



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 030

Tuesday, May 4, 2021

Chair: Mr. Vance Badawey



Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Tuesday, May 4, 2021

• (1830)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.)): Members, it's my pleasure to call this meeting to order.

Welcome, each and every one of you, to meeting number 30 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so that you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few points to follow. First off, members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either the floor, English or French.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Keep in mind the directives from the Board of Internal Economy regarding mask and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled, as normal, by the proceedings and verification officer. All comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the very best we can to maintain the order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Members, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 29, 2020, the committee will now continue its study of targeted infrastructure investments.

It's my pleasure to welcome and introduce our witnesses today. First off, between 6:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., we will be hearing from the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Rural Economic Development; Éric Dagenais, senior assistant deputy minister in the spectrum and telecommunications sector at the Department of Industry; and Ms. Kelly Gillis, deputy minister of infrastructure and communities at the Office of Infrastructure of Canada.

Welcome, Kelly, once again. You've been here so much, I'm going to call you a new member of the committee.

We also welcome Alison O'Leary, assistant deputy minister of program operations, communities and rural economic development, at the Office of Infrastructure of Canada.

From 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., we will hear from the Honourable Senator Frances Lankin; Mr. Sean Strickland, executive director of Canada's Building Trades Unions; and Mr. Craig Stewart, vice-president of federal affairs at the Insurance Bureau of Canada.

With that, welcome to all of you.

I will now move to the Honourable Maryam Monsef for her opening remarks.

Maryam, you have the floor for five minutes.

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Rural Economic Development): Thank you so much, Chair.

Hello, colleagues. *Boozhoo. Aaniin. As-salaam alaikum.* I'm on Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory and I'm speaking from my basement in Peterborough—Kawartha. I'm grateful for the study you're doing and the opportunity to speak with you today about infrastructure accessibility and its contribution to the overall success of our communities.

I know that this year has been a really difficult one for everybody on my screen, and for your families and your teams, and I know that you know that it has been incredibly difficult for Canadians. The pandemic has disproportionately affected women and those who were already vulnerable, such as low-wage workers, young people and racialized Canadians. Like my parliamentary secretary, Gudie Hutchings, I want to salute everybody on the front lines of the fight against COVID, particularly our friends and colleagues from Newfoundland and Labrador who are coming into Ontario to help us with this difficult and virulent third wave.

The pandemic has reminded us of how vital our connections are.

• (1835)

Bridges, broadband, roads, waterways and community centres connect us, and we're stronger when we're connected to the people and the services that matter to us. COVID has magnified gaps in services and in the infrastructure available for specific populations, including in rural communities. Our government has been working to address infrastructure gaps in every community in this country since we formed government, and our infrastructure plan is working. Five years in, we are 40% of the way through this 12-year plan, and we have delivered over 40% of the funding available.

The investing in Canada infrastructure program includes over \$180 billion in investments; 3,400 projects have been approved so far, including more than 2,000 projects just this past fiscal year during the pandemic.

Let me thank my officials and my team who, like you, are working from home. Their service delivery standards have not missed a beat. Within 20 to 60 business days, we moved these important projects forward for communities. I am so grateful to get to work with them. There have been 3,400 approved so far, with more than 2,000 in this past fiscal year, and with over 1,000 projects in this committee's 13 ridings.

In rural communities, more than \$3.2 billion has been invested under the rural and northern stream, which is specifically dedicated to supporting rural communities and making investments in broadband, water, roads and community centres across the country. I want to thank the Liberal rural caucus for advocating for this separate stream and for bringing back the rural economic development secretariat through their advocacy.

[Translation]

This is a big step forward for Canadians living in rural, remote and indigenous communities.

[English]

It's a big step forward. These investments create jobs, more than 100,000 jobs each year, and improve our quality of life. The result is that more Canadians have access to high-speed Internet. More have access to clean air and clean water. Our communities are safer, more resilient and more inclusive.

[Translation]

These investments are important in rural communities.

[English]

They're important. These are strategic investments that create growth, fight climate change and build inclusive communities. They're more important now than ever.

You saw that the federal gas tax fund—which we intend to rename, by the way, the Canada community-building fund—is making a difference in communities across the country. To help ease the crunch of the pandemic, as per requests from municipal leaders, in 2020 we delivered the whole year's \$2.2 billion in gas tax fund to municipalities.

More needs to be done. Budget 2021 includes our plans to conquer COVID, get Canadians back to work and build back better. That includes broadband as well as social infrastructure like housing and child care and supports for sectors hit hardest by COVID such as tourism.

There is a \$6.2 billion investment already in place for broadband, and Budget 2021 added an additional \$1 billion to this important fund. There are investments to go ahead with our national infrastructure survey. Of course, we're proposing to double last year's gas tax fund payment, just as we did in June 2020, and to provide the full 2021-22 amounts in one payment instead of the usual two installments.

Mr. Chair, I see your hand is up. Is that a signal that my time is up?

The Chair: That's the one-minute mark. When I throw the hand up, it's the one-minute mark. You have about 20 seconds.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Perfect.

We are committed to completing the remaining 60% of the infrastructure program and to adapting to the evolving needs, as we have through the COVID-19 resilience stream that is providing improved ventilation in public buildings to reduce the risk of aerosol transmission of COVID.

We'll work with this group. We look forward to your study. Of course, we will work together to build a more inclusive, fairer society for all.

[Translation]

Thank you.

• (1840)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Monsef. Well done.

We'll now move on to our first round of questions. First up are the Conservatives, and Ms. Kusie for six minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much, Minister, for taking the time to be here with us again today. I'm sure it's a very busy time for you, given that we just had the federal budget and, of course, there are just so many files that touch upon the rural economic development file.

I was very fortunate to sit on the House procedures committee with your predecessor, Bernadette, who of course went on to the cabinet in the Fisheries and Oceans capacity. There's indeed certainly quite a legacy to follow there.

I appreciate you taking the time to come here today and to answer the questions of the committee. We are several meetings into this study now after having completed previous studies, one which I believe touches upon this study—the Canada Infrastructure Bank study.

I guess my first question is just a result of some of the struggles and disappointments that we have seen, having undertaken that study in addition to this study. There certainly have been very interesting witnesses, but in some of the patterns we've seen in the discussion of infrastructure projects, for example, we see the re-announcing of the same funding over the past number of years, because it just takes so long to get any tangible action on an issue, for example. We've had conversations about that, and I'd be interested to hear your thoughts on it. We get concerned that a lot of the announcements in the budget are just a result of the pending election and not a sincere effort to address the concerns of communities.

As well, we've heard in testimony about a lot of problems in the coordination with other levels of government. In my position of shadow minister for transport, I certainly have seen this. For example, in a conversation I had with the Ontario transportation minister, Minister Mulroney, she indicated problems with some federal commitments being carried through after provincial commitments had been made, resulting in some holdups for infrastructure. We just think that it's very important to walk the talk when it comes to putting your money where your mouth is.

As well, we had concerns about private sector investment in Canadian projects. For example, your government of course was forced to purchase the Trans Mountain pipeline project when it was very difficult to secure private funding, if not impossible. We saw this again with Energy East and, of course, with the cancellation of the Kitimat pipeline project just a month ago. I also feel that the Teck project that never came to fruition was a result of the intended off-putting of your government in an effort to have it not result in a viable project.

We've also seen this with the A2A railway. I certainly hope that this won't be the case. Being a member of Parliament from Alberta, I do look forward to this as a potential throughway for our natural resources, since they have been stymied in so many other regards. That's very concerning for me.

Another piece related to your file is the sustainable internal trade plan for Canada. We've seen a lot of interprovincial trade barriers, and I think that as the official opposition we would really look forward to seeing them broken down, in an effort to really allow the economy to evolve internally and domestically in one piece. The hope is to restore investor confidence in Canada, which has been broken, I believe, as a result of the examples I gave previously.

• (1845)

I certainly imagine that this must be a lot for you to manage and oversee, given the breadth of your file, and especially given your role as Minister for Women and Gender Equality and that your government is so interested in protecting the chief of staff to the Prime Minister rather than the women and the men of the Canadian Armed Forces. Certainly, I know that in your role you will advocate for the Prime Minister's chief of staff to come forward to the defence committee and testify. I know your government certainly claims to stand up for women. I saw you in action at Women Deliver and how strong you were there. They must also take accountability for their failure to act on sexual misconduct allegations against General Vance three years ago.

With all of that, Minister, I would just ask and hope that your government will finally step forward and take action on these things I have brought forward to you today. I look forward to your addressing that.

Thank you.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you for that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister Monsef, unfortunately, the time is up.

Ms. Kusie, thank you for the statement.

We're now going to move on to our first set of questions. We're moving to the Liberals. Hopefully they can give you some time to respond to some of Ms. Kusie's statements.

We have first up Mr. El-Khoury, who will be splitting his time with Mr. Iacono.

Mr. El-Khoury, you can start off. You both have the floor for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome the witnesses.

I'm particularly pleased that the Honourable Minister Monsef has joined us this evening to share ideas, take questions and provide answers. The presence of Minister Monsef, who is known for her hard work, adds to the prestige of our work.

Madam Minister, we've heard recommendations that Canada would benefit from a streamlined national strategy to bridge the digital divide and provide access to reliable and affordable high-speed Internet connections to all regions.

Can you talk about our government's approach and why there are so many different programs?

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you for the question and for your hard work, Mr. El-Khoury.

[*English*]

I appreciate the advocacy you've done for your communities since you were elected. I asked my officials, my team, to look it up. There are over 70 infrastructure projects in your riding that you have made happen. They're creating jobs, and they're improving the quality of life for your community. Thank you for that work and your warm welcome.

Certainly COVID has exacerbated existing gaps in our country, particularly the digital divide. Since we formed government back in 2015, we have been able to put forward investments to connect 1.7 million Canadians, and we started adding more to that in our new mandate with the universal broadband fund. It's recently been topped up with another \$1 billion through Budget 2021. The broadband fund has a separate stream for indigenous cellular gap projects. Another stream is the rapid response. Shovels go in the ground this construction season, and they end sometime near the end of this year, as close to the end of this year as possible. Another pot of funds is for core projects that take longer than a year.

