have been provincial elections, different things happening, re-profiling, reassessment of priorities, and this had the impact that there's still a lot of money on the table.

Why I am pressing some provincial governments more than others is that I say this money is there for work this summer, for example. We can do projects, whether it's the rec centre, whether it's to make sure the roads are being built or whether it's about the drinking water.

If you look at our record, we have approved more than 4,800 projects and \$20 billion. There's still a lot of capacity in the system. My point is that, if you talk to the unions, they say, "Let's get it done". We need to do that. I'm saying the same message in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. I will continue to do so, because I think it's in the best interests of Canadians.

The money is there on the table, but because of the way our agreement works, the provinces—which are co-investors, because the way we structured the agreement was to do more investment in infrastructure—have to open the intake and prioritize. Certainly, they send the project to us, and when it fits the program, we are glad to invest and we want to make sure we will do that together.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Champagne.

I'm going to go to Mr. Jeneroux for his six minutes, but the lights for the bells are flashing. Do we have unanimous consent to continue until five minutes before the vote?

All right, fine.

Mr. Jeneroux, you have six minutes.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Getting back to a question similar to Mr. Iacono's question, it's my understanding that Signature on the St. Lawrence, SSL, would be responsible for the operation and maintenance of the new Champlain Bridge for the next 30 years.

The largest stakeholder—and you know this—is of course SNC-Lavalin. I would imagine as the minister responsible for the bridge which is requesting money in these estimates here today, that you, being from Montreal, or your office have met with SNC-Lavalin.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I come from Shawinigan. I just want to state that for the record, for those who are watching us.

Indeed, this is one of the largest infrastructure projects in North America, so I did call the CEO of SNC-Lavalin. I called the CEO of Dragados. I called the CEO of Arup. I called the CEOs of all major partners in both the Gordie Howe International Bridge and the new Samuel de Champlain Bridge.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: My question is specifically about the Champlain Bridge. Thanks, Minister.

In this conversation with the CEO of SNC-Lavalin, was it ever mentioned the possibility of moving the headquarters and the potential of 9,000 jobs lost because of a DPA not being granted?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Because I called the meeting, the CEO appeared with his whole management team. As you know, at the time, my main concern was to make sure that we would all work toward the completion of that major infrastructure project.

The discussion was about the Samuel de Champlain Bridge, and I wanted to.... I just want to state for the record that I did call for the meeting. They did not ask me. I summoned all the CEOs and I had the CEO of Dragados as well. They wanted to meet separately, although they're part of the same consortium. I think it's incumbent upon me as Minister of Infrastructure to make sure that top management would have the same interest in making sure we complete this project as soon as possible.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Of course. Just equivocally, yes or no, did the 9,000 jobs come up in that conversation with SNC-Lavalin?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: The discussion was around the Champlain Bridge and how we can make sure—

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: So is that a “no”, then, Minister?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As I said, the discussion was not about what you're referring to. The discussion was about the Samuel de Champlain Bridge.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: So that would be no, the 9,000 jobs were not discussed.

The Chair: I think he answered the question.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Madam Chair, I think he's more than capable of answering himself.

Just clarify, yes or no, so we can move on, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As I said, the discussion was about the Samuel de Champlain Bridge. That's why I called upon them in my office.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: You sound as if you're the Prime Minister right now. Give a simple answer, yes or no.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'll take that as a compliment, if you say that I sound like our Prime Minister.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Okay. Yes.

Madam Chair, I'd like to move the following motion, pausing the time, of course:

That the Committee invite the Signature on the Saint Lawrence, no later than Friday, May 31, 2019, to update the Committee on the status of the new Samuel de Champlain Bridge, which is expected to be complete by June 2019.

I would like a recorded vote on this, again, because a vote against this would again mean continued cover-up of how SNC-Lavalin is connected with the Prime Minister and perhaps this minister.

The Chair: Is there any debate?

Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Once more, if that motion is passed, I propose that we remove the date and leave the organization of the rest of the session in your capable hands. I don't want the work that is already on our agenda to disappear.

[*English*]

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Madam Chair, could I respond?

