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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey



Standing Committee on Health

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• (1625)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.)): I call the meeting back to order.

Welcome back to meeting number four of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health.

Today we are meeting in public to discuss a report from our subcommittee and to reach decisions on future business.

I will dispense with the preliminaries and simply advise the committee that your subcommittee met on Monday, January 31, to consider the business of the committee and agreed to make the following recommendation:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of the Emergency Situation Facing Canadians in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic and that the evidence and documentation received by the committee during the Second Session of the 43rd Parliament on the subject be taken into consideration by the committee in the current session, that the committee hold additional meetings on this study in the current session, and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.

Colleagues, if we adopt this report, it will be as if we adopted a motion with the same text. We can amend the report before we adopt it, should changes be desired. We can also adopt other motions later to give us more clarity on how this study will unfold once we determine what our other business should be.

For clarity, the contents of the report are fair game. The other discussions that took place in subcommittee were held in camera and it wouldn't be appropriate to divulge them in public, but the report itself, and any amendments you wish to make to the report, are fair game.

The floor is now open for debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold has the floor.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I want to propose an amendment to the report before us.

The amendment is more or less in the middle of the text. Instead of stating that “the committee hold additional meetings on this study in the current session,” the motion should state that “the committee hold at least half of its additional meetings on this study during this current session.”

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

The debate now concerns the amendment, which recommends that half of the time be spent on this topic.

[*English*]

On the list I have Mr. van Koeverden.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have just an amendment that we should add something to the end of the motion so that it would read, “through Standing Order 109, that the committee request a government response”.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. van Koeverden.

The debate at present is on the amendment proposed by Monsieur Berthold. Let's dispense with that, and then we will consider the amendment you've put forward.

The debate, colleagues, right now is on the amendment put forward by Monsieur Berthold with respect to the fifty-fifty division of time being dedicated to this study.

Is there any further debate on the amendment?

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Chair, would you just mind reading out the motion as amended, please?

The Chair: I'll need some help with that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, can you read the amendment that you moved?

[*English*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Yes. It's “that the committee hold at least half of these additional meetings on this study during the current session”.

• (1630)

The Chair: Is there any further debate on the amendment as presented?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Naaman Sugrue): Mr. Chair, I would just like clarity on the terminology. It says “additional meetings”. Is that referring to remaining meetings for this calendar year? I'm not aware of us having access to meetings outside our normal time slots.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, I think that the issue is the use of the word “additional.”

Mr. Luc Berthold: The word “additional” is currently included in the motion drafted by the clerk. I don't mind if the word is removed by another amendment. I just added, “hold at least half of its meetings.” However, if the word “additional” is too much, I have no issue with stating in my amendment that the word should be removed.

Basically, Mr. Chair, I want the report to state that half the committee meetings in this session will be on COVID-19. The clerk could suggest the exact wording for that.

The Chair: I think that it's clearer this way.

Do you want the clerk to talk about it?

Mr. Luc Berthold: He could suggest the exact words to use in the amendment so that the motion fulfills its purpose.

The Chair: I understand your point, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Clerk, is that clearer now?

The Clerk: Yes, I understand. I don't think that any changes are necessary. I was the one who misunderstood.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay.

Dr. Powlowski, go ahead, please.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): I have a procedural question. Does this commit us then for the whole session? I'm just thinking if two months down the line it turns out that, lo and behold, there are not a lot of COVID cases, we realize that we may want to spend more time dealing with issues other than COVID. Are we bound by this decision, or can we change it at a later date?

The Chair: My understanding is that we can decide that the study is now wrapping up and we're ready to proceed to a report. The committee can, through a motion, alter course.

I see Mr. Berthold, but I understand that we have a problem with the phone lines, which is preventing some of our staffers from being able to join. We need to suspend to get those connected.

Colleagues, I'm going to suspend the meeting for five minutes to resolve this technical issue and then I'm going to come back to Mr. Lake, who is on the list in the room.

• (1630) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1640)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Colleagues, when we suspended, we were debating Mr. Berthold's amendment to the subcommittee report calling for a fifty- [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and any other work we may undertake.

I recognize Mr. Lake.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Could we read the motion as it stands right now?

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, do you have it before you?

The Clerk: Yes. The motion as it stands is the exact text of the subcommittee report.

