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Chair

Mr. Dan Ruimy

Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

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• (1615)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dan Ruimy): I think this is a great example of how we should continue to move forward and not be afraid of conflict as we try to achieve consensus. The whole point here is to keep the dialogue open, and we're not always going to agree. As we continue to go forward, we'll have our say and we'll try to pass the motions and the majority will rule, but I think we want to keep that open mind.

So if it's okay, I'm going to go back to reading my little spot here.

Coming back to the industry portfolio, I'm just going to start again. Twelve federal departments and agencies make up the industry portfolio. Together these organizations are uniquely positioned to further the government's goal of building a knowledge-based economy in all regions of Canada and to advance the government's jobs and growth agenda.

Industry Canada works in partnership with the members of the industry portfolio to leverage resources and exploit synergies in a number of specific areas, and there are four.

First is “innovation through science and technology—helping firms and not-for-profit institutions more rapidly turn ideas into new products and services”. That's something that I heard around the room, so that's a really good thing.

Second is “trade and investment—encouraging more firms and more sectors to export to more markets, and helping Canadian firms attract a larger share of foreign direct investments”.

Third is “growth of small and medium-sized enterprises—providing access to capital, information and services”. Again, going around the room, we have a lot of business people here who bring a great perspective to the table.

Finally, the fourth area is “economic growth of Canadian communities—fostering new approaches to community economic development based on community strengths and information infrastructure”.

When I was reading this, my first thought was, who are we? What do we really do? What can we do? What's the potential? How can we actually take this and change the way we do business in Canada?

The industry portfolio includes the Business Development Bank of Canada, the Canadian Space Agency, the Competition Tribunal, the Copyright Board of Canada, Destination Canada, the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Industry Canada, the National Research Council of Canada, the Natural

Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Standards Council of Canada, and Statistics Canada.

This is an incredible portfolio and we have an incredible opportunity to think outside the sandbox, and maybe play a little bit differently. What I think we should do right now is maybe talk about potential future business and how it can apply in this strategy.

I'd like to open the floor up for discussion.

Mr. Dreeshen.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Certainly you've set the stage for our discussion. Given all the different agencies that are part of our committee's responsibilities, I think that's extremely critical.

From my experience in other committees, it was very important to have the ministers present the information they had in order to get things rolling. They more or less set the stage so that we knew where they were going and what things they had done. In the case of a mandate letter, we knew how they interpreted it, because those are all public documents. I think that's really one of the key issues.

Perhaps later I will take an opportunity to place a motion to have Minister Bains come here as soon as possible. I don't know whether it would be best to do it now, because I do want to say a few other things before we get to that stage, but that's really, I think, one of the critical parts.

We also have two other ministers. We should have an opportunity for them to explain what is important, what they've seen, and what their goals are. The reality is that we, as members of the House of Commons, are not within their ministries. We need to know from them what it is that is important and where their goals are going to be.

That's the first part. I'll come back to it again in perhaps a more formal way in a moment.

Other studies and other things that I know are critical in rural areas are broadband connectivity and the ability of businesses to expand. We have an amazing operation that takes place in my riding, in Olds, Alberta. It has the highest connectivity in the country, and that's basically because there are some businesses that have done some amazing work. Every course at Olds College, an agricultural college in my region, is completely linked in in terms of computer systems analysis. Amazing things have taken place there. That is an area that I believe we could be taking a look at, and we could look as well at how we could commercialize some of this technology and move it into other areas.

Those are the areas that I'd like to see us study. In order to get the ball rolling, we could ask about the availability of the minister, and I would be prepared to put a motion forward if that is in order, Mr. Chair. The motion that I have—

• (1620)

The Chair: Well—

Oh, sorry. I thought you were finished.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I was just asking if it is in order for me to—

The Chair: I think we should just take the time, go around, and see what motions or proposals are out there. Then we can have a discussion about them. You're right; there are so many things.

Go ahead, Mr. Nuttall.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): I have a few that I was thinking about since we got the agenda.

First of all, not to belabour the point—I was speaking with Mr. Masse earlier about this—but as of yesterday in Bombardier's announcement there was both some positive and some very negative news as well. I would like to see them before this committee. I'd like to understand what it is that they are facing right now, and what it is they're looking for from the government, whether it's just from a regulatory perspective or also a monetary perspective, because sometimes those things go hand in hand. Sometimes you can change one and it changes the other in terms of the need. That's something I'd like to see as soon as possible.

Secondly, I would like to see at some point a study of the repayable loan program, whether it's through FedDev or Western Economic Diversification. Governments in the past, including Conservative governments, have essentially purchased portions of companies. I'd like to understand the effect of that on the marketplace as well as on the government side.

Then there's something we've seen over and over again, which is in the minister's mandate letter, and hopefully we can talk to him about this when he gets here. There's a statement in there regarding the transition of manufacturing economies into some other economy. I'm not sure what that is, where those jobs are going, what that's going to look like, and how many jobs we're looking at. What are our goals, specifically in southwestern Ontario, to be very precise? The Prime Minister said that as well in the past, which was reiterated in the mandate letter.

I'd also like to understand what types of training programs would be provided to those people as we “transition” them out of

manufacturing jobs, as well as what the government would be looking at in terms of interim financial support to these people for whom we're trying to find other industries to go to.

The final one is a study of BDC. I'll tell you that one of the most frustrating things I've seen in our finance sector is when you have a private institution doing business against a taxpayer-owned crown corporation. It shouldn't happen, not in this economy, not in this country. One of the most frustrating things I've seen is when you have a private-sector finance company, credit union bank, tier one bank, going up against a publicly funded, publicly owned crown corporation like BDC for business.

