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Chair: Mr. Sven Spengemann





# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1540)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, colleagues. Welcome to the 23rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. This afternoon—

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. I'm not getting any interpretation.

**The Chair:** That's an important point. Let's see if we have interpretation. I'd be happy to start over from the beginning, if that was an issue for colleagues.

Madam Clerk, can we check on interpretation? We may have a more significant issue than a temporary lapse.

Colleagues, are we hearing interpretation now? Is it working?

It's working. I will start over.

[*Translation*]

Colleagues, welcome to the 23rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. This afternoon, we'll resume debate on Mr. Harris's motion, which was brought by Ms. McPherson, and on the amendment proposed by Ms. Sahota.

[*English*]

Colleagues, when we left this discussion at the last instance, I believe there was agreement that we preserve the speaking order from that moment. If that's the case, then the speaking order was Dr. Fry, Monsieur Bergeron, Mr. Fonseca and Mr. Oliphant.

With the committee's agreement, I propose that these be the first four speakers.

Colleagues, use the raise hand feature or a way of signalling to the clerk if you're attending in person and wish to intervene.

With the committee's consent to proceed in that fashion, we will now give the floor to Dr. Fry to continue this discussion.

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*] I really would like to reiterate once again that there are all sorts of statements out there saying that I have been filibustering. Filibustering is actually if I start talking about whether or not my cat could get a COVID-19 vaccine, or if I

start talking about how my next-door neighbour is actually mowing her lawn—we are mowing lawns right now in Vancouver—but she hasn't had a COVID-19 vaccine and I'm concerned about that. That's the kind of stuff that filibustering is.

My intervention on this debate is that I do have a huge problem with the motion as it stands. I'm speaking right now only as a physician. For me, I'm hearing from a lot of constituents who call my office every day confused about what's happening, what's going on, when they are going to get a vaccine and are they going to get a vaccine, and is vaccine A good, is vaccine B good, etc. The more that we put disinformation in a motion that is approved by this committee, the more it confuses people.

The issue here of people dying of COVID-19 is one that concerns me greatly. For me, public health is all about testing, tracing, tracking and surveillance. Those are the four 101s of public health. That's what I want people to do. I also want people to have a vaccine when it becomes available to them. I would rather they just get clear solid information so they can make decisions based on that and we don't confuse it with disinformation.

That is my major concern with this. I'm not concerned about anything else. I am concerned about the fact that (a) when this motion first came out, this motion was making statements that are no longer true, (b) we had all kinds of misinformation about Canada's access to the COVAX vaccine and (c) we had all kinds of misinformation about whether people are going to get a variant and if they get a variant, what they're supposed to do. It is confusing. This is the kind of confusion that can cost lives and can cause the spread of this COVID-19. We don't want the spread to continue. We want to start bringing it down.

What has further increased my concern since the last time I spoke to you is the fact that we are now seeing that in Paris they're in lockdown from new variants of COVID-19. That is what the spread is now. People aren't even sure if that is a new spread, a new pandemic, or whether it's just the COVID-19 variants, etc. I think we're seeing Italy in lockdown and Germany in lockdown. We're seeing a third wave caused by these virulent variants. I just think that this is scaring everyone. The anxiety is huge. As a physician, my first role is to care about the well-being of the patient and, for anxiety, give them proper information. It's at the heart of what we do when we speak to things.

I am not filibustering. I am really very concerned about this. I wanted to make sure that everybody understood what my concern was, which is at the heart of the debate: what my concern is about and why I am worried about it. I am not filibustering.

I think people need to talk about filibusters, the historic filibusters—and I won't go into historic filibusters—where people read from the phone book. That was a filibuster. I am just concerned about misinformation that can cause people (a) not to get vaccines and (b) not to know what is the right thing to do, not to know what the status of anything is.

I think that I would entertain really any kind of motion or amendment to the motion that would ensure it is clear, that we get clarity on some of these issues, whether it be to ask ministers to come and talk to us or anything that would clarify the situation. The concern for me is about clarity, disinformation, the anxiety of people in Canada, patients getting depressed and people not knowing what to do. That is what I was talking about.

I am not going to continue to belabour this. I'm hoping that everybody realizes that for me as a physician in the time of a pandemic a filibuster is not worth it. That's not what I'm trying to do at all. I really want to clarify. I really want to make sure people get the correct information, because people are confused. They don't understand. The first thing about anything to do with public health or medicine is informed decision-making by the patients, i.e., writ large, the public.

- (1545)

Having said that, I would be happy to find a way to entertain amendments from my colleagues that would clarify the situation, say what is happening and change some of the language to current language with regard to this issue. I'm happy to do that because for me, the idea is to get this thing done, move forward and make sure that patients and people are getting the right information.

Without protesting.... I don't think I'm filibustering at all. I have not said a single thing that's off topic. I have not said a single word to do with anything other than my concern about disinformation and getting clear information to people so they can make the best decisions for all of us and we can get rid of this thing.

I'm also concerned about the third wave of variants hitting Europe right now and the fact that we don't know if they're variants or if they're an absolutely new type of COVID virus.

There's one last piece of information that I want to update everybody on. There has been a leisure poll, and it shows, in fact, that if

you look at vaccines per a hundred persons, Canada is seventh, just behind France. We're talking here by decimal points, not by massive amounts.

Again, as to information and disinformation, let's just get the facts right and let people decide what they think from those facts.

Thank you very much. I will cede my place, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Dr. Fry, thank you very much for your remarks.

[*Translation*]

I'll give Mr. Bergeron the floor.

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ):** Colleagues, I am very happy to finally have the opportunity to speak to this motion.