The motion as amended, if that's what you'd like to hear, Mr. Lake, I will read now: “That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of the Emergency Situation Facing Canadians in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic and that the evidence and documentation received by the committee during the Second Session of the 43rd Parliament on the subject be taken into consideration by the committee in the current session, that the committee hold additional meetings on this study in the current session, that the committee dedicate at least half of its meetings to this study, and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House.”

The committee could also put an end date to that fifty-fifty qualifier if it so desired, or it could, some time later, pass a motion that overrides it, thereby putting an end to the fifty-fifty requirement.

The Chair: Mr. Lake.

Hon. Mike Lake: I have a couple of thoughts.

The question came up earlier about the ability to not study interminably if we decide there is no need for that. I would just say that the committee can make that decision. We're masters of our own domain, here, so we can easily make that decision and hopefully we work well enough to do that.

This might be a friendly amendment, and I know it's my own colleague moving the amendment in the first place, so it would be a subamendment, in a sense, to say that rather than “at least half”, I think it should be “half”. I don't think we necessarily want more than half of these meetings to be COVID related. I think striking the words “at least” and just saying “hold half of its meetings” makes sense.

There has been some discussion and I think that might be in the spirit, but I'll look to my colleague to see if that is amenable.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

I remember your earlier advice to me, Mr. Clerk, that there is no such thing as a friendly amendment, so what we have is a subamendment, unless the consensus of the room is that we're okay to proceed with that.

It is fine as a subamendment.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

The motion just read by the clerk isn't the same as the one that I moved.

I think that I'll invite my colleagues to defeat the motion that I moved. We should listen to the clerk re-read the motion that he just presented, because it's exactly what must be said. He used the right words to say exactly what I wanted to say.

I fully support a vote on the motion just read by the clerk with amendments to what Mr. Lake proposed. The motion read by the clerk is perfect. It says exactly what I wanted to say. We aren't talking about an additional meeting anymore.

I'd like to invite my colleagues to defeat my motion and to work on the clerk's motion, which is excellent.

Mr. Chair, we could do this very quickly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

● (1645)

[*English*]

Colleagues, I'm sorry to be overly technical but the way we are obligated to proceed is to consider Mr. Lake's suggestion as a sub-amendment. We need to decide either by consensus or by a standing vote whether the words "at least" should be deleted from the amendment. Then we need to deal with the amendment. Then we need to deal with any other amendments. Then we need to deal with the motion.

The debate now is on the words "at least"—

Mr. Luc Berthold: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, and I don't want to be technical, but we cannot talk about an amendment to a motion that is not the motion that I presented. That's the problem right now, because what the clerk just read is not my motion.

Mr. Lake wanted an amendment to the motion. That is not my motion.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Okay. I understand now.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I was, on the request of Monsieur Berthold, providing some alternate language to accomplish what he requested.

The Chair: Okay, but the language he is most comfortable with does not include the words "at least".

We are now proceeding with the amendment proposed by Monsieur Berthold, which does not include the words "at least".

Is there any further discussion on the amendment? The essence of the amendment is to dedicate one half of our time to the COVID study.

Hon. Mike Lake: On a point of order, can we, for clarity—I hate to belabour this—have the clerk read the motion we're about to vote on, please?

The Chair: That's a good idea.

Mr. Clerk, take two.

The Clerk: I would actually ask for members' indulgence to have Mr. Berthold clarify his original amendment or we can go by unanimous consent to withdraw and start anew.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I'm asking for unanimous consent to withdraw my motion.

[*Translation*]

I want everyone to agree and to work only on the clerk's motion, which I think is fine.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is it the will of the committee that we proceed in this fashion?

I see no objection.

Mr. Clerk, could you suggest wording for the amendment to be reintroduced by Monsieur Berthold?

The Clerk: My understanding is that it has now been withdrawn and Monsieur Berthold is moving an amendment to the subcommittee report that is now before us and that would read as follows: "That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of the Emergency Situation Facing Canadians in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic and that the evidence and documentation received by the committee during the Second Session of the 43rd Parliament on the subject be taken into consideration by the committee in the current session, that the committee hold additional meetings on this study in the current session, that the committee dedicate half of its meetings to this study, and that the committee report its findings and recommendations to the House."

That would be the subcommittee report if it were amended.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

The debate is on the amendment, as you just heard.

Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Sorry, Mr. Chair, but I want to be clear that we're voting on the amendment. I also have an amendment, so I want to make sure we're not voting on the motion and that I'll have a chance to move another amendment after we deal with this. Is that correct?

The Chair: Indeed you will, and I think we might have one from Mr. van Koeverden as well.

