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Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen



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• (1655)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 18 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

Today's meeting is taking place in using the new webinar format. Webinars are for public committee meetings and are available only to members, their staff and witnesses. Members may have remarked that the entry to the meeting was much quicker and that we are immediately entering into an active participation, bearing in mind that we've had a little bit of delay here in getting the witnesses. All functionalities for active participants remain the same. Staff will be non-active participants only and can therefore can only view the meeting in gallery view.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind all participants at this meeting that screenshots and taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

To ensure an orderly meeting, we have a few rules to follow, please.

Interpretation in this video conference will work much like it is in a regular committee meeting. You have a choice at the bottom of your screen to either use the floor, English or French.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name and, when you're ready to speak, you can click on the microphone to activate your mike. When you're not speaking, we would ask that your mike be on mute.

To raise a point of order during the meeting, committee members should ensure that their microphone is unmuted and say "point of order" to get the chair's attention.

In order to ensure social distancing in the committee room, if you need to speak privately with the clerk or the analysts during the meeting, please email them through their committee email addresses.

For those people who are participating in the committee room, please note that masks are required unless seated and when physical distancing is not possible.

Now, with that, we have one witness here.

Thank you, Ms. Bull, for being with us.

I'll invite her to have some opening remarks, and, hopefully, by the time she's done, we will have the second witness so we can proceed further.

Ms. Bull, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Tabatha Bull (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, COVID-19 Supply Council): [*Witness spoke in Ojibwa and provided the following text:*]

Aanii, Tabatha Bull n'indignikaaz, Nipissing n'indoonjibaa, Migizi dodem.

[*Witness provided the following translation:*]

Hello, my name is Tabatha Bull. I am from Nipissing First Nation, and I belong to the Eagle Clan.

[English]

As president and CEO of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, I want to thank you, Mr. Chair and all distinguished members of the committee, for the opportunity to provide you with my testimony and to answer your questions.

Speaking to you from my home office, I acknowledge the land as the traditional territory of many nations, including Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

From the beginning of the pandemic, the government provided supports for business. A number of those supports were required to be remedied to include indigenous businesses. CCAB has repeatedly highlighted the need for a navigator function specific to indigenous business to assist with the understanding and uptake of the various programs. Indigenous businesses have found navigating the bureaucracy, which often does not consider their unique legal and place-based circumstances, a significant barrier to accessing the supports necessary to keep their businesses alive and maintain their well-being.

The lack of targeted assistance for indigenous business to utilize these government supports underlines the need for an indigenous economic recovery strategy that is indigenous-led, builds indigenous capacity and is well resourced to support indigenous prosperity and well-being.

Such a strategy was not mentioned in the recent Speech from the Throne, nor the fall economic statement. We acknowledge the number of important renewed commitments that were made, but there was no mention of efforts to support the economic empowerment of indigenous peoples, businesses or communities. We hope the government will use the upcoming budget to signal to Canadians that indigenous prosperity and economic reconciliation matters.

During my previous appearances before the House of Commons Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs on May 29 and November 17, I stated that unique circumstances facing indigenous businesses were not initially considered when forming the eligibility of CEBA or Bill C-14. This left many ineligible for the wage subsidy. We appreciate that these gaps were remedied. However, we must not forget the additional burden the almost month-long gap had on many indigenous businesses.

Unfortunately when the government introduced Bill C-9, which extended the benefits for rent and wage subsidies, CCAB again had to underline that the government did not consider the unique circumstances facing indigenous business. In this case, it took 82 days to receive clarity from federal officials that the aboriginal economic development corporations are likely not eligible for the rent subsidy. This delay and the disappointing response demonstrate that indigenous businesses continue to be an afterthought when programs are designed to support Canadian businesses.

To support sound federal policy development and effective interventions during the pandemic and in collaboration with leading national indigenous organizations, CCAB undertook two COVID-19 indigenous business surveys to understand the impact of COVID-19. From our most recent survey, we found that nearly half had to let go of staff. Although 57% of indigenous businesses remained open throughout the pandemic, 30% of those businesses surveyed indicated they would survive less than six months without additional financial support. In this vein, I would like to underline that indigenous businesses have repeatedly told us they cannot take on any more debt.

I also mentioned in my appearances at House and Senate committees that numerous indigenous businesses were prepared to readily provide PPE to meet Canada's medical needs. Lists of such indigenous businesses were provided to numerous federal departments as early as March 2020, but only a small fraction of the over \$6 billion of federal procurement contracts for PPE was awarded to indigenous business. In a press release of September 21, 2020, it was noted that seven indigenous companies were awarded contracts totalling approximately \$2.5 million. This equates to 0.04% of the federal spend on PPE. We understand through discussion with PSPC and through our own combing of publicly available data this value is slightly higher. However we continue to be unable to obtain confirmation of the total spend on PPE in indigenous businesses.

To remedy this information gap, I would like to propose that this committee consider measures that would mandate government departments and agencies to report on their purchases from indigenous businesses as a part of their submissions to the main estimates and the supplementary estimates committee. Simply put, we cannot evaluate and improve upon what we do not measure and report.

I would like to leave you with this point of consideration. Too often, indigenous business concerns are an afterthought, resulting in indigenous organizations like CCAB working to prove to government that their response has not met the needs of indigenous peoples.

A reasonable starting point to support indigenous economic recovery would include procurement and infrastructure set-asides for indigenous businesses and communities respectively, and for government organizations to publicly report these expenditures.

• (1700)

CCAB is committed to continuing to work in collaboration with the government and our members and partners to help rebuild and strengthen a path toward reconciliation and a healthy and prosperous Canada.

Thank you, all, very much for your time.

Chi-meegwetch.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bull, for your presentation.

I see that Mr. McHattie is here with us.

Please go ahead.

Mr. David McHattie (Vice-President, Institutional Relations Tenaris Canada, Chair of the Board of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, COVID-19 Supply Council): Good afternoon and thank you, everyone.