The goal is to connect every single Canadian to this essential service, and yes, there are different funds with CRTC. The connect to innovate program existed before the universal broadband fund. Indigenous Services Canada as well as the regional economic development folks also help with that process.

The good news is that there's a lot of funding available, more than ever in Canada's history, to connect everybody to high-speed Internet. Yes, there are many cooks in this kitchen, but we need these cooks in the kitchen because each of them has a different piece of this program. That's it. We heard the importance of coordination. Through the universal broadband fund, my department has stepped up to be the lead coordinator amongst all of these cooks to make sure that the process is smoother for applicants and the results are better for Canadians.

To address MP Kusie's question, yes, this is all a lot of work. Thankfully, we have great teams who work with us. Do you know who else works really hard? The moms out there who right now don't have access to high-speed Internet and are trying to figure out how to look after their kids, how to do their work and how to stay safe in this very difficult time. Who else works hard? Farmers, who, like my colleague mentioned earlier, are afraid of droughts and other challenges that come their way in addition to COVID.

Canadians work hard, and it is an honour to work hard on their behalf.

• (1850)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

You have the floor, Mr. Iacono.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to welcome Madam Minister.

With the 2021 budget introduced by our government, the universal broadband fund will amount to \$2.75 billion.

However, the former Conservative government, which focused on saving money by limiting infrastructure spending, invested only \$6 billion of the \$9 billion set out for 2010. This stands in stark contrast to our government, which is putting a significant amount of money into various funds and programs for infrastructure projects.

Moreover, starting in 2021, an additional \$1 billion will be invested over six years to support a more rapid rollout of broadband projects.

Madam Minister, how can you give us the assurance that the projects approved by our government aren't given only to big telecommunications companies?

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Yes, thank you so much, Angelo, and particularly for your advocacy on behalf of seniors with the seniors caucus. That work has been invaluable.

The previous government focused on short-term investments. We're focusing on long-term infrastructure investments such as our

12-year, \$180-plus billion program. We're also mindful that access to high-speed Internet is about health and safety, and about economic development. We're spending because it's a smart investment in our communities, and we can't afford to leave rural and smaller communities behind.

In the connect to innovate program, we saw one third of our federal investments go to larger ISPs, one third to smaller ISPs and another one third to indigenous Internet service providers or partners. We will continue to ensure that there is a diversity of partners in our projects to meet the diverse needs across the country.

I wonder, *Éric*, if there's anything you'd like to add to this.

Éric Dagenais and his team hustle hard behind the scenes.

Mr. *Éric Dagenais* (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Spectrum and Telecommunications Sector, Department of Industry): No, thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chair, I think the minister has covered it. I have nothing to add. Thank you.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you.

Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Iacono, you have about 25 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Madam Minister, I want to briefly discuss the government's goal of connecting 98% of Canadians by 2026 and 100% of Canadians by 2030.

Why is more time needed to connect the remaining 2% of Canadians?

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The goal is to connect as many households as quickly as possible and funds are available and we're approving projects as quickly as we can. This is a big, beautiful country and there are some places across the country that are harder to connect than others. They may require low-earth orbit satellites, for example, or will just take longer to connect. That's what we're accounting for in those timelines, but the goal is to connect as many households to this essential service as quickly as possible.

• (1855)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Iacono, as well as Mr. El-Khoury.

We're now going to move on to the Bloc, with Mr. Barsalou-Duval for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Madam Minister, for joining us today. I think that this marks the second time, at least as part of similar studies, that we've had the opportunity to meet with ministers. Whether you're responding to one of my questions or to another member's question, perhaps you can shed some light on the specific structure of your department and on your exact responsibilities.

My questions for you include an issue that significantly affects the gas tax and rural municipalities. That's your file. I've had the opportunity to ask your colleague, Ms. McKenna, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, this question several times. I was quite disappointed with her response, but perhaps you'll be more encouraging.

Your government recently decided to tighten up the criteria for the federal gas tax fund. As a result, many municipalities have been unable to invest in their city halls, fire halls, garages and warehouses. For the big cities, this isn't a major issue, since they have other options. That said, I think that a number of those cities would have preferred to maintain the flexibility that they had in the past. The big cities have so many projects and are so large that they can invest the money in other places. However, for smaller municipalities, this creates an issue. These municipalities rarely have the luxury of being able to use the money received through the federal gas tax fund for anything else. Once the eligible work is complete, they can no longer use the money.

In the past, when municipalities needed money to invest in their city halls, fire halls, warehouses or garages, they could invest the money wherever they wanted. Often, in small municipalities, there isn't a huge amount of infrastructure. The amount is quite limited. When an urgent need arises in one place, the money must be used there. Sadly, sometimes, the municipalities simply can't use the money. It goes back into the public purse, and the municipalities lose track of it.

I guess that you're aware of this, but smaller municipalities often have much greater financial challenges than some of the larger municipalities. Smaller municipalities have a fairly limited tax base.

Do you consider that the restrictions imposed by your government unfairly penalize small municipalities?

What are your thoughts as Minister of Rural Economic Development?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I thank my colleague and I miss seeing his little one in the House of Commons.

I can assure my colleague that the gas tax is flexible and that the funds go directly to municipalities, who get to choose what is the best use of these very important, much-needed dollars. We actually stepped up and expedited the delivery of these dollars to municipalities last year and we'll do so again this year. I'll ask my wonderful deputy to comment on that. I will also say that eight out of ten dollars spent on COVID response have come from the federal government. We'll continue to be there for communities, for municipal leaders who are working so incredibly hard right now, to make sure that they get through this with whatever it takes, as long as it takes, as you've heard the Prime Minister say.

Deputy, is there anything you'd like to add about the fund formerly known as the gas tax fund?

Ms. Kelly Gillis (Deputy Minister, Infrastructure and Communities, Office of Infrastructure of Canada): Thank you, Minister.

[Translation]

The federal gas tax fund, which is a fairly flexible program, includes 18 different project categories to invest in infrastructure needed by municipalities.

[English]

Municipalities can save it. It's something small municipalities appreciate. If there is a larger piece of infrastructure they'd like to invest in, they can save the infrastructure money from the gas tax one year and do that larger project the following year. It is an area that gets [Technical difficulty—Editor] the challenges you've mentioned.

The money does not return to the consolidated revenue fund. It is a transfer payment to the provinces and territories, which in turn flow that money to the municipalities based on the agreement we put in place with them in 2004. It is quite flexible, with 18 different categories of investment. From roads to bridges to water and sewer to broadband connectivity, there is a wide range of opportunities that municipalities can use. They determine the pace of investment. They determine, based on those 18 categories, what they want to invest in. Also, it pays 100%. There's no need to cost-share, and that's really important as well.

As the minister noted, normally in previous years—

• (1900)

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you.

I appreciate your input regarding the fact that the money doesn't go to waste, since it can be carried forward to another year. As you said, the municipalities greatly appreciate this program. I don't think that's the issue.

The question pertains more to the restrictions imposed more recently. In the past, we said that the categories that you brought to our attention concerned priority projects. The administrative interpretation now is that the projects are no longer just priorities, but the only projects that can be funded.

In the past, people thought that money from Quebec, for example, could be used for other purposes. With the new restrictions, the money can no longer be used at all for other purposes, such as city halls, fire halls, garages and warehouses. This is causing a great deal of frustration in the municipalities.

I know that I often say the same thing. However, I think that, if I keep repeating myself, the message will eventually get through. That's why I wanted to emphasize this point.

On another note—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Chair, I just want to clarify that we have not changed, or created any restrictions with, these transfers. I want to get that on the record. We have not done that.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

We'll now move to Mr. Bachrach of the NDP.

Mr. Bachrach, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister, to our committee. I've been listening intently, and I have a few questions that I'd love for you to take a crack at answering.

As the Minister for Rural Economic Development, I wonder if you could share with us how you define “rural”.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Well, I'm in a mixed rural-urban riding, with some rural adjacent. There are some communities, as in my colleague Gудie Hutchings' riding, that have a population in the double digits or sometimes triple digits. Each province and territory has a different definition for their rurality, in accordance with our infrastructure agreements with them.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Does your department have a definition for “rurality”?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We do.

Deputy.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: For the investing in Canada program, we have defined that the rural and northern infrastructure stream is for a maximum population of 100,000. However, in the agreement with the provinces and territories, some of them have reduced that number to what makes sense for their jurisdictions. That's how we've defined it for that particular program for smaller municipalities. Again, in that particular stream, we allow a wide range of different types of eligible programs that make sense and can be prioritized for rural municipalities.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, does your department prioritize ensuring equity between investment in rural communities versus urban communities? Is that one of your priorities as a department?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Absolutely. In fact, we've worked with our partners across the country, and of course with our rural caucus, to develop a rural lens. We applied this lens to the COVID response. That's been really helpful. It helps us see how different measures are affecting different communities of different sizes differently and, of course, to mitigate. For example, if we see that a certain program is not seeing the kind of uptake that we need to see in a smaller or rural community, that changes our approach.

We applied a rural lens to the universal broadband fund. One outcome, to your point, was that smaller communities don't have the

capacity to do the grant-writing that larger communities may have. We've put in place a concierge service, a one-stop shop that communities can call. A really smart official, usually an engineer, will pick up that call on behalf of the federal government and help applicants navigate the difficult process, connect them with engineers and project managers or others in the region who also want to get connected, so it's a better service and a better outcome and a more efficient outcome for them.

● (1905)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Do you track investment in rural infrastructure over time, as a department?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Yes, we do. In fact, as part of the universal broadband investment we will be collecting rural data through a partnership with StatsCan to see how these funds are affecting rural communities as those connections are made.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: On a per capita basis, would you say that rural Canada is receiving equitable infrastructure investment compared to urban Canada?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Rural communities are getting more investments, particularly with budget 2021, through our government's efforts than from any other government that has come before us.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Is that something your department tracks, the ratio or the per capita investment between rural and urban Canada?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We track every dollar invested very carefully.