This is on the amendment to the subcommittee report.

Mr. Lake, do you have a further intervention? I didn't mean to cut you off. I know you had asked that the amendment be reread, but I didn't know if you had some comments on it as well.

Hon. Mike Lake: No, I think we should vote on this.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: The motion is amended.

I recognize Mr. Davies.

● (1650)

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a very simple amendment. It's just to remove the words "the Second Session" so it reads "that the evidence and documentation received by the committee during the 43rd Parliament be taken into consideration". We received evidence and documentation in the first session and the second session, so I think we should have all of that available to the committee.

The Chair: The amendment is in order.

The debate is on the amendment to delete the words "the Second Session".

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. van Koeverden, do you have another amendment?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: I do. I gave you a little preview earlier. It's just that we add "and that pursuant to Standing Order 109 the committee request a government response".

The Chair: The debate is now on the amendment, which is in order.

Is there any debate on the amendment proposed by Mr. van Koeverden? Seeing none, is it the will of the committee to adopt the amendment as presented?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: The motion to amend is so adopted. I believe we are now ready to vote on the main motion as thrice amended.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have a point of order.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Will we need another motion to hold a meeting next week, on Monday, with the analysts, regarding the work done in the previous session?

We must be able to schedule the upcoming COVID-19 study.

If you ask my colleagues, you'll see that we want a briefing. We have several new committee members. I wanted your input on this.

Do we need another motion for next Monday's meeting?

The Chair: I'll ask for the clerk's perspective. Before I do that, I'll give you my opinion. We can amend our motion to state that the study will begin on Monday with a briefing with analysts and a summary of testimony from the last Parliament. Otherwise, we can do this with a second motion.

I think that both options are acceptable. We're in your capable hands.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I don't think that you can move a motion. However, you said it so well that, if we added this to the motion, we would resolve everything at the same time. Exactly as you said, we would want to start the study with a briefing. We would be closing the loop on this issue.

[*English*]

The Chair: Colleagues, I believe now we have a further amendment that would add something like, "and that the aforementioned study begin at the next meeting of the committee with a briefing

from the analyst including a summary of evidence received during the 43rd Parliament".

That is the amendment that has just been proposed by Monsieur Berthold.

The debate is now on that amendment.

Go ahead, Mr. Davies, please.

• (1655)

Mr. Don Davies: Just as a question of process, I don't know that this is necessary. We just passed a motion, and it has meetings in it. We'll be determining week to week what the meeting is going to be. Having passed this and having determined that half of the meetings will be on COVID, we can just proceed right now to decide what the first meeting will consist of. In either event, I agree with Mr. Berthold that it should start with a briefing, but I am not sure that you have to amend the motion setting out the study to do so.

I'll leave that in your hands, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's a fair point.

We have not yet adopted the main motion. We've adopted these amendments so far, but not the main motion. I take your point that we're now into administrative details that need not be included in the motion, but that's where we are.

Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: This is just to make sure that we can wrap things up and give guidance to the analysts and the clerk for the meeting next Monday. If we add this item immediately, it will be resolved, and we can move on to the next item.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any further debate on the amendment?

Go ahead, Dr. Powlowski.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I have to say something a little unusual here.

I wonder if the analysts have the time to make an interim report before Monday. There was a lot of testimony over the last couple of years. Before we make them stay up all night, for the next four or five nights, to come up with the report, would it be out of order to ask the analysts whether it is possible to do this before the next meeting?

The Chair: Dr. Powlowski, that's not at all out of order. I have some inside information that indicates that we're going to receive an affirmative response, but I'll let you hear it from Sonya.

We'll go over to the analyst to respond to Dr. Powlowski's inquiry.

Ms. Sonya Norris (Committee Researcher): Well, I was present for the second session of the last Parliament. We did start preparing reports, so it is possible to give documentation that summarizes the evidence from the second session.

For the first session, I was not part of the health committee. There were 28 meetings and 171 witnesses. I could probably produce a document that covers [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], but as to summarizing the evidence, I'm not sure how best to supply the committee with a summary.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Given that, might I suggest that we focus on the second session for the evidence?

My main part in moving the amendment is just simply to put the evidence before the committee for our consideration.

It would be open to any member to go back and read that at their convenience. However, I think it will be enough to digest and chew on if we just get a summary and review of the second session and then leave it to members to go back and dig further if they want.