That is not their mandate. Their mandate is to supply capital into the marketplace where it does not currently exist so that they can spur economic development, not replace dollars that the private sector's already putting forward. I can give you 100 different scenarios over the past five years that I've been involved in, and I've heard of others before that, where it blows your mind. It's just a poor use of taxpayers' money. That's certainly something I want to see us drive right down into.

If we can encourage BDC to free up funds to invest in areas that actually need capitalization and can't get it today, instead of being in places they shouldn't be, that can have a very strong economic benefit, specifically in the manufacturing sector.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thanks.

If we're brainstorming about where we go with this—and it is big with three ministries involved, a dozen agencies, and then other agencies that tie in—and knowing where to start with things, to be forward-looking, speaking with the ministers about what their visions are going forward, the three ministers who have mandate letters that attach to the work of this committee, is important.

Also, backward-looking, to say where we're coming from through the 12 agencies, the agencies themselves will have their own vision on what they see as blocks to innovation or competitiveness.

I'm on the agriculture committee as well. We've had some similar discussions about crossover in other areas—areas that may not be directly the work of this committee—things like transportation infrastructure and how do you get product to market? How do the border agencies work in order for us to move product back and forth over international borders? We could find other agencies as we go forward.

Right now, if we're trying to stay close to the treetops, to look at the top, and hopefully come to some types of motions as we have a discussion around the table, I'd like to see us thinking about getting input from the agencies that are attached, and other, let's say, barriers to business growth.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Masse is next.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Thank you.

I think it's critical to get the ministers in here as well to hear what they want to set as priorities. I think it's helpful for the minister as well. It's an important two-way dialogue that can also help shape us in terms of our work.

I like the idea of doing another manufacturing study. The reason I suggest it is that you can separate it, as we did, into different components. You'd have innovation as a component. You would have, for example, automobile manufacturing and aerospace. You can define all these different types of things, and it would be good groundwork. We did a couple of reports that were very good.

We have four years. One of the most difficult things about this committee is narrowing down from so many different topics, but a general study on manufacturing gives us plenty of opportunity. We could have one meeting on that subject and one meeting on another subject and get from that what their interests and priorities are. From there, we can move forward.

We had a series of recommendations. Some of them everybody will agree with and some of them we may not. We could have a supplementary report. Instead of a dissenting report, what I'd prefer to call it is a supplementary addition. It's not seen as negative, as a dissenting opinion is. It's just a difference of opinion. Sometimes they're necessary and sometimes they're not.

One thing outside the sandbox is studying food pricing through the retailing and distribution of it. I've met with a couple of food suppliers who have inefficiencies in their systems. With the price of food going up, there's an opportunity to discuss that. It includes the border and it includes producers' relationships with retailers.

There are all kinds of other things that can come up, but those are just a couple of ideas. Of course there's Postmedia as a smaller thing. That's important, as well as Canadian takeovers. We're looking now at the situation related to Rona, for example.

At any rate, that's why I like the general idea, in particular, of manufacturing, and then agreeing on the different components and having special meetings on each section of those components and building a really good report that could lead to recommendations and some other study deriving from that.

We're also very conscious of the fact that the minister eventually is going to have legislation that comes here. We understand that's a priority for the committee to take care of.

Thank you.

• (1630)

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Gladu.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): I agree that the scope is very broad. In addition to getting the ministers here and finding out what the departments are already doing that we don't need to do, you may want to have the parliamentary analysts take a look at what the committee previously was working on that still has further work to be done so that you can consider whether you'd like to do anything there.

There are only two other items that I would add. We have an issue in Canada in getting adequate venture capital at the right risk portfolio to move businesses ahead. I'd like to see us do something

on that. As well, we certainly have more interprovincial barriers to trade than I think we have with other countries. That might be something to look at also.

I apologize. I have to go and speak in the House, so I have somebody to sub in for me.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. Arya is next.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): To start off, there are several issues I would like to discuss. We can use the analysts here to give us briefings on things like IRB, now called ITB. For those people who don't know, this was industrial and regional benefits; now it's called industrial and technological benefits. These are the commitments made by defence suppliers or contractors to the government, equal to the contract value that they are supposed to invest or spend in Canada.

The definitions have been changed. Now defence contracts under \$100 million are exempted from the ITB. I would like to know more about it, because that is an excellent tool to stimulate economic growth here in the country.

Then there are the economic development agencies, such as FedDev, FedNor, and the western one. I think we will get a feeling that the investments they are making are not uniformly spread across the various regions. As for Ottawa, the FedDev investment per capita in Ottawa is minimal compared to the amount they are investing in southern and western Ontario. I would like to look into those things.

Then we have a strategic aerospace and defence initiative. Huge funds are there to help aerospace and defence companies to invest in R and D. I would like to know the progress that has been made. We don't know the total fund that is available under this program and how much is being used.

Finally, coming to the main issue of small and medium-sized manufacturing companies and the lack of capital that is available, today in this country if I want to start up a manufacturing company to manufacture this pen and the start-up costs are \$20 million, trust me, even if I have 25%, 30%, or 40% of the capital, there is no commercial bank that will be willing to fund me. There is a lack of financing available for small and medium-sized companies.

Just to contrast, 15 years back Canada was number two or number three in the world in aluminum manufacturing. In the last 15 years we have just had one tiny aluminum smelter set up here, and during the same 15 years, oil-rich Arab countries have set up five world-class aluminum smelters in a radius of 1,000 kilometres. We have to examine why.

