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Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen



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• (1615)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): I'd like to call this meeting to order.

I welcome you to meeting number four of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

The committee, as you are well aware, was supposed to be scheduled for a meeting today from 3:30 to 4:30, but at this point in time we are commencing at, according to my clock, 3:15 my time, which would be 4:15 your time. The meeting is to consider future business. Please note that this meeting is public.

The committee will meet again on Wednesday, November 4, 2020, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., to hear the President of the Treasury Board and the TBS officials on the main estimates, 2020-21. The meeting will be a televised session as well.

Pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on Wednesday, September 23, 2020, the committee may continue to sit in a hybrid format. This means that members can participate either in person in the committee room or by video conference, by Zoom.

We've all been on these committee meetings many times and we do have some rules. I suspect that by this time you all know those rules, but if at any time someone has a question I will repeat them. It's really just on the issue of English/French and translation. Also, if you're going to speak, please wait until I recognize you by name and also make certain your mike is unmuted.

In order to ensure social distancing in the committee room, if you need to speak privately with the clerk or the analysts during this meeting, please email him or them at the committee mailbox. I appreciate your doing that. You should all have that.

On Friday, the clerk sent out the text of a report from the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure. All of the propositions in the report were agreed to by the members of the subcommittee. Now these propositions need to be approved by this committee, so we are putting that forward to you today.

Once the subcommittee report is disposed of, then we will be free to move to other motions, if you wish.

I would ask that you take a look at the final report that we had from the subcommittee. I just want to bring a couple of things to your attention, and perhaps the committee might want to address

those, because at this point it can add to what the subcommittee has put forward.

In particular, in point 4, where the subcommittee's final date was set for November 22, 2020, that being a Sunday, it might be a little awkward for the PBO to respond to us and to the clerk in dealing with issues. It might be worthwhile that the subcommittee consider doing either the Friday, which is November 20, or Monday, November 23.

I bring that to your attention because Ms. Vignola had that date in there. I guess I would ask Ms. Vignola if that's a concern for her to make one of those changes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): I have no problem with that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, then I'll leave it to the committee to decide whether they want either the Friday or the Monday, and perhaps someone could mention that.

The second part I'd like to mention is that under points 5 and 6, we did not put in a timeline or deadline for when witnesses should be presented. By getting those witnesses to us ASAP, we would be able to set time frames with the clerks and the analysts to set things up. Again, I would ask the subcommittee to consider maybe giving it a week, until the end of this week, for witnesses to be submitted, or consideration of that as well.

With that said, I will open the floor to discussion on the subcommittee report.

We have Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you.

Just as it relates to the date, my reading of "by Sunday" gives the report the opportunity to come back in the preceding work week, so as not to have a need for an amendment. It reads that it be presented by that date, so I think it allows the report to come back prior to the 22nd, if I read that correctly.

The Chair: Certainly, I think it can be.

When we notify the PBO, though, we'd like to give them a date, maybe Friday, which would fit within this. I'm okay with that if people are okay with it. I just want to make certain that we don't leave the PBO in a situation where they can't get a hold of somebody on the weekend, etc.

Mr. Matthew Green: Then, Mr. Chair, perhaps the Monday gives them the extra time to be able to come in and report back.

The Chair: I'm not hearing anything further. Is that a consensus to have it—

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Paul Cardegna): Mr. Chair, Madame Vignola would like to intervene.

The Chair: Certainly. Ms. Vignola, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: November 22 is a Sunday, and I hope the Parliamentary Budget Officer at least takes weekends off.

It should make little difference whether we choose Friday or Monday. I suggest Friday, because a Monday deadline won't help if he doesn't work weekends. I think Friday would be a good date.

What I'm hearing through the grapevine is that the report is done, as it were, so if we ask him to appear Friday, it should still be plenty of time.

• (1620)

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion?

The Clerk: Monsieur Drouin would like to intervene, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Certainly, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We agree with Mrs. Vignola that it should be Friday, because if it is not ready by then, it won't be any more ready come Monday. I wouldn't want to make the Parliamentary Budget Officer have to work all weekend.

On this side, we agree with changing it to Friday.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any further discussion? As I'm not seeing any, then we will make the change from Sunday, November 22, to Friday, November 20.

As for the witnesses, is Friday comfortable for everybody to get their witness information in by? Is there any discussion on that?

Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Since the Nuctech motion had already been moved in the summer—by Mr. McCauley, if I'm not mistaken—both sides, the opposition and the government, should have their witness lists ready.

Next is the government's response to the pandemic. Since we were studying the issue this summer, the witness lists should be ready, so Friday strikes me as a reasonable deadline.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anything further?

Mr. Paul-Hus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On our side, we agree as far as the deadlines and the report are concerned.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

The Clerk: If I may, Mr. Chair, if the committee agrees with Friday for the submission of the witness names for points 5 and 6, do they want to set a time—noon, three o'clock, five o'clock? I might suggest noon on Friday would work, or five o'clock on Friday would work as well. It is helpful for us to have a time. If we say end of business day, it lacks clarity.

In the past, we've done five o'clock. We could do that as well.

The Chair: Mr. Paul-Hus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Chair, I move that we add “5 p.m.” to the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the 5 p.m.? Seeing none, is there any further discussion that the committee would like to have on the subcommittee report? I'm not seeing any hands up.

With a show of hands, are we accepting the report from the subcommittee?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

That's good. We're moving along. That's very good to see.

I just want to point out one other thing on that Nuctech study. The motion the committee passed says that it be started by November 23, 2020. I want to make certain that the committee is comfortable. Perhaps we could invite the departments to appear before that date so that we can at least start and adhere to the motion that was presented and approved by the committee.

Is there any discussion?

Mr. Paul-Hus, that was your motion, and you had set it to start no later than November 23. With what we would be going through with the estimates—

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Chair, as agreed at the subcommittee meeting, the priority is to meet with the ministers on the main estimates and supplementary estimates (B). If, however, the ministers aren't available during the committee's time slots, it is essential that we begin our study on Nuctech right away.

We are also waiting for confirmation that the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates will be able to meet twice a week, which will help speed things up.

[*English*]

The Chair: Certainly, and thank you for that.

My concern on this is.... If for some reason we are delayed, I want to make certain that we have it in place so that we can invite some of the departments, or at least one, just so we adhere to what the motion is and what was asked. If you are comfortable with that, the committee, with the clerks and the analysts, will make certain that something like that is set up.

Thank you.

The Clerk: I beg your pardon, Mr. Chair.

Madame Vignola wanted to intervene on that point.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: On the Nuctech study, are we talking about inviting the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry or the Minister of Public Services and Procurement? I ask because we are already hearing from the Minister of Public Services and Procurement on the estimates. I see no issues with inviting her twice, but the two appearances would be quite close together.

As Mr. Paul-Hus said, if we can't hear from her twice in the tight window before November 23, we will turn to our witness lists for the Nuctech study.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for that.

What we're looking at is just in case we aren't able to get the ministers there, because of dealing with the estimates. We would have it set up so that the departments could at least start the study before we.... That's what I'm bringing to your attention right now.

Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a quick point. In the previous session, when we dealt with COVID-19 witnesses we had a list. I'm just wondering if the clerk is going to send us the list of who's asked to appear, because we are in a hybrid format. Normally, we'd get together and talk about them, but now that we have a hybrid format.... The clerk can correct me if I'm wrong, but last time you sent us a master list—here's whom the Conservatives invited, whom the Bloc invited, whom we invited—just to cross-reference to see if we have some of the same witnesses.

The Clerk: Perhaps I can clarify, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Drouin, are you referring to the witness list that was submitted during the last session of Parliament?

Mr. Francis Drouin: I am referring to how we are going to proceed now with respect to the fifth recommendation. Basically, I would like to see the list of witnesses being proposed for the Nuctech study.

[*English*]

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Paul-Hus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would simply like to remind my fellow member Mr. Drouin that, at our last meeting, we had decided that the parties would choose their witnesses, the clerk would compile a list and we wouldn't necessarily discuss it. If I'm not mistaken, that is what we had agreed upon.

Perhaps the clerk can confirm that for us.

• (1630)

[*English*]

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, perhaps I can intervene on this point.

What is written in the subcommittee report with regard to Nuctech is that once the witnesses are submitted, the chair, in conjunction with the clerk and analysts, would prepare a work plan for the consideration of the committee.

I apologize, Monsieur Drouin, if I misunderstood your question. I think you were asking exactly that.

Essentially, what we do is take the list. The analysts in these situations usually try to group them thematically. Then we submit it back to the committee for consideration. The committee will know which parties submitted which names, and can then discuss which names it wants to adopt from the work plan. If I remember correctly, this is how we proceeded with the COVID study in the summer.

Thank you.

The Chair: Does that clarify things for you, Mr. Drouin?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: From my distance, I think I can see your thumbs-up there. The camera is way down at the far end of the room.

With that, the floor is now open.

I believe I see Mr. Green with his hand up.

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes, sir.

The Chair: We'll open the floor with you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to begin my remarks by saying that I'm very glad and happy that we've been able to pass that and can start to get to work on the reports and the studies. You'll note that I had sent out two notices of motion that broke out the omnibus nature of the previous work that I'd presented. I'm going to set that aside, because I'm hoping that in testing the will of this committee today, we can go ahead and get back on track with the demand for documents that was put out some time ago, with a slight adjustment to dates and taking into consideration feedback I received at our scheduling subcommittee meeting, to try to meet people halfway on stuff.

With your indulgence, I'd like to put the first motion. I can reference it. If people would like me to read it out, I'm happy to do that. I can practice my French, perhaps—or perhaps not.

The first motion I have is the COVID-related motion, that the committee send for all briefing notes, memos and emails related to the national emergency strategic stockpile. The motion is before you. It was sent out on Friday.

I'll note, for those who are keenly interested, that I changed the date so that we're clear that this is not the exact same motion. This is taking feedback from other members of the committee to extend it to August 31, but then to kick to December 1 to allow that month for staff to get whatever happened between my original ask and this one.

Through you, Mr. Chair, I just want to make sure the committee is clear on exactly which motion I'm talking about. I don't want putting this motion to cause any more confusion than perhaps it has in the past.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, Mr. MacKinnon has asked that Mr. Green read the motion into the record, please.

Mr. Matthew Green: I would be happy to.

This will be a great clip for my social media, so I appreciate the indulgence, Mr. MacKinnon.

The motion is as follows:

That, in the context of its study of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee send for all briefing notes, memos and emails from senior officials, prepared for the Minister of Health, the President of the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Chief Medical Health Officer of Canada, and the Minister of Public Service and Procurement between 2010 and Monday, August 31, 2020, regarding the stockpiling, management, disposal and replenishment of medical equipment and supplies in the National Emergency Strategic Stockpile; that the committee receive the information no later than Tuesday, December 1, 2020; that matters of Cabinet confidence and national security be excluded from the request; that any redactions to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents, as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons and that these documents be posted on the committee's web page.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Green, do you want to add anything more before I open this up for discussion?

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes. I appreciate that the way in which I tried to reintroduce all of this caused concern. We're now almost two full months past prorogation and the scheduling that we received. I'll remind folks that the original spirit of this motion was

supported by this committee in the past, which hopefully provided the opportunity for staff to get a good head start on this.

Kicking it into the beginning of December gives us an opportunity to receive the information, consider it, and perhaps find a way to respond, if necessary, in the weeks leading up to Christmas. What I don't want is a December 31 date that kicks it into some time in 2021, so I'm calling on the reasonableness of the government to support what I think should be a clear and transparent process, open by default, for the government as it relates to the national emergency strategic stockpile.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green

I have Mr. MacKinnon and Ms. Vignola.

Mr. MacKinnon, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank my fellow member Mr. Green for his motion. I don't believe I expressed support for this motion. On the contrary, I think it is a ridiculous motion that puts an additional burden on people we are depending on right now to purchase medical supplies and personal protective equipment. It is those people who will have to respond to the various motions for the production of papers—motions adopted by the House of Commons and supported by the members of the opposition. Other committees had very similar motions.

It is my duty as parliamentary secretary and our collective duty as government members to roundly condemn the witch hunt that seems to be taking shape through these motions for the production of papers. The opposition is looking for problems where none exist.

Allow me to explain.

The purpose of the national emergency strategic stockpile is to help provinces and territories in the event of a pandemic or medical emergency. I don't think that is a controversial idea. Supplies are added periodically, maintained and deployed when necessary.

The Public Health Agency of Canada maintains the stockpile, ordering supplies as needed. Any study of the national emergency strategic stockpile would need to be done by the Standing Committee on Health, which examines how Health Canada conducts its operations and manages its resources. The motion adopted by the House contains a similar request for the production of papers.

The job of Public Services and Procurement Canada, or PSPC, one of the departments we scrutinize, here, is to procure goods and services when a client department asks it to. If a department wants goods, services or equipment of any sort but lacks the necessary authority to make the purchase itself, the central purchasing agent—PSPC—procures the goods or service on the department's behalf. In accordance with best practices in procurement, PSPC procures goods and services at the request of a client department.

What happens to the service or equipment afterwards is entirely the responsibility of the department or agency in question, not of PSPC. We find ourselves having to explain that on a fairly regular basis, which I find baffling. If Transport Canada wants to purchase a particular piece of equipment and has neither the ability nor authority to do so, PSPC purchases the equipment on Transport Canada's behalf.

● (1640)

Transport Canada accepts the equipment, adds it to the department's inventory, sets it up, deploys it and manages its life cycle, as necessary. Eventually, the department will remove the equipment from its inventory and start the process all over again. That's what departments do when they purchase equipment, and the same goes for the Public Health Agency of Canada.

I can't wrap my head around why Mr. Green is so intent on burdening the same public servants—we aren't talking about 5,000 of them—with this colossal task. His motion calls for the production of papers going back years. The committee would force these public servants to review and produce all of this documentation, while ensuring trade secrets, intellectual property and cabinet confidence are all protected.

I do not understand this motion, since the Standing Committee on Health and Health Canada will be answering the same questions. PSPC will be forced to do the same in response to the various motions adopted by the House and other committees.