The Chair: That's eminently reasonable. Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Monsieur Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: The amendment that we're moving doesn't involve any particular report, only that the analysts report back to us on what was said. We'll take what's provided. I'm fine with that and I don't have any concerns.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Is there any further debate on the amendment? Is it the will of the meeting to adopt the amendment by consensus?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Monsieur Berthold.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: It's now time to discuss the scheduling of our other studies.

Mr. Chair, I'll be moving my motion on children's health care. Here it is:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the impact the recent pandemic has had on children's healthcare and that:

1. the study include, but not be limited to; addressing health care service backlogs affecting children, inter-provincial barriers for research, data collection and sharing on children's health, children's nutritional needs, shortages of qualified health care workers capable of dealing with children's health issues, and how Canada can resolve its current child's health care crisis;
2. the study include a focus on disparities in access to services for rural, indigenous, racialized, and lower income communities;
3. the study consist of a minimum of six witness meetings;
4. the Minister of Health be invited to appear for one of these meetings;

5. the committee present its findings and recommendations to the House.

This motion was sent to all committee members. I'd like to speak about it for a few moments, if that's okay.

The Chair: You still have the floor, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think that one group significantly affected by the pandemic over the past few years is children. We aren't just talking about pandemic-related events, but also about the lack of resources for children, which in turn is linked to mental health issues.

I think that this committee must take the time to talk about the needs of children, who are the next generation. This is extremely important because few government authorities have taken the time to talk about children and all that they have experienced over the past few years, in school or in other places. We need to understand how the federal government, within its jurisdictions, can work to improve the care and health of children in general.

Of course, the pandemic has exacerbated this situation. That's why I'm asking my colleagues to support this motion and this study. It's important. It would send a clear message to all Canadians, especially young Canadians, that their elected representatives in Ottawa are thinking about them and are concerned about their situation.

I want to thank you and urge you to support this motion so that we can talk about it as soon as possible and so that Canadian children realize that they're a key concern for their elected representatives in Ottawa.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

[*English*]

The motion is in order and it is in your digital binder as of today. The debate is now on the motion.

Madam Vignola.

[*Translation*]

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

As a mother of four children, I obviously think that children are important. I'm not in a hurry to have grandchildren, however. They can take their time.

Children's health is a priority. I think that this motion is excellent. However, I'd like to propose a small amendment to ensure that we don't encroach on the jurisdictions of Quebec and the Canadian provinces in terms of health.

I move that we replace “and how Canada can resolve its current child's health care crisis” with “in order to find potential solutions.” We would conduct the same study, but it would be to identify potential solutions to propose to the provincial ministers of health in Canada, in order to avoid encroaching on their areas of jurisdiction.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

[English]

The debate is now on the amendment to the motion proposed by Madam Vignola, specifically, to point number one.

Mr. Davies, go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: I was going to speak about the motion generally, and not to the amendment, so I'll pass for the moment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Dr. Hanley.

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): I had the same.... I was going to speak more to the overall motion than the amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Hanley.

The debate is on the amendment. Are there any interventions with respect to the amendment proposed by Madam Vignola?

Go ahead, Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I just want to say that I support Mrs. Vignola's proposal. We have no issue with it.

The Chair: Okay.

Are there any comments?

[English]

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, could I ask about the phrase that is replacing, "and how Canada can resolve its current child health care crisis"?

What is the new language?

[Translation]

The Chair: Mrs. Vignola, I think that we're ready to vote on the proposed amendment. However, we must have the new version. Could you read it again, before we vote on it? That way it will be clear to everyone.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Certainly, Mr. Chair.

We would remove the words "and how Canada can resolve its current child's health care crisis" and replace them with "in order to find potential solutions."

The text of the amendment will be sent in a few moments.

[English]

The Chair: All right.

You have the amendment before you.

Dr. Powlowski, did you have an intervention on the amendment?

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: No. It was on the motion itself.

The Chair: Okay. Very well.

Is it the will of the committee to adopt the amendment as presented?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: The motion is amended. The debate is now on the motion as amended.

Go ahead, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: I'm sorry. I guess this is just one of the difficulties of operating by Zoom. I'm not clear that I have before me the most current version of the motion.

Does this motion have in it a reference to the issue of nutrition for children? Mr. Berthold has assured me that it does, but I don't see those words. I don't know if I have the most current version of the motion. That's my first point. Second, I want to be clear that this study, if we are to undertake it, looks at the issue of health care provision to children and not just the impact that the pandemic has had on health care for children.