I can tell you that one of the reasons manufacturing companies are flourishing there is that state-owned industrial development banks are there to step in and take part of the risk along with the entrepreneurs. We don't have an industrial policy here. Those oil-rich countries, like us, are rich in oil, but they don't have technology, they don't have expertise, and they don't have the market. We have all those things, but what they have is a clearly stated manufacturing policy or industrial policy with an objective of growing the share of the manufacturing sector in the GDP from 0.01% to a modest 3% to 4%. With that policy in hand, they have created state institutions to back that up, and they are implementing it.

Those are the kinds of things I think we should look into.

Thank you.

• (1635)

The Chair: Gentlemen, if I can try to make it a little easier here, a lot of the stuff that's coming out is really great stuff. I think meeting with the ministers is something that should happen, although I'm not sure what their time frame is like.

Mr. Nuttall, you mentioned the Business Development Bank. I've had my own dealings with the Business Development Bank. I was a consultant for them for 12 years at the time.

The challenge is that we have all these agencies here, but we really don't know what their mandates are. We really don't understand where they are coming from—their goals, their opportunities, even how they relate to innovation.

I find it difficult to try to understand how we move forward from that without getting an understanding of the individual agencies—maybe not all of them, but perhaps some of them. That might help us to clarify where they stand and what their issues are.

Go ahead, Mr. Nuttall.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: The one thing I would say—and I agree with you 100%—is that they need to come here. They need to determine what their mandate was over the last number of years, where they are at in that mandate, and if they are near the end of it, what they are going to do differently going forward to have even better results, or in some cases good results where they have had bad ones.

However, I would say this. Government is a top-down organization, specifically when you have a change in government. There are mandate letters put in place that will affect those things moving forward, so I think we should go to the organizations and ask what they are planning to do.

We first must say to those who are going to be in control of those organizations what it is that we want them to do and then move on from there. We may be able to provide some great critiques on where the specific minister and staff are going, or we may just say that it all looks like we're on the right path so let's keep going. I think the most important thing is to find out from the ministers how they plan on using these agencies, because the agencies could come in and then two weeks later they could have a completely different mandate.

The Chair: Mr. Dreeshen.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think we've all had an opportunity to present some ideas for future study. I'm not sure exactly what the process will be there, but I know that the clerk will be able to manage that as we go forward.

This is one of the things that I mentioned earlier, and I am now taking this opportunity to make the request that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology invite the Honourable Navdeep Bains, Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, to appear on Tuesday, February 22, 2016, to present his mandate, and that the meeting be televised.

That's the motion I have.

The Chair: One of the challenges, because the government is still a new government, is putting the date down. He might not be able to make that date. If you change the motion to not put in the date or a suggested date, that would probably make a little bit more sense.

• (1640)

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: What if it said “earliest convenience”? That's our next meeting.

The Chair: Yes, I'm fine with that. However, Mr. Baylis has something he wants to say.

Mr. Frank Baylis (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): I think it's a good idea to have the minister here at some point, but I would say that I'm very much bottom up as opposed to top down. I think that we might speak to these departments and they might tell us something that they want to tell us instead of saying, “Well, the minister has told us this.” We want to hear from them first, unvarnished, so I would strongly suggest that we first do a review of the major departments—maybe all of them or not—and have them in here and listen to what they have to say.

Once we've heard their points of view, then I would look at it and say, “Okay, we've heard what they have to say, but what is the minister looking for them to do?” I would not do the minister first at all. I would very much start with learning what's going on. There's a tremendous amount of stuff that we need to be brought up to speed on, and I'm not there.

The Chair: Mr. Arseneault is next.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chair, he said what I wanted to say.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: I would ask for a little subamendment. Add that potential date and then ask for “and if possible, within the next following two weeks”. It would give the minister some flexibility, we would get some definition of appropriate time, and this would give some sensitivity to the minister's schedule. That's the way I would do it.

It would be a friendly amendment. It gives a time frame that I think is reasonable. If the minister can't do it even within the two weeks, I'm sure that by our suggesting a day and then suggesting that it happen within that time frame, he is likely to come back and say, “Okay, no, it's going to be in the third week.” It's a clear indication that we want him to come in front of us, and a clear indication also that we recognize the scheduling issues that the minister might have.

The Chair: Mr. Arya.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Number one, I don't know if a motion is required at all. I'm not sure whether every time we want to invite a minister such a motion has to be passed in this committee. Is a formal motion required?

The Chair: Or consensus.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Okay. Then we can just pass a general motion that all three ministers be invited and leave it to the chair to get in touch with the ministers and fix the appropriate dates.

The Chair: Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I think we have to do it all.

If invited, the departments would come, I would assume, if not any time, probably more conveniently than the ministers, possibly. If we're working on the ministers' schedules, we could have the departments come and continue informing us on where they're at. I'm also very much bottom up versus top down, and I think that hearing from the people on the ground is a really good first start. If we had a choice, that's where I'd want to go.

The Chair: Mr. Baylis.

Mr. Frank Baylis: If we're going to have a motion, my motion to Earl's point would be that we do not invite the minister until we've done our homework and met the departments. That would be my proposed amendment to your proposed amendment to the motion.

The Chair: That's a different motion.

Mr. Nuttall.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a few things. First of all, an amendment that would be allowed is that I would ask that we include the deputy ministers on the invitation for each of the three.