It will come as no surprise that I do not support the motion. We are in a pandemic, and frankly, this isn't helping anyone. No one should take pleasure in imposing all of this extra work on senior officials and employees who are doing a stellar job. They look for personal protective equipment around the world and oversee the purchase of vaccines, looking after the logistics and working with organizations such as Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada to build a national stockpile.

Now I ask the honourable members here today, from all the parties: is that not exactly what you would have them do? Their days already start incredibly early and end just as late, not to mention the overtime they do on the weekend, and yet, we would have them shoulder another burden, digging through records for documents that would in no way help us draw lessons to better manage the pandemic today.

● (1645)

This is my appeal to you, so to speak, on behalf of those public servants. Let's not make them do this or let's at least revisit the matter later. It is no secret that every aspect of Canada's handling of the pandemic will eventually be scrutinized—and the response of every

province and every country will surely be as well. Everyone will have questions, and everyone will want to review the response and learn from it. That will be the case universally. Wanting to draw lessons and learn from the response to the pandemic is a goal shared by everyone, not just a single party. There will certainly be lessons to take away.

That said, this is my appeal to you, Mr. Chair and Mr. Green. Let's not force public servants to prioritize tasks like these over the safety and welfare of Canadians.

That is where I stand on this motion. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacKinnon.

I have Ms. Vignola next, then Mr. Drouin, Mr. Green, Mr. McCauley and Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: The honourable member is right about one thing. The motion would have us examine 10 years' worth of work, 10 years of procurement and stockpiling efforts, but the reason for doing so is simple.

Millions of masks were thrown out because of shortcomings in the replenishment process. Of course, Health Canada makes its own decisions in that regard, but as far as procurement goes, does it not behoove us to check whether the processes in place to protect Canadians and Quebeckers are valid? It is out of the question to wait until the pandemic is over to realize that we should have done this or that.

We are in the midst of the pandemic, and now that we have a tiny bit of hindsight, we can check whether the process is adequate and whether we can make any improvements to immediately protect people's health. We have to make sure the equipment and supplies in the stockpile aren't expired. The masks I referred to had been expired, not for three weeks or six months, but for five years. As I see it, everyone should review the process, and that is the committee's job.

To be clear, had the government supported the opposition's motion to create a special committee, there would not be three or four committees examining the same issue from various angles. There would be a single committee examining the issue from every angle, and we wouldn't even be having this conversation right now. I don't mind, because this is important work, but why not focus our efforts? That option was rejected, so we will try something else.

There are lessons to be learned, and the time to learn them is now—not when the pandemic is over. That would be the worst thing we could do. Let's immediately take advantage of the hindsight we have.

The motion was put forward this summer and the work got under way. The last thing I want to do is overburden public servants and those who have to search through the records. That is not my intention, and it certainly isn't Mr. Green's, to speak on his behalf. The objective is to get to the truth and to improve the process for everyone's sake.

That's what I have to say on the matter.

• (1650)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

Mr. Drouin, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to respond to Mrs. Vignola's remarks. Yes, the motion may have made sense this summer, when the provinces, Quebec and all of Canada weren't in the middle of a second wave, but now they are. I would like the opposition members to agree at least on which committees they want to be on and have examine these issues.

As members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, we have a responsibility associated with PSPC and the Treasury Board. However, the way the motion was written, it relates mainly to the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada.

As my fellow member Mr. MacKinnon explained so well, PSPC is responsible for procuring supplies such as personal protective equipment, once—and only once—the Public Health Agency of Canada has notified PSPC that the equipment is needed. That is why we are reluctant to support this motion.

This is also a matter of principle. A motion with very similar wording was put forward last week, and the honourable member Mr. Green already voted in favour of it. Our party did not support it because we understand how hard the people who have to produce this information—many of whom live in my riding—must work to fulfill this request. They helped us come through the first wave, and now, we are going to thank them by piling even more work on in the midst of the second wave.

This summer, the pandemic lost a bit of steam, but we knew the second wave was coming. Now the opposition is choosing to request information, which I fully understand. That is their duty. They can do that. We are in the grip of the second wave of the pandemic and the crisis continues, so I ask you: is now really the time to call for a sweeping audit to obtain all these documents?

I have never seen a company or a not-for-profit organization perform an audit in the middle of its fiscal year. There will be plenty of time to request this information. Actually, it has already been requested, with the House adopting a motion to that effect. Because of the opposition, employees of the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada, who are working tirelessly here, in Gatineau, in Hull and in Aylmer, will have to stop everything because the opposition is calling for an audit at the height of the crisis. I have never seen that, Mr. Chair.

I respect the committee and I respected the House's decision. I am not trying to go on as long as I can. I just want to reiterate what was said last week about the member for Calgary Nose Hill's motion. You heard that a number of key stakeholders had concerns about how the motion adopted by the House was written. That is on you now, and I hope you explain that to your constituents when you go back to your ridings.

Mr. Green said he likes to post on social media. It is on him now to explain why he is asking for this when he knows full well that the House has already requested the information and that it will be going to the Standing Committee on Health.

• (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Green is next. Mr. McCauley is after Mr. Green, then Mr. Kusmierczyk, followed by Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Matthew Green: This is good, Mr. Chair. In conflict resolution you want to escalate the issues to really get at the heart of the matter. I feel like that's exactly what we're doing.

In previous filibusters, the Liberal government made an intent that WE was the sticking point and they didn't want to be held accountable for the WE scandal. Okay, we have other committees working on WE, and I can appreciate why a focused effort on that.... I know that other members of this committee have been on the ethics committee and will continue to go down that rabbit hole. That's fine.

I have heard in the comments, Mr. Chair, the insinuation that I am playing a game of Go Fish. I can share with you that the beautiful thing.... I talked about this last time. It's almost as if my friends from the Liberal Party, from the government, have a case of amnesia where somehow they think that these conversations we've had in the past are simply forgotten. The eye in the sky doesn't lie, Mr. Chair. Yes, this will make for good social media content because of all the bluster that came out of government, like the pleas that they're absolutely not going to support this and how dare we hold this government accountable.

I would like to read into the record, Mr. Chair, that, in fact, in a more reasonable time—perhaps a less partisan time and a time when some of my colleagues would have actually been interested in making sure that we do hold government accountable in a way that supersedes our partisan nature—this motion passed. This motion passed unanimously. For all the pearl-clutching that's happening in this committee, the question was put on the motion as amended, and the amendment came from my friends on the Liberal side, the government.

I was negotiating in good faith with them. We accepted the amendment. I repeat, the yeas in favour were from Ziad Aboultaif, Kelly Block, Francis Drouin, Matthew Green, Majid Jowhari, Irek Kusmierczyk, Steven MacKinnon, Kelly McCauley, Julie Vignola and Patrick Weiler. It was unanimous to demand documents for up until the date that I've only just amended slightly.

This work was set to come back to committee a week after the Liberal government cut and ran on a prorogation that I thought was really centred on WE. What is becoming clear is that it's not just about WE. It's about the lack of ability to be accountable for anything, Mr. Chair.