By the way, if it is just the impact that the pandemic has had on children's health care, then why isn't this just an issue that is dealt with in the meetings we have allocated towards the pandemic? We could easily call witnesses who speak to the impact of COVID on children in that context.

You know, I'll support this as long as it's clear that if we are going to use our [Technical difficulty—Editor] that it be clear that we can examine health care issues with children that go beyond just COVID or the pandemic but that might affect them generally; and second, that it's broad enough. I would like to see the words—unless it's understood by my colleagues—that we can look at the issue of nutrition for children, because I think that's a very large social determinant. I won't go into it in detail, but the issues of childhood obesity, diabetes and access to nutritional food I think are very important parts of childhood health.

I would just like to make sure that this study is broad enough to encompass that. Mr. Berthold has kindly assured me that this would be, and that he's comfortable with that, but I want to make sure that the words are in there. So far, I don't see the words in there, unless I'm looking at an old version of the motion.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies. I don't want to thrust myself into the debate, but I think the responses to your enquiries are pretty straightforward.

The motion that is before us was put on notice today. There is a date at the top of it that indicates Wednesday, February 2. The motion in point one specifically includes, as one of the items to be studied, "addressing children's nutritional needs". I think that covers that one off.

With regard to the other point you made, about whether this is limited to the pandemic, these are the opening words of the motion: "That Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study on children's health and the recent impact the pandemic had on children".

So I think both your points are covered. Again, though, I don't want to thrust myself into the debate. If others want to offer commentary on Mr. Davies' preoccupations, by all means go ahead.

Dr. Hanley, please.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Chair, that assures me. I was looking at the motion dated Monday, January 31, 2022. You have totally cleared up my issues, so thank you.

The Chair: Dr. Hanley.

Mr. Brendan Hanley: Further to the point mentioned, there is an explicit line on the February 2 version about children's nutritional needs. Certainly I support the intent of this motion.

I would also like clarification, perhaps from Mr. Berthold, if this is intended to be in the pandemic stream, or not in the COVID half, as it were.

I think in the interests of scheduling, yes, this is a good motion. I think it will need scoping to be limited to six studies. Some understanding of what the intent is—COVID or non-COVID—would help.

I also want to have a sense of which motions we are adopting so that we can then talk about the prioritization. I understood that was the intent from the subcommittee meeting, that we really set on a study that each party would like to put forward and then discuss prioritization.

In particular, the motion that I'm proposing to address on the workforce crisis might be a good way to start the overall theme of health care provision in the context of that crisis. Then we might be able to address many of these related issues, and of course, child health is a primary one.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Dr. Powlowski, please.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I think the wording of the motion looks okay, in that it is children's health and then there's something about the pandemic. I think it addresses Don's concern about it not just being about COVID.

In this case, I certainly welcome this motion. I think children have largely been forgotten about during the pandemic. They've been asked to sacrifice a lot for the sake of those who are at the highest risk of dying from COVID. They were asked not to go to school, not to have parties with their friends, not to have hockey. This has been very difficult on children.

Do you know what? The one part of our population who is not represented in Parliament is kids. I would certainly welcome the opportunity to talk about issues from the children's perspective and the effects COVID has had on kids' health. I agree with Don's premise, which is that we talk about kids' health in general, so I think the angle of COVID is a useful launch board for a general study of kids' health.

The bottom line is that I like your studies, Luc. Thanks.

• (1715)

The Chair: We have Mr. van Koeverden, please.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you.

I wanted a little bit of clarity as well as to whether we were focusing on the effects that COVID has had on children.

I think that would be a good way to spend our Mondays. I'm assuming that they will be Mondays for the COVID half of our meetings. They will need to be topical. We will need to focus on specific issues, not just COVID in general. Some clarity on that would be helpful.

I'm in favour of studying all of the effects that COVID has had on children, but also in the broader context as well. A little bit of clarity there would be great. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mrs. Vignola, you have the floor.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Health is a very broad topic, whether we're talking about children, seniors, adults or teenagers. We must take this topic seriously.

Some of you are doctors, and others were athletes. You know the importance of a holistic view. Physical health and mental health are based on different factors, including diet and exercise. All these aspects must be covered, in my opinion, to have an overall vision. If we leave any one of these aspects out, we've taken away a piece of the puzzle. We've just upset the balance, which is essential for children and for monitoring children. If a doctor or other practitioner focuses on only one aspect of our proposed solutions for children's health, they may be overlooking a bigger issue.