Secondly, in terms of top down and bottom up, I'm not trying to insinuate that the information on the ground is not as valuable as the information coming from the minister. However, there is a structure and there is a level of command, and I heard loud and clear from the government that things are going to change.

Well, how are they going to change? I say, please come here and tell us how they're going to change, and then we can get objective, third-party, professional advice from each of the 14 or 15 different bureaucracies. That is a very professional way to do it.

The other thing—and somebody said this—is that if we want to invite the agencies at the same time as the ministers and go around what the minister says, then that's great. At the same time, if the minister says that he isn't coming here for two and a half months, I have an issue with that.

• (1645)

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): In the interests of time and getting something accomplished, I think everyone agrees that we want to hear from the ministers and we want to hear from the industry portfolios. Is that correct?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Everyone agrees.

Now, we have also made the request that we would like to see the minister at the earliest possible time. Can these two be parallel?

Can we start with the portfolios? I believe we have a lot more flexibility to ask them to come here and give us the state of the nation as they see it and also to ask them where they're going in the future. In the meantime, we can put the requests to all three ministers and ask them when their earliest available time is. If we hear that it's three months from now, we can put a motion together that it's not acceptable and ask if we can have an earlier time.

We're presuming that the ministers are not going to be available or we're presuming that the ministers are going to be available in two weeks. Neither of those is correct, because they're not fact based.

I'm not sure whether this is a new motion, an amendment to a motion, or an amendment to an amendment of a motion, but the key thing is, can these two be parallel?

We put the request in and then we'll see what happens.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: A request to all of them...?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Yes.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: We'd request the ministers, the deputy ministers, and agencies to come to make presentations...?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: No, not at the same time, but we'll put the request and then ask the minister, "When is the earliest time...?" If their response is that it's going to be two and a half months from now, then we have an issue and we can say that's not acceptable—if that's the case.

The Chair: If I can jump in here, the ministers will come when they're available to come. The departmental agencies in our portfolio will come when we tell them to come.

We're going around here. I think we all agree that we want to have the ministers come to see us.

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: Let's deal with that one. Let's put that one to rest.

Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Chair.

That's why I amended the motion. The worst thing you can get in a committee is a ping-pong match between the minister's schedule and the committee. It doesn't do anybody any good, so that's why I think the motion and the amendment to the motion make sense. We're not giving an ultimatum. We're suggesting that if the minister can't make it, then there's a two-week opportunity. They'll look at that, and if they can't actually make that happen, I'm sure he'll know how important it is and will come in a reasonable time frame soon after. I've seen this too many times where it becomes a ping-pong match between....

I think that's more important than just asking the minister to show up, because it's a blank slate. I think the priority is the issue. I'll stop there, with no more interventions, and let you finish your job.

The Chair: We want to be effective with our time. Again, we all agreed that we can invite our ministers, right? At the same time, it sounds like it's probably a good idea to also pick and choose some of the agencies that we may want to have come in and act as witnesses for us. They can give us a debriefing.

I hear what you're saying with the minister, top down, but I also hear that as part of our way of doing new things, we want to think outside the box. For me to listen to the head of one of the agencies come here and give us fluff...I don't think any of us want that. I think we want to know a little more as to what's holding them back and what they think their challenges are.

I think the two aren't necessarily connected, the minister's office and.... Because committees are supposed to operate independently, correct? I know from our conversations that we want to be independent, so it's nice to have the ministers here and it's nice to have their mandates here, but I think, too, that we can try to do our own research, and from there.... For instance, if we do bring in the BDC, we may find something in there that can actually speak directly to what you were referring to, and that might actually open the door to something really incredible.

Mr. Dreeshen.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you.

I certainly appreciate Brian's amendment. Changing it to "as soon as possible" certainly works for me, but from my experience on committees, I've yet to see a minister dragging his feet. When they're asked to appear, they appear as quickly as possible.

The other thing is that when the minister comes, he also comes with departmental people. Usually what happens is that the minister is there for the first hour, and in the second hour you have the opportunity to grill the officials. That is then a chance for us to maybe move in a little more to those particular agencies and get some information from them.

Rather than bringing those officials from the agencies to be there, it would be better to actually have that discussion with the department heads and go from there. Then we might have a little better idea on how to move forward with that.

That is all I will say to the particular motion. As soon as you're ready, we can deal with that.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Baylis.

Mr. Frank Baylis: I completely disagree with us not doing our homework first. I think we have to do our homework. We have to learn. We have a number of agencies we have to speak to.

Mr. Nuttall made a point about the BDC and some problems we've seen there. I can tell you that I've had multi-million dollar loans from the BDC. At one time, one of my companies was the biggest consultant to the BDC, so I have a completely different view from yours. I have probably a much deeper understanding, and even I think I could still benefit from speaking to them. I'm ready to say....

I have a different motion, but we can vote on this first one. I am saying that our first job is to bring ourselves up to speed on the

different departments, and at that time we can speak to the ministers. But I don't like putting the cart ahead of the horse.

The Chair: Mr. Nuttall, go ahead.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: I sincerely appreciate that. It's great you've worked with the BDC. I am sure they will come and make a great presentation.

I also know that I've referred millions and millions and millions of dollars of business to them and worked very closely with them in the past. That doesn't take away the fact that they are still in competition with private sector financing—

Mr. Frank Baylis: No, they're not. That is an incorrect statement.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Chair, could the member please close his mic? Thank you.

I would also say this. You talk about working independently, and we need to. I think one of the things we heard in the election is that it needs to be done, that we need to be third-party, separate from the government, objective. Part of that is understanding what the government is doing.