Deputy, perhaps you can provide more detail to our colleague.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Certainly.

As the minister said, we do track where our investments are going. We even map them. You can look at a rural community and see what types of investments have been made in your community. At this point, we do know that there have been about 5,500 projects worth almost \$10 billion invested in rural Canada since 2015.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I keep trying to get at this in different ways, but essentially we don't have a single definition of what a rural community is. Yes, there's a map that shows where all the investments are, but to get a sense of whether there's equity on a per capita basis between rural Canada and urban Canada, first of all there has to be a single definition. Second, we need to track that data over time. It feels like that isn't something that really takes place. It's something I'd really recommend.

In 2019, the CRTC found that 99.6% of urban Canada has access to high-speed broadband; 45.6% of rural Canada has access to broadband. Why has rural Canada fallen so far behind when it comes to access to broadband?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: That's an important question. It's one reason I put my name on the ballot. I saw communities like mine, with so much to give, not having the right kind of voice or advocacy or investments. That's changed.

Take broadband, for example. Our government has invested more in broadband connectivity than all governments that have come before us combined. We see the value of investing in rural communities. When they thrive, they create jobs for the rest of us and improve the quality of life for all of us.

While I can't speak to the record of governments that have come before us, our record for delivering for rural communities is strong, and we'll continue to be there for them.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

We're now going to move on to our second round, five minutes apiece for the Conservatives and the Liberals, and two and a half minutes for the Bloc and the NDP, followed by five minutes each for the Conservatives and the Liberals.

We're going to start our first set of questions with Mr. Soroka.

Mr. Soroka, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Scheer.

My first question, Minister, is about the spectrum auctions and how many companies have benefited from them over the years. I'll give an example. In Alberta, Shaw has deployed only 8% of the spectrum in the rural part of Alberta. I'm wondering if you'll do a "use it or lose it" clause when it comes to spectrum auctions.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: That's a very important question, Gerald.

I'll ask Éric to answer it, as he and his team are hard at work on this as we speak.

Mr. Éric Dagenais: Thank you, Minister.

There's an upcoming auction of the 3500 megahertz spectrum starting on June 15, and the deployment conditions that are associated with those spectrum licences are the most aggressive deployment conditions that we've ever put in place, and they do support, essentially, a "use it or lose it" policy. Then we will be putting in place the spectrum auction rules for the 3800 megahertz auction, which will be taking place—

• (1910)

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Sorry, so how much time do they have to use it before they lose it?

Mr. Éric Dagenais: There are different milestones that they have to meet at year five, year 10 and year 20. They are 20-year licences, and we expect to see progress by the ISPs—

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Okay, so nothing will be that short-term. It's yearly, then extended all the way to 20 years.

Mr. Éric Dagenais: There are different milestones at different time frames. They have to start investing right away to meet those milestones.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Okay. With that, I'll pass off my time to Mr. Scheer.

The Chair: Mr. Scheer, the floor is yours.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you indicated that about a third of the funding in your department goes to the established telecoms. Is that correct?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: No, a third of the connect to innovate program, which we introduced in our last mandate to connect Canadians to high-speed Internet, supported larger telcos. There was a third for indigenous and a third for smaller ISPs.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Is it safe to say that, out of the universal broadband fund, money is going to the large, established telecoms as well?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We are working with a diverse range of partners, and we want to make sure that smaller ISPs—Internet service providers—as well as medium-sized Internet service providers are part of the work, as we need them to be, along with the larger telcos.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I'm looking at the project list, and I see quite a few entries for Bell and for Telus. Notably, there are no projects listed in Saskatchewan, Manitoba or Quebec so far.

We have this situation in Canada where the telecoms get special, privileged protection from competition. The federal government protects the large, established telecoms from all kinds of normal competitive dynamics. In return for that protection, they're supposed to give back to Canadians. Canadians pay some of the highest cellphone fees in the world, some of the highest fees for service when compared to most of our major trading partners.

The telecoms are massively profitable. In fact, Bell Canada just released its Q4 results a little while ago. They made \$932 million in the last quarter. They made \$2.7 billion in profit in 2020. Here we have a situation where these large telecoms are benefiting from their privileged protection from competition. Then they ask for a handout from this government, and your government is writing them cheques. We've seen this kind of corporate welfare under the Canadian Infrastructure Bank just recently. We've seen this kind of corporate welfare when this government gave \$12 million to Loblaws and \$50 million to Mastercard.

Can you tell this committee exactly how much money Bell Canada has received from the various broadband funds that your department administers?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Let me correct the record. We're investing across the country in every province and territory to connect folks to high-speed Internet. Just a few weeks ago, we announced a partnership with the Government of Quebec worth a combined total of more than \$800 million to connect everybody, the remaining 150,000 residents without high-speed Internet, to this essential service.

I'm not sure what resource you're using, Mr. Scheer, which particular site, because what you're reading is inaccurate. I'm happy to provide you with accurate—

Hon. Andrew Scheer: It's ic.gc.ca—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

Mr. Scheer, you have 10 seconds. If you want to make a point, go ahead.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Just very quickly, Minister, how much money have you given Bell Canada through the various funds that your department administers?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Éric, is this something that you can provide accurate info on to Mr. Scheer?

Mr. Éric Dagenais: Yes, thank you, Minister.

It's not something I can provide accurate information on at the moment, but it's something we can provide to Mr. Scheer later.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer, Mr. Soroka and Minister Monsef.

We're now going to move on to the Liberals.

Ms. Jaczek, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for giving us an overview of our government's ongoing commitment in terms of broadband connectivity. You've been talking about billions of dollars and tens of thousands of projects, but I'd like to just bring it right down to the practical level, to the community level.

One of the most common concerns I hear from my constituents on connectivity is the issue of under-connectivity, in which households have very slow Internet connection that often can't support programs such as Zoom, which, of course, we all need to work and connect with loved ones remotely. People are frustrated when they don't have Internet services but their neighbours, say 100 metres away, do.

Could you explain, Minister, how our government is addressing this issue?

• (1915)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, Doctor, for your very important work in these difficult times for your community. Canadians have every right to be frustrated. In the best of times life is hard without a decent Internet connection. COVID has just added to so many frustrations. To your point, everything's gone digital. For those who are a stone's throw away from a neighbour who's getting

perfectly fine Internet access and they can't catch a break, or maybe they have too many breaks in their Internet connections, we've heard them.

What the universal broadband fund is offering applicants is not only to invest in the backbone infrastructure but also to go that extra mile, that last mile of connectivity needed to connect those households with less-than-stellar connections, and sometimes not a decent connection. This last-mile investment, along with investments in cellular and ongoing backbone infrastructure investments, will ensure that everybody has access to this essential service. The rapid response stream of the universal broadband fund, which I referred to earlier, provides those very communities a bit of extra support this fiscal year. If there are ways to connect them through fibre, for example, those funds are being deployed as we speak. Certainly, we're not going to stop until everybody has this access.

I absolutely hear those frustrations. They're real. They're all around me here in my community, too, but we're determined to make those connections as quickly as possible.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: We've also heard from a number of witnesses during the course of this study that small rural communities may lack the capacity to apply for government funding. Applications take time, sometimes, especially within the context of the pandemic. Some municipalities are just relying on a couple of hard-working staff members. What has our government done to ensure that small communities, and on the other side small ISPs, have the support to apply to a program like the universal broadband fund?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, Doctor.

First, we brought back the rural economic development secretariat. Alison O'Leary, our wonderful ADM, is here, along with Kelly Gillis. This is a one-stop shop within the federal government to renew those relationships and connections that were lost when the previous government made the decision to get rid of the secretariat. That's an important connection to rural communities.

Second, we recognize that some 60% of municipalities have fewer than five staff members supporting mayors and council and everything else, in addition to grant-writing, and that was before COVID. As I said, the broadband fund we put forward includes a pathfinder service. It's a phone number as well as an email address that folks can reach out to and keep coming back to. That handholding we've been doing is working. We're seeing increases in applications directly correlated with those who called and reached out to us, and the strength of applications received from those smaller communities.

In addition, across government we're applying the rural lens. As we develop programs and policies, we take into account ways to make them more accessible to rural communities. We're collecting data so that rural communities and Canadians know that they're being counted.

With both the universal broadband fund and the work that I'm doing with women and gender equality, we've streamlined applications so that it's easier, and more accessible and more inclusive for all applicants to take advantage of federal funds, including those in rural communities.

Certainly, I look forward to any recommendations that come from this committee to make sure that we make our processes, programs and policies even more inclusive for rural and small communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, and Ms. Jaczek.

We're now going to move on to the Bloc, with Mr. Barsalou-Duval for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Madam Minister, you ended the discussion earlier by reassuring us about the criteria for the gas tax fund, which has a new name that I can't remember, because we're used to calling it this.

You said this, and I believe you. However, the municipal representatives aren't fools. Every time I speak to representatives of cities or towns in my constituency, the first thing that I hear is that the gas tax fund can no longer be used for the projects that used to be carried out with the money. I hear the same thing from the Fédération québécoise des municipalités, the Union des municipalités du Québec and the Quebec representatives of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. If all these people are unhappy, there must be a reason.

Could this be a game of semantics? Is it possible that the criteria haven't changed, but that the interpretation and application of the criteria have changed? If nothing has changed on your end, why are all these people unhappy?

• (1920)

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: That's a great follow-up, and I certainly hear from those municipal leaders as well. We haven't changed our criteria for this important program. The Province of Quebec may have, but we have not.

Deputy, is there anything you'd like to add to that?

The Chair: Ms. Gillis.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Quebec has a similar program. In the past, the program was used for various buildings that were never eligible for the Canadian program. Quebec aligned its program with ours. We didn't change the interpretation. Quebec did.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gillis.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Has the federal government had any discussions with Quebec to force the province to align its program with the federal program?

[*English*]

The Chair: Minister.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I believe the deputy just answered that question, but if you'd like to reiterate it, Kelly, please go ahead.