We need a holistic view. I like Mr. Berthold's motion because it gives us that view of health and the status of the systems and supports for children right now.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll first try to answer the questions about COVID-19 and the aspects unrelated to COVID-19. The study must focus on [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] children, but there have been effects because of COVID-19. I couldn't move a motion without saying that we also had to consider this given the current situation. The study focuses mainly on children's health. The choice of witnesses will be up to each party. As Mrs. Vignola said, this will allow for a holistic approach. We won't be compartmentalizing ourselves into one area. We'll be conducting a study that can provide an accurate picture. We'll be hearing from people who can provide information on the issue as a whole.

I must admit that six meetings aren't a lot, but we have to start somewhere. I think that, at the end of this meeting, if we find that more meetings are needed, we'll make a decision accordingly. I also think that, in six meetings, we could establish an overview of the situation, see whether we should proceed and propose solutions at our level. We aren't experts. However, many people have approached us as committee members to talk about children's health.

I think that we should do this. It isn't just a COVID-19 study, but a study on children. That said, we can't ignore the impact of the pandemic that has been going on for the past two years. I made sure that the study speaks to my concerns so that we don't miss anything. If, during a meeting, we find that we've missed something, we'll be able to continue the study anyway.

If I had started listing the current situations, I'd still be reading the motion. I think that the motion gives us the opportunity to study [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and then expand on a specific point afterwards. That said, we need a general overview of the situation, and this study will provide that. That's my proposal to the committee.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Davies, please.

Mr. Don Davies: First of all, I think it's a very excellent subject for all the reasons that my colleagues have said so far. I also like the fact that I think the issues that are mentioned give us a really broad range of perspectives.

I have two things I wanted to raise for our consideration. One is whether or not we really want to have the Minister of Health come to one of those meetings because that wipes out a meeting generally, pretty much, for witnesses, so you're really talking about five meetings for the general public and stakeholders.

The second thing I wanted to raise is that it should be clear that each party be entitled to an equal number of witnesses. I can move that as an actual amendment, if we wish. The reason that that's a good thing—you can hear me say this a lot—is you get a real diversity of perspectives when that happens, and issues.

One thing I've learned is no party has a monopoly on good ideas or on perspectives. It's been my experience in this committee that when each party is bringing a different issue or a different angle with different witnesses before the committee on a subject, it really adds a lot of depth and diversity to the perspective.

I'm going to move a formal motion to amend to say that the study consist of a minimum of six witness meetings, with each party entitled to propose an equal number of witnesses, or however that could be phrased, with each party to be entitled to an equal number of witnesses.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mrs. Vignola, you have the floor.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'm sorry, Mr. Davies.

At this point, should we focus first on Mr. Berthold's motion and then on Mr. Davies' proposal, which is more of a procedural proposal?

The Chair: Right now, the debate concerns the amended motion passed. However, it's completely acceptable and appropriate for another member to move another amendment. I agree that it's a technical amendment, but it's still a formal amendment.

This debate concerns the amendment, and Mr. Davies has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies: If we have an understanding at the committee that procedurally that's how we'll go, that's fine with me. I'm [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] but if we're clear that there's an equal number of witnesses, that's fine.

I am curious about my colleagues' thoughts, and maybe Mr. Berthold's opinion on whether or not he wanted to devote one meeting to the Minister of Health on this subject. I'm happy to hear his reasoning for that.

The Chair: Mr. Davies, before we go on, I need to be clear. Are you proposing an amendment to the motion, or are you indicating that we should be able to work this out without the formality of an amendment to the motion?

If there is an amendment to the motion, that's what we need to proceed on.

Mr. Don Davies: I'd be okay, if it's easier, to do a straw poll. If everybody is in agreement that there will be an equal number of witnesses allowed, I don't need to move the amendment. If there's any issue about that, I will move the amendment and we'll have to have a vote on it.

The Chair: Colleagues, is this going to be easy, or do we need to have a formal debate? This is an informal question that I'm posing to you.

How do we feel about an equal number of witnesses on the panel for this study?

Hon. Mike Lake: I have a point of order.

I think we need to have a conversation about it.

• (1725)

The Chair: All right.

I would suggest, then, Mr. Davies, that you need to put forward a formal amendment to deal with this formally, as opposed to informally.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will do so.

I think it would be most appropriate to move that we amend item three to read: "That the study consist of a minimum of six witness meetings, with each party entitled to an equal number of witnesses"

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

The debate is now on the amendment.