I would like to begin by saying that, throughout my entire political career, which has lasted over 26 years, I have been a member of the party in power for just 18 months. In other words, I am a past master of being in the opposition. I will say that, in the course of my lengthy political career, while I have engaged in systematic obstruction, I've never talked about my cat, my dog or mowing my lawn. Whenever I engaged in systematic obstruction, I always tried to keep my remarks relevant so that nobody could accuse me of straying from the subject.

With all due respect to Ms. Fry, I am quite capable of recognizing systematic obstruction regardless of what people are talking about. I'm not suggesting that Ms. Sahota's and Ms. Fry's remarks were not relevant, but they did seem to me to qualify as systematic obstruction. I was extremely surprised, not to mention disappointed, that anyone would engage in systematic obstruction with respect to this motion, because my governing party colleagues led me to believe they were seeking a compromise, so when they hog the mike to prevent anyone else from speaking, that's not really signalling that they want a compromise. I therefore concluded that they were indeed engaging in systematic obstruction. As I said, I was quite surprised and deeply disappointed. I was, as always, prepared to seek a compromise, as colleagues of mine who belong to both committees of which I am a member know. However, I have had to wait several meetings for my turn to speak to this matter.

I found it passing strange that one of my governing party colleagues would oppose the idea of reporting to the House on the grounds that it would waste time the House could dedicate to studying bills. It is not only strange, but ironic, that our governing party colleagues are wasting the committee's time telling us that we shouldn't waste time the House could be spending on bills.

It's even more astounding considering the fact that the governing party put the business of the House on hold for months after seeking prorogation. That was after the only bills that progressed in the House that spring or summer were bills to implement emergency measures. That meant we weren't able to legislate for months. We only began to do so this past fall.

That's why I found the argument that tabling reports in the House prevents the House from dedicating time to bills so inappropriate and ironic.

That said, I had the opportunity to tell some of my governing party colleagues that focusing on bills is not the exclusive province of the government. I truly believe that. It is every parliamentarian's responsibility. We're each responsible for ensuring adequate time to legislate. I certainly understand that.

It's also my understanding that, with unanimous consent, extending the House's sitting hours is totally doable. That is what we do for emergency debates.

• (1550)

While it seems to me that the opposition has increasingly been employing the tactic of transforming a simple motion into a report that could lead to a debate in the House, I also get the impression that the government is trying to avoid all debate in the House. I don't think either option is beneficial in a democracy. I don't think it's healthy to put all kinds of things before the House, tying up much of its time at the expense of bills, but I don't think it's healthy to avoid all debate in the House of Commons on potentially controversial topics. I think the House of Commons is the perfect place to debate controversial topics.

I have shared all this with my opposition and governing party colleagues. I've also discussed this with the Minister of International Development. That's why I was so surprised and disappointed by this turn of events. As I said, I thought our governing party colleagues were seeking compromise.

As I've already reiterated many times elsewhere, I don't think the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development is the place for partisan games, and that's for at least two reasons. For one thing, I think that all members of this committee share the same values. For another, I think it's always best, in foreign affairs, to present a united front and speak with one voice. To illustrate that point, I want to emphasize that this committee has never, since the October 21, 2019, election, been the scene of systematic obstruction other than on the part of government members on this controversial motion. That's why I was so disappointed by this turn of events. I truly believe, and I mean this most sincerely, that this committee is not a good place for partisan games.

I wouldn't want to be accused of doing exactly what I'm criticizing my colleagues for doing, which is systematic obstruction, so I'll wrap this up, but not before I propose a subamendment to Ms. Sahota's amendment.

First, I would replace “global circumstances” with “various factors”. As I've already said, I think there are circumstances and factors that aren't under the government's control. Nevertheless, as I've also said, I think other factors are the result of this government's

bad decisions. Using the words “various factors” allows for individual interpretations of the language. Are we talking about exogenous factors, which are outside government control, or endogenous factors, which are caused by the government itself? We would be expecting people to use their brains to interpret the proposed language.

In addition, rather than just strike the last sentence of the motion, I would replace it with this: “And that the Minister of International Development be invited to discuss this issue with committee members.” That way, governing party colleagues would demonstrate that they are open to debate. This would give the minister a chance to come meet with committee members and have an in-depth conversation about this problematic and controversial issue. Also, we would not place undue demands on House time that is to be spent on bills. That is something that should be a priority for us all.

• (1555)

I wish we could have come up with another solution, such as not meeting at the same time as the House so that this debate could have happened, but, given that our committee discussion got off to a pretty bad start, we have to find another solution.

My suggestion is that we invite the Minister of International Development to come debate with us. I'll put it out there that I've talked to the minister, and she seems willing to meet with us.

I hope this part of the subamendment won't lead to a long drawn-out debate that would prevent us from making a decision about Mr. Harris's motion, which Ms. McPherson so capably and thoughtfully argued in favour of.

Thank you, colleagues.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

Colleagues, Monsieur Bergeron has introduced a subamendment to Ms. Sahota's motion. I'm advised that the clerk will email the text around so you can have that in front of you in writing, although Monsieur Bergeron read it and its content is not complex. With your agreement, let's preserve the list of speakers as it was originally—

• (1600)

**Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I think it would be helpful for me.... I'm looking for Mr. Harris's motion and then Ms. Sahota's amendment and then Mr. Bergeron's amendment so I can see the three of them there just to see what is gone. I have a feeling that I really like Mr. Bergeron's subamendment, but I just want to back up to see what it does to Ms. Sahota's amendment, which I liked, and then what the ultimate effect is on the whole motion. I know I've lost it a little bit, because it's been about two months.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Mr. Chair, may I read the amended version of the motion so everyone can get the gist of it?

**The Chair:** That would be nice, Mr. Bergeron. I just want everyone to know that the clerk sent the language of your subamendment to committee members.