The Chair: Ms. Gillis.

Ms. Kelly Gillis: Thank you, Chair.

[*Translation*]

First, we've been speaking with Quebec about all programs and agreements. That said, Quebec decided to change its program to align the program with ours.

If we need to redefine the types of projects that qualify for the program, we'll do so as part of the next agreement.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gillis, and Minister, and Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

We're now going to move on to Mr. Bachrach for two and half minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, operation high speed in Quebec is spending about a billion dollars—over \$800 million in government funds—to serve about 150,000 households. We've tried to do the math a couple of different ways, but it seems like to get broadband to the 1.8 million Canadians who lack access, which was the last estimate by the CRTC, it's going to take significantly more than the \$2.75 billion in the universal broadband fund.

Does your department have an estimate of what kind of federal investment is going to be required to meet the 2026 target?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: That's a very good question. Half of that \$800 million-plus investment you refer to in Quebec has come from the federal government, and different provinces and territories will have different needs and different costs and different construction seasons. Certainly, we've invested more than \$6 billion already in high-speed Internet connectivity, with another billion dollars for Budget 2021. We're rolling out that program as we speak, and I think the partnership with the Infrastructure Bank is also going to be interesting. We're seeing more and more Internet service providers take that route as well.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Sorry, Minister. Maybe I didn't quite phrase it properly. I'm just wondering if your department has an estimate of what federal investment is going to be required to meet the 2026 target.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We do.

Éric, please go ahead.

Mr. Éric Dagenais: Mr. Chair, with the \$2.75 billion that is in the universal broadband fund as well as the \$2 billion within the Canada Infrastructure Bank, the \$750 million from the CRTC, as well as the billions of dollars that we will be leveraging from the provinces and the private sector, we think we can meet the target of 98% by 2026.

• (1925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dagenais.

Mr. Bachrach, you have about 20 seconds.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay, so about \$5.5 billion in federal investment should get us to the 2026 target of 98%?

I'm wondering, Minister, or to the departmental officials, what that 98% is based on. How did your department come up with 98%, and who are the 2% who aren't going to be served by 2026?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The low-earth orbit satellite discussions, which I'm sure you've been a part of and hearing, will be the solution, we think, for that remaining 2% of Canadians who live in the most remote, hardest to reach communities across the country. We've developed this in line with the maps we have, which we update regularly, that tell us who is connected to high-speed Internet and who is not. Of course, we're keeping a very close eye on it through additional data that we're going to be collecting through our partnerships with StatsCan.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister and Mr. Bachrach.

We will move to the last part of our second round. I believe Mr. Scheer is taking Ms. Kusie's spot.

Mr. Scheer from the Conservative Party, you have the floor for five minutes.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thank you.

Minister, we were talking about the amount of money established for the large telecoms. You had asked your officials and they said they wouldn't be able to provide a response. Can you commit to this committee that you will break down how much each of the large established telecoms—Bell, Telus, Rogers—has received from the various envelopes that you administer?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Chair, I can follow up with this committee on the breakdown of the funds with different partners and different Internet service providers. I would be happy to.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Minister Monsef, could you send that to the clerk? I want to make sure that Mr. Scheer gets a copy of it.

Mr. Scheer, go ahead.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Just for clarification, because I know we're coming close to the end of my time right now, you had asked which website I was looking at. I am looking at "selected universal broadband fund projects". I don't know if this is yet to be updated. This is one particular fund, and I recognize that, but so far it's only showing projects in Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Northwest Territories, Nova Scotia and Ontario. There do seem to be a few provinces who have not yet had projects announced.

That's more by way of clarification—

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Can I add some context to that, Mr. Scheer?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Sure.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We update that project tracker quarterly. It just had its first quarterly update. What you see on that site so far are the rapid-response approvals that we rolled out. The core universal broadband fund, which is the majority of the fund, has yet to go up on that website. We're still going through those bigger applications and having conversations with provinces about how they want to move forward with their broadband needs.

So it will be updated. The site you are looking at doesn't give the full picture but only the rapid-response projects that had recently been approved.

The Chair: Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I appreciate that clarification.

On a point of order, Mr. Chair, procedurally I was hoping that we could move to resume debate on the motion that Ms. Kusie had proposed at the last meeting. I'm more familiar with my House procedure than I am with committee procedure. I would like to use my time here, having the floor right now, to resume debate on the motion that Ms. Kusie had proposed last week.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer. There's no debate on the resumption of that debate to move forward. Therefore, I will go straight to a vote.

Mr. Clerk, can you call the vote, please?

The Clerk: Just to clarify, this is a vote to resume debate on the motion that we'd run out of time to discuss the other day.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: Wonderful. Unanimous. I'm very impressed. Great job.

• (1930)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Bringing people together.

The Chair: Bringing people together. Sunny ways are back.

With that, Mr. Clerk, just so that we have clarity, can you do us all a favour and read out the motion, please?

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Chair, just before we get to that, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Could we release the minister at this time?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Minister Monsef, I will take this opportunity to thank you for your time today. Unfortunately, one speaker didn't get to speak to you. That was Ms. Hutchings. She dropped off the bottom. She was the next and last speaker before you were going to depart.

I do want to express, on behalf of the members of the committee, our sincere appreciation for attending today. We thought it was a good back-and-forth, with great questions and great answers. Once again, I thank you for that.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, Chair.

Gudie is the best rural lens you'll ever find. I think we all missed out.

Thank you, colleagues. Be safe.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, Clerk, go ahead.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson): Sure:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), an order of this committee do issue for a copy of all relevant documents relating to the agreement signed with ITC holdings regarding the Lake Erie Connector, including, but not limited to, the agreement itself, all correspondence between ITC Holdings and the CIB, any appendices, terms of a repayment schedule, the Bank's evaluation of the project and any other relevant documents in an unredacted form within 20 days of the adoption of this order.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Do we have questions or comments?

Mr. Fillmore, you had your hand up first. Go ahead.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll just start by saying it's really unfortunate, and it's fairly plain to me, and I think to any impartial observer, what this motion is really about. It's to foment a lack of confidence in the Canada Infrastructure Bank just at the very moment when Canadians need it most and most need to have investment in their communities.

I think I spoke from my heart at the last meeting about my disappointment that we find ourselves in this position. We're all sent here to represent our communities and to do the best we can for them. The reason that we have all been sent here is being sacrificed in favour of what I think is some less than admirable political point-scoring.

I want to resume a part of the discussion that we did get in to at the last meeting, and that is about the length of time in Ms. Kusie's motion. This could run into thousands and thousands of pages of documents to be produced and to do this is just 20 days.... Earlier, we had an amendment to increase it to 60 days. That failed. I think Mr. Bachrach attempted to stretch it to 30 days, and that failed.

I hope the opposition will at least agree to amend the deadline. I would like to meet somewhere in the middle, but to at least agree to amend the deadline to provide the Infrastructure Bank with 45 days. With that goal, I would like, if I could, to read it with a pro-

posed amendment to the motion—"within 45 days"—included. It is as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), an order of this committee do issue for a copy of all relevant documents relating to the agreement signed with ITC holdings regarding the Lake Erie Connector, including, but not limited to, the agreement itself, all correspondence between ITC Holdings and the CIB, any appendices, terms of a repayment schedule, the Bank's evaluation of the project and any other relevant documents in an unredacted form within 45 days of the adoption of this order.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fillmore.

We do have an amendment. For those members with their hands up, I'll ask if your questions are pertaining to the amendment.

No? I see that Mr. Scheer's hand went down.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Just a minute, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. El-Khoury, is your question to the amendment or to the main motion?

• (1935)

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: It's to the amendment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Jaczek, I'm sure yours was for the amendment as well.

Mr. El-Khoury, I'm going to come to you next.

Mr. Bachrach, go ahead.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Chair, because the original motion is fairly lengthy and has a lot of different clauses, and Mr. Fillmore's amendment, as I understand it, is a bit of a rewording of the original motion, I'm just wondering if in simple terms it essentially reflects the spirit of Mr. Scheer's motion, with the timeline extended to 45 days.

Maybe Mr. Fillmore can just describe what he's trying to do here.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Yes. Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate the question for clarification from Mr. Bachrach. It is intended to reflect in fact the exact intention of Ms. Kusie's motion, not Mr. Scheer's. It simply amends the timeline to 45 days so that we can be fair in the demands we're placing on the CIB to provide an intense amount of documentation—and also, by the way, translated documentation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Chair, while I have the floor, could I just respond, speaking to the amendment now that I understand it?

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Bachrach, you can get in the queue. We do have members here. Nice try, though.

I'm going to go to Mr. El-Khoury, and then I have Ms. Jaczek, Mr. Scheer and then Mr. Bachrach, and I'll get you in the queue.

Mr. El-Khoury, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to talk about the motion. The committee and the opposition parties have worked hard to ensure that the government and the committee always fulfill their official languages obligations, which require that all documents be submitted in both English and French.

Some people who participated in the previous debate spoke about the possibility of receiving documents in English and having the documents translated by our staff. That really isn't fair or equitable, given our workload. It's almost impossible for our staff to accomplish this task.

Moreover, we don't know how many pages these documents contain or how long it would take to produce a satisfactory translation in compliance with the official languages. In my opinion, even 45 days may not be enough time. I propose 60 days.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. El-Khoury.

We're now going to move on to Ms. Jaczek.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much, Chair.

First of all, just speaking to the motion as a whole, obviously I believe that Mr. Fillmore's amendment is giving a far more appropriate length of time for the production of any documents, but I am still extremely disturbed about the whole idea of this motion.

It just seems to be something that will interfere with the workings of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, and has the potential to disrupt a deal that is good for Ontario, as we've heard from officials from the Government of Ontario. That deal seems to have all sorts of benefits potentially for ratepayers, and is essentially something that should not be jeopardized in any way.

I am extremely disturbed that this motion has been put forward, and the very least we could do.... As Mr. El-Khoury has said, the translation of what will doubtless be thousands and thousands of documents just seems like an incredibly onerous exercise, with a goal that could jeopardize what seems, to me, to be an excellent opportunity for completing this particular initiative of the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

• (1940)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jaczek.

Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I know that we heard some of these arguments at the last meeting. It's not going to surprise members that I'm not swayed by Liberal members who are advocating for secrecy around this deal. The only shareholder in the Canada Infrastructure Bank is the Canadian government—it's the Canadian taxpayer. The government is right to say this is the first of its kind, because the Canada Infrastructure Bank has so far been unable to complete a single project; and as the Parliamentary Budget Officer has told us, the projects that it has announced so far do not include private sector money.

Now, here we have a situation where the bank is subsidizing a project that will primarily benefit a private company that is owned by another company, Fortis Inc., which made \$9 billion in revenue and paid out over \$800 million to its shareholders. I don't need to repeat the staggering financial position of Fortis Inc. It's in a very positive position in terms of cash flow, in terms of revenue, in terms of bragging about increasing its dividend every year; and it decided not to put any extra money into this proposal.

Ms. Jaczek talked about how this project is going to be so good for Ontario. The Ontario government hasn't put any money into this project. If the Ontario government has decided not to put its skin in the game, what does that tell us about the project? The problem here is that we don't know a lot of details about it. I think it's incumbent upon this committee to have that detail.

This amendment is about the timeline. I'm looking at the calendar, and I think 45 days puts us awfully close to the end of the parliamentary session. I think it's very important that this committee have this data before the House rises, before the government can get out of, or dodge this, so to speak. If there are things that come out of this deal that opposition parties, or even government backbenchers, decide they'd like to know more about, we lose so many parliamentary tools at our disposal.

I'm willing to meet the government. I think Mr. Bachrach had an idea last week of 30 days. That is eminently possible. I know the government's trying to talk about how much work this will be for translators and how much documentation could be provided. We've all been at committee or heard about other work done by committees where they have had much tighter timelines on much bigger projects. The House of Commons translation staff is excellent. It has very quick turnaround times.

We're not talking about digging back into the archives. This is not a cold-case file exercise where we have to find the keys to the basement and go downstairs with the flashlight and dust off the microfiche machines. This is a current project. All of this information would be on deposit, at the CIB. They've just gone through whatever work they have done to approve this project.

I think the need for a longer timeline is a complete red herring. I think 30 days is eminently reasonable. It does give the bank more time. As I said at the last meeting, if the Infrastructure Bank comes back to this committee with a compelling reason that it hasn't been able to fulfill this order, or if the translation staff at the House of Commons tells this committee that there's some impediment to meeting that deadline, then this committee can evaluate that. But I would like to stick to the 30-day deadline so that we can ensure that we get this information back before the House rises.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I was going to make many of the same points, and perhaps in the interest of time and of getting to the vote on the amendment, I will just say that we have no idea how many documents there are. I'm not sure what the basis is of the suggestion that it's going to take a lot of time because there are a lot of documents. If the department comes back and needs more time because they're wading through thousands and thousands of documents, I think the committee would be happy to consider their concerns in that regard. Like Mr. Scheer said, I think the timeline seems simple based on my short experience here. We're obviously not of one mind, and we've heard the different perspectives around the table. My preference would be that we move to a vote on the amendment and try to get back to our meeting and hearing from the witnesses we had scheduled.

• (1945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: We're doing our best here. We climbed down from our first attempted amendment last week of 60 days, and 20 days is just patently unreasonable. I don't think I've ever seen a document order of 20 days in my six years in this place.

Really, what we're talking about.... We're fiddling at the margins here, I would say, because what's really at stake here is the motion itself. The motion itself is asking the Infrastructure Bank to break the law. It's putting officials at the bank in the position of asking them to break the law, to break their own governing statutes.

It's a thing that we should not be doing, as a committee. I think it's going to reflect poorly, at the end of the day, on the way we are perceived and our ability to understand and execute our jobs in a responsible way at this committee. It's putting all the staff, both at the CIB and the committee staff, in an extremely unfair and awkward position. Frankly, the motion is an embarrassment and it should be an embarrassment for all of us. That's what really is at stake here.

We've tried to come down from 60 days to 45, to try to find an incremental way forward through the thicket of this motion, but please, you must try to meet us somewhere on this path through the thicket.

I understand Mr. Bachrach is ready for a vote and Mr. Scheer is ready for a vote. I see that Mr. Barsalou-Duval has his hand up. I should certainly love to hear his opinion on this before we proceed to a vote. I see Mr. Iacono has his hand up.

I think we just have to have an opportunity to hear a few more perspectives and, I hope, some common sense on this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fillmore.

I'm going to move on to Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I must say that I listened to the comments of the other committee members and I was intrigued by the arguments for providing more time.

At the most recent committee meeting, it seemed to me that we agreed on 30 days. I must admit that, if we had asked for three days, I wouldn't have minded. If it's impossible, the public servants will tell us. They'll tell us the time required to achieve the result.

Ultimately, no matter how many days it takes, we can always talk again. If it's impossible, we'll need to look at how to arrange things and obtain the required documents.

I don't see any issues. However, I gather from Mr. Fillmore's comments that, regardless of the number of days, it will be an issue for him.

Why are we discussing the number of days? We're talking about the motion, not the number of days and the time frame.

Mr. Chair, I would like us to vote on the motion so that we can move on to the real business, rather than getting bogged down with the number of days. Ultimately, we'll need to live with the production capacity of our public servants.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Iacono.

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

I'd like to start off by saying that this feels like a fishing expedition and we have no idea what we're fishing for, and for what reason. We're just putting on this motion to go and get documents—great—but I have a question. Who is going to pay for this? Mr. Scheer, are you going to be paying for the translation of all these documents? Are you or your party going to pay for all this translation, and for having people work excess hours in the limited days you want these documents to be provided to you, or are you going to just throw this on taxpayers?

I'd rather use money in a more productive way than to just go out on a fishing expedition, requesting documents, having no valid reason as to why we are requesting all these documents. Then they have to be translated. You seem to forget that there is a cost. Aren't you concerned about taxpayers and the cost of all this to taxpayers, to Canadians? You're just concerned with going on a fishing expedition and forgetting that somebody has to pay for this.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1950)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

I have some hands up here now. Is there anybody who has their hand up just because they haven't taken it down? Do you all want to speak again?

Mr. Bachrach, Mr. Barsalou-Duval, and Mr. Scheer, you all want to speak again, I'm assuming. Good.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'd rather go to the vote, Mr. Chair, but if people are going to keep talking....

The Chair: I'm going to go back to Mr. Bachrach.

Go ahead.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: It seems as though we're going down a bit of a rabbit hole. To suggest that the cost of having the CIB officials provide the documents is the primary driving concern here is just not reasonable. Looking at the Liberal obstruction of other committees and the costs that has caused for the taxpayers of Canada, I think we would most happily tally up those costs for comparison.

Mr. Fillmore's assertion that we're asking the CIB officials to do something that is illegal, I think, is patently untrue. The law clerk has written, "there can be no doubt that, as a matter of law, the power of a House committee to order the production of documents prevails over the seemingly contrary provisions of a statute, including the Privacy Act." We're actually asking them to follow the law, and that law requires them to produce documents if the committee so orders.

I think this is clearly a reasonable motion. There seems to be some appetite for compromise on the timeline, and I would certainly be happy to support something along the lines of 30 days. As soon as we go to 45 days, we're not going to see those documents before the end of the session. It really goes against the purpose of trying to get these answers, which the Canadian public deserves. We've seen these damning reports from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and I think very much the Canadian public deserves to know how these deals are structured and what value the taxpayers are getting.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair, but I'm very eager to get to a vote.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Before I go to Mr. Scheer, members of the committee, would you mind if I excused the witnesses?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Unless they find us entertaining....

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, could you excuse the witnesses, please?

Mr. Scheer, you have the floor.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Like Mr. Bachrach, I will keep my remarks brief because I am anxious to get to the vote on this. I have never heard an argument so ridiculous as the one I just heard from Mr. Iacono. I mean—stop the presses, everyone—this is the first time a member of the Liberal government has been concerned about efficient use of taxpayers' dollars. By that logic, we'd save a lot of money on translation if we didn't even allow Parliament to hold the government to account, but of course we've seen this government try to do that. The first thing this government did during the pandemic was try to write itself unprecedented powers, sidelining the role of the opposition. We saw why when we saw the various scandals that came out through the WE contracts and things like that. This is just ridiculous.

Parliament's provision of oversight on government departments and agencies is essential. That is the core function of this Parliament. We come together to provide accountability for how the dollars that are entrusted to us are spent. That is the very essence of the House of Commons, dating back over almost a thousand years of parliamentary tradition now.

We've seen this bank waste so much money already. It lost over \$500 million last year and it hasn't completed a single project. This argument about the cost of translation is just a red herring.

Congratulations, Mr. Iacono, you got me to bite on it. I just couldn't let it go. What an insult to every parliamentarian, everyone who shows up to fight for our constituents to ensure that their tax dollars are treated with respect and only spent in their interest. That's what this motion is about. If there's nothing to see here, if everything is fine, this committee will come to that conclusion, but it's essential that we provide that kind of oversight.

With that, I won't engage again on this debate, Mr. Chair. I think, as Mr. Bachrach said, we may as well come to a vote on the timeline here and then we can resume debate on the main motion.

• (1955)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

Mr. Fillmore.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Barsalou-Duval for his comments. I think we're seeing a little movement on the timeline, but before I come back to the timeline and maybe a vote, I want to raise something in the motion that Monsieur Barsalou-Duval would perhaps be concerned about. It is the requirement to have the documents produced in two official languages.

This committee and the opposition parties have placed a lot of emphasis on ensuring that all parts of the federal government respect the official languages obligations. In fact, just last week, the Conservative Party raised this issue during question period. Last Thursday, the Conservative member for Richmond—Arthabaska raised a complaint about committee documents being in English only. This is directly tied to the 20 days, 30 days, 45 days and 60 days.