My name is David McHattie. I'm vice-president of institutional relations for Tenaris in Canada. I'm the board chair of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadians has been severe by any metric, and I believe that the impact will be lasting for a considerable period of time. I was appointed to the COVID-19 supply council to provide insight and expertise regarding impacts on the Canadian manufacturing sector and how it can better support Canada during this time of need.

As an essential business for Canadians that directly generates 10% of GDP and employs directly 1.7 million Canadians, it is important that COVID-19 policy supports are developed with Canadian manufacturing in mind. Including direct and indirect impact, manufacturing amounts to nearly 30% of Canada's economic activity.

Priority issues for Canadian manufacturers are important for all of Canada. The safety and health of Canadian manufacturing employees is the primary priority. The industry needed access to PPE, timely testing and information to provide the goods essential for Canadians. Many manufacturers have ramped up or shifted production in response to the crisis to make more food, energy, PPE and other health care and health sciences products or input products. While this sector has modified its production, it has also had new safety protocols, and production regimes negatively impact its costs.

As many countries restricted supplies, Canadians became more aware of how important a stable, secure and flexible local manufacturing supply chain is to our national well-being. This is as important for industrial products as it is for consumer products. Organizations like the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters were able to quickly transmit best practices through training services and to connect to members.

By creating the COVID-19 supply council, the federal government took a good step in reaching out to a diverse group for feedback, insights and support. The diversity of this group led to stimulating discussion that benefited all. Initiatives undertaken by the government that connected suppliers and buyers to establish a contingency reserve for strategic products and to inspire the expansion of Canadian supply chains have been lauded universally.

Considering that we're all learning lessons from the past 15 months, it is important that we continue to ask ourselves questions. How has the definition of essential goods changed for Canadians? Manufacturing does matter. Can we develop ideas and produce them here to supply ourselves and the world? How can we stimulate more domestic supply of essential goods through industrial policy and procurement strategies? How can we inspire Canadians to buy more local without limiting the benefits from globalization?

It's with the spirit of questions like these that the supply council worked. I appreciated the opportunity to participate and to contribute and felt like the government was listening to the views of manufacturers and exporters and Canadians broadly.

Thank you.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McHattie.

We'll now go in to our first round of questions and we'll start with Mr. Paul-Hus for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank both witnesses for being with us.

I'll start with you, Ms. Bull.

The organization you lead has identified a lack of transparency with respect to contracts awarded to indigenous businesses.

You're also a member of the COVID-19 Supply Council. Can you tell me how many meetings the council has held since its in-

ception? If it's more than three meetings, I'd like to know if there are any minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Tabatha Bull: My recollection, and I actually in preparation for this went back to look, is we had four scheduled meetings, one of which I was unable to attend, during the course of the supply council.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. McHattie, you said you attended discussions that were stimulating and interesting. To what extent were you involved in procurement planning? Did you have any input? For example, Honeywell offered to sell N95 masks, but the offer was turned down. Were you involved in the discussions regarding these types of purchases?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: The meetings of the COVID-19 supply council didn't discuss specifics, but rather discussed broadly concepts of the desire to expand the supply chain to include Canadian businesses, and to assure that the businesses in Canada were able to get supply.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Did these discussions focus on future or immediate needs? Were there meetings to respond quickly to Canada's needs?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: Some of the discussions were about presenting ideas like the supply hub. We were given a very good presentation from those who were developing it. We gave, where appropriate, some feedback on how that could work for us, and how we could help expand the concept to connect with as many Canadian businesses as possible.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Okay, I understand.

There's also the issue of reports on the conflicts of interest.

There is proactive disclosure with the other committee that has been established, the COVID-19 vaccine task force. Companies participating in this working group have signed conflict of interest disclosure agreements. As far as your board is concerned, nothing was found.

Have you been asked to sign a disclosure agreement for potential conflicts of interest?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: We did sign a disclosure agreement, yes.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Would you like this to be published on the government website to avoid any misunderstandings? Would you like the minister to publish it?

[English]

Mr. David McHattie: I don't have a position one way or the other on whether that should be published or not.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: For your part, Ms. Bull, has your organization signed an agreement to disclose potential conflicts of interest? If so, would you like this to be made public?

• (1710)

[English]

Ms. Tabatha Bull: We did, yes. I don't have a specific position at this time, but I wouldn't have a concern with it being public that we signed a conflict of interest.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Okay, thank you.

I know you're doing some analysis from a long-term perspective, but in the short term, do you have a say in the contracts that have been signed?

For example, the government ordered 40,000 respirators and received about 21,000. However, by any estimate, we have far too many respirators.

In your meetings, do you address these kinds of issues, namely, should we stop spending hundreds of millions of dollars on equipment we no longer need? Do you participate in these discussions?

[English]

Mr. David McHattie: We were not involved in the details of those kinds of discussions. We were only sharing our concerns, and our interest in finding more supply, and finding ways that the supply, and the inputs for that supply, could be provided by Canadian businesses.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: In light of what we've been through, do you think Canada is far too dependent on China for its supply of essential products such as masks, gloves or other personal protective equipment?

[English]

Mr. David McHattie: My personal view is that Canada benefits when we can have a greater supply at home and local. This pandemic has taught us that, while there are many benefits to globalization and having a diverse source of supply, nothing can replace having a capability at home that is secure, flexible and available to Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. McHattie, can you explain the role of the supply council? I've heard your interchange with Mr. Paul-Hus on the overall strategy of

what you were trying to achieve in terms of representing your members, but also helping Canada procure the PPE it needed.

Mr. David McHattie: As a member of the supply council, I was representing Canada's manufacturers and exporters. The objective was to provide some insight, some ideas and some feedback. We knew we were being asked, especially in those first challenging months, to provide fairly quick feedback on ideas and on initiatives that the government was working toward.

People were beginning to talk about how we could recover, and my view was to create a stable, secure supply in Canada that would benefit Canadians. There were many businesses wanting to step in and support the recovery of Canada and, where possible, provide a local supply that would be very valuable inside the overall context.