I recognize Mrs. Kramp-Neuman.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): With regard to the amendment, perhaps I'm not completely clear on the rules, because this is my first committee. I need some clarification on the assignment of the witnesses.

Is it not true that it reflects the composition of the House? I have watched committees before and that's generally how it's reflected. Perhaps I could get some clarity on that, because I don't want to abandon that precedent.

Could you enlighten me as to how we're going to move forward with this, and whether or not we're going to have a true reflection of the composition of the House with regard to witnesses? If we didn't do that, we would be deviating from normal practice.

The Chair: Mrs. Kramp-Neuman, you are absolutely right. That is the normal manner in which we proceed, which is why Mr. Davies has proposed an amendment to vary from the normal practice.

Mr. Don Davies: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

It's probably more accurate to say that it is the practice at the majority of committees that witnesses are allocated by [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], but there are committees that go with equality of witnesses. In fact, that's how the health committee operated in the last Parliament, for all of the second session, so it can be done.

The Chair: I don't dispute that it can be done. I provided my advice based on my 10 years of experience, but I haven't been on the health committee in those 10 years.

Go ahead, Dr. Powlowski, please.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I agree with Don. We did it last time and had an equal number of witnesses, and it worked out quite well. We had a good spectrum of opinion on various issues and we always had someone from Quebec, so it worked out to everybody's interests.

I support having an equal number of witnesses.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Lake, please.

Hon. Mike Lake: This is just an observation. This seems very unusual. I've not been on a committee where this approach has been taken. I'd be interested to hear the rationale, because as I look at the results of the election, I think the Bloc was around 8% of the vote and a little bit less than 10% of the seats. The NDP was around 16% of the vote and I believe around 7% of the seats. I don't really understand the rationale, because it would be a significant deviation from any committee that I've been on in my 16 years as a parliamentarian.

We're dealing with enough issues around trust in terms of the way that we proceed. Canadians voted a few months ago. Canadians want to see themselves reflected in the witness lists as a proportion that comes from a part of the country or a proportion that comes from any community in Canada. It's incumbent on us as the members of the committee to have those discussions.

Of course, not every witness who comes before committee is assigned to a political party. Many witnesses who are experts or interested in coming before committee will put their names forward, submit their names to the clerk and propose to be a witness before a committee in that way.

If anything, as a health committee studying important issues that over the last couple of years have tended to divide Canadians, as-

signing witnesses by political party seems to be just about the worst way to go about apportioning witness time. We have a discussion in terms of a party. We put forward suggestions for witnesses, but as I explained, taking a look at the numbers, I don't really understand the rationale.

Don, I've served with you for a long time. I have a lot of respect for you. I'd like to hear a bit more about the rationale in terms of this proposal, because it is highly unusual, at least in relation to the committees I've been on.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

Mr. Davies, do you want to respond? Then we'll come back to Ms. Vignola, who seems to be having some technical difficulties.

Mr. Don Davies: Maybe briefly. Thanks for those comments, Mr. Lake.

Again, I won't repeat what I said before other than to reiterate that it was the practice of this committee in the last Parliament and that other committees have done it too. They've gone to that practice of equal witnesses.

There are always some slight deviations. For instance, there are certain committees, not very many, that are chaired by the opposition. Why is that? That's a deviation from the number of seats in the House of Commons. It's simply a reflection of the fact that sometimes [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] exception to the rules.

In my experience, one of the great advantages, and frankly pleasures, of sitting on the health committee is that when it's working at its best, it is a committee that is most unlike others in that there are usually not a lot of ideological issues. Everybody who's involved in health care is generally motivated by the same thing, which is they're in health care because they want to improve the health of people. Maybe COVID has upset that balance a little bit. There's been more partisan behaviour in the past two years than certainly I saw in the years prior to that. I think that's regrettable. I think we're at our best when we're operating in a non-partisan way.

The other thing I would point out is that every Parliament has a different dynamic. This is a minority Parliament. Let's face it. If we were in a majority Parliament, it would be a different dynamic. In this case here, it takes all of us working together and there are compromises in a minority Parliament that have to be made in order to get things done. I'm sure the Conservatives will be asking for the support of other parties, which they wouldn't have to do in a majority, but those are just the compromises that are made in a minority.

Overall though, and I really appreciate the remarks by Dr. Powlowski, it worked very well. There's a little bit of trust here in the sense that the witnesses that I put forward, and that I know my Bloc Québécois colleague put forward, often added perspectives that were extraordinarily helpful and were not ideological.