If we actually see a gap, we aren't just going to sit here and communicate that to the minister. We're also going to say, "You know what? There's a gap here that we need to fill." That's our job, to fill those voids. Let's figure out what those gaps are. If the government is already taking care of it, we don't need to spend your resources and all the staff time going down roads that we just don't need to, because the government is already attending to those.

The Chair: Monsieur Arseneault.

[Translation]

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question about procedure. I want to make sure I have understood correctly.

Mr. Nuttall moved a motion, and Brian Masse proposed an amendment. Is that indeed the procedure to follow? Perhaps Mr. Préfontaine could confirm.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Roger Préfontaine): Yes, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault: I am requesting a vote because we are going around in circles and we should be moving forward. Is this the time to request a vote? What does the procedure dictate? Are we voting on the first amendment or on the main motion?

The Clerk: There is just one thing I could say, Mr. Arseneault. The principle is that the debate in committee should not be limited. Members have the right to speak and can debate the motion put forward as they see fit, under the chair's guidance, of course.

Mr. René Arseneault: But in this case, the debate is not about the amendment to the motion. That is my understanding. The debate is about the first motion.

The Chair: Yes, it is about the first motion.

Mr. René Arseneault: Unless I misunderstood, an amendment was proposed by Mr. Masse.

[English]

The Chair: What is the motion that's put forward here? Could you repeat that, please, Mr. Dreeshen?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: The original motion I put forth said, "That the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology invite the Honourable Navdeep Bains, Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, to appear on Tuesday, February 22, 2016, to present his mandate, and that the meeting be televised."

The friendly amendment that was discussed was to make that "as soon as possible" rather than the date.

• (1655)

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: My question is with the amendment. What would be the new wording, that we are asking Mr. Bains to be here at the earliest possible time? Is that the amendment?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Yes.

The Chair: It's important to understand that—you can shake your head—there's a bunch of people here and we want to be comfortable with everything. I understand that you have strong opinions. This side has strong opinions too, so let's keep our composure here and let's be respectful. All right?

Is the motion to invite Minister Bains, or all three ministers?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I believe that we should start with the minister, but—

The Chair: Okay, so the motion is Mr. Bains at his earliest convenience. That's the motion.

(Motion negatived [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Mr. Baylis.

Mr. Frank Baylis: I have a motion that will start with a bottom-up approach by educating ourselves before we move on to the political agendas. I think this is what our electorate would like us to do, to take informed decisions based on informed information. I have a different motion.

My motion would be that a representative from each of the agencies in our portfolio be asked to appear before the committee and provide a briefing on their state of the union for their departments and to include what are their biggest challenges, their biggest opportunities, and what are their overall goals, and to do this with a focus on innovation.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: I don't know why we'd add "focus on innovation".

Second, usually you try to set up the earliest meeting with the minister and then you'd fill in your time until the minister got there with the different departments that you wanted. If the departments are busy, then they'll stall the minister from coming here, and then we have to go through this all again. I don't understand this at all.

The Chair: My understanding through the clerk is that if we request the department head to be here on Tuesday, they will be here on Tuesday.

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes, but again we do so without securing the minister's spot. We go through that and then we have to fight again for the minister's spot because we haven't invited the minister. We delay everything that we're going to do, including other business.

If we want to have these departments come, why just innovation? I mean, there are other things. We have so many different.... Are we going to have the Canadian Tourism Commission come here to talk about innovation? I want to hear about other things that they have in their mandate, so I'd just leave it blank and do that.

Again, the practice has been to try to get the minister as soon as possible. It's actually healthy for the minister. Then, you backfill with some of that stuff that you have.

The Chair: I hear what you're saying. Unfortunately, that was voted down. The motion we have in front of us right now is....

Clearly from this side of the table, their approach is bottom-up. I'm trying to include everybody on this, but at the end of the day it's different philosophies and bottom-up is where this group wants to go.

Mr. Brian Masse: I have an amendment.

Let's strike out "innovation" then, if we're going to do that, because I want a free chance. It's not that I won't be asking questions about innovation or whatever, but I don't want them coming here just prepared for innovation. I want them coming here prepared for the department.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Nuttall.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Thank you.

I have a few things here. First of all, I hope we can get to a vote by 5:30.

Secondly, I'm looking at this, and you know, we can invite all of these organizations here—and we should put them all in line to come—and we should invite the ministers to come as well. The way I see it right now is that what's being practised is a block by the Liberal members of Parliament on this committee—let's call a spade a spade—from getting the ministers to come to this committee. You can say it's because you want a bottom-up approach, or you can put any lipstick on it that you want, but at the end of the day, this is interpreted as, "We don't want the minister to come here and face any questions from the industry committee." I'm concerned about that.

Look at the different organizations that are being invited. Does anyone here honestly believe that under the mandate being given to them by the government we're going to hear different from what the government has asked them to do? What we're going to hear from these organizations is "these are our marching orders". There may be things left outside of that which they want to communicate to us, which is a good thing; however, they're going to communicate their marching orders.

You're from business. That's what happens, right? You give the order. You're the CEO or the whatever and you give the order. You tell them what to do and they go out and they implement. That's what the agencies are meant to do, to be implementing the vision. If we think that for some reason they're going to come here and go outside of that, it's a dream. It's just not going to happen. They would face consequences for that.