The objective was to provide advice and insight. We knew that we weren't participating in any decision-making. Our views were being listened to as counsel only, but were not used in decision-making.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'm sure there are MPs who have the same stories as I do, but I know that in my riding, for instance, Tulmar Safety was not in the business of manufacturing visors and/or health gowns, but it retooled quickly to supply the local hospitals. I'm sure you've heard very similar testimonies from many of your CME members.

• (1715)

Mr. David McHattie: Definitely, and without a doubt in those first months manufacturers moved as rapidly as they could to serve the communities where they operated, where their people were employed and where their customers were.

From coast to coast, across the country, there were manufacturers stepping in to do that. They often did so at their costs, because they were in an environment where you had to operate with different production regimes, often starting a product from scratch, or adapting an existing product, often at a higher cost.

It was very valuable to share with the government in many forums, including this forum, that Canada could help and connect, using government procurement where possible, with suppliers and buyers. It was a great opportunity, and would have an important benefit in communities across the country.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Great. Thank you.

Mr. McHattie, I just want to say thank you to all your members who stepped up big time and produced for Canadians so we could have that PPE. It could have been a very different story had they not done that a few months ago.

I'll say the same thing to you, Ms. Bull. I know a lot of aboriginal businesses stepped up to the plate when Canada called.

I'd just love to hear what sort of problematic issues you have encountered. I know there were 28 contracts issued to aboriginal-owned businesses, but I am hearing from you that we need to find a way to measure that better. You said you'd love to see a way to provide the number of contracts that were provided to aboriginal-owned businesses through the supply bills. Is that what you said at the beginning?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: I'm sorry. No. That first press release came out. We've looked into those businesses and, as we've looked into the publicly available data on PPE, we have seen that there have been more outside of that RFP, but the significant number of businesses that were able to answer that specific call from indigenous businesses for non-surgical masks was well in excess of what was awarded.

We'd like to be able to see publicly available data on how many indigenous businesses were able to supply PPE to the Government of Canada in order for us to continue to move towards the minimum 5% procurement target that's been set.

The Chair: Mr. Drouin, you have 25 seconds still.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I'll just take the opportunity to say thank you to Ms. Bull for stepping up to the plate as well. I certainly appreciate it, and we've seen some businesses pivot really quickly. I know the aboriginal community and first nations communities across Canada have stepped up big time, so thank you. That was 25 seconds.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Vignola, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll begin with Mr. McHattie. Then I'll have some questions for Ms. Bull.

Mr. McHattie, has the COVID-19 Supply Council been meeting since June 2020?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: Yes, it has.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: How many times has it met since June 2020?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: I believe we met once, in December.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: As I understand it, the council's role is to advise the government and suggest possible solutions.

What recommendations have been made to government to date? Is there an official list of the council's recommendations?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: Generally speaking, for the interventions from council members and industry, we were given the opportunity to share our insights verbally. We often went around the room, each providing ideas and feedback. We didn't submit specific lists, although that didn't prevent any one of us individually, through email or otherwise, from sharing further information between meetings.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Instead, they were informal meetings to brainstorm ideas for improvements to Canada's procurement.

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: I wouldn't necessarily classify it as informal, because there was a structure and an agenda, but the aspect you might term informal was that we each got the chance to speak and to share our insights verbally with Minister Anand and her team.

We weren't generating formal reports, which I guess is more the point.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Yes, that's what I meant by informal meetings. Even in a formal meeting, everyone can talk. At least, I hope that's the case and that we're not in a dictatorship in Canada.

Were vaccines among the topics you discussed?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: Yes, they were included on the topic levels. The idea of doing as much as we could in Canada and finding a way was something that many members, including me, expressed an interest in.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: What strengths and weaknesses emerged from your discussions about vaccines? In other words, what is already working well and what needs to be improved?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: From my perspective, Canada has strong universities, a strong infrastructure of people and ideas. What we lack sometimes in some areas is specific manufacturing capabilities, so we discussed the interest in building on where we do have strengths and expanding them to eventually be able to produce strategic products like vaccines where we can in Canada. In this, we were speaking in an aspirational and collegial tone, not assigning why we could not or why we did not, but more that this was our aspiration, that we felt it was important for Canada to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much.

Ms. Bull, in your opening remarks, you said that the pandemic has had a significant impact on indigenous businesses. You indicated the extent to which they had had to close their doors or reduce their business hours.

Do you think this impact is comparable to that experienced by visible minority and white-owned businesses? Are the effects of the pandemic following a more positive or negative trend among indigenous businesses?

[English]

Ms. Tabatha Bull: We do definitely see, when we compare the results of our first survey to the Stats Canada and the CFIB surveys, that there has been more impact on indigenous business. Part of that is because there's a larger portion of indigenous businesses that are small and medium entrepreneurs, but additionally, access to financing and access to being able to participate in the programs that were available are also not equitable, so we have seen more of an impact on indigenous, and particularly more on women-owned businesses as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Green for six minutes.

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

I'm hoping to carry on on some of the questions related to procurement strategies for aboriginal businesses. I know there are both mandatory and voluntary set-aside programs, and I'm just wondering, Ms. Bull, if you'd care to comment on whether or not, in your opinion, those set-asides were adequately considered with the size and scope of the procurement that happened over the duration of COVID.

• (1725)

Ms. Tabatha Bull: To my knowledge, under PPE and procurement under COVID, there were not set-asides specifically for indigenous businesses. There was one RFP specific to indigenous business for the non-surgical masks, as I spoke about before, but there weren't set targets specifically in response to COVID.

Mr. Matthew Green: Are you aware currently of our federal contractors program that has within it employment equity standards?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: I don't believe I am. I'm aware of the PSAB program, which has employment requirements to be determined as an indigenous business.

Mr. Matthew Green: Yes, that's the "bringing meaning to procurement" under PSAB?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: Yes.