Our government agrees that we should absolutely be respecting our official languages obligations. There has been some confusion during this debate, I think, about how this motion could possibly respect those obligations. There has been a suggestion that the CIB could be allowed to provide the documents in English only, and then the committee staff would translate them.

Colleagues, given the breadth of this sprawling motion, we're talking about hundreds—in fact, probably thousands—of pages of documents. It would be extremely unfair and patently unreasonable to place the burden on our committee staff to provide the translation. It should be the CIB's responsibility to respond to the committee's request to have the documents in both official languages, and our responsibility as a committee is to give them enough time in that request.

I will again remind us of the Conservative Party's comments last week, specifically about the fact that committees must provide documents in both official languages, not in English only, as has happened on several occasions. There might be an amendment out there to make sure that the documents come in both official languages. However, the need to have them in both official languages is tied to the timeline as well, so I would like to come back to the point of the timeline.

The government is willing to try perhaps 40 days. We might find some traction on this. I hope you get the message that we are trying to find a path forward, as I said, that is fair to the people who support us on this committee so professionally and who work so hard, that is fair to the CIB officials and that is respectful of fair and reasonable process.

I'm happy to move to a vote on the motion. Should it fail, I'll immediately try again with an amendment of 40 days.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fillmore.

Just to be clear, regardless of the intent with respect to translation, obviously we would need it, and regardless of where you think documents go, they all go to the translation bureau. Essentially, that's where the documents will go to be translated.

I will now go to Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to address the comments made by my colleague, Mr. Iacono. I must confess that I was deeply shocked, if not scandalized, to learn that the reason for not wanting to pass the motion is that it would cost too much to correct and translate the documents.

I expected that a member from Quebec would never object to having documents in French. I'm also surprised. I don't think that we're talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars or millions of dollars, but about a few people who will be working on the translation of documents. I find it interesting that my colleagues around the table assume that the documents would be in English. In my view, the fact that they make this assumption is further evidence that this country operates primarily in English, and not in French. I also expected that these documents might be produced in French and that they would require translation into English. However, it seems that this is more the exception than the rule, Mr. Chair.

I don't know whether my colleague would like to retract or apologize for what he said, or at least clarify what he meant.

● (2000)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

Mr. Bachrach, you have your hand up.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Chair, it seems like the compromise is 30 days if Mr. Fillmore is suggesting 45 days, and the original motion is 20 days. By my math, the mid-point is closer to 30 days. I just think we are going to end up there eventually anyway, and I would love to find some way to short-circuit it, so if this amendment fails, I would love to make an amendment changing the timeline to 30 days.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Go ahead, Mr. Iacono.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I want to set the record straight.

Perhaps Mr. Barsalou-Duval misunderstood my comments. I find it outrageous to request so many documents for a fishing expedition.

You and I both know that I speak French very well. I'm a member of Parliament from Quebec and I speak French very well. I'm a proud Quebecker. I completely agree that any document that comes to us should be translated into both languages, since Canada is a bilingual country.

I didn't make my comment to avoid having the documents translated. I wanted to point out that these requests are related to a fishing expedition. In my opinion, we should pay more attention to the need rather than just obtaining documents for a fishing expedition.

My comment was about that issue and not about my opposition to receiving the translation of the documents.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Thank you, all.

We will call the vote on the amendment.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We are back to the main motion.

Mr. Bachrach, go ahead.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: In the spirit of compromise, I would amend the timeline to 30 days.

• (2005)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Are there questions on that?

Mr. Scheer, you have your hand up on the amendment, I assume. Go ahead.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: No, I was going to speak to the main motion. I don't have anything to say to this amendment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any questions or comments on the amendment by Mr. Bachrach?

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

We're now going to move on to question of the the main motion as amended now.

I have, first up—your hands both went up at the same time. Flip a coin, guys.

Mr. Fillmore, go ahead.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thanks, Chair. I honestly believe I did have my hand up first there, but thank you for the coin toss.

One of the things my colleagues and I have noted as a reason we don't support this motion is the impact it would have on the Canada Infrastructure Bank's ability to function in the infrastructure investment world. We've heard Dr. Jaczyk talk about this as well, and others.

If infrastructure project partners think their company would be dragged through the mud in this way, for cheap partisan gain, they may think twice about participating in investments with the CIB. It pains me to believe that that is really the intention of this motion: to shake confidence, to push people away, and to try to make the Liberal government, therefore, look bad, by chilling investment through the Canada Infrastructure Bank and by creating an environment in which partners do not want to participate because of such an unreasonable airing of proprietary information.

I know the opposition would be perfectly happy with that. It's clearly what the motion is intended to do. We know that the Conservatives want to get rid of the Canada Infrastructure Bank altogether, but we know that Canadian citizens would be the ones who lose out in that scenario. They'd lose out because they'd wind up with fewer critical infrastructure projects being built in our country, less economic growth, fewer jobs and less of a green economy than we are trying very hard to create.

I know that one of our colleagues will always complain. I'll remind him of what he said and what he campaigned on less than two years ago. I think it's important to this debate because it makes

clear the motivation behind this motion, and what this motion is actually trying to accomplish, which is to sabotage the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

Let's recall what my honourable colleague put in his Conservative Party election platform in 2019. He promised billions and billions of dollars in delays and cuts to infrastructure spending. I know he will usually chime in to say that's a lie, but let's just take a moment to listen to what some journalists said when he finally got around to releasing the Conservative platform back in 2019.

The National Post headline was, "Delayed infrastructure funds key to Conservatives' balanced budget plan". The National Post went on to say that the Conservative platform was, "delaying billions of dollars' worth of federal infrastructure investments".

The Globe and Mail said, "The biggest spending cut proposed by the Conservatives...is an \$18-billion reduction in infrastructure spending over five years."

The Globe also noted disappointment of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. It said that "The [FCM] decried the infrastructure cuts, saying in a statement that local governments across the country have an 'urgent need for increased investment.' The Conservative platform promises 'appear to move in the opposite direction,' [then] FCM president Bill Karsten said." He is a tremendous public servant from my own riding of Halifax.

Criticism of these promised delays and cuts to infrastructure was widespread at the time, and I think we can all remember it very clearly, and rightly so.

With this motion that we're debating today we can see that nothing has changed—nothing has changed. The Conservatives are out to delay and cut infrastructure spending, and I have to say that it saddens me to see the other opposition parties dutifully following in line behind the Conservatives with their support of this fundamentally flawed motion.

Here is some more reaction to those promised cuts. This is from Emmett Macfarlane at the University of Waterloo. He said, "Well this is incompetent. Infrastructure spending desperately needs to go up, not down." I would certainly agree with Mr. Macfarlane, and that, of course, is the intention of the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

Gary Mason said, "What party releases its platform the Friday of a long weekend? One that doesn't want too much attention focused on it would be my guess."

- (2010)

Perhaps the ears of our friend, Mr. Bachrach, would perk up a little bit to hear what Hassan Yussuff, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, said. He said, “Over and over again, Conservatives have demonstrated hostility toward Canada’s workers. Today, Andrew Scheer is doubling down on that hostility and seeking a mandate to cut. With a platform loaded with job-killing service cuts, it’s clear that Andrew Scheer represents an equal threat to Canadians as Stephen Harper.”

[Translation]

Radio-Canada journalists Philippe-Vincent Foisy and Hugo Prévost wrote the following:

A Conservative government would impose tens of billions of dollars in budget cuts in its first term.

[English]

Coming back to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Bill Karsten, the president, said on the eve of the election, “Cities and communities across the country have an urgent need for increased investment in infrastructure. Proposed measures in this platform appear to move in the opposite direction, with fewer infrastructure dollars available year-over-year to create jobs, improve roads and bridges, and maintain the local services Canadians rely on.”

What if anything is the Canada Infrastructure Bank for if not to create those local services that Canadians rely on?

Andrew Coyne, of the National Post, on the eve of the election in 2019, tweeted, “If what you seek is a coherent vision of conservatism in the 21st century, you will have to look elsewhere.”

Alex Boutilier of the Toronto Star, another Haligonian who moved to upper Canada, tweeted, “The largest cuts are in unspecified ‘other operating expenses’—\$14.4 billion over five years. The Conservatives suggest they can achieve that through reining in travel spending, consulting fees, and cutting down on federal office space.”

Marieke Walsh, of The Globe and Mail, tweeted, “The second largest proposed spending cut in the platform is a plan to save \$14-billion over five years on federal government operating expenses, which are not detailed in the platform.” She also tweeted, “The party said shrinking the size of cubicle space for public servants could be one of the ways to save that money”.

David Akin of Global News is quoted as saying, “The single biggest saving measure is putting off some infrastructure spending. That will save \$18-billion over five years”. Well, he certainly understood what the Conservatives were intent on doing.

Don Martin of CTV News tweeted, “Now we see why this was released late on a Friday before a long weekend. Some big cuts with few specifics.”

Rachel Gilmore of CTV News is quoted as saying, “The Conservative plan to balance the budget includes some serious cuts, including: – Cutting \$1.5 billion a year by reviewing business subsidy programs -’ Prioritizing’ infrastructure spending, which would eliminate \$1.3 billion in 2020-21—Cutting foreign aid by \$1.5 billion”.

Emmett Macfarlane, again, from the University of Waterloo, is quoted as saying, “I’ve avoided the Doug Ford-Andrew Scheer comparisons because they’re definitely different people but the details coming out about the CPC fiscal plans, particularly on the cutting side, are eerily Ford-esque.”

[Translation]

Last October, in *Le Journal de Montréal*, Guillaume St-Pierre wrote that a balanced budget would require cuts. Andrew Scheer plans to cut infrastructure investments by \$18 billion over five years. In addition, operating expenses will be cut by \$14 billion.

- (2015)

[English]

Denise Balkissoon, of the Globe and Mail, tweeted, “The Conservative party says it will cut \$18-billion in infrastructure spending days after Mr. Scheer criticized the Liberals for not spending enough on infrastructure.”

Don Martin, again, is quoted as saying, “Friday afternoon release, just ahead of a long weekend, that usually means bad news and the conservative blueprint for governing which came out less than an hour ago shows some startling ways to cut spending that had not been disclosed before.”