On this particular one, I think, because the bridge is supposed to be open by June 2019, give it a fair bit of leeway in terms of being May 31. I think the date is prudent. If the chair sees otherwise, I'll leave it up to you, Madam Chair. The bridge is only walkable at this point in time, and it was promised back in December that it would be driveable.

At the end of the day, I would suggest that that would be my position on this motion.

● (1215)

The Chair: This will be a recorded vote.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 3)

The Chair: We're back to Mr. Jeneroux. You have three minutes remaining.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Madam Chair, I think it was interesting to see members on the other side, particularly ones from Quebec, vote against that motion.

Moving on, Minister, there's a transfer of \$99 million to the Canada Infrastructure Bank. I have to tell you, it's a little hard to ask questions about the Canada Infrastructure Bank because nothing is really public at all about it. However, we do know that the transfer authorities, to date, are around \$477 million.

The last time your officials were here, the committee was told that there was a transfer to the one and only reannounced investment, the REM project, also in Quebec. Is the \$99 million another transfer to the REM project?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: What I can say, Madam Chair, is that I would disagree with the member in terms of being open and transparent. I have been answering questions about the Canada Infrastructure Bank. I think the committee had a chance to get the CEO of the Canada Infrastructure Bank. As I said, they had more than 100 meetings since inception. They're looking at about 60 projects. There are 10 projects that are active, which they are looking at, which would be public transit—

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Is this specific to the \$99 million, though?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Just allow me to put that in perspective. It would not be in Canadians' best interest for me to go into commercial discussions that are happening. Obviously, what the deputy minister would have said, I stand on the record. That's the position that we would have on this matter, Madam Chair.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: If you don't want to get into the details now, perhaps you could provide us, as was done last time, with a written response in terms of where that \$99 million—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm sure we would be happy to come back to the member with the full details because I certainly believe, as the government does, in openness and transparency. There are things that, as the member knows because he's been in business, I cannot go into commercial negotiations or discussions—

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Of course.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: —because that would prejudice our own—

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Minister, I have one more question I'm hoping to get in here.

I want to ask you a question regarding the development of the bank, since we're talking about the \$100 million in transfer. I realize this was before you were Minister of Infrastructure, but in March 2016, the government, specifically Infrastructure Canada, brought in an investment banker from the Bank of America Merrill Lynch to assist with the development of the Canada Infrastructure Bank. We'd like to know who that person was and whether their name has been disclosed. If you're unable to provide it now, I'm hoping that you will in the follow-up after committee.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm happy to come back to the member.

What I can say is that we have a number of professionals. Just to go back to this thread of the bank, the chair of the bank, as you know, is the former CFO of the Royal Bank of Canada. The CEO has been there for more than a decade. We're really building the talent. One thing I just want say—I know the member wants to go quickly—is that we're going to be investing public money and the member was there when we had P3 Canada. This is one step further to making sure that we can do that.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Right.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: We're trying to assemble the best team of professionals and I would not be surprised that we've consulted widely.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: I appreciate that, Minister.

On that, Madam Chair, I would just like to move:

That the Committee immediately invite Pierre Lavallée, the newly appointed President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, to provide an update on the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

This was something I put on notice back in October 2018, so there perhaps may be a friendly amendment. Again, we'd like a recorded vote on this particular one, especially since the minister himself has said this is someone we should have at committee. We have yet to have him here at committee.

The Chair: Mr. Liepert.

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

As my colleague mentioned, due to the fact that it's been almost a year since this was put on notice, I think it's only appropriate that we propose a couple of short amendments.

I would ask that the two words “newly appointed” be removed. I'd also ask that a timeline be imposed so we can ensure these meetings take place before the House adjourns, and also that it be a televised meeting as many Canadians have questions about the status and the work the bank is doing.

Those would be the amendments—removing the two words “newly appointed” and adding a timeline—and we can either put a specific time or say prior to the adjournment of the House. We would propose that the amended motion would read:

That the committee invite Pierre Lavallée, the president and CEO of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, to provide an update on the Canada Infrastructure Bank, no later than May 3, 2019, and that the meeting be televised.

• (1220)

The Chair: Okay.

Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I'm not sure I followed that. First my colleague moved that this be done before the House adjourns. However, in the final version of the motion, it says “no later than May 3”. Which of these two dates are we keeping?