Mr. Matthew Green: I bring this to you because one of the motions that I brought before this committee was to look at this government's commitment under its existing policies on procurement. One of them is the federal contractors program, which has an agreement to implement employment equity for contracts that are over \$1 million. While not directly related to sole-source procurement or procurement directly to aboriginal businesses, certainly this would manifest itself in strategic partnerships with manufacturers to ensure that they're meeting these employment equity standards.

One of the requirements of this is that once a contractor receives an eligible contract from the Government of Canada, the contractor must fulfill the following requirements: collect workplace information, complete a workplace analysis and provide an achievement report, establish long-term and short-term goals on equity-seeking groups, and make reasonable efforts to ensure that reasonable progress is made towards having full representation of the four designated groups.

The second designated group on the list happens to be aboriginal peoples. I'm wondering if your council has had any conversations around how procurement through the federal government is reflected in this way, or if some of the small and medium-sized businesses have been approached to partner up on the federal contractors program to ensure that these employment equity requirements are in place.

Ms. Tabatha Bull: We have seen some situations in which small and medium-sized, indigenous-owned businesses have partnered to meet these contracts.

One concern that we're currently looking at is whether the benefit actually results in supporting the indigenous business or if it's a numbers game, really, of meeting the employment equity but without building the capacity within an indigenous business or ensuring that the indigenous business is able to benefit from the contract.

Mr. Matthew Green: I would strongly agree.

I'll share with you, just for your own note and for the note of the people who are on this committee and the folks who are watching, that there's a compliance policy in this. I've taken a keen interest in this because it also impacts many other groups.

In that, if a contractor is found in non-compliance, then the contractor will be placed on what's called the federal contractors program limited eligibility to bid list. Why I bring this up as a note is because the footnotes is that there are no names currently on the limited eligibility to bid list. Based on a previous motion I'm bringing to your attention that you could bring back to your committee, it seems as if it's the government's position on this policy that all of the contractors in the federal contractors program are in compliance, which, quite frankly, I find very difficult to believe.

In wrapping up my questions in this round to you, Ms. Bull, I'm going to ask you to take the remaining time here to suggest.... You brought up a motion, but are there other clear ways in which we can ensure that existing government programs are actually meeting the mandate? Notwithstanding that there's probably going to be a third wave, and knowing what we know now from your time on the council, what would be some recommendations that this committee could take away to ensure that all the well-intentioned good-language programs of this government, "bringing meaning to procurement", the set-aside program for aboriginal business, are actually having tangible results for the communities that they claim to support?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: I think one thing we definitely need to look at is, first, the definition that's used for indigenous business under the PSAB criteria. That definition requires that a business demonstrate that 33% of its staff are indigenous under the Indian Act. That requires a business to obtain status cards or Métis carrying cards from its staff, which is not an easy conversation to have with your staff. There are definitely indigenous people in this country who do not feel comfortable providing their status cards and Métis cards to the Government of Canada for that reason.

When we look equitably across other minority-owned businesses, Black-owned businesses or women-owned businesses, that requirement does not exist, so we are currently not treating indigent-owned businesses on an equal playing field.

For the remainder of COVID and for purchasing PPE or other products during COVID, I suggest that we put a moratorium on that requirement to ensure that we're being equal to all businesses.

The other is that—

• (1730)

Mr. Matthew Green: Do I have any more time left, Mr. Kitchen?

The Chair: Ms. Bull has about five seconds to answer, unless you'd like to conclude.

Mr. Matthew Green: Sorry.

Ms. Tabatha Bull: That's okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to our second round, and we'll start with Ms. Harder.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us today. I very much appreciate your time.

Certainly the impact of COVID has been significant, and we've scrambled to respond. In particular, of course, last March and April, the government found itself in a situation where it had to scramble. Originally, it would appear that the minister thought it would be a good idea to include Canadians in the solution. She talked a lot about "a collaborative approach" that she wished to take at that time.

Out of this, she formed a special council composed of 16 individuals, and the two of you were part of that council. Those 16 individuals were selected from a variety of different backgrounds, either from the private sector or from not-for-profits. The minister originally felt that you had the ability to offer helpful insight and make recommendations to her. That's my understanding of the intent.

Then, when we look at the minutes that were made available online, we see that you had only three meetings that were posted publicly, and we found out today that there were actually four meetings. Originally there was a meeting on May 8, another one on May 28, another on June 22, and then not until December. The December meeting isn't reported online; however, you commented that the meeting did take place.

On May 8—that was your first meeting—according to the brief paragraph of explanation provided online, the only things that were done at that meeting were that the minister greeted you, she thanked you for your involvement, she went over the terms of reference and then commented that the next meeting would be in three to four weeks, without setting a concrete date and without really giving you your mandate.

We find that the next meeting was held on May 28, three weeks later. Now, we're in the middle of a pandemic at this time. The government was having a very difficult time procuring equipment, the PPE, that was necessary to keep this country afloat.

The minister said that she wanted a collaborative approach. She put these 16 people around a table who have incredible expertise to offer, but yet she didn't feel it was necessary to bring you together for three weeks, again, in the middle of a massive crisis, arguably the worst crisis since World War II.

The minister felt that she could go it alone, that she could make all sorts of decisions and...all sorts of money, without needing the expertise of industry, without needing the expertise of individuals who have collective wisdom to offer.

I find that interesting. It would appear, then, that this council was more for the sake of appearances and looking like the government cared about the opinion of Canadians—bringing expertise into the room with them—rather than actually doing so.

It seems that a blind eye was turned to qualified individuals, which is disheartening. Canadians deserved to have your voices heard. I think you had some really cool things that you would have been able to contribute had a meeting been convened during that important and crucial time from the beginning of May to the end of May, when numerous decisions were made.

I guess my question is, did you have the opportunity between meetings to submit advice or insights? Was there a mechanism by which you could do that, or was it only at meetings that were held by the minister?

Mr. David McHattie: If you want me to go first, the constructive criticism I think is fair. However, between May 8 and May 28...I'm not sure that criticism is all that valid, because—

• (1735)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Sorry, I'm not asking you to verify whether or not it's valid. I'm asking whether you had a way to give your insights between meetings

Mr. David McHattie: Sure, but when we had that first meeting, we went around and we generated.... We gave a lot of ideas. We—

Ms. Rachael Harder: Was there a way to give input in between the meetings?