Here are the facts. We had 11 national emergency strategic warehouses in nine locations. Sometime in the last year, in the lead-up to this pandemic, a decision was made to dispose of critical life-saving PPE, N95 masks, gowns and gloves in the millions. The only reason we know about that is that the person who was supposed to throw them out didn't get the contract and went down and took some pictures. That's the only reason we have any idea about this, in terms of the "open by default" Liberal government.

What did that tell us? It led us to understand and to discover that, in fact, out of the 11 locations, the Liberal government made a decision to close down three in the lead-up to COVID. Three critical national emergency strategic stockpile locations housing and storing millions of PPE items that they let expire.

I thought I was being a mensch by making it 10 years. Here's why: It's been my experience as a New Democrat that the Liberals and Conservatives spend all their time pointing the finger at one another, so I said let the truth shine through. Let's make it 10 years, to ensure that both parties would be held accountable—I don't want to say "exposed"—for the state of the absolute incompetence and mismanagement of the national emergency strategic stockpile.

Two million pieces of critical PPE, N95 masks, were thrown out of the Regina location. Two remaining locations with critical PPE were shuttered. We have no idea how many were thrown out then.

We also know it to be true that on the procurement side—which, by the way, this committee is responsible for—of the 11 million initial N95s that were brought in, something like nine million were unusable. Again, there has been incompetence and mismanagement of procurement.

● (1700)

I warned at that time that we were heading into a second wave and that we better damn well make sure that the national emergency strategic stockpile was going to be replenished and was going to be managed in a meaningful way. Here we are, having unanimous consent from the Liberal side. All of them supported this in the first wave because, I believe, at that point in time they understood how critically important it was to get to the truth.

My question is this: What did they find out? What information did the parliamentary secretary have access to? Recall that this report should have been mostly done. Despite all of this recent pearl-clutching about burdening our staff, this work has been done. I'm only asking for a few months more, and to give them an extra month to do it.

These two things can't simultaneously be true. We can't both be burdening staff and having all the other committees asking them the same questions. Here's why, Mr. Chair. If all the other committees are asking the same questions, then this work should already be done and it should be no problem to report to this committee.

I tried to be conciliatory in my opening remarks. I tried to move beyond this absolutely asinine filibuster. We're probably going to sit in here now until 8:30 or nine o'clock, but I'll put on the record right now, Mr. Chair, that I'm here on my own. My family is back home. I don't have to get back for bedtime now, so I'm ready to dig in on this. We amended this motion in a reasonable, good-faith way, a motion that was unanimously passed—unanimously.

Here's the thing: There may have been a time, Mr. Chair, when people could say something in one committee and it would be buried in Hansard and people would forget about it. But we are savvy now, Mr. Chair, in opposition. We are savvy. I have the ability to pull the quotes from the last time we moved this motion, clip it from ParLVU and put it almost side by side with the things being said now so Canadians can see how the congruency in leadership and accountability is missing. That's the truth.

I know it behooves the parliamentary secretary to come here and fight the good fight with the whips on the line and everybody else, but people are watching and they're not buying it anymore. This isn't about WE. All the other excuses they had about all the other things we listed—I moved beyond those. All I want is the very simple acknowledgement that what was supported prior to prorogation was in the welfare of this committee, to find oversight and to find some kind of accountability of this government in this absolutely historic, unprecedented pandemic. Yet they don't want any accountability. It's as though it's their birthright to come in here and govern on majorities and shut down information, critical information, that Canadians deserve to know.

I don't know who's watching this tonight, Mr. Chair, but I can tell you this: I am very comfortable in this seat and I will continue to dig for the truth. We have three roles in opposition, despite what our Liberal friends in government would have us believe. Rolling over and just doing whatever they want is not our job, actually. We need to pry into this, and to poke and prod this government to do the right thing at every step along the way. We need to be a check and balance to this government's unprecedented expenditures, and, quite frankly, to all the missteps that are related to allegations of corruption. Third is to be the government in waiting. That's the role of the opposition. This idea that somehow on this committee we're just going to hold hands and do whatever the Liberals want to do, and, if not, we're just going to bog this down.... That's fine. You know what? I have some great books here for reference, some excellent books on getting to the heart of matters and demanding documents. We'll just continue to do that. It's not bogging down the process, because this is work that should have already been done.

A couple of things have come from this. One, it's not WE. It's not the WE scandal. I've set that aside. That excuse is off the table. Two, this should have already been done, substantially completed way back when. Three, they unanimously voted on this, to recap. Four, this is the new normal, whether we like it or not. For them to continue to move the goal post on the national emergency strategic stockpile.... Somebody made decisions to throw that stuff out. If I understand correctly, it might even be the case that the person is not even there anymore. Why is that? These are questions we deserve to have answered.

• (1705)

I'm just going to put folks on notice that this isn't going away. This isn't something you can wish away. We will get to the bottom of this at some point. Let's just hope it's before the government decides to slink back to the Governor General for the call of the next snap election or whatever else it is they have up their sleeves.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Go ahead, Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Green and Ms. Vignola for some very good points.

Watching my Liberal colleagues talk about this, it's kind of like Queen Gertrude with "The lady doth protest too much, methinks" from Shakespeare.

There are a couple of things I want to bring up. It's quite funny to hear the Liberal side talk about there being so many other committees studying this. I want to hearken back to the 42nd Parliament, where we had five different committees studying greening the government and the Liberal majority on this committee insisted that we needed to have another one, despite so many overarching concerns we needed to look at. It's funny that they would justify five or six overlapping committees at one time, but now they're in abject opposition to doing the same.

I want to bring up a couple of other points. We hear again and again from the government side, "Oh, pandemic. We can't do any-

thing. The pandemic." Just last week, we saw Kevin Lamoureux justify corruption because of a pandemic. We can't look at ethics because we're in a pandemic. Now we're hearing from the Liberals that we can't look at incompetence that has hurt Canadians, blatant incompetence that has punished Canadians, because of a pandemic: "We have to do it for the safety of the public service. We can't bring them in and force them to work. We can't take them away from needed stuff." It's as if it's Patty Hajdu herself sitting there flipping through her emails to find this information. There are over 120,000 public servants working in Ottawa. I'm sure we can find the resources to get this information.

I was looking at the PBO's study on the 699. Do you know how many people from the Public Health Agency are taking the 699, which is paid time off without work? Six in the entire department are not available for work, six out of the entire department. We had the people. We had the resources to get this done.

The public accounts are coming out next month. We have all the resources to comb through all the government's spending records to publish the public accounts safely. The other general work is still getting done safely. We can get this stuff done safely as well.

We should look at this. We have the resources. There's no reason in the world we can't get this done. I'm with Mr. Green. This is not an issue that's going to go away, so we either sit here and allow the will of the committee to proceed, or we get to a point where every single meeting is just going to be Liberals filibustering and blocking our ability to help Canadians.

I want to thank Mr. Green for being so forceful on this, and Ms. Vignola for her remarks. I would just say to my Liberal colleagues, let this go ahead as we agreed before prorogation. A lot of it has probably already been done. Let's get the work done. We have the assets. We have the ability to easily get this done. We owe it to Canadians so we do not have a repeat of this down the road, whether it's in one month, one year or two years.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

We now have Mr. Kusmierczyk. After Mr. Kusmierczyk, we have Mr. Jowhari and Ms. Vignola.