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Liepert: The version that we would propose is no later than May 3, 2019, but we could certainly be flexible on that because of all the other motions we've been considering.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the motion moved by Mr. Jeneroux?

Mr. Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I would simply like to move the following amendment:

That the amendment be amended by replacing the words “no later than Friday, May 3, 2019” with the words “before the summer adjournment of the House”.

[English]

The Chair: We'll vote on the subamendment.

Would you like a recorded vote?

Okay.

(Subamendment negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

The Chair: Now we'll vote on the amendment.

(Amendment negated: nays 6; yeas 3)

The Chair: Now we're voting on the main motion, as it is before us.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 3)

The Chair: We'll move to Mr. Sikand.

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): I have only one question, so I'll gladly share my time.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Because we're dealing with such exorbitant amounts of taxpayers' dollars, I want to reiterate for the constituents back home how the funding model works. I represent a riding in Ontario, and we need all levels of government to participate to get the vital infrastructure we need, especially in the GTA.

Given that we have the Ford government and perhaps they will not co-operate, how will our government ensure that the tax dollars will get to the municipalities where they're supposed to be? I know one of the avenues is the gas tax.

Could you summarize how the funding model works? Thank you.

• (1225)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Obviously, I can sense the frustration, because when there's money on the table, it needs to be put to use. I have been restating that. As I said, one of my first comments when I hosted the federal, provincial and territorial meeting was to really stress the fact that we, all orders of government, need to work towards construction season. For me that's just common sense. Workers are expecting, unions are expecting, Canadians are expecting that we would get along to make sure that we are providing timely feedback, timely intake, timely review, timely prioritization and timely approval. We and the deputy and the whole team at Infrastructure Canada have been working extremely hard to deliver within these timelines.

Now, in some cases and some provinces—you mentioned the case of Ontario—I have been stressing to my colleagues, in the most respectful manner, let's open up, let's make sure people get to work, let's make sure that we use that money. We have had close to \$12 billion on the table for almost a year, and the only stream that has been fully open so far is the rural and northern one, which is \$250 million out of \$12 billion. Obviously there's a lot we can do.

I appreciate that yesterday there was an announcement made with some transit, and there are a lot of questions around that. But my main point is that—and I think colleagues have said it—we need to leave politics aside on infrastructure. Infrastructure's too important for Canadians to bring any political considerations. Like I said, I

have a lot of ambitions to make sure we deliver for our cities and our regions.

For Canadians who are watching us, what they need to understand is that when we negotiate the bilateral agreements with the provinces, because we respect the provinces, because we want them to have the ability to identify the projects and prioritize them, we want them to get going, because clearly there's no use to Canadians for money to be on the table. Certainly, we'll be working with all provincial and territorial governments to make sure that this is happening quickly. We're working with the unions. We're working with the entrepreneurs and businesses who want to get going, because they see the construction season is at our doorstep, and we really want to make sure we deliver for people. When you have a deinvestment in infrastructure, like we've seen in the previous 10 years, we know that the costs become exponential after. Anyone who has a house knows that if you start maintaining after 10 years, you have a lot of catch-up to do. That's what we're doing now. We're catching up. That's why we just need to put in the money, the resources, and the effort to get things done.

Mr. Gagan Sikand: Thank you, Minister.

I'll be sharing the rest of my time with Mr. Hardie.

Mr. Ken Hardie: Thank you.

In the spirit of all of the motions going back and forth—motions and emotions—I would like to move the following:

That, given the importance of Canada's trade corridors to the national economy and to add value to this Committee's study of our major trade corridors, the Committee allocate up to two meetings to receive an update on the government's National Trade Corridors Fund initiative.

This is important at this stage because among the questions that we raised when we were looking at the trade corridors was whether or not the investments themselves were strategic and whether or not all the people who should be contributing to the overall health, effectiveness and efficiency of our trade corridors were actually making coordinated strategic investments not just in money and building things but also in the planning side. An issue that I recognized out on the west coast, where one part of our study took place, is that we have many component parts. We have the rail. We have the ports. We have seaport, airport, land crossing, road network. They all act as component parts but not necessarily as complementary parts, especially when it comes to the planning and the implementation of some very expensive improvements.