Mr. David McHattie: Yes, it was available to us to submit emails in writing or make short phone calls. The minister and her team were available to us.

I'm all for constructive criticism, so don't get me wrong, but I think that between May 8 and May 28, there was a lot of work being done. I felt listened to at the time, and I felt that what we had discussed in the May meeting was being considered in the decisions that were being made by government.

The decisions were government's to make. We were providing some advice.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. McHattie, thank you. I guess what I'm wondering is whether, if there was a meeting held today, you guys would have important things to contribute to that meeting.

The Chair: Unfortunately, Ms. Harder, we're at the end of your time.

That was a great question. I'm wondering if maybe Ms. Bull and Mr. McHattie could answer it in writing and just respond to us at that time. It would be greatly appreciated.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I believe Mr. Weiler is next up.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I'm streaming from the traditional unceded territories of the Squamish, Musqueam and Tseil-Waututh nations. My riding also includes the traditional unceded territories of the Sechelt, Lil'wat and N'Quatqua nations. I'm very grateful for their stewardship of these lands and waters since time immemorial.

Ms. Bull, you mentioned the disproportionate impact to first nations-owned businesses. I've certainly seen it first-hand in my riding, particularly for those involved in the arts, culture and tourism sectors, of which there are many. You mentioned that the unique circumstances of indigenous-owned businesses bar them from government COVID-19 relief programs. I'm hoping you can explain why that is.

Ms. Tabatha Bull: Certainly. Thank you.

Initially, the first program under CEBA was designed for access through traditional financial institutions. We know that only about 33% of indigenous-owned businesses have relationships with traditional financial institutions. There was further funding provided, \$307 million, through the national aboriginal capital corporation to be distributed in the same way as CEBA through the aboriginal financial institutions, but that money was not available to be distributed until late June. Again, there was a significant delay from when CEBA was announced.

Then, on the wage subsidy program that was unrolled initially, aboriginal economic development corporations were not eligible for the wage subsidy. That's because of the structure of how they're set up. We did have many discussions across government. Again, that was also remedied, but it was about a three-month delay from when other indigenous businesses were able to access the wage subsidy in comparison with economic development corporations. Economic development corporations do employ a significant number of Canadians, indigenous and not.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Absolutely. With the funding through aboriginal financial institutions and then the additional \$133 million to support indigenous businesses thereafter, has this gap now been filled and some of the inequities between indigenous-owned and non indigenous-owned businesses addressed and remedied?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: For some we have seen an uptake of those funds. However, we do see a significant number of businesses that did not access the programs. Part of that is because of the various bureaucracies and understanding whether the programs did fit for the business. We also see that with additional programs, such as the rent subsidy program and other programs to support businesses

through grants, businesses that are on reserve and that did not have a CRA number prior to September 20, 2020, are not eligible to access those programs.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Okay. That's helpful.

With regard to one of the other points you brought up, in addition to set-asides and transparency in government contracting, what capacity-building measures, over and above the navigator program, would you suggest to help assist indigenous-owned businesses get better involved in government procurement and contracting?

● (1740)

Ms. Tabatha Bull: I think there's definitely a need for closing the loop on procurement. Even with some of the procurement we saw specifically with PPE, indigenous businesses were not eligible for or were not able to obtain the contract. When they asked to have a debrief to understand why, the answer was that it was a closed competitive procurement, and the way that procurement was set up did not allow for a debrief. So you have a number of indigenous businesses that may have specifically pivoted to provide PPE, and have now invested in being able to provide that, that do not have the opportunity to understand why their bid was not accepted.

I think the other opportunity is that those contracts that are under \$25,000, that do not have to go through an RFP process, often go to the same businesses that you would normally use. We need to be able to grow the networks and connect through capacity building to indigenous businesses so that they can start to access those other opportunities as well. We have had some great opportunity with the office of small and medium enterprise to conduct webinars for indigenous businesses to understand how best to do business with the government.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: You mentioned that predominantly indigenous-owned businesses are smaller and medium-sized organizations. Do you find that is similar for non-indigenous-owned businesses, or if there's a particularly disproportionate impact for indigenous-owned businesses?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: I have not spoken to my colleagues at the Black Chamber or WEOC specifically about this. I think one thing that we do definitely find for indigenous businesses is that quite often they're funnelled towards one ministry whereas women-owned businesses are not necessarily funnelled to the Ministry of Gender and Equality. There's a government-wide solution and there are government-wide programs for them. For indigenous-owned businesses there definitely seems to be a funnel towards Indigenous Services Canada while it really needs to be a government-wide approach.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bull and Mr. Weiler.

We'll now go to Ms. Vignola for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It is agreed that the COVID-19 Supply Council has played an advisory role. My understanding from the interventions of Mr. McHattie and Ms. Bull is that one piece of advice was to increase local manufacturing production.

As a result of the council's recommendations, have you noticed an increase in manufacturing capacity in Canada? Has your advice been taken into account?

Concretely, do you see positive and tangible effects from the meetings you've attended that have taken up valuable time during this pandemic period?

[English]

Mr. David McHattie: I see progress and would look at it as an investment. At the same time, I think there were many other initiatives ongoing, such as the Industry Strategy Council. There were many things that might seem like separate departments, separate topics, but we had conversations at many levels regarding how we could have better and more sustainable domestic supply. The reasons to do it are very important and it's really important that Canadians also ask for this. We can't always look to our governments to solve our problems. We as Canadians have to turn around and choose, where we can, from things that are more local. I've heard messages from provinces and from the federal government. I think it's a step in the right direction, but we have a long way to go. I think one thing we should be proud of as Canadians is that we are a very diverse society and we have an opportunity to provide something that many other countries can't. Hearing Ms. Bull's feedback was also an opportunity for me to hear other perspectives. I found high value in the conversations and appreciated them.