• (1710)

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

I want to start by picking up on a comment that Mr. Green made very early in his comments. Mr. Chair, I think you made the same comments as well, about how we got off to a really good start at the beginning of this committee meeting. There seemed to be a really good spirit of collaboration. Right off the get-go, we passed a motion that had six items on it, and we passed it unanimously. I think it demonstrates our commitment to working together on this committee to get real work done.

I know that my colleague Mr. Green also in previous meetings put forward.... I know we are prepared. There are 12 motions on the table. We are prepared to support 12 of 13 motions. On our part, there is a real willingness to work together, to collaborate and to get important work done in this committee.

I've been clear, pretty much since the beginning of this committee's work, that where you're going to see push-back from me is where I see motions that are asking for the proliferation of committees, for the production of papers and the duplication of work without a clear and well-defined value added. That's where you're going to see me push back. I'm ready to roll up my sleeves, ready to support motions, whether by colleagues on this side of the aisle or by my esteemed colleagues on the other side of the aisle. The motions have to meet a certain standard. Again, where you're going to see me push back is when I see proliferation of committees, production of papers and duplication of work and I don't see a clear value added.

I guess where I may differ a little from the approach of my colleagues is that I do believe we are in a crisis. I believe it's the greatest health and economic crisis we have faced in our country, period. I do believe, with every fibre of my being, that this requires an all-hands-on-deck approach. It requires that we are laser-focused, and it requires us to make choices: Where do we want our attention to be focused?

My colleague mentioned that there are hundreds of thousands of public servants in the government, and that it's okay if just a few of them focus their attention on fetching emails and documents from 10 years ago. My argument is quite the opposite: We need every single pair of eyes, hands and brains, all that human capital, all those resources, all that attention focused on addressing and solving this issue and helping Canadians and our country get through this crisis. We need all hands on deck focused on this.

I want my colleagues to know that for me, there is a really high standard that I set, a high bar in terms of what motions will pass. Specifically, it's based on where we need to put our resources.

On this particular issue, we had members of PHAC and other government agencies in front of this committee in May, answering many of these very questions. May 15 was actually when we had a meeting on this exact issue, the national emergency strategic stockpile. We had folks—officials, vice-presidents, executive directors—from PHAC and Public Works. I remember one of the points that Mr. Green made at that meeting, which stuck with me. He highlighted the fact that a Senate committee in 2008 underscored and highlighted and concluded that the previous Conservative government had severely underfunded and mismanaged the NESS.

• (1715)

As much as I'd love to read emails and documentation and spend hours talking about how the Conservative government mismanaged the national emergency strategic stockpile, let's save that for another day and focus on the work in front of us. Let's focus on the crisis at hand. Enough of the political stuff; we need to focus on this crisis. We need full attention. We can't afford to lose even a handful of public servants being distracted from the work they need to do.

What I will highlight from Mr. Green's testimony is that when we had the officials here in May—I remember really appreciating this—he asked them what we were doing now to ensure proper supplies and what the plan was for the next wave. Keep in mind that this was in May, and Mr. Green was asking them some very fine questions: “What are we doing to prepare for the second wave?” That was very prescient.

I would rather have us focus our attention—because other committees are looking at this work—not on what happened in the last 10 years but on what we are doing now and what we are doing next. That would be a much more appropriate use of our time and resources.

I want to go on the record here to simply state where I have trouble with this particular motion. It's simply that I want to make sure that all our resources and attention are focused on the crisis at hand.

Thank you very much, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Jowhari is next, followed by Ms. Vignola.

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

I'm one of the lucky ones who were here when we initially passed this motion. I'm blessed that I'm here to actually talk on this new motion.

As Ms. Vignola mentioned, this is a great opportunity for us to look at the process. But the process is not just the process that happened as result of COVID-19. When we look at the strategic stockpile of PPE inventory, there are many dimensions when you look at inventory management. You look at how much of the stock you need; how you replenish it; how you decide what type of stock you need and what the reorder point is; where the locations are where you're going to stockpile; what the mechanism is for receiving orders from the provinces; how you determine the priority. These stockpiles are strategic stockpiles. They are not there to satisfy all of the demands.

There are many aspects to evaluating this. To the extent that the documents that might be available during this short period, especially during COVID-19, in terms of how much of it was disposed of.... I don't think these documents are actually going to shed a complete light onto how the consolidation of these centres came about, who made that decision, how we decided on what type of stockpile we needed and what combination we needed: Do we need surgical masks, do we need level three masks or do we need gloves? All those decisions needed to be made. I'm not sure whether we have that data.

Also, other committees, for instance the health committee, and the motion that was passed in the House, are generating these documents. When you look at the end-to-end process, I don't think the end-to-end process is only over the three months. It was over many, many years that these decisions were made. We need to wait until those documents are tabled to be able to see to what extent those documents that are being generated—or, as said, are nearly ready to be handed in to the other committees—put us in a position to be able to answer some of these key questions.

The level of the stockpile is only one element. There's the decision-making: How do we monitor it? How do we control it? All of those may or may not be answered in the documents that are being prepared.

My suggestion is to wait for these documents that other committees are asking for to be tabled. Let's review those documents, and then ask the fundamental question that everybody is asking, from all sides of the House. Whether it's the Conservatives, the NDP, the Bloc, the Liberals, the Greens or the independents, we are all asking the same question. The fundamental question is, how do we make sure that this doesn't happen again? Let's see what process was followed and where we can make those improvements.

We also need to make sure that we ask for documents in an appropriate time frame. Right now, we are in the middle of wave two. The questions that are being asked, or the questions that we're trying to get the answer to, are most probably being addressed right now because we are going through wave two. We are saying now, based on wave one, that we have some ideas of what PPE we need. Based on the surges in various provinces, we also need to look at which provinces, which territories. Based on the needs from various regions, as the cases are going up, how do we look at strategizing or how do we look at prioritizing where these supplies are going to go?

• (1720)

Some of the answers that may come in this report may or may not be relevant to what we are doing right now, because we are learning, and we are learning every day. There are provinces and territories that we thought had beaten COVID, and now we are moving into lockdown situations. The prioritization now is going to change. The strategic stockpile is going to change, and the decision-making is going to change.

Let's focus on making sure that we use the lessons learned from the first wave and address the immediate need, which is the second wave, making sure that all the organizations that needed to benefit from the stockpiles get the support they need. Hopefully, when this thing is over, this will be a great motion to study, because we have

the previous 10 years; we have wave one; we have wave two, and hopefully we'll beat this on wave two, so we don't have to go to wave three.

We will have a benchmark: How did we do? How did we react? That's going to be a much better time for us to leverage all the lessons learned, and also optimize the generation of all of these documents. The fact that only six members of the Public Health Agency are on 699 leave right now itself tells you how busy they are. Why are they busy? They're focusing on the people. They're focusing on you and me. They're focusing on our community. They're focusing on elders. They're focusing on children at school, and they're doing everything in their power to make sure that those supplies are ready.