As we're looking forward here, guys, I think we need to come to some sort of agreement. I don't think that what my colleague has put forward in inviting a minister to come to a committee where he's to be held accountable by the people of Canada is a bad thing. That is a good thing. That is a practice of democracy. I will stand up for that seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

• (1700)

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: You cannot.... Actually, that's a good question. I'm glad you brought that up, motions for the previous question.

An hon. member: Point of order—

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: The motion "That this question be now put" is known as the previous question. In the House, the previous question is a debatable motion. When the debate ends, the motion for the previous question is put to a vote. If the motion is carried, the initial motion under consideration is immediately put to a vote. In committee, motions for the previous question are inadmissible.

So I actually have the floor as long as I need it.

We should discuss how we can get both the agencies and the ministers to come to this committee, because that's the business of this committee. That's why we are elected and what we've been put here by our parties to do, the business of this committee.

I will stand up for it for the next 27 minutes. We can keep talking. I know you have a lot of time, and so do we. Let's make sure we're doing our job, guys.

The Chair: Perfect. Let's talk about some other things, then.

Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I really like the approach we're taking in terms of educating ourselves from the departments. I don't think that precludes us inviting the ministers in once we have a sense of what's going on, what's working, and what isn't working. I think that having the parliamentary secretaries here to also hear those conversations will help the whole process so that we aren't out of touch with the ministries.

But I think it's very, very important to hear from the front-line people. The approach that Mr. Baylis took I thought followed best business practices, and that's to get your information as close to the source as you can and then work on it as a management team, which would definitely include the ministers.

They're really two different business approaches. It's not to say that we won't talk to ministers, because we obviously need to have ministers' input to the committee. We also need the input of significant businesses and also need to go out in the field to talk to businesses. I think we need to be really engaged as close to the front line as we can, so that as situations change in the economy....

All of us are here to try to grow the Canadian economy and to help with export development. We have the four points that you've rightly put on the table, and I think that if we had those on the wall.... That is what our focus is. It isn't partisan politics here. We're not trying to block each other. We're trying to find an approach where we can educate ourselves so that we can do the best job we can for our constituents, regardless of what part of the country we come from or what political party we come from.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Baylis, and then Mr. Nuttall.

Mr. Frank Baylis: In his opening, Mr. Nuttall stated his ideas of things we should look at before the idea of speaking to the ministers. One point he brought up was that BDC is in direct competition with private banks.

Now, as a person who has taken loans from both private banks and from BDC, I can tell you—I've done a lot of work with them—that the BDC charges generally two to three percentage points higher than a private bank. They only step in when you cannot get a loan from a private bank. I don't see how this is competition. If I could get a loan from an existing bank, I wouldn't go to get a loan that was 2% or 3% higher. It's not part of their mandate. They don't compete, unless you think....

This is just my personal business experience, but I tend to get a loan with the lowest interest rate, if I can. So I don't see that it's competition.

The fact that you made the statement further confirms to me the need for us to be educated. I do not think it's the minister's job to come here and tell us how the BDC works. As my colleague Mr. Longfield says, I think we should speak to the BDC about how they work. If you don't believe them, you can question them and you can read more about them, but to bring the minister here to ask him to tell us how they work doesn't make any sense to me.

I think we should do our homework. This is what we should debate. I think we've already made a vote on the last question, and if we're not going to waste our time and if we're going to move forward, let's move on the new motion I've put forward.

• (1705)

The Chair: Mr. Nuttall.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: That's the way it works. It's democracy, right? You have a majority. You're going to win the votes when you need to. But we still have to listen to each other speak, just like I listened to Mr. Baylis.

There are a couple of things. First of all, if I were a betting man—and I'm not—I would make a bet that when BDC finally comes in here, they will give you examples of where they're in direct competition with private sector banks.

I know that: I just can't give you a personal example. That would be breaking my client privilege that I have to respect under the Privacy Act from when I was in finance, so I won't. However, I can give you sectors that they're involved in, which are ridiculous, such as the hospitality and hotel sector in urban centres. You sit there and you go, "How is that spurring economic development?" They're traded—

Mr. Frank Baylis: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Well, because the banks are already funding these things.

We will find these things out when they come here. I can't wait for them to come here and do that. We need to invite them to come here and answer those questions.

Those are not the questions I will be asking the minister when he comes here. When the minister comes here, we'll be asking about a very broad approach. To think that the minister would somehow.... As you've said, that I would be asking him questions on a specific issue like that would not be rational.

We will be asking him, what is your broad approach? What vision do you see? There are areas of this country where we were split, in southern Ontario with FedDev, in northern Ontario. We have western diversification. We have northern. We have maritime. We have Quebec. What are the opportunities for the Government of Canada to have a very positive effect in those marketplaces? How are you seeing those tools being used, moving forward?

Those are the types of questions we really do need to ask the minister when he comes.

Another one would be if we had in some of the other ministers. I can think of tourism. Maybe there is an opportunity for BDC to be in that industry, and tourism is something we can have them involved with. We should be asking those same questions there as well.

At the end of the day, having the ministers come here and be accountable to this committee is a good thing.

Mr. Frank Baylis: You didn't put a motion asking for the ministers. You put a motion to ask for one minister.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: For one minister; you're absolutely right.

Mr. Frank Baylis: And you've decided already that tourism—

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: I had the floor.

Mr. Brian Masse: That's not in order, asking back and forth.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Absolutely.

Why would we move to have multiple other ministers come when we couldn't have the minister who's really in control of most of the portfolio here? At the end of the day, what should be done is that at the same time that we move forward with the agencies coming in, we should be inviting the ministers as well.