• (1745)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McHattie.

We have only five seconds left.

Ms. Vignola, do you have a quick five-second question?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us. I'll resume my questions later.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Mr. Green for two and a half minutes.

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

Mr. McHattie, I've heard anecdotal feedback from some temporary workers in my area who have actually reported instances of their sole job being to repackage PPE from China with labels that say "made in Canada". Are you aware of any instances of dumping of Chinese PPE into the marketplace repackaged as Canadian?

Mr. David McHattie: I'm not personally aware of any, but if there are any, I hope there's a phone number for somebody to call and that that practice would be eliminated immediately.

Mr. Matthew Green: You may be aware that in some of our early procurement we procured something like 11 million N-95s, nine million of which had to go back because they hadn't actually been properly tested. What would be some of the other challenges, from your perspective as a local domestic manufacturer, with regard to potential international dumping within our markets?

Mr. David McHattie: At least in my experience—and I'm speaking of the products that Tenaris makes, which are steel pipes for Canada's energy sector—we do see unfair trade, and we utilize the Canadian International Trade Tribunal and the Canada Border Services Agency. There's a specific process that we follow.

While we believe that Canada has a very strong trade remedy regime, it can always be improved because, in my view, those who are seeking to cheat the system will continue to evolve and cheat the system.

Mr. Matthew Green: My last question is pertaining to some of my earlier questions for Ms. Bull.

Do you also support the set-aside program? Would you support a set-aside program on a move-forward basis for aboriginal procurement as it relates to these existing government programs?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: Yes. I definitely support the federal—

Mr. Matthew Green: I'm sorry. Actually, Ms. Bull, the question was for Mr. McHattie, from the manufacturing perspective. We're looking for some allyship here on the committee.

Mr. David McHattie: Without a doubt, this is something that we support. The Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters association has a manufacturing of the future council, and the workforce of the future.... Our interest is in creating diverse streams of employment and bringing under-represented people into our manufacturing sectors. We think that's going to make us stronger, not only by having them being there, but also for the ideas and the skills they will contribute. Anything we can do to incentivize this and procurement opportunities for our indigenous businesses of equity is something that Canada's manufacturers are 100% behind.

The Chair: That's your time—

Mr. Matthew Green: It sounds like there's no excuse for us not to go in that direction.

Thank you, Mr. McHattie.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for letting me finish.

The Chair: Ms. Harder, we're back to you for five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McHattie, I can appreciate your mention that between meetings you could send a note. I understand that is one form of communication; however, in your comments, you also said that you found the conversations very insightful or very helpful, which tells me that there's a lot to be gained when people are brought together, when they are at the same table and collaborating in the same room at the same time.

I would gather from your comments, then, that actually a lot was missed when meetings weren't called for long periods of time. Again, there was a long period of time of three weeks in May, then another long period of time from the end of May to the end of June, and then there was another six-month period from the end of June to December. That's a lot of waiting time between meetings and a lot of opportunities that are missed, to go to your point that conversations can be had that are incredibly insightful and altogether helpful, not only for you as industry leaders, but of course for the minister as well.

It's interesting to me that the council was formed and was supposed to be a place where there's a meeting of the minds. It brings people together to where they are able to put forward different ideas and engage and perhaps even debate in lively discussion for the sake of coming up with new and innovative ideas.

It's confounding to me, then, why the minister wouldn't call a meeting more regularly, especially at the beginning of the pandemic when things were being figured out. Wouldn't you agree with me that holding a meeting where people can collaborate is important?

• (1750)

Mr. David McHattie: I don't disagree with you. Looking back, I think it would have been great to have some meetings between June and now. Although there were other vehicles to do so, more conversations are better. The pandemic might be something that we have today, but there are structural things we can resolve for the future so that we can have a stronger and more vibrant economy and have somewhere where Canadians can be proud of their manufacturing sector, for example, and choose manufacturing from Canada more frequently than they do today.

Ms. Rachael Harder: I can appreciate that, Mr. McHattie, because to your point as well, we want people at the table who have the experience, the ingenuity, the work ethic and the ability to solve problems and put forward creative solutions. I think this council originally started out at that place when the minister chose 16 incredibly well-credentialed individuals who should be at that table. It is confounding to me why those voices weren't utilized to the extent that they could have been.

One of the things I have observed from the conversation today, Ms. Bull, is that you mentioned that there were four scheduled meetings, when you look back at your notes, but when we go online, we see evidence of only three. Do you know why we wouldn't have evidence of a fourth meeting and why minutes wouldn't be reported out to the public?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: No, I can't answer that.

Ms. Rachael Harder: The other thing I noticed is that, online, each meeting is summarized by only a paragraph.

Ms. Bull, maybe you can help me understand this. How long were these meetings?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: The meetings were scheduled for an hour and a half to two hours. As Mr. McHattie said, we did have quite an extensive round table in those meetings for sharing ideas.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Do you have any idea as to why we wouldn't have a better idea of what happened in those meetings? Do you know why so much information would be kept secret from the Canadian public?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: I would not be able to answer that.

Ms. Rachael Harder: You have no insight as to information that would have been private in nature or something that would have been dangerous to make available to us as Canadians.

Ms. Tabatha Bull: No.

Ms. Rachael Harder: You were in those meetings, weren't you?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: I was, yes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: In your mind, could the information have been made public without any problems?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: From the meetings that I was on and the information I shared, I would have no concern with it being made public.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay.

Mr. David McHattie: I concur.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you, Mr. McHattie. I appreciate that.

I think that concludes my time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Harder, I appreciate that.

We'll go now to Mr. Kusmierczyk for five minutes.

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

I am connecting from the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy—the Ojibwa, the Odawa and the Potawatomi.

Thank you both for your testimony and your answers. Thank you so much for your service in being part of and advancing what is the largest peacetime mobilization of industry since the Second World War.

The supply council obviously has played an important role in terms of our procurement strategy. What role do you think the supply council could play moving forward after the pandemic? Is there a role for the supply council moving forward?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: I can start with that one.