[English]

She indicated to us that the language in red is Madam Sahota's original language, and the language in blue is that of Monsieur Bergeron. If colleagues want to check their emails as Monsieur Bergeron is rereading the amendments, that may be the most expeditious way to proceed and to make sure that everybody has the language in front of them.

[Translation]

Would you please read it, Mr. Bergeron?

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** While my colleagues consider the proposed amendments, I will read the text again as it would be amended:

That the committee recognizes that due to a variety of factors the government has faced delays in the supply of vaccines for Canadians through national manufacturing and international procurement, Canada is the only G7 country accessing vaccines through COVAX, an initiative intended to provide vaccines to high risk individuals in low and middle income countries.

The committee further recognizes that this failure by the government to secure domestic supply makes Canadians more vulnerable to dangerous variants and extends the detrimental global economic impacts of COVID-19 by delaying vaccinations to high-risk people in poor countries.

Finally, that the Minister of International Development be invited to discuss this issue with the Members of the Committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

By now colleagues may have the text in their email.

I would just like to seek the agreement of the committee to continue with the original speakers list. It now includes, from the original four, Mr. Fonseca and then Mr. Oliphant. Then we will transfer that speakers list over to discussion on the subamendment, followed by Dr. Fry, who has her hand raised as well on the subamendment.

With that, Mr. Fonseca, please go ahead.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Sorry, Mr. Chair, but on a point of order, it's not the usual practice to transfer a speaking list when you have a subamendment. I think we should deal with the subamendment.

**The Chair:** We did it last time with the consent of the committee. If there's disagreement on that, then we can open a new speakers list, Mr. Genuis. It's at the committee's will.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I would just like to see us proceed to get this done, so if people don't need to speak to the subamendment, because it reflects agreement, then let's just proceed. I would request that people again indicate their interest in being on the speaking list if they still have things to say in light of the new development.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Genuis. It's a constructive comment.

Let's leave it to the discretion of the two members who were still on the original speakers list, who are Mr. Fonseca and Mr. Oliphant. If they have comments on the subamendment, let's have them come in, and then Dr. Fry is the next speaker.

From the floor, I'm in the hands of the clerk to signal who would intervene in person.

Mr. Fonseca, do you have comments on the subamendment?

**Mr. Peter Fonseca:** Mr. Chair, I want to thank Monsieur Bergeron for his, as he says, finding compromise, finding this common ground, understanding that really our north star here is to provide the best information to our constituents and to be able to come forward. With his 26 years of experience and Dr. Fry with her 28 years of experience, we have over half a century.

I think what we have heard here is where there's a will, there's a way. I think we're all speaking to the same thing. We want to be able to bring in the minister, bring in experts, to provide clarity to what COVAX is all about. Who is it supporting? Who is it helping? What's Canada's role in COVAX? I'm proud of its role.

I think members are thinking we may bring it to a vote. I think we're finding some consensus here so I will leave it there, Mr. Chair.

• (1605)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Oliphant and then Dr. Fry.

**Mr. Robert Oliphant:** Always my concern with the speakers list not changing is I am in support of the subamendment; however, I have great difficulty still with one part of the motion as it stands.

My fear is if we use this method of me speaking to the subamendment, then I would also need to be speaking to the amended motion. It really follows very much on Mr. Bergeron's comments that I do believe we should find a non-partisan way of doing it, but there is a degree of polemic in this motion. When it says that the committee recognizes the failure by the government to secure domestic supply makes Canadians more vulnerable, that doesn't have anything to do with the motion as it stands and it is also an opinion that has not been verified by a committee study.

We're attempting to make a motion to report it to the House not based on evidence we have had before our committee, but on the opinion of a member, and I don't think that's the best way to move forward. There's a place for that, and that is to bring a motion to the House. There's a place for that, and that's to call for a take-note debate or an emergency debate. Those are bona fide parliamentary procedures that are there.

This is not that. The committee does not normally do this kind of work. Maybe a subcommittee does, but we don't do this. What this fails to do is also recognize the leadership of the Government of Canada with respect to the COVAX initiative around the world. What if Canada hadn't been out early and demonstrating that this initiative is designed to encourage wealthy and more developed countries to make commitments to COVAX with the knowledge that they could use that for their own domestic supply? It was a very important device that Canada took leadership on. When I read the motion as it stands, it doesn't have any of that nuance. It doesn't have any of that.

All of this is to say that it's giving you a little bit of a notice that I will be back to speak to this motion and I will want to deal with something in the middle of it. Meanwhile, I quite like Mr. Bergeron's subamendment and feel that I would support it, but I want to get back then to Ms. Sahota's amendment and then back to the original motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Oliphant.

Next is Dr. Fry on the subamendment.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Thank you, Chair.

On the subamendment, I think I am in agreement with what Rob is saying. I have always felt that Mr. Bergeron has wanted us to try to come to compromises on a lot of things we do. I think that is what a committee like this is about. I'm in agreement that he's coming up with a compromise; however, I still feel there are some pieces in this that are, as Rob said, presumptive on the part of the mover, the person who brought in the motion originally. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] evidence. For me, evidence is a very important thing. I like the idea that Mr. Bergeron is suggesting, that we bring in the minister. I might want to add Minister Anand to that as well so that we have the person who is procuring vaccines also able to give us some answers.

I think I like the intent of Mr. Bergeron's amendment. I like the idea that he's trying to find a way to do this. As I said before, I won't go back into what is a filibuster or what isn't; I just was not filibustering. I was really concerned about disinformation. There are a couple of pieces in this that are still not evidence-based statements. I would like to see those couple of pieces taken out.