I have pages of this because pages exist of it. The Conservative Party has decided that investing in Canadian communities is not something they are supportive of. In fact, as they pursue their philosophy of shrinking the government and government spending, they are clearly attempting to do it on the backs of Canadians and on the infrastructure that Canadians require and depend upon to run their businesses, to get to school, to raise their children, to educate their children, to pipe their services, to create energy, everything.

All the infrastructure that our communities rely upon require and deserve federal investment, not federal cuts. For this motion to try to camouflage that philosophical position, which is anti-community investment under the guise of a fishing expedition seeking thousands and thousands of pages of proprietary business dealing information.... As I mentioned, last week we had proponents of the A2A railroad here. I wish they had left their cameras on because I would liked to have seen their faces when they heard what this motion actually meant, and the chilling effect it would have on investment in major infrastructure in our country.

With the CIB we have renewed that leadership. We have instituted a growth plan. We are approving projects. We have the REM in Montreal. We have the Lake Erie Connector. There are other examples emerging as we speak.

This is what Canada is asking for. These are the projects that are going to steer us out of the economic slump this pandemic has caused and at the same time create jobs, lead us into a greener economy and create a more inclusive economy in which all Canadians can participate. This is the work that we were all sent here to do by our constituents, by the people who hired us to come to this place.

I'm going to leave it there, Mr. Chair. I look forward to hearing what some of my colleagues have to say.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fillmore.

I'm going to move on to Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, this is what happens when Liberals are exposed to accountability and transparency. They react very vociferously when they get backed into a corner, and they fear the sunlight that was supposed to be the disinfectant has become the thing that gives them some burns.

Where to begin? It's said that Canadians would lose out if the Infrastructure Bank ceased operations. Lose out on what? The bank has completed nothing. The only two projects this government can point to are projects that were already going to get funding. The government just made a political decision to provide funding through the CIB, and the parliamentary budget officer has revealed that there is no private sector investment in them.

We have here a first-of-its-kind type of arrangement whereby, instead of public dollars leveraging private sector money to get public infrastructure built, the Canada Infrastructure Bank has proposed a model in which private money has leveraged public funds to get private infrastructure built. Instead of having the private sector play a role in designing, operating or maintaining a public asset—something that Canadians own either through municipal, provincial or federal governments—this is now going to be an asset owned by a private sector company.

I could litigate every single point. I know Mr. Fillmore can recite lots of quotes from his ideological soulmates in various institutions who benefit from the Liberal government and support their ideology. If this debate goes on beyond this committee's meeting, I can come to the next meeting with lots and lots of quotes from ethics experts talking about this government's scandalous decision to grant a sole-source contract of almost \$1 billion to their friends in the WE Charity; how the Prime Minister and his family personally benefited from the WE organization; how they benefited politically by giving the WE organization a platform.

I could stick to infrastructure and bring in Auditor General and parliamentary budget officer reports and read, not quotes from editorialists or columnists with their own opinion, but cold hard facts, black and white numbers. The reality is that what we offered in the last election was a recognition that this government had cut infrastructure through its lapsing of that funding. In the first few years of

this government's existence, it lapsed \$8 billion in infrastructure spending. That was commitments to municipalities, towns and rural municipalities and villages. They were going to get help to upgrade their water systems, expand their roads, all kinds of different types of assets that would improve the lives of people in those communities. This government lapsed that funding, effectively cut that funding by \$8 billion in the first year, and continues to lapse that money year over year.

This motion has been referred to as a fishing expedition. By that logic if the CRA looks at anybody's tax return, then CRA is on a fishing expedition. We have mechanisms in our government whereby oversight is provided. That's not to say that every time a committee exercises its oversight function that it always uncovers something, but it's the fact that oversight exists to ensure proper behaviour by government departments. If this committee and other committees just decided they would never cast a second look or have another run at the numbers or the proposals, it would be hugely detrimental to the accountability and transparency our Parliament is based on.

We have discovered through all kinds of studies gross examples of missed expenditures. I submitted an Order Paper question asking about infrastructure cost overruns due to delays. I believed we would probably get some projects here and there in the infrastructure department. I was shocked to find out how much extra costs for the taxpayer Parks Canada has caused through project delays. I wasn't expecting to find it, but the very fact that I asked the question forced government agencies and departments to answer the question, and now we can see the millions and millions of dollars that Parks Canada has cost taxpayers by failing to manage its own asset. That's what this motion is all about.

● (2020)

As I mentioned at the last meeting, if private sector companies don't want to have these types of accountability measures imposed upon them, there are a lot of lenders who will provide confidentiality and secrecy to them. I believe it's safe to say that every chartered bank in the country has all kinds of commitments to its clients about maintaining secrecy and confidentiality about their clients' operations. This is different. This is the taxpayer who is funding this.

Mr. Fillmore wants to talk about cuts that the Conservatives promised in the last campaign. Let's talk about the cuts to corporate welfare that we promised, corporate welfare that this government just can't get enough of. Liberals and corporate welfare go hand in hand.

We've seen so many examples of hard-working Canadians struggling to get by during this pandemic. I know so many people in my riding who have lost everything, as I'm sure every member on this committee—regardless of party—does in their communities. These people have been forced to shut their doors because of the pandemic and have lost their life savings. Friends of mine have had to sell their homes to pay off the bills from their small businesses. They've owned restaurants that they're not allowed to open.

It's heart-wrenching and it's heartbreaking. Then, when you see this announcement coming on the heels of this government giving \$12 million to Loblaws for fridges—multi-billion dollar companies—as well as \$50 million to MasterCard.... A credit card company that makes its living off the backs of working Canadians who can't pay their full balance is getting \$50 million in taxpayers' money. Now we have an example where, through its subsidiary, a private sector company worth billions of dollars gets a cheque for \$655 million. This whole exercise is to find out why that decision was made and how the agreement is structured. That is what this is all about.

Now, I did mention in our last meeting that I was sympathetic to the argument about some types of information where there would never be an expectation of disclosure on the part of the third party here, ITC Holdings. In the spirit of co-operation, and inspired by Mr. Bachrach's enlightened compromise of 30 days rather than the original 20 days, I would propose a motion that was first put forward by Ms. Kusie. I can assure members that I have consulted with the law clerk's office today to ensure this is worded properly,

In the spirit of compromise and in trying to ensure that the motives of this are clear—that this is about accountability and understanding why this motion is necessary and the information from the committee is being asked for—I would propose the following amendment after the words “within 30 days of the adoption of this order”. We've just amended that with Mr. Bachrach's words. The motion would have the amendment added to it. I would have to amend that whole sentence as follows:

That the documents be provided in an unredacted form to the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel within 30 days of the adoption of this order;

That the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel redact from the documents, except for the agreement itself, its appendices or schedules: (a) any information that constitutes a trade secret, (b) any information the disclosure of which could reasonably result in material financial loss or gain to ITC or a third party or prejudice their competitive position, (c) any information the disclosure of which could reasonably interfere with contractual or other negotiations of ITC or a third party, and (d) any personal private information;

That the CIB, in consultation with ITC, may propose redactions to the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel respecting the information that should be redacted pursuant to this order; and

That the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel provide the redacted documents to the committee as soon as the redactions are completed.

● (2025)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

Mr. Scheer, would you have that handy as a document that you could send to the clerk, please?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Yes. It might take me a minute or so, but I'll do that.

The Chair: I'll give you that minute.

In the meantime, did you folks want to take a two- or three-minute health break before we move on?

I'm going to suspend for about three minutes for a health break, and then we'll reconvene.

● (2025)

(Pause)

● (2035)

The Chair: I am now going to the floor for questions on the amendment.

I have Ms. Jaczyk and Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

I'm not sure if you've taken your hand down, but for any one of you, including you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval, if you have any questions on the amendment, please get your hands up.

Ms. Jaczyk, go ahead.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Mr. Chair, I move that the committee now adjourn.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jaczyk.

That is a dilatory motion, and there is no debate on it.

I will ask the clerk to call for the vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Thank you, members.

I am now going back to questions on the amendment.

Ms. Jaczyk, you have your hand back up.

Go ahead with resuming debate on the motion.

● (2040)

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

While Mr. Scheer has made it very clear that he does not like the Canada Infrastructure Bank and has alluded to lapsed funds. He has talked about the bank losing money, which in both cases is an inaccurate description of how the bank, in fact, functions.

I want to address in particular why this specific project, the Lake Erie Connector, a clean power project, is so important, and why it is particularly fitting that the Canada Infrastructure Bank be involved in this project.

Clean power projects are often delayed or not developed because of financing challenges and gaps in the capital structure, so to help deliver clean power projects, the CIB will provide low-cost and long-term capital, often pegged to revenue streams that are not typically sufficient for traditional debt and equity investors. So in working with governments and project developers on delivering clean power projects, the CIB will structure these investments to increase the use of private sector capital, reduce the weighted average cost of capital, provide certainty on long-term debt and equity returns, and transfer more construction and operations risk to the private sector.

Of course, clean power is particularly important and, as we know, the CIB, in its growth plan, has dedicated funds, some \$2.5 billion, for clean power. I think we all understand—at least most of us do—that climate change is a serious problem globally and that Canada needs to do its bit, so clean power is a particularly appropriate area for investment by the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

Because I was particularly interested in this project, certainly when I saw that Ontario's minister of Energy, Mines and Northern Development and Minister of Indigenous Affairs, the Honourable Greg Rickford, was so enthusiastic about the project, I decided to do a little bit more reading about this project. I want to make sure that everyone on the committee has a full understanding of what we're talking about in this case. First:

The Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB) and ITC Investment Holdings (ITC) have signed an agreement in principle to invest \$1.7 billion in the Lake Erie connector project.

Under the terms of the agreement

—this is all publicly known—

the CIB will invest up to \$655 million or up to 40% of the project cost. ITC, a subsidiary of Fortis Inc., and private sector lenders will invest up to \$1.05 billion, the balance of the project's capital cost.