I am to a large extent highlighting the areas that all members have talked about, and that I think are important to me and to my constituents: whether it's the process, whether it's the stockpile, whether it's the oversight, whether it's the history, whether it's how we managed during wave one or how we are going to manage during wave two. Therefore, my ask or my recommendation is, let's keep the focus on Canadians. Let's make sure that the stockpiles we have, whether it's the gowns or the masks that we've acquired and the internal capacity we've built, are getting to Canadians.

Partnering with other departments, whether it's working with PHAC, PSPC or ISED, let's make the investment. Let's focus on those as the government's number one priority. As a committee, we have six great motions. I'm looking forward to the next motion that Mr. Green is going to put to debate.

Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the time. I would ask all members to consider prioritizing the focus on Canadians rather than the production of documents.

Thank you.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

Are you growing your moustache for Movember?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Yes, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Good for you.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: As you know, I had a statement in the House where I said, since it is Movember, to grow a mo and support a bro. I can't see that far, but I'm hoping that you're growing a mo as well. Thank you very much for noticing, sir.

The Chair: It takes months for mine to grow.

Ms. Vignola, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I will keep it brief.

Yes, the bar is high and it should stay that way where a motion is concerned. The bar must be high not only when the waters are calm and the sailing is smooth; it must be high in all weather.

My fellow members said that similar motions had been put forward on other committees. I am trying to understand why the information needs to be produced a second, third or fourth time when it will have already been produced once for another committee. Can the documents not simply be forwarded? If not, I would like to know why. Surely, the process is flawed.

I have one last thing to say before requesting a vote, assuming it is up to me to do so.

I want us all to ask ourselves why we are here. Are we here to make fun little videos to post on our Facebook pages or on YouTube? No, we are here for Canadians. It's true that we are in the midst of the second wave and that we have to purchase supplies, but we must make sure that the same mistakes aren't repeated. Now more than ever, we must make sure that people are protected. This isn't the time to make video clips for Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok and the rest of social media. We are here to serve the people, not to take statements out of context in preparation for a possible election the people do not want.

I move that we vote, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

I'm looking around and I do not see any more hands up for debate. I will therefore follow through with the question.

Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The question is on the motion by Mr. Green in his name. I will call the roll now.

Mr. Chair, the results are five yeas, five nays. It will be incumbent upon you to exercise your casting vote.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

I vote yes.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

• (1730)

The Chair: I'm just looking at the clock. It is basically 5:30 at this point.

Mr. Green, do you wish to continue with your motion?

Mr. Matthew Green: I do. My concern is that if I don't, I might not find another time for it. However, I'll dispense with my comments. It is before you. I could read it out, if it is for the good and welfare of the committee, and we could go around the circle again, but I would like to save this committee as much time as possible on the back end.

The Chair: Thank you.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, Mr. MacKinnon has asked that Mr. Green read the motion.

The Chair: Mr. Green, would you read the motion, please?

Mr. Matthew Green: I'd be happy to. It reads:

That, in the context of its study of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee send for documents from Public Service and Procurement Canada (PSPC) containing the following disaggregated data related to businesses owned by under-represented groups (black, indigenous, women, and persons with disabilities) who have engaged with PSPC with regard to the federal government's response to COVID-19: (a) (i) how many companies from under-represented groups have secured contracts with PSPC, (ii) the value of these contracts, (iii) the number of businesses from under-represented groups screened and approved as credited vendors, (iv) number and value of set aside contracts for these businesses, (v) the number of sub-contracts entered into; (b), that the committee send for all papers and records, in unredacted form, from Employment and Social Development Canada ("ESDC") relating to the Federal Contractors Program, and in particular: (i) all current, signed Agreements to Implement Employment Equity ("Agreements"); (ii) the most current list of contractors covered by said Agreements; (iii) the most current compliance documentation furnished by each contractor covered by an Agreement, including the goalsetting report, achievement table, workforce analysis, revised goals for remaining gaps in representation, and any explanatory material; (iv) the most current documentation of ESDC's compliance assessment for each contractor covered by an Agreement; (v) the most recent Limited Eligibility to Bid List; (vi) all documentation filed in an appeal of a finding of noncompliance by a contractor to the Minister; (vii) all documentation connected to an independent review of an appeal; (viii) any documentation internal to ESDC assessing or evaluating the Federal Contractors Program; that the committee receive these documents, papers and records no later than Tuesday, December 1, 2020; that departments tasked with gathering and releasing the following documents do their assessment and vetting as would be done through the access to information process; and that these documents be posted on the committee's web page.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Mr. Green, you had indicated that you're comfortable with just presenting the motion and trying to further time. Thank you.

I see, Mr. Kusmierczyk, that your hand is up.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad to see that my colleague from Hamilton is seated, because this is going to blow him away.

I love this. I love where the member is going with this. I really do. For me, this is exactly why I love being on this committee. This is important work, and this is the type of work I am excited rolling up my sleeves about and supporting because it is important. This is it. So I really commend him for bringing this very thoughtful motion forward.

This aligns really well with this government's focus in terms of promoting diversity and inclusion. You can look at, for example, the Black entrepreneurship program that was announced recently. That's going to be coming online. There's \$220 million that's going to be going towards that. You look at the fact that part of that funding is going toward the establishment of a Black entrepreneurship knowledge hub, which is going to collect some important information and data about the barriers and the opportunities that are facing Black entrepreneurs in Canada.

You look at the fact that the government put forward a women's entrepreneurship strategy, the first ever, for \$5 billion. You look at the fact that the government indicated in its throne speech that it wants to accelerate the women's entrepreneurship strategy, because this is an important part of not only the prosperity of our country but also the economic recovery of our country.

You look at, in April, how our government made an announcement that it would provide \$306 million to indigenous businesses as well, because we know how important indigenous businesses are to the prosperity of this community. In terms of entrepreneurship, they are the fastest-growing group of entrepreneurs in our country, and we know they need support, not just during the pandemic but after.

I love where my colleague from Hamilton is going with this. I will be supporting this, but I want to know if my colleague would be interested in going further. I think that we need to go further. This is timely. This is absolutely timely.

I want to know whether Mr. Green, my honourable colleague, would be interested in working with me to go further. I would propose an amendment to this motion. If it's okay, Chair, I'd like to put forward or read that amendment, if that's possible.

• (1735)

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I would put forward, to build upon what Mr. Green has brought forward to this committee, an amendment—a friendly amendment, I hope—that the committee conduct a minimum of six meetings' study on businesses owned by under-represented groups—Black, indigenous, women, and persons with disabilities—and their ability to procure from the Government of Canada, before and during COVID-19, and that the committee report its findings to the House by May 30, 2021.

Again, I do believe that procurement is a critical aspect of entrepreneurship and the success of these businesses in Canada, and I believe that the time is now to study that and bring witnesses forward.

That is the friendly amendment that I propose in the spirit of collaboration.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk. Do you have that in both languages?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I just put that forward at the moment, but I can get that to you very quickly.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, do we need those?

The Clerk: We don't need the amendment in both official languages.

However, may I ask that we suspend briefly so that I can call you on the phone?

The Chair: Certainly.

We will take a five-minute suspension. We'll be back in five minutes.

• (1735)

(Pause)

• (1740)

The Chair: Here we go.