Why on earth would a committee not want the ministers to come to it? Even if you were to say, "We want the ministers to come, but after the agencies", why wouldn't we start with the invitation now? It just makes sense.

The only thing I can think of is that you don't want the ministers here to be held accountable. That makes no sense to me. We were elected to do a job. Let's do it, guys. Let's invite them to come here. Let's have them come and be held accountable.

Yes, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: If I can interject, the motion that we're discussing right now is inviting the department heads.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Absolutely.

The Chair: I think you need to address that motion rather than the ministers, because that motion has already been overruled.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: You're right. I would actually move an amendment.

Is there an amendment on the floor already?

Mr. Brian Masse: I already moved an amendment to eliminate the word "innovation" as a priority. It's not because I don't care about innovation; it's just that I want them to be able to present an overall platform here if I'm going to make use of my time. I will have innovation questions, but I don't want any constraints on them.

● (1710)

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Clerk, is there a rule here in regard to an amendment to an amendment? I know it's different in different areas and levels of government.

The Clerk: The committee will need to deal with the amendment to begin with.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Okay. Then you're right that I am not speaking to the amendment, so we should deal with the amendment.

The Chair: The amendment is to take "innovation" out of that statement.

Do we need to read it again? The clerk will read it.

The Clerk: The motion is that a representative of the agencies in our portfolio be asked to appear before the committee and provide a briefing on the state of the union (for the departments) and to include where their biggest challenges are with a focus on innovation.

Mr. Masse moved—

Mr. Frank Baylis: I don't think so. It says, "challenges, opportunities, and goals". Then the last part was "with a focus on innovation", and that you're proposing to take off.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: On a point of order, could we actually have this distributed in both official languages?

The Chair: The amendment is to take out "with a focus on innovation".

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

The Chair: Mr. Nuttall.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: I just have one other procedural question, through you, Mr. Chair, to your clerk.

After a motion is amended, are we still allowed to move any other amendments to the earlier amended motion?

The Chair: Yes. You can move an amendment.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: I don't know the exact wording, but I would move that on top of the agencies we also invite the ministers responsible to come at their earliest convenience.

The Chair: We have a proposed amendment. That amendment is to also invite the ministers at their earliest convenience.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Could we have a recorded vote, please?

The Chair: Gentlemen....

Mr. Frank Baylis: Let's just vote on it. I propose we vote on that amendment.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: I've asked for a recorded vote on the amendment.

The Chair: The amendment is to include the three ministers, at their earliest convenience.

Mr. Frank Baylis: I'm going to propose an amendment to that amendment, then. It would be "at their earliest convenience after the committee has done its work to meet with the departments".

The Chair: We've already established that we will do one amendment at a time, so we'll need to deal with the first amendment.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: I think we're getting closer, Mr. Baylis, with what you've proposed. We're not there yet, but we're getting close.

Essentially, where I come from, we talk about 360 reviews. Has everyone heard of a 360 review before? A 360 review means that the review needs to happen on the top, on the bottom, and everywhere in between, because you can find a tonne of useful information while you're doing it.

What we're talking about right now is doing a 360 review but not including anybody on the top. It's just as impractical as doing a 360 review and not including the agencies.

This side of the table is asking that we concurrently move on both. Let's have the agencies here. Let's have the ministers here. If the ministers are that packed, which I believe they are, especially Minister Bains, who has a very large portfolio, we don't want to wait until we're done to ask Minister Bains to join us.

We want to schedule this thing so that we can have it all happen and be as fruitful as we need to be. Wasting half an hour here, to me, is worth it to make sure that we don't waste five weeks two months down the road.

• (1715)

The Chair: Are you done, Mr. Nuttall?

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: For now, for sure.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Longfield.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: With respect, I think we are getting into semantics a bit. With the first part of the 360 review, in our case we're saying let's get the departments to us. The second half of the 360 review is getting the ministers and deputies in front of us. Then, we do have a full picture.

At this point, what we're talking about doing, the first half of that 360 review, is to bring in the departments and consult with them.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Can I ask Mr. Longfield a question?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Longfield, I hear you.

I would like to ask you one key question going forward. We're going to have information coming out of the mandate letter. The mandate letter is a very broad document. We're going to be able to get some information, because the minister doesn't just have a letter in his hand that he was given three and a half months ago, he's

actually been doing the work. In FedDev, for instance, which I'm a critic for, there have been six announcements, I think, and roughly \$75 million or \$80 million handed out. They're going to know some really key information; we're going to be able to ask some questions.

Then following that information, in terms of the broad focus, we're going to be able to move to the agencies at the same time and ask how this broad focus is aligning down through the organizations. How are they hitting the ground and implementing what your government is proposing?

Systematically, when you start with the annual review process, the 360 review process, you want to start by saying, what is it that you have given in terms of the marching orders so that we have something to measure against.

What we're going to get now is that they don't know what the measurements are. "We don't know what the goals are. We don't know what the tasks are that you guys have been given. Just tell us what you think you want to do." All we're going to be doing, then, is inviting these people back after we have the ministers, to say, for instance in southwestern Ontario manufacturing, how is it that you're implementing what the minister, his deputy minister, and the staff in that department have tasked you with?

It's just common sense.

The Chair: Mr. Arya.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Look, I'm all for listening to everybody's views, having open discussions, but this is going on and on and on.

Can you please read the motion and put it to a vote?

The Chair: Mr. Dreeshen was next.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My issue in this particular case is this. Here we are, sort of the board of directors, and the first thing we're saying is that we don't want to talk to the CEO. I think it's important that we deal with that, and part of the amendment is to try to make that happen as quickly as we can.