I may like to suggest, if Mr. Bergeron is interested, that we add Minister Anand to the list of ministers appearing before us. Clarity, for me, is what the name of the game should be about.

That's about it.

**The Chair:** Dr. Fry, thank you very much.

It is on the floor as a subamendment and can't be amended further. Like Mr. Oliphant, you're free to bring points once we're back on Ms. Sahota's amendment.

Are there any other points on the subamendment as proposed by Mr. Bergeron?

If there is no further debate, I would propose that we put Mr. Bergeron's subamendment to a vote. If we have unanimous consent on the subamendment, we could proceed in that fashion. Is there anybody opposed?

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

**The Chair:** We are now procedurally back on the amendment as proposed by Ms. Sahota. We are open for a new speakers list. By virtue of raising hands virtually or signalling to our clerk in the committee room—

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** The floor is yours, Mr. Bergeron.

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Doesn't passing the subamendment automatically cancel out Ms. Sahota's amendment?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I do not believe so. I think it reverts to the original amendment once the subamendment has been disposed of, unless we hear otherwise from the clerk.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** No, Mr. Chair. Logically, we cannot go back to Ms. Sahota's amendment. It proposed two things: to remove the last sentence in the original motion, which my subamendment has just replaced; and to change a passage in the original motion, which my subamendment has already changed.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bergeron, I may have misspoken procedurally. It should be the amendment by Ms. Sahota as amended by the subamendment that we're now discussing. In effect, it is your language that is now on the table as accepted and open for further discussion.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.):** I have a point of order, a point of clarification. Basically we are now looking at the entire motion as amended by the subamendment. That's what we're really on, right?

It's back to my motion in a way, but it's been further amended as amended by the subamendment, so we're looking at the entirety, which then reads with Mr. Bergeron's amendment, right?

**The Chair:** I think we're all in agreement that....

Procedurally, Madam Clerk, maybe there's a better way to express that.

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** I think it was just the way it was worded. I totally get what we're doing, but it was just worded weirdly.

Thank you for the clarification.

**The Chair:** We will open a new speakers list. So far I have Mr. Oliphant and Dr. Fry.

Madam Clerk, I rely on you for comments from the committee room.

Go ahead, Mr. Oliphant.

**Mr. Robert Oliphant:** Thank you.

I think I'll just pick up from where I was. I'm looking for some new language.

As I said, I like Mr. Bergeron's rewriting of this. We now have a new version we're dealing with, which incorporates Ms. Sahota's amendments, which would then work.

As I go through this, the wording is:

The committee further recognizes that this failure by the government to secure domestic supply makes Canadians more vulnerable to dangerous variants and extends the detrimental global economic impacts of COVID-19 by delaying vaccinations to high-risk people in poor countries,

To me that is convoluted and is a difficult sentence.

I'm struggling with trying to unpack that. I have no difficulty recognizing that Canada does not have domestic supply of vaccines. Successive governments and successive businesses have determined that Canada is not a place that was ready to produce these vaccines. In hindsight now we think it should have been, and that some of the decisions by previous governments should not have been made and that some of the business decisions made by major pharmaceutical companies did not take Canada's importance into account. I think we now know that.

We don't have domestic production, but we made a massive procurement effort. We did two things. We invested in the development of vaccines and we secured contracts for seven vaccines to make sure we had enough vaccines for Canadians. There is a delay on that, obviously, and we are watching us play catch-up. I'm not denying that. I'm not denying that some countries are ahead of us and some countries are behind us and that we need to do that. How-

ever, there is a view here that because we are taking a small number out of the millions of doses of vaccines now being provided through the COVAX mechanism, that is somehow causal and problematic for Canadians' well-being. I don't think we have evidence of that.

Do I think the world will be safe when the whole world is vaccinated? Yes. It will not be safe until then. Do I believe we should have a robust domestic vaccination program? Yes.

Frankly, it's a little bit like when you're on the airplane and they make the announcement about putting on your oxygen mask when it falls down. It's like we're a developing country. I'm not shy about saying we should put the mask on first to help the people beside us. However, I also say we don't just leave the mask on ourselves; we continue and do that.

Canada has shown leadership, pretty profound leadership, in encouraging European and other western countries to engage in the COVAX initiative. I don't think that's reflected in the motion.

When I read the motion, I see it as a partisan snipe. What I'm trying to do is take the partisanship out of that and ask what we can learn about COVAX as an initiative. Maybe we don't know everything about it. What can we learn about countries that have now acceded to COVAX that wouldn't have if Canada hadn't taken that initiative? What is the problem? I read today about one country that is short on its COVAX supply, and I immediately made notes about this, because that's part of my job, and will be looking for ways to help that country.

There are dozens and dozens of countries that need vaccines. What we want to do is to ensure we all get them. We want to ensure Canadians get them and we want to ensure others get them.

● (1615)

Witness to that is the fact that when the leader of the federal NDP was asked if indeed he would exercise Canada's option to access COVAX vaccines, he did not say no. That is because I believe he's also doing his job as the leader of the New Democratic Party in Canada to ensure that Canadians have vaccines.

Similarly to what we're doing with the Americans, we will make sure we get vaccines on loan from the Americans and then pay them back, to try to equalize this distribution. The same could be said for the AstraZeneca vaccines we got from India, that we should not have taken them because they should go to another country. The same could be said for the Pfizer or the Moderna vaccines: Don't take them, give them to someone else. That's not the way we should lead in Canada.

We have a variety of things.

We have the problem of domestic production, which we are working on and can do better. Opposition, please get your ideas in on how to encourage that investment in Canada. I think it's great if you do. We also have procured vaccines, the largest number, the largest array of vaccines of any country in the world, which I'm very proud of, and they're coming in.