Mr. McCauley, I think, is away from his chair right now. We'll just hold for a little bit, if you don't mind. I see Mr. McCauley is not there, so we'll hold for a second. I did say five minutes. Saskatchewan clocks are a little bit faster than the rest of the country, apparently.

Are you there?

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, what was the date you had for your amendment? Do you mind repeating that?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: It would be May 30, 2021, no later than May 30, 2021.

• (1745)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I want to thank Mr. Green for bringing this forth originally. I'd certainly love to dig into this more.

My biggest concern is that I want to make sure we add enough teeth to this. Those who were with us in the 42nd Parliament, of course, studied SME procurement with indigenous people, and we heard again and again.... Every single witness we had from indigenous and Métis communities came forward and said that the government was not following its own laws on procurement, that PSPC and INAC were a mess, and that not one of them was actually helpful or following the laws. Then we had the bureaucrats and the government show up, throwing their shoulders out because they were patting themselves on the back so hard.

We repeatedly brought it up in committee that the people we were supposed to be serving were saying that it wasn't working, yet witnesses—ADMs and that—from PSPC, INAC and the others thought everything was perfect and were tripping over themselves to compliment themselves on what a great job they were doing—complete disconnect. We tabled a report on this, and since that time, not one action has been taken on that report.

I applaud you, Mr. Kusmierczyk and Mr. Green, for bringing this forward. We don't have to do it today, but I really think we need to build some teeth into this if we're going to be spending this time. The Liberals have been in power for five years and have done nothing to address this. It's rather shocking. We did a greening government study that was duplicated by five other committees. That seemed more important than this. However, we actually did a study previously, and nothing has been done.

I do hope that we would actually add some teeth to this, and I think we could all support the motion and the amendment.

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, thank you very much for your amendment. I'm going to ask you to read it one more time for me if you would, please. I'd just like to hear it one more time if I could.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Okay, great. I could read it in French as well, as I have it—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: No.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: No problem. I'll read it in English. I'll read it slowly, just to make sure the interpreters can do their work as well.

It reads as follows: “that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee conduct, at minimum, a six-meeting study on businesses owned by under-represented groups, black, indigenous, women and persons with disabilities and their ability to procure from the Government of Canada, before and during COVID-19, and that the committee report its findings to the House by May 30, 2021.”

The Chair: Thank you. I appreciate that.

As I look at this, it appears to me that you're.... It sounds like you have some consensus around it. However, you're adding to a motion that's already looking into documents. It would alter that motion completely, from what I can see. I'm thinking it is outside the scope of the motion being presented by Mr. Green at this point in time. It might be something that you could present as a motion independently. By the sound of it from other members of the committee, you might be able to work amongst yourselves to come up with one that is acceptable to everybody.

So on this amendment, I'm going to rule that it's outside the scope.

That said, is there any further discussion on Mr. Green's motion?

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, there are three people who wish to speak—Mr. Kusmierczyk, Mr. McCauley and Mr. Green—but Mr. Drouin wants to intervene, at this point.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I just need a point of clarification.

I'm having a hard time understanding how a motion to have meetings related to the production of documents is somehow ruled out of context. Can somebody give me a rationale so that I can go back and explain it? I'm really having a hard time. It's the production of documents, and then we are asking for witnesses to come before the committee on the very same issues that the motion to produce documents is asking. If it were asking for another study on something completely irrelevant to the production of documents, then I'd say, yes, I agree, but now the two are linked.

I'd love a point of clarification on that.

• (1750)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

I'll ask the clerk if he can explain it a little bit more clearly for you.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Green's motion is being moved in the context of a study already existing before the committee—that is the context of the study of the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic—and the motion seeks to send for documents. It doesn't seek to actually create another study. It could be argued that Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment, which is to create a new study, while the subject is limited, goes outside the scope of the original motion. Amend-

ments, to be admissible, must be considered within the context of the motion they seek to amend.

That being said, the chair has rendered his ruling that the amendment is inadmissible. However, nothing prohibits any member from challenging the ruling of the chair, at which point it will be voted on by the committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: We would challenge that decision.

The Clerk: I beg your pardon, Mr. Chair. I'm sorry to intervene, but Mr. Drouin wanted the floor again.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Yes.

We would challenge that decision.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Chair, perhaps I can clarify my position here a little bit.

There is no intent whatsoever to supersede Mr. Green's motion. I support his motion fully. What I am suggesting is complementary. It builds upon it. I'm seeking my colleague's collaboration on this, again in the spirit of collaboration that we're trying to establish here and knowing that this is an important issue. I did not mean at all to supersede his motion or to supersede his production of documentation. I believe it complements it and I believe it builds on it.

I'm maybe looking to my colleague for some direction on this and to join me on this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

The motion to challenge—

Mr. Matthew Green: If I could, as a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'm unclear. The speakers list in and of itself was exhausted prior to the actual challenge hitting the floor. I'm just wondering if we would have some time to speak to this prior to it getting to that point.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, perhaps I could just explain briefly the procedure.

The Chair: Sure.

The Clerk: When any member moves to challenge the ruling of a chair, at that point the ruling of the chair has already been made. That motion is usually non-debatable and usually the question is put immediately, which is to say the committee gets to take a decision as to whether or not they agree with the ruling of the chair. Typically, the motion is not debatable and we proceed immediately to the vote.

That is what I wanted to explain, as Mr. Drouin has moved that the ruling of the chair be challenged. Thank you.

Do you wish me to go to the recorded division on the challenge of your ruling, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Clerk, I do.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): If I may jump in here, Mr. Clerk, could you clearly state what is being voted on, and yes or no? Thank you.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd, and to other members who have asked, I will do that.

Mr. Matthew Green: May I also have a point order, for my own clarity on procedure?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Just so I'm clear on what we're voting on.... If the challenge is not successful, could the motion then be put independently as a stand-alone motion that could still be put forward, or does it die in the ruling of the chair?

• (1755)

The Clerk: If I may, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: The chair has ruled the amendment is inadmissible. What we are to be voting on now is the motion “Shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?” Those members who agree with the chair's ruling that the amendment is inadmissible will vote “yea”. Those who disagree with the ruling of the chair, who feel the amendment should be admissible, shall vote “nay”, essentially not to sustain the ruling of the chair.

With regard to Mr. Green's contention about the amendment, Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment would serve as a motion in and of itself, and he could move it independently of Mr. Green's motion, at which point the committee would debate it as a normal motion. The concern is that, moved in the context of an amendment to Mr. Green's motion, you, Mr. Chair, have ruled that it is outside the scope of the motion.

What the committee would be voting on now is the motion “Shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?” Those who agree the amendment should be out of order would vote “yea”, which is the way you have ruled, Mr. Chair. Those who disagree and feel the amendment should be admissible and debatable would vote “nay”. Does this clear up all questions for members of the committee?

With your indulgence, Mr. Chair, I will call the roll on the question.

Shall the ruling of the chair be sustained?

It's five yeas and five nays. Mr. Chair, you will have to use your casting vote.

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

The Clerk: The ruling of the chair is sustained and Mr. Kusmierczyk's amendment is deemed inadmissible by the chair.

Now you presumably would return to debate on Mr. Green's motion. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will return to the debate on the motion.