What exactly is the Lake Erie Connector?

...a proposed 117 kilometre underwater transmission line connecting Ontario with the PJM Interconnection, the largest electricity market in North America.

The 1,000 megawatt, high-voltage direct current connection will help lower electricity costs for customers in Ontario

—I made reference to this being especially important for customers in Ontario—

and improve the reliability and security of Ontario's energy grid. The Lake Erie Connector will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and be a source of low-carbon electricity in the Ontario and U.S. electricity markets.

During construction, the Lake Erie Connector is expected to create 383 jobs per year and drive more than \$300 million in economic activity. Over its life, the project will provide 845 permanent jobs and economic benefits by boosting Ontario's GDP by \$8.8 billion.

The project will also help Ontario to optimize its current infrastructure, avoid costs associated with existing production curtailments or shutdowns. It can leverage existing generation capacity and transmission lines to support electricity demand.

- (2045)

ITC continues its discussions with First Nations communities and is working towards meaningful participation in the near term and as the project moves forward to financial close.

It's another win-win involving our indigenous communities.

The CIB anticipates financial close late in 2021

—if not disrupted by this particular motion—

pending final project transmission agreements, with construction commencing soon after. ITC will own the transmission line and be responsible for all aspects of design, engineering, construction, operations and maintenance.

This has been an ongoing discussion for many years because ITC actually acquired, or decided to commence, the Lake Erie Connector project in August 2014 and has already received all of the necessary regulatory and permitting approvals, including a U.S. presidential permit and approval from the Canada Energy Regulator.

This is a very important investment and there is a commitment to go ahead. It is extremely important for citizens in Ontario.

It has received a number of endorsements, and the CEO of the Canada Infrastructure Bank at the time, Ehren Cory, said:

This project will allow Ontario to export its clean, non-emitting power to one of the largest power markets in the world and, as a result, benefit Canadians economically while also significantly contributing to greenhouse gas emissions reductions in the PJM market. The project allows Ontario to better manage peak capacity and meet future reliability needs in a more sustainable way.

This is a true win-win for Canada and the U.S., both economically and environmentally.

As I've said many times during the debate on this motion, any move that might cause anxiety to possible investors in this project is something that I think is harmful. That is why I am, at this point in time, not convinced that this motion should move forward, even with the proposed amendment by Mr. Scheer—which, of course, we will be studying very carefully.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jaczek. Well stated.

Before I move on to Mr. Fillmore, I do want to inform the committee that I have been informed that management will not have services available past 9 p.m., so there is a hard stop at 9:00 p.m. That's when I'll be suspending the meeting.

With that, Mr. Fillmore, go ahead.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Thank you, Chair, and Dr. Jaczek.

The potential investment of \$2.5 billion in Canadian clean energy on the way toward a \$5 billion investment over the mid-term is a remarkable opportunity, absolutely. I would like to get the benefits of this project on the record so that all committee members will be fully aware of them. These are the benefits according to the project proponent, and the benefits that hang in the balance of this ill-conceived motion.

First, what are the real customer savings involved here? The Lake Erie Connector is going to maximize efficiency and increase competition, which creates opportunity for significant customer savings. For Ontario customers, that's going to translate into some very quantifiable benefits: In net benefits \$100 billion plus per year; \$3 billion in savings over 30 years of the project; savings of \$22 per year per residential customer, and \$660 per customer over 30 years of the project.

It will enable market access. We heard this in earlier testimony. The Lake Erie Connector will enable direct access between Ontario, a significant energy market with a very different resource mix, and PJM the largest multi-state competitive power market in the world. I believe it's 13 states and the District of Columbia. This is going to enable the buying and selling of energy capacity in renewable energy credits. Harnessing energy trading with the largest electrical market in the world will also allow Ontario to take advantage of low-cost capacity imports on an as-needed basis and find high-value export markets when the province is in surplus, all the while using transmission lines that are currently underutilized. These benefits are going to prove entirely valuable for Ontario's electricity system and help lower costs for residents and businesses, as previously stated, at a time we need it most.

Having access to the Ontario energy market will provide the PJM participants on the other side of the border with increased trading opportunities, with resulting increases in market efficiencies, including the ability of load-serving entities and large electricity customers to obtain energy from non-emitting wind, solar, hydro and nuclear resources during periods of surplus generation in Ontario, with a resulting reduction in PJM's emissions profiles. As we know GHGs don't obey political boundaries; what's good in Canada is good in the U.S., and if we can help reduce emissions there, then this is another checkmark in the win column for the Erie Connector.

It's a shovel-ready project. The Lake Erie Connector is ready to go. It has received all of the necessary regulatory and permitting approvals, including a National Energy Board certificate of public convenience and necessity, a U.S. Department of Energy presidential permit, a Pennsylvania and United States Army Corps of Engineers permit. Route 5A is finalized; it has secured all of the necessary real estate and rights-of-way, positive discussions with indigenous communities and Ontario Ministry of Energy inclusion in the LTEP.

ITC/Fortis has invested over \$40 million U.S. to permit the project; it's well invested. It's a very serious credible application. ITC/Fortis is ready to invest up to \$1 billion U.S. in this Ontario infrastructure.

Moving forward now with the Lake Erie Connector would ensure that infrastructure would be put in place for both markets to import and export electricity and enjoy a wide array of shared benefits.

One of those is access to clean energy. As the connector project's website states:

The Lake Erie Connector can offer significant support to the goals laid out in the *North American Climate, Clean Energy and Environment Partnership* between Canada, U.S.A. and Mexico, including the continental goal to achieve 50% clean power generation by 2025.

Are we really sure we want to put this in jeopardy?

Furthermore:

The Lake Erie Connector can help provide a cleaner energy mix by reducing Ontario's GHG emissions in the electricity sector by up to 2-3 million tonnes per year.

It can open access to non-emitting electricity imports to Ontario from PJM during periods of potential capacity shortfalls, such as during Ontario's nuclear refurbishments.

● (2050)

For PJM participants, load-serving entities and large electricity customers will be positioned to obtain energy from non-emitting wind, solar, hydro and nuclear resources during periods of surplus generation in Ontario with a resulting reduction in PJM's emissions profile.

Another one of these shared benefits is “economic development in both regions”, south and north of the border:

The Lake Erie Connector will provide system reliability and security benefits.

The project is expected to increase market efficiencies and benefit local economics.

When completed, the Lake Erie Connector will make tax payments which will benefit local communities and residents.

Another benefit is “safe technology” with “low environmental impact”. The “[h]igh-voltage direct current cables”, or HVDC, that are considered for this project “have very little impact on their environmental surroundings”. HVDC technology is proven to be safe and reliable: “The solid cables are well insulated.” They contain no gels or liquids. They are made from non-flammable materials. They're essentially inert: “Because the cables are constant direct current”—DC current, in other words—“no fluctuating electromagnetic fields are created.” Also, “[t]he HVDC converter stations that will be located on either end of the cable will utilize the latest technology which has proven robust, flexible and very stable.”

As well, “[m]ost of the HVDC cables for the Lake Erie connector will actually be buried under Lake Erie”. Indeed:

The water jet installation process minimizes disturbance to the lake bed and helps [to] minimize the width of the trench, which is barely larger than the cables themselves and which begins to be filled in by natural forces of water movement once the cables are in place.

Transmission lines buried underwater are much less susceptible to damage by inclement weather or natural disasters.

In fact, “[i]f a cable is damaged, automatic protection systems stop the power flow within a fraction of a second...”.

Colleagues, to conclude, I think it's pretty clear that the opposition is trying to derail an investment that will benefit the Ontario economy, will benefit Ontario electricity ratepayers and will benefit our environment, and I think that's very unfortunate. I think it's also very unfortunate that it comes at this time, when we are seeing our largest trading partner, our next door neighbour—with the longest shared border in the world—returning to the Paris climate agreement and establishing their own net-zero emission goals.

This is a time, more than ever before in the history of these two countries, for collaboration and co-operation on our shared efforts to address the climate emergency head-on and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by any means that we can possibly come up with, including transborder transmission opportunities. It is incumbent on us to pursue this, not just because it's an economic imperative that will help us to recover from a pandemic-induced recession, but because it's an environmental imperative that is going to help us to restore the environment and make sure that we leave a habitable world for our children and grandchildren. I'd go further and say that this work toward reducing our GHGs, in collaboration with the United States, is a moral imperative. This is something that we must do.

There are many ways that we can go about reducing GHGs in North America. Putting a price on carbon pollution is high on the list. Changing behaviours among the public to shift modes of transport from single-occupant vehicles to active transportation and to electrified transit is another one. Encouraging our communities to grow and to develop in more dense, more walkable and less car-dependent physical arrangements is another one.

● (2055)

Furthermore, we can encourage young Canadians to pursue fields of study in the sciences, particularly in the environmental sci-

ences, so that they understand the seriousness of the stewardship role they're inheriting as they come of age. They will become the people who sit in the very chairs that we're sitting in now and lead this world into what today is an uncertain future. However, it can be a much brighter future, a much cleaner and greener future, if we allow good green infrastructure projects like the Erie Connector to proceed and if we create the economic and business case conditions that can encourage even more proponents to come forward with similar projects. We can build a critical mass of investment in the green, clean infrastructure of tomorrow that will help us reach our GHG reduction targets, whether they're provincial targets, national targets or shared targets under the Paris climate accord. This is how we're going to change the world, quite frankly, and leave a habitable world for our kids and grandkids.

I think I've made my point, so I'm going to leave it there. I thank my colleagues for their kind attention. I'm sure they will have more to say as time goes on.

● (2100)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fillmore.

Before I adjourn the meeting, I will remind members that witness lists for the study on the government's response to the downing of Ukraine flight 752 should be sent to the clerk as soon as possible. The first meeting will be Tuesday, May 11. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Transport will be making a joint appearance on Thursday, May 13.

Members, with that said, we had a great meeting. With nothing else to say and no questions, we will not move past nine o'clock because of health and safety reasons and strained resources, as I'm sure you well imagine.

I therefore adjourn the meeting.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>