I will admit I did get my vaccination last week. I happen to fall within that sweet spot between 60 and 64. The reason I did that is that there is a short shelf life on the AstraZeneca vaccines. I don't want to lose them. The drugstores are calling to make sure we use them. We use them because they're going to expire.

Then we have the issue of COVAX, which I'd like to know more about. I'm very pleased to invite the minister to talk about this. I think that will enlighten us about what COVAX was intended to do, how it's being perceived in the developing countries as well as in developed countries and how it is encouraging developed countries to engage in COVAX even further. I'm reading the numbers every day about countries that are now putting.... Billions of dollars are invested in COVAX. Bravo! That's what we should do. But other countries don't do that. Canada led the way on that.

I would like to see in this motion some recognition of the fact that we have provided leadership on COVAX and that it's working. I'm not denying that we are the first country to access them, but I'm also not embarrassed about it. Canadians want to be vaccinated. I get it. Canadians want others to be vaccinated as well.

We also looked at the death rates from COVID-19, both the morbidity rates and the mortality rates. We recognize that the mortality rates are much higher in some countries than in others. It would be absolutely naive to say that every country should need, does need or should get vaccines at the same rate without having an understanding of both morbidity and mortality.

When you look at those rates, you begin to see that Canada needs them. We have a higher death rate. When I look at the numbers, say, in Nigeria, their average age is so much younger than Canada's and the mortality rate is thus much lower. We have an aging population; therefore, we have a more vulnerable population than other countries.

I think the nuance of all of that needs to be embedded in this motion. I'm probably less concerned about it now that we've passed the amendment that we don't report it to the House, that we use this. This is where I'd open the door to Mr. Harris and Ms. McPherson to say if the minister has so disappointed in her explanation of what is going on, we could make a report to the House. We're not precluding that. That is the kind of thing we can do, but we should do it based on evidence.

All of that being said, Mr. Chair, I would like to make an amendment. I need to look at the clerk. As Mr. Bergeron said, the sub-amendment has changed the amendment; therefore, I believe I would be amending the motion now as it stands in committee as opposed to amending the amendment.

I think we can do that. Is that correct? I see her nodding.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, I believe that's going in the right direction. Is that correct?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira):** Yes.

Mr. Chair, as long as everybody understands—it was not clear to me—that you have agreed to the motion as amended by the sub-amendment already, then that's fine. You can move on to a new amendment.

**The Chair:** That is we can as long as the text of that amendment doesn't touch the motion that Ms. Sahota introduced and Mr. Bergeron amended. My understanding is that it will not.

Mr. Oliphant.

**Mr. Robert Oliphant:** I don't have this in writing, and I apologize. Mr. Bergeron's amendment happily surprised me, but it still surprised me.

What I would like to do is amend the sentence that begins, “The committee further recognizes this failure” to say, “While the committee recognizes leadership by the Canadian government in the COVAX initiative, it also recognizes that the government's draw upon COVAX vaccines will”.

Could I cede the floor, or do you want me to keep talking while I write this out?

**The Chair:** [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] on to something constructive. I don't know whether there's opposition to your proceeding and developing your thoughts, but I think they may take us somewhere.

I also want to take the opportunity to remind colleagues that we have an hour scheduled for this. I'm not going to prejudge how long this discussion will take or what the will of the committee is. We have a substantial number of items of committee business that we also have on the agenda for this afternoon.

I take Mr. Genuis's point that we would, I think, collectively want to move this forward. I think we are in the process of doing that.

Mr. Oliphant, perhaps you would want to take a moment to elaborate to the point of potentially arriving at an amendment. If not, we can revert to the speakers list.

• (1625)

**Mr. Robert Oliphant:** I think I have it now.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Robert Oliphant:** That sentence would read, “While the committee recognizes the leadership of the Canadian government in the COVAX initiative, it also has concerns that the limited supply”—following up on Mr. Bergeron's not blaming, but saying it, and people can draw their own conclusions—“of vaccines in Canada makes” —and then it continues—“Canadians more vulnerable to dangerous variants and extends the detrimental global impacts of COVID-19”.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Oliphant.

I now take Mr. Genuis's point. This is an amendment to the original motion. It's substantively different from the thought of the previous speaker.

We have a long speakers list that was developed prior to Mr. Oliphant's taking the floor. I would like to solicit a speakers list on this amendment.

A number of colleagues have their hands up. If it's not to speak to Mr. Oliphant's amendment, I would ask you to lower your hand and then just re-enter. If it is to Mr. Oliphant's amendment, I'm a bit challenged in terms of sequencing, because I have some hands up and I also have interventions from the floor.

Let's try to be constructive, colleagues, and stay in the vein of Mr. Oliphant's attempt to bring us to progress on this. If you have thoughts on the amendment, please express them. If you don't, please lower your hand.

I have on the list now Dr. Fry, Mr. Fonseca, Ms. Saks.

I see some hands being lowered. Also, I see Mr. Bergeron, through the clerk—

**Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** —as well as Ms. McPherson.

There is a point of order.

Mr. Morantz.

**Mr. Marty Morantz:** I'd like to have the amendment in writing before we continue the discussion. I think that's only fair.

Also, I think Mr. Bergeron should have a translated version as well. We're doing these motions on the fly. It's difficult to have a debate about a motion when you're just hearing one member dictate verbally what he thinks it should be. If we could get it in writing, in English and French, before we discuss it, that would be ideal.

**The Chair:** Thank you for the point, Mr. Morantz.

Madam Clerk, is there a way to make that happen?