Do we have any hands up? I don't know whether the ones I'm seeing here are old or new, Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: I have Mr. Kusmierczyk, Mr. McCauley and Mr. Green.

The Chair: That's what I have as well. Thank you.

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: That was just an old hand that I didn't remove.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks.

I was just going to suggest to Mr. Kusmierczyk and Mr. Green that after we move forward, hopefully, on Mr. Green's motion, we can just talk separately and get a strong motion put forward at the next meeting, or the week after, to move Mr. Kusmierczyk and Mr. Green's co-study, for lack of better words, just so we can move on. We all seem to be in agreement that we'll do the study.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chair, Mr. McCauley took my sentiment. I just want to be on the record and say that I fully support the spirit and intent. I didn't want to cause this committee to come to a place where you were challenged in that way, which is why I supported your ruling. I hope that Mr. Kusmierczyk and I, and others who are interested in this, can get together and bring back something that is really good and workable, because I support everything he said.

Quite frankly, I just wish I had thought of it myself.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

I see no further hands up for debate on Mr. Green's motion. Do we need a vote on division, or do we have hands up?

• (1800)

The Clerk: Mr. MacKinnon has asked for a recorded division.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Clerk.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you.

It is now just after six, Ottawa time. I know the room is going to be needed for other meetings.

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we have some good momentum going here, so I'd like to propose a motion tonight. I believe there is support there. I believe the spirit of collaboration is there and we can get this motion passed tonight very quickly.

I would like to put forward a motion.

The Chair: Go right ahead, please. We'll give you the floor.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I don't mean to interrupt, but I have a point of order. I'd like to vote on this, but I wonder whether somebody can introduce a motion on such a short notice at committee. Does this need to be given a 24 hours' notice before we consider the motion?

The Clerk: May I, Mr. Chair?

The Clerk: Notice is required for any substantive motion to be moved before the committee, except for a motion related to the subject at hand. That caveat, "related to the subject at hand", means that if a motion is related to a subject that's currently being studied, it doesn't need to have notice given before it can be moved. When we're dealing with committee business, everything, any motion, would be related to the committee's business. As a result, in the committee business discussion, notice—strictly speaking—is not required.

Thank you.

The Chair: Certainly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lloyd, for the record, I had exactly the same question myself, so I appreciate your asking that.

The motion is as follows: "that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee conduct, at minimum, a six-meeting study on businesses owned by under-represented groups, black, indigenous, women and persons with disabilities and their ability to procure from the Government of Canada, before and during COVID-19, and that the committee report its findings to the House by May 30, 2021."

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

I see some hands up.

Mr. Paul-Hus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I had my hand up first.

I have another meeting that has already started, so I will leave you to it. The problem with the virtual format is having a number of meetings at the same time.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I thought we kind of agreed as a group that Mr. Kusmierczyk and Mr. Green would get together and pro-

pose this, perhaps at the next meeting, with the intent to have some teeth put into this.

I'm a bit disappointed that you would seem to cut Mr. Green out of this without his input. We studied almost half of this in the 42nd Parliament. The government has sat on its hands and done absolutely nothing toward it. We studied procurement for women-owned businesses and also indigenous-owned. We've done half of it and the government has done nothing.

That's why I'd suggest that perhaps, in good faith, you and Mr. Green—especially because Mr. Green is kind of leading this to begin with—would get together and hash out a motion that we could all agree on and that would actually have some teeth behind it.

As such, I think perhaps I'll put a motion forward that we should adjourn this to allow Mr. Kusmierczyk and Mr. Green time to work it out for the betterment of the committee and for Canadians in general.

• (1805)

The Chair: Ms. Vignola.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'm fine with the date. I am more concerned about the six-meeting minimum. I know the study involves a lot of work, but I think a minimum of six meetings is a lot. Studies on indigenous peoples and women were conducted during the 42nd Parliament, so half the work is already done.

I am not sure whether Mr. Kusmierczyk wishes to move the motion as is or take another look at it.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, I'm trying to see whether we have any hands up.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Sorry, Mr. Clerk, should my earlier motion to adjourn not instantly be voted on, or am I wrong there?

The Clerk: Thank you very much, Mr. McCauley. I was trying to contact the chair to ask him to clarify. I misunderstood whether you were....

If you were moving to adjourn the debate, then yes, that question does have to be put immediately without debate or amendment. My apologies if I misunderstood your intention. If your intention is to move that the debate be now adjourned, the committee will have to decide on that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Yes, my intent is to give time to Mr. Green and Mr. Kusmierczyk to work together to build one motion. We're all in agreement that we'll do this, but we need a stronger motion that actually has teeth behind it.

I'd move to adjourn, so they would have time to present a better one at the next meeting.

The Chair: Do we need a show of hands to adjourn?

The Clerk: I would suggest, Mr. Chair, that we proceed to recorded division for the sake of clarity.

The Chair: I think so, too. I just cannot see enough hands.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 4)

The Chair: It was defeated, so we will continue with the motion.

Is there any further discussion on the motion as presented by Mr. Kusmierczyk?

The Clerk: Mr. McCauley has raised his hand.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Chair, I would just ask that sometime over the next couple of days, as we move forward on this motion, we think together as a committee and, again, put some real teeth behind this study so we don't end up with another one like our SME study for indigenous and women...which just sat there not acted upon by the government. That's all I'm asking for.

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

Certainly, I'd want to hearken back to the frame that I put in the original text of my demand for documents, in terms of teeth and accountability. I believe it will give us a really good lead into what exactly it is we're looking at as it relates to procurement policies versus what actually happened.

I do appreciate Mr. McCauley's advocacy around ensuring that I'm included, as I do appreciate Mr. Kusmierczyk's goodwill in wanting to see this move forward.

I would share with you that this has been a priority for me since gaining a seat on this committee. I just can't afford, in good faith and good conscience, having said everything I've said about the delays and the prorogation, to delay this another day, so let's move forward with this.

I want to thank Mr. Kusmierczyk for his thoughtful prioritization. I also want to recognize the other work that's been voted on, which remains a priority for this committee. I believe we can work

in good faith in ensuring that the teeth are there, because, quite frankly, I bring my own set of teeth with me to every meeting I come to, as I know Mr. McCauley and my other friends from opposition—the Bloc and the Conservatives—do as well.

I don't think that will be a problem. I don't think we'll ever participate in a toothless committee. I'll just say that on the record.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

I think the two hands I do see up, which are Mr. Kusmierczyk's and Mr. McCauley's, were previous hands up. Is that correct?

Mr. Clerk, can we have a vote, please, on the motion moved by Mr. Kusmierczyk?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10; nays 0 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. I appreciate that.

I'm seeing no hands up and no indication—

The Clerk: Mr. Lloyd has his hand up in the Zoom environment.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn the meeting for the night.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

Do we require a vote, or is that a general consensus with hands up? I can't see around the room.

The Clerk: There are hands up for all four members in the room, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, everybody.

We managed to get a lot of things accomplished, and I appreciate that. It was great to see such indication of people working together.

I want to thank the interpreters for staying as long as they did, the analysts for being with us, and the clerk, as well, for the tremendous work they're doing to allow this to keep going.

We will see everybody on Wednesday evening.

With that, we are adjourned.

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