Part of the necessity for this motion is to actually do the reality check and just see how strategic our investments have been and basically what problems we've been trying to solve and what the outlook is for solving them. That's the reason why I would like to move this motion and have some time allocated to this.

The Chair: Mr. Liepert.

Mr. Ron Liepert: Madam Chair, we would be prepared to support this motion. One of the things that a study like this would show is that, as the minister has rightly stated, we're behind in infrastructure. One of the reasons we're behind in infrastructure is we are slowly getting rid of almost 10 Liberal governments at the provincial level, who have spent nothing on infrastructure. Other than in Alberta, prior to the NDP government, where infrastructure was a high priority....

The federal government didn't have to come in to Alberta and spend money, because the provincial Conservative government was spending money in Alberta on infrastructure. Our infrastructure in Alberta is well in advance of Ontario's, which has had 13 years of mismanaged provincial government, and therefore, now the federal government is being forced with Canadian dollars to come into Ontario and spend money that should have been spent at the provincial level under the Kathleen Wynne government. We'd be very happy to see whether or not that has been the case over the past 10 years, and we support this motion, Madam Speaker.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also support the motion on the substance. However, I wonder if my colleagues would be open to a friendly amendment so that when we organize these meetings, we can take what is already on our agenda into account. When I look at the agenda you sent us, I see there are about five potential time slots, without making any assumptions about the date the House will decide to adjourn its work for the summer.

The study on trade corridors will not conclude before the end of the session, and that study should be continued after the election of the next government, no matter which one it is. I think the study has inherent value. We should be able to accept this motion and respect the studies that are already on our calendar. There is one on seatbelts that is not complete. We also have some time reserved for trade corridors on our calendar. There are the various motions that we voted on this morning. It seems to me that that is a lot for the four or five potential time slots we have left.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. McColeman.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): I would be happy to support this motion as well, underscoring some of the reasons my colleague has articulated. As a member of Parliament from Brantford, Ontario, I realized that as an industrial community, a blue-collar community...the great downturn, which was called the worst downturn since the Great Depression, beginning in 2008 and ending roughly in 2010-11.... I watched the Conservative govern-

ment during those days, as I sat in the benches of the then Conservative government under prime minister Harper. I watched them spend more in infrastructure, more in rebuilding in many communities in my surrounding area. They were rebuilding recreational centres, as the minister has mentioned, building new infrastructure for an urban downtown university, which the parliamentary secretary witnessed when he came to announce the official opening of that facility with me. There were other projects—road building, road repairs, bridge repairs—that we were seized with to keep our economy afloat during those years. We did emerge. We did go into the downturn and emerged better than any of our G7 partners. This is something that's often overlooked.

I pick up on the experience that we've had with the Kathleen—

Mr. Ken Hardie: On a point of order, Madam Chair, can we call the question here, please? We're running out of time, with respect, sir.

The Chair: Mr. Hardie has asked to call the question. It's not admissible.

Mr. Coleman.

Mr. Phil McColeman: It's McColeman, Madam Chair. I get that often, and that's okay.

The Chair: I know you do.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I've been called a lot worse, especially by some of the people across the aisle.

The Chair: In essence, if we want to get on with this, we do have one minute left to get to the vote.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Okay.

I want to point out that the Prime Minister had promised to shine a light on things. I think the support of this motion goes well beyond just the rhetoric of the minister who says he's non-partisan and then takes a shot at us for the last 10 years of doing nothing, not repairing anything, no maintenance. I wanted to make that point as we enter into this vote.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

Mr. Hardie's motion is before us.

Mr. Aubin.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I still don't have any replies about my amendment motion asking that we add "while complying with our calendar, given". The rest of the motion could stay as is.

[English]

The Chair: We'll be voting on.... Is that a friendly amendment to you, Mr. Hardie?

Mr. Ken Hardie: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Hardie accepts that amendment.

We'll vote on Mr. Hardie's motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: It's unanimous. We have such a great group here.

Thank you very much.

I have to thank you very much, Minister Champagne, for sharing these 90 minutes with us in between a few other things.

We will suspend to go in camera for committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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