**Mr. Robert Oliphant:** Mr. Chair, that's a point of order, so on that point of order, my concern is that the Standing Orders are clear that amendments may be made verbally in a committee, not in writing, and may come in the language of the member's choice. I'm not saying it wouldn't be helpful, but I'm concerned [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] following the Standing Orders. I really think we do better when we stick to the Standing Orders, because in debate and in committee it's quite different when giving notice of motion and presenting motions, which need to come in both official languages. But I do want to retain the right of members to make amendments to motions in one of the two official languages, French or English, and we can do our best to try to circulate them.

This would not nullify the motion. I think it would be very dangerous and I want to make sure that we follow the Standing Orders. The clerk can confirm if I'm right or wrong.

**The Chair:** Mr. Oliphant, I didn't see Mr. Morantz's point as an attempt to extinguish your amendment. The amendment is verbally before the committee and is in order. I simply saw it as a way to facilitate discussion among those colleagues who want to have the

text in front of them but hadn't had a chance to write it down, as you said. If there's a way to generate that, I think it would be helpful, in the spirit of the constructive vein the committee has struck this afternoon. If not, then absolutely your amendment stands.

I'm now going to attempt to assemble a speakers list based on the hands that were already raised. There is interest in discussing the point that you put forward. Dr. Fry, Mr. Fonseca, Ms. Saks, Monsieur Bergeron and Ms. McPherson are on the list as it currently stands.

Dr. Fry.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Are we speaking to Mr. Oliphant's subamendment?

**The Chair:** It's an amendment.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** There are some pieces in the amendment that concern me because, as we are speaking to clarity here, I do not agree that.... Well, I think that if you want to talk about us recognizing the leadership of the government, etc., that becomes a little partisan. I can see people not wanting to read that.

What I would like to speak to is the fact that we are attributing the ability of low- and middle-income countries to get vaccines and the ability of international procurement...that it is linked to COVID variants, and it isn't. We do know that some of the vaccines that are available now do not deal with some of the variants. Some of them do not deal with the South African variant and some of them do not deal with the Brazil variant. The current vaccines we have are not necessarily going to deal with the variants, so that's one thing that we can't say, because it isn't based in evidence. I just wanted to say that it is a misleading statement to say that it does.

I agree, however, with the fact that what Mr. Oliphant wants is clarity. I also agree with the fact that what we want to do is to ensure there is factual data here. As I said before, the only reason I didn't like Mr. Oliphant's amendment is that it continues to link us having a supply of vaccinations, domestic and international, to being able to stop variants, and it isn't so in terms of evidence. I just wanted to make sure that we didn't put in something that is actually not based on evidence. We know that the Brazil variant and the South African variant are still out there and we're not sure what vaccines are working against them accurately or not.

I mean, this is moving so fast that nobody has a chance to see what's going on. I know that countries are locking down because they're concerned about the rise in variants, but it doesn't mean that the current vaccines that are out there are going to deal with those variants. I want to make that clear. It does not mean that the current vaccines that are out there are able to deal with some of the variants. They may be able to deal with a few, but not all, so I don't want us to put language in there that says they will. I just wanted to make sure that is clear.

For me, this whole issue is about clarity, about facts and about evidence-based information. I know that this is Mr. Oliphant's bottom line as well: to make sure that we're clear. I would prefer that we have no—what can I say—partisan language in this, because it just leads us down to arguing and to arguing about partisanship. I like the idea that when Mr. Bergeron spoke he spoke to non-partisanship.

What we really want to know is what's going on. How did we procure? How did we not procure? Are there any new vaccines out there that are dealing with variants? We want to hear that information, so why don't we just bring in the Minister of International Development? I also want to say—again, for the sake of accuracy and factual data—let's bring in the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, because she's a procurer. She knows what's out there. She has been dealing with vaccine manufacturers. She knows what's going on.

Let's bring in just those two. I don't want a variety of ministers coming in. Let's have one hour for one and one hour for another. Let's get some answers so that we can actually then have a very good discussion and something that goes out there to the public and is factual and evidence based. That's my objective.

As I said, the only thing I didn't like about Mr. Oliphant's amendment was that it is continuing to link the idea that if we had more domestic supply and if we had more international supply we would be able to deal with the variants, and that is not really true.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Fry.

Here's what I propose, colleagues. It's 4:35. Again, I don't want to be heavy on the clock because it's the collective will of the committee that's going to drive the agenda, but if we can get the round of interventions currently on the slate and see if we can take this amendment somewhere this afternoon.... If it looks like we need more discussion time, I would suggest that we transition to committee business, because I do realize that there are a number of motions that colleagues want to bring there and a couple of points of business that are important in terms of the way forward on the other studies that we're engaged in.

With that in mind, I want to continue to go through the list as it's currently before me. I have Mr. Fonseca, Ms. Saks, Monsieur Bergeron, Ms. McPherson and Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Fonseca is next.

**Mr. Peter Fonseca:** Thank you, Chair.

Like I wanted to support Monsieur Bergeron, I will support his amendment and also Mr. Oliphant, and to hear from Dr. Fry and what she had to say in terms of clarity in terms of public health.... What was very poignant was just how fast this is moving. Every day things change.

It's evolving at such a quick pace that we've seen at one point where we were scrambling a little bit to get the vaccines. Now by the end of this week, over eight million vaccines will have come into Canada. By the end of June, we have 36.5 million vaccines coming into Canada. From COVAX, I believe it's 1.9 million vaccines that we said we would procure, but on COVAX, and as Mr. Oliphant was saying on the leadership role, thinking back to the beginnings of COVAX, from the onset, we as Canada should be very proud that putting in \$440 million, by being the leader, being number one in COVAX.... That leadership has brought others forward, and that's what we would like to hear from the minister, from experts and from those who understand COVAX and what it's able to do and to show that, through Canada's leadership, we've been able

to get billions of dollars of investments now within COVAX. More and more countries every day are coming online.