The unfortunate part of taking the approach that is being suggested is that we end up interpreting what the mandate letter is. Therefore, we can interject any little piece of it that we wish in the discussion. The mandate letter is public. We know what it is, but we don't know the interpretation or the direction that the ministers are going in this regard. This is the reason that it's critical.

The overall motion does speak to bringing in the departments. As I said earlier, the process has been that the minister comes in for the first hour with his officials; in the second hour his officials stay there, and that discussion is where you can put some meat on the bones of the mandate letter. If we don't know where the minister is, then we are all interpreting where that is going to be. Believe me, the opposition may have some different interpretations than the government might have once that has been presented.

I think it's in the government's best interests to make sure that the discussion on the mandate letter, which can only come from the minister, is the first move that we have.

Thank you.

● (1720)

The Chair: Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: I find it really unusual that we wouldn't invite the minister as part of one of our first meetings. That's not the norm here. The norm on all the committees is to have the minister, and having the minister appear at the "earliest opportunity" is about the weakest you could do to invite a minister. That doesn't even include a date. It doesn't have a response time. It doesn't have anything. It simply says that the industry committee—sorry, I mean the innovation, science, and technology committee—is interested in hearing from the minister, so you get a chance....

I think having the agencies come here is a really good example of a good thing to do. I think that's a real benefit, but you know what? I'd rather hear from the minister at a time more convenient to his schedule than to their schedule, at the earliest time possible, and then perhaps there is a time frame in which we can hear from the minister and then we will go back and finish the other work being done because it is more convenient for the minister.

If it's a month later that we're finally meeting with the minister, I've never seen anything like that before. I really haven't. I think this is a fair compromise. It's not demanding a date. It's not demanding a time of response. It is at least telling the minister that we're interested and we want to hear from them, and all we have to do is interrupt something that we're doing—and we should do that anytime, no matter what. If the minister wants to come here when we're doing a study on something or when we're doing legislation, then that should always be our priority. It's a two-way street.

The Chair: Monsieur Arseneault.

[Translation]

Mr. René Arseneault: My question may appear to be off topic, but it isn't really.

The meeting should end at 5:30 p.m. I am sitting on another committee this evening. The meeting is supposed to last three hours. It is about physician-assisted dying. That meeting is very important, and I must leave. What are the rules of procedure regarding the 5:30 p.m. deadline?

[English]

Mr. Chandra Arya: I think we have had enough discussions. It's going on and on and on.

[Translation]

Mr. René Arseneault: Will it be finished at 5:30 p.m.? Can the meeting continue after that time?

[English]

The Chair: No. It can continue and if you do leave, then we—

[Translation]

Mr. René Arseneault: Procedural rules may be different in other committees, but we should have a vote to be able to extend the meeting's length. The same situation happened the day before yesterday. We finished at 11:30 p.m., and we had to vote.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, as per the clerk, the notice of meeting was 3:30 to 5:30. In order for the meeting to continue, we need to have a consensus. Do we have a consensus?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Can I please ask, through the chair, to the clerk, to read the motion again and ask for an immediate vote after that? Thank you.

● (1725)

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: That's actually against the rules. Point of order, that's against the rules.

On a point of parliamentary privilege, you can't force the vote on this. What we can do is we can all—

A voice: [Inaudible—Editor]

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Excuse me. You're not an elected member. Please.

Mr. Frank Baylis: I have a question—

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: This is interesting. Again, the whip's office is taking control in here. It's incredible. This is not what we were told was going to happen. Mr. Trudeau stood up time after time.... I agree with Trudeau on this.

Mr. Frank Baylis: I have just a quick question. You know, we were in camera and we decided to go public because we thought we'd be more productive and there would be less political posturing and that. That clearly hasn't happened, so the question to the clerk is this. Can we have a vote just to go back in camera right now? Can that vote be done now, right now?

The Clerk: Yes, and it's non-debatable.

Mr. Frank Baylis: I'm putting that motion forward right now. Let's have a vote.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: I don't want to debate. I want to ask a question.

Mr. Frank Baylis: No, let's have a vote. I want to follow the order....

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: It's not a debate. I don't want to debate with you. I want to ask a question.

Mr. Frank Baylis: Excuse me. Thank you. I've been told to follow the rules, and I'm trying my best. If I understand, if I put the motion now I want to go back in camera, to the clerk and the rules, can that happen right now?

The Clerk: Yes.

Mr. Frank Baylis: Yes. Okay, then I put it, and—

The Chair: I just want to bring your attention to the original conversation about why we asked for it to be in camera. The comment was that we could go back to it, if we were having a challenge and that's where we are right now.

The motion is to go in camera

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair, before this vote.

Just to go back to what you've now cited me as saying—and I did say it and I agree 100%, but at the same time, so that my words are fulsome and on the record, because they were in camera before—what I said was that the point of going in public was so that the public knows the decisions we're making and the reasons for making them. If we're going back in camera, I would ask the question—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: I'm not debating. This is not a debate; this is a point of order.

The point of order question is to the mover. Please tell this committee for what purpose you want to go in camera. It's not a debate; it's a point of order question.

Mr. Frank Baylis: If I understand the rules—

The Chair: Sorry, kids—hold on—it's non-debatable.

Mr. Frank Baylis: Let's have the vote, please.

The Chair: As per the clerk, it is non-debatable.

Mr. Frank Baylis: If you'd like to follow the points of order, let's have the vote.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We will go in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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