As an indigenous person running an indigenous business association, it was definitely an honour that there was a place for us to speak about the importance of indigenous business and minority-owned businesses.

As Mr. McHattie said, there were some great opportunities for us to work together with larger manufacturers, representing small business. I think that is a real opportunity for us to continue to collaborate as Canadians and to support business across.... I do think that there is an opportunity for us to continue to look at how we can move procurement in Canada forward and how we can find ways for collaboration.

• (1755)

Mr. David McHattie: I agree.

We served at the pleasure of those who asked us. We enjoyed participating. I know many of us are also participating in different ways in other places. Having people get together to share their ideas....

There are certainly more questions now to answer for what we want the Canadian economy to look like going forward. I know the Industry Strategy Council is another place where a lot of these things were discussed. They're not necessarily related to COVID-19, but the solutions might all be very similar.

It was great to have such a diverse group of people together discussing these things. We'd always be happy to further those conversations with anybody.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I appreciate those answers very much.

I'm curious whether the collaboration and the conversation within the supply council also spilled out outside of the supply council. Did you find that taking place as well, between the members?

Mr. David McHattie: Certainly. I personally didn't know Minister Anand at all before. I really appreciated the opportunity to share ideas with her. I have a very positive view of her now as a result, and of many of the other council members—some of whom I already knew and some I did not. There are good opportunities.

It's tough in a video world. It's not the same as when you can get together in person, but I hope that we're able to do this more in the future in that form or some other form.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I think that anyone who's had any kind of interaction with Minister Anand has come out with the same positive impression. We definitely have a tremendous leader there.

I know that the terms of reference for the supply council could have been changed over time, I know it was part of the mandate. Did the terms of reference evolve over the life of the supply council or did they remain the same?

Mr. David McHattie: They remained the same.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Did digitalization and technology factor into the conversation of the supply council in how they could be used to improve federal procurement?

Mr. David McHattie: Not only federal procurement, but also in sharing best practices and insights.

If you remember those earlier days, there were ways to connect on the ground, from the largest corporations to SMEs that were all manufacturing. Sharing information was very valuable, and the tool that was developed, the supply hub, was a digital tool that, I think, can even be expanded further.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McHattie.

You have two seconds left Mr. Kusmierczyk, so I'm assuming you're going to turn that down.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I'll share that with Kelly.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going into our third and final round.

We'll go with Mr. Paul-Hus, and if anybody else wants to help us get back on time quickly, we appreciate that.

Mr. Paul-Hus.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to come back to the way the council operates. I have somewhat conflicting information, and I'd like your perspective.

When the COVID-19 Supply Council was established, the minister stated that it was “not meant to fill a particular gap in the supply chain per se” but that its purpose was “to take a fresh look at the procurements.” In her words, it's more like an advisory committee.

As for Prime Minister Trudeau, he said the council's job was to ensure that Canada would have sufficient supplies to continue fighting the pandemic, such as ventilators, masks and hand sanitizer.

From what I'm hearing today, you were called in to give advice, but you weren't really involved in the operations. But the Prime Minister said you were there to help with operations.

Mr. McHattie, which is the right version: the minister's or the Prime Minister's?

• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: I think that it's a tough question for a member of the council to answer.

I think everything was open to us, and I didn't feel someone was putting handcuffs on us and saying not to suggest this or that. Everything was open to us and I thought we had fairly broad conversations to cover both and we went into some specifics where there were specific ideas.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: So it was all about conversation and an exchange of ideas.

Did the advice given at these meetings serve any purpose? Did you see any changes in equipment procurement procedures or were they just meetings to look good?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: They were certainly not meetings for show from my perspective, and I doubt from anyone on the council.

There were the initiatives we didn't do personally but we gave some feedback on, like the supply hub, like the contingency reserve for strategic products. These were ideas that resulted...that I think the minister's department was thinking of and they shared them with us and asked for feedback.

I think there were some outcomes, but we were advisory.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Did you have concerns about masks from China? A lot of equipment came from China in the beginning. However, we know that Chinese factories use forced labour. Was this a concern that was raised during the meetings?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: We definitely tried to promote the difference between something made in Canada and what's made in other places. We're certain there were some of us who would have intervened, talking about why we should try and develop more local supply chains for diversity reasons, for inclusivity reasons, and for our economic recovery. When you spend a dollar in Canada, it's powerful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Many of the well-known contracts awarded were for the purchase of personal protective equipment. We know that astronomical amounts of money were given to businesses. However, we haven't been able to obtain any information as to whether the equipment that was submitted was of good quality and effective.

Was that a concern for you as well?

[*English*]

Mr. David McHattie: We were concerned, of course, about the quality, the safety and the sustainability of any of the products, but

we didn't weigh in on any specific trade-offs. We were advisory. We weren't taking any kind of an operational position on what was bought from where. We did not discuss specific companies or specific products. If you look at a ventilator, it has 1500 inputs. We did not talk about those 1500 inputs, as an example.

From my perspective at Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, our role was more conceptual. We talked about the quality from Canada being at a high level, but we wouldn't disparage other people's quality.

The Chair: Mr. MacKinnon, filling in for Mr. Drouin.

[*Translation*]

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

As I speak to you now, I am on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River, on the territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. McHattie and Ms. Bull, for being with us today.

I had the pleasure, as parliamentary secretary at PSPC, of sitting in on a number of those supply council meetings. I want to thank our witnesses for their time, their expertise, their insights and their knowledge.

Frankly, Mr. Chair, I find this badgering about what was discussed at these meetings a little tawdry, and certainly unproductive on the part of the opposition. What you had were conversations with people from all walks of life, and notably from the business community, during a crunch time for Canada. It's a matter of public record that we were in a PPE crunch, and we called out to representatives across the country to come and counsel the minister and the government on these issues. I know their advice was very well taken and very well received.

In that spirit, I want to further the conversations that went on in the minister's supply council and ask about next steps.