Speaking about the same message that our Prime Minister has said, we need the whole world vaccinated. To protect us, we need everybody protected. That's the only way it will work, and to know that we've been able to procure the most vaccines per capita of anywhere else in the world allows us.... As I've said, I spoke to those numbers, how many vaccines we'd have here by June. We will have many. We will be able to share those vaccines with COVAX, with others, to be able to ensure that what we all are looking at is to get everybody, as many people as possible, vaccinated throughout the world as quickly as possible.

I think Canada has taken the right approach. When it comes to the manufacturing of vaccines, we can't go back to the 1980s under the Mulroney times or whoever was in government at that time who decided that we no longer needed to manufacture vaccines, but what we did do, as soon as the pandemic was announced by the WHO, was that, within 12 days, Canada was right there. We invested \$200 million-plus, and within 30 days another \$600 million. That's showing the leadership that Mr. Oliphant wants to see with this motion that we need to speak to. It's now over \$1 billion.

I know that Monsieur Bergeron, all Quebecers and all Canadians will be very happy that the manufacture of vaccines will be, I believe, in the Montreal area. We're all proud of the great knowledge, ability and human resources that we have here to be able to do that in very short order. Watching the news, I'm not sure if all this is correct, but seeing that we're going to be able to start manufacturing our vaccines.... I think it was the CEO or the COO of the plant saying that, by the fall, we will be able to manufacture here. We've learned a lot through this pandemic, and we continue to learn. What this is getting to is the speed of this.

I think that what we see in this motion.... First, I don't agree with much of it, the premise of the motion, but what I say is that it's already past due. It's past its due date. It is no longer whatever was trying to be done here with this motion, but I think it can be amended. We could do something to get us to where we want to be.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1635)

**The Chair:** Mr. Fonseca, thank you very much.

We'll go straight to Ms. Saks.

**Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the colleagues who are contributing. I feel like we're making progress with Mr. Bergeron's subamendment that we've taken on.

I'd like to answer to what my colleague Mr. Oliphant mentioned with regard to this one statement in the current amendment that we're looking at:

The committee further recognizes that this failure by the government to secure domestic supply makes Canadians more vulnerable to dangerous variants and extends the detrimental global...impacts of COVID-19 by delaying vaccinations to high-risk people in poor countries.

As my colleague Dr. Fry mentioned, we always have to be so careful in what we put forward in the public realm about our discussions of what we're doing, because there is a tremendous amount of uncertainty. There is a tremendous amount of anxiety with Canadians right now about variants and supply, which vaccine is safe to take and which isn't, and on and on it goes.

In this committee we have the responsibility that any statement that we put forward is based on evidence and is based on clarity of the facts. That is what we're here to present, to do.

As Mr. Fonseca said, the proposal was to pull a draw of 1.9 million from the COVAX stock that we contributed to with 92 countries that are participants in the Gavi COVAX makeup. We were a leader in investing to make sure that, not just for domestic supply—the agreement does allow for domestic draw—but on an international scale there was a collective effort. We were leaders in setting up this structure, and we were leaders in investing in the structure.

That aside, if we want to perhaps say that it is a little bit partisan, let's go to the facts as of March 22. What has COVAX achieved? It's shipped over 31 million vaccines to 57 participant countries, 31 million.

This motion debates about 1.9 million, which we always said we'd have the ability to draw from, versus the eight million that are arriving in Canada by the end of March and the slated 100 million available to Canadians by the end of September.

Let's just deal with the facts, which are the numbers, and numbers don't lie. We know what we are participating in, and we know what we've invested. My colleague Mr. Fonseca really mapped out the amounts of investment that we've put in and the leadership role that we've played.

This statement to say that our draw of 1.9 million is delaying vaccines to high-risk people in poor countries, well, 31 million have already gone out to 57 participating countries, so that statement, to me, really is misleading. It doesn't show the truth of where this program is going, what it is providing globally and what we are leading participants in.

Really, it puts anxiety in the minds of Canadians about what this program is, why we participated in it and what we are contributing to a global effort to address and make sure that every citizen who needs one gets a vaccination and that every person around the world who wants a vaccine can be protected, because we all need to be protected as countries, as individuals and as states. We all have a role to play in this, and Canada has played a leading role.

My colleague Mr. Oliphant has raised his concerns and offered a solution to address this line, and I really feel that we need to look at the numbers that are on the table. They're up on the Gavi website, and you can see the numbers of distribution right there. It's constantly moving and it's constantly changing. The numbers are higher every day in terms of the provision of vaccines to participating countries. The facts are there: 31 million by March 22. I think that is a tremendous accomplishment by COVAX and Gavi, and we can be proud of that.

I really think we need to take some time to consider what the purpose of what we're putting in this statement is, this one line

about the committee recognizing the failure and the global economic impacts, because it wholeheartedly isn't in alignment with the data that is available.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Ms. Saks, thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron.

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Mr. Chair, I will not deny that I am highly skeptical of what is going on right now. In light of Ms. Sahota's amendment, two passages in the main motion seemed problematic to our colleagues on the government side, and I honestly believe that my subamendment changed them in a way that made the motion acceptable.

Is this the ideal motion that our colleagues on the government side would have imagined in their wildest dreams? I am well aware that it is not. However, since Ms. Sahota was not proposing that we remove or change anything else in the motion, could we, in the interest of cooperation, agree to leave it at that and avoid further prolonging this discussion?

I confess I am at a loss as to what to do. I had scribbled down another proposed amendment, but Mr. Oliphant put his forward, and Ms. Fry isn't even satisfied with that. So we may have a debate among Liberals as to whether Mr. Oliphant's proposal is appropriate. It seems to me that everything is being set up to ensure we don't resolve this and we can't reach a compromise.

Once again, I am a little puzzled, not to say disappointed, by what is going on. I will go ahead and read you what I had scribbled down anyway, and you can tell me what you think.

First, I am not a scientist like Ms. Fry, but I consider myself to be a relatively well-informed person who goes to the trouble of following what is being written on the subject. My understanding is that vaccination really does seem to be a good way to keep the variants from spreading as well. So the longer we delay vaccination, the more the variants will be able to spread among people, with extremely damaging effects. So I would not change that part of the motion. However, I would replace “The committee further recognizes that this failure by the government to secure domestic supply makes Canadians more vulnerable” with “These supply issues make Canadians more vulnerable”.

I was hoping to be able to find a solution with this new wording, but I must admit I am increasingly convinced that the government members do not wish to come to a solution. They find such intricate ways to keep going round and round, to prevent us from finding a solution.

I quite honestly confess to you that I don't know what to do anymore. I feel we are wasting time and, meanwhile, we're not doing anything useful. I am disappointed.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

We have on the floor procedurally, Madam Clerk, a subamendment to Mr. Oliphant's amendment of the main motion, the way I've understood it.

What I'd like to ask colleagues, just in light of the clock.... I'm sensing interest on the part of members to move the conversation forward and to be constructive. I'm also sensing some frustration.

There is some committee business before us, as I've mentioned before. Is there a willingness on the part of the committee to continue this discussion for another 10 minutes to see where it goes, or should we break off now and schedule to revisit? I just want to get a sense from members in terms of where we are with respect to this afternoon's timeline, the thoughts that are before us now and what could be potential solutions to the discussion.

We could run this right to the end of the clock, and we will lose any opportunity to address, I think, some important business that will keep us moving forward, including issues with respect to the agenda for this week, but there may be thoughts to the contrary. I just want to survey quickly, outside of the speakers list that I currently have, the view of the committee in terms of what we should do this afternoon.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I am quite distressed. I like Mr. Bergeron's idea of finding a motion that we can all buy, but I am also a little concerned that my intentions and my statements are being misconstrued as part of some Liberal plot.

I really want people to understand. Every single day I read JAMA and the British Medical Journal. I read all of the things that come out on this.

The idea that you're linking the fact that we do not have domestic vaccines to people being able to get variants...to be able to be cured by the vaccine for variants is absolutely untrue. It bothers me that—

**The Chair:** Dr. Fry, I think that's more a point of debate than a point of order. What I had—

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** It's not a point of debate.

It's more that I feel that my own statement is being presumed to be malicious, and it isn't. I don't like that, personally.

**The Chair:** I don't know if the word “malicious” was used, Dr. Fry. I think this is something that will come—

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Well, not malicious, but seriously—

**The Chair:** What I'm trying to get to in a few short minutes is the committee's sense of where we should take this discussion with respect to the remaining time this afternoon.

**Hon. Hedy Fry:** Well, let's get on to what you need to do in terms of committee business.

**The Chair:** I'm happy to let the committee continue. In fact, I wouldn't stand in the way, if that's what the committee feels could and should be done.

I see interest in the substance. I also see some procedural concerns and some concerns with respect to how various positions are being characterized.

Ms. McPherson, do you have a thought on where we should go this afternoon with respect to the remaining timeline of the committee?

• (1650)

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Chair, I think it is only reasonable that we stop, because obviously the Liberals have no interest in actually acting with any sort of good faith on this.

Mr. Bergeron has brought forward exactly what was asked for. He brought forward amendments that met exactly what Ms. Sahota had asked for.

We are continuing to filibuster. We speak about people having a lot of expertise in this committee. I can tell you one thing: I am new. I am a new parliamentarian, and I find it absolutely disgusting to listen to this non-stop when there is so much work to do and so many things that this committee should be looking at.

I'm also very upset that it is being called a partisan snipe. This is something that I would have put forward no matter what. I think it is in fact one of the most pressing issues of our time, and I don't say that lightly.

I would recommend that we stop discussion on this now, because I don't see any way forward that will be fruitful.

**The Chair:** Ms. McPherson, thank you.

Mr. Oliphant is the third member on the speakers list on this point. Then, if it's the will of the committee to transition into committee business, I would suggest we do that.

Mr. Oliphant, please give us your thoughts.

**Mr. Robert Oliphant:** I'm fine to go to committee business as well.

**The Chair:** Let's do that.

I don't want to pre-empt any substantive interest in the motion as it stands. There is room for the committee to take it back up and be constructive. There's also room to talk offline and on the sidelines and hopefully there'll be—

**Ms. Ruby Sahota:** Can I, before we go into committee business, just quickly clarify some things? We are back on my amendment, and I haven't spoken for many meetings now, I feel.

I just want to clarify things based on some of the points that were made today.

All I want to say is that when I moved my original amendment, I did it off the floor, on the spot, without consulting with my colleagues. I had had a conversation with Ms. McPherson about removing that, but in terms of the language, as you know, I didn't come prepared with something to email to everybody right away. I just kind of changed stuff off the floor. I was trying to make minimal changes so that we could come to some kind of agreement. I had not consulted with all of my colleagues on the exact language. I was just trying to put something forward that I thought was going to be constructive at that time.

Anyway, it was unfortunate that at that point we didn't get an agreement. That's all I wanted to say.

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

If colleagues agree then, let's pull the parking break up on this but preserve the interest in continuing the discussion further offline or in the committee setting. There is some interest still on the part of at least some members.

Let's disconnect. Let's go back to the link for the in camera portion of the meeting this afternoon and reconnect in about five minutes, in camera.

Thank you, colleagues.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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