I'll start with Mr. McHattie. From your perspective at Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, what are the barriers you see that remain in order to continue the evolution of a domestic supply chain for PPE, and for any sort of health-related applications that were discussed and outlined?

With about a year's worth of hindsight, are there things governments could be productively doing to help Canadian manufacturers get a bigger foothold in this sector?

• (1805)

Mr. David McHattie: That's a great question.

I certainly don't mind, and I didn't consider it badgering. I think the work that's done by members of Parliament in trying to hold the administration to account is perfectly fine and acceptable, so I'm okay with that. However, I want to bring it up a level.

What can we do better in Canada to attract investment in Canadian manufacturing, regardless of whether it's PPE, biosciences or whatever? Think about things in terms of when you invest in new capital equipment; you're investing in a higher or more advanced technology. It's more likely to have digitization, automation and the kind of industry 4.0 Internet of things. This is something where Canada—as ranked among OECD countries—is near the end of the list. We're not at the front of the list. We would like that trend to be reversed, so we need to find ways to attract investment to Canada.

There are two aspects to that. We can compare ourselves to the United States and we can compare ourselves to other OECD countries. The report of the Industry Strategy Council is an extremely good report for someone like me: I love to think and talk about that. It's tough for Canadians to read all of these detailed things. It's easy to say we should have lower, more competitive taxes and we should find a way for companies to have more to reinvest. We need to partner with companies to invest more, so we need to do a lot more of this.

Innovation is not only in R and D and in new concepts and ideas. Innovation is in applying what's available today. When you're a manufacturer, you need to keep investing in your manufacturing equipment. Every time you do something new, it is going to be more innovative. We have a great opportunity to do more of that. I would like to connect lessons we learned in the COVID-19 supply response with those broader manufacturing investments, and I think we have opportunities to take.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Thank you, Mr. McHattie.

Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Ms. Bull has 10 seconds if she wants to add a quick response.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: I apologize.

Perhaps my next colleague can give you the floor, Ms. Bull.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Vignola for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McHattie, in your comments, you talked a lot about attracting investments and creating jobs.

Ms. Bull, my question may be of interest to you, as well.

The idea is not to attract these investments from abroad, but to attract them from within. Do we have that opportunity in Canada, or are we still waiting for the good Lord to come through the side door?

• (1810)

[*English*]

Ms. Tabatha Bull: We definitely can do that.

We've demonstrated that innovation is alive in Canada. Particularly, by continuing to support that fabric of small and medium-sized enterprise and the innovative thinking that we're seeing happening at that level—by continuing to sustain those businesses—we have an opportunity to be at the forefront of innovation. Also, we should ensure that we're stimulating that research in the institutions that exist here.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I don't know what the basis for your participation on the council was or what the incentives were. Were you paid or compensated in any way for your travel and time, for example, or did you participate as a volunteer?

[*English*]

Ms. Tabatha Bull: No. It was all volunteer.

If I were not on the supply council, I would not have the audience that I have today. As an aboriginal business association, this is an important audience for us. The opportunity to be on the supply council and support that work continues to help us work to support indigenous business.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much.

That will be all for me.

I'd like to thank you for being with us today. Have a good evening.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

In light of the time, we're going to suspend after Mr. Green.

Mr. Green, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

Ms. Bull referenced some of the barriers to traditional financing. She may have caught that this government released \$750 billion in equity supports, liquidity supports, to Bay Street, our big banks. Was there any spillover? Were there any earmarked programs in terms of the money and the liquidity supports that were provided through our financial institutions that would have been directed directly to aboriginal businesses?

Ms. Tabatha Bull: As the Canadian council, we do have an MOU. We work very closely with EDC and BDC in supporting indigenous entrepreneurs. They are making some significant progress. We're able to see some real gains in that area in the work that they're doing directly with indigenous entrepreneurs but also in finding opportunities for partnerships with non-indigenous businesses. We are seeing some good progress there.

Mr. Matthew Green: More specifically and to the point, the \$750-billion rollout in the course of a COVID response, the paper purchase buyback program through the Bank of Canada.... I'm wondering if, in this new-found financial liquidity support, any of that landed within aboriginal-led programs, aboriginal-directed programs.

Ms. Tabatha Bull: Thank you. I do not have that answer at this time.

Mr. Matthew Green: I want to leave you with the last minute and thirty seconds to say whatever you think you had begun to say or anything you think you may have missed that we can provide as recommendations on moving forward

Ms. Tabatha Bull: Thank you. *Meegwetch.*

As I said, I think that the supply council was an opportunity for us as an indigenous association—as well as for other minority associations—to have a voice at a table that maybe we don't always have the opportunity to have. That conversation did lead to the supply hub. I did find an opportunity.... When mentioning the indigenous businesses that could provide PPE, there was follow-up to ask who those businesses were, and there was a link to the supply hub to the list of businesses that can provide PPE.

That is definitely a step in the right direction. However, I do stress again that this needs to be a government-wide solution and a government-wide indigenous entrepreneurship strategy, not something that fits within one ministry. Within every program that comes out of ISED or NRCan, we need to be looking to ensure that

those programs meet the needs of indigenous businesses and that indigenous businesses have the same opportunity to participate in those programs. That is something that we're pushing for very hard in our upcoming budget submission as well.

I think we also need to really look at the opportunity and the propensity of indigenous businesses to export, both generally in the U.S. and in Australia, as well as the opportunity for them to participate in export dialogues with their indigenous counterparts in Australia, New Zealand, the U.S. and across the globe.

• (1815)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bull and Mr. McHattie, for being here today and bearing with us as we dealt with the challenges of the telecommunications. I appreciate your comments and your staying with us the whole time.

At this point in time, the public portion of the meeting is now complete, and we will be going in camera. You're free to go.

Members of the committee, the clerk will have sent you a page that basically indicates how to get onto this meeting and then how to get onto the in camera meeting. You will have to get out of this meeting completely and then re-enter through the in camera portion with the new code. We will see you in about five minutes, hopefully—as quickly as we can—and then we can reconvene.

Thank you, everybody.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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