I think it's a good thing and we can see how it works. I think people will see that sometimes equality is a very good thing in the House of Commons.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Colleagues, I am mindful of the fact that we have now reached the appointed hour, but we don't have a motion before us to adjourn. However, I am advised by the clerk that if we go much longer, we're going to have to suspend to ensure we have resources to continue if that is the will of the meeting.

I propose the following. There are two people who are presently on the speakers list, Madam Vignola and Mr. Berthold. I propose, unless there is a will or a motion to adjourn, that upon hearing from Mr. Berthold we suspend to allow for us to have the resources we need to continue.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vignola, you have the floor.

• (1735)

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I support Mr. Davies' motion, Mr. Chair.

I have been a member of the House of Commons for only two years, so I may still be very naive concerning procedure. That said, I think that children's health is not a partisan issue. I also don't think that potential solutions are a partisan or an activist issue or that they depend on party lines.

When I call witnesses, I don't ask them who they voted for in the last election. Instead, I look for witnesses who have the expertise needed to answer my questions. I even call witnesses before they appear to let them know what kinds of questions I would like to put to them, and I ask them whether they have the knowledge needed to answer them. If the witness tells me that they do not, I find another witness, as I want to invite witnesses who have the necessary expertise to appear, be it before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, or before another committee.

I am sure that Mr. Thériault does the exact same thing for the Standing Committee on Health. It doesn't matter whether we are talking about 8%, 7%, 16%, 32% or 34%. In my humble opinion, as professionals who care about the issues we discuss, we will not select witnesses based on who they voted for in the last election or based on the amounts they may have contributed to parties during election campaigns. We select them based on their ability to answer our questions and to help us see things more clearly and suggest possible solutions, especially when it comes to children's health. So I agree with Mr. Davies.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vignola.

Mr. Berthold, go ahead.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, I think it is important to point out two things.

First, this is not a precedent that was created in a number of committees, but rather a motion adopted in the House that pertains to a broader study carried out by the Standing Committee on Health, which called for an equal number of witnesses during the first hour and stakeholders during the second hour. We just need everyone to have the same understanding of the situation. This is not a precedent or a habit of the Standing Committee on Health. It is not part of the Standing Committee on Health's tradition to adopt this kind of a motion.

Second, in order for us to move forward, I think it would be a good idea to try out this work method in this first study, which concerns children's health. That will enable us to see whether we can work like this and to note the results. That is why it is important for us to adopt this motion not for all studies, but for this study alone, to see how this approach works.

Mr. Chair, I have no issue with Mr. Davies' amendment concerning this specific study. I propose that we adopt this motion, which will help us move forward and will help the analysts in their work. We can plan to begin studies like this, and then we could continue prioritizing, as next week will come quickly, and we will have to have a topic to study next Wednesday.

The Chair: My understanding is that you wanted to suspend the meeting to continue our discussion. Is that indeed the last point you raised?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, given the many events currently taking place, my colleagues and I can no longer continue this evening's meeting.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Mike Lake: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. There's nobody on the list, so let's just call the question to end the meeting.

The Chair: We now have somebody on the list.

What I had indicated prior to Mr. Berthold's intervention was that we would.... I'm happy to entertain a motion for adjournment, if somebody wants to bring it. Otherwise, I suggest we suspend to ensure that we have the resources to be able to continue the meeting.

With that, we stand suspended.

• (1735)

(Pause)

• (1740)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order, with apologies.

This is one of the challenges associated with working in different time zones. My advice from the clerk was that we had sufficient resources to go until 6:30. From where I sit, it is 6:40, but from where he sits, it's 5:30, so we have adequate resources to continue for another 50 minutes. If we're not done by then, we will have to suspend to see if we can go further. My apologies for the mix-up. That's entirely as a result of being an hour behind the centre of the universe.

Is there any further debate on the amendment proposed by Mr. Davies?

Mr. van Koeverden, please go ahead.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you.

I don't want to belabour this at all. I just think it's important to note that while we are in favour of a children's health study, seemingly, and in favour of voting on this as soon as possible, it doesn't remove the possibility that we have other studies to discuss, and then, collectively, we have to rank those as priorities and determine which one goes first.

I think we should move to vote on Don's amendment. If time allows, then we can discuss other studies, but I don't think it's necessarily decided that any of these studies will go first.

The Chair: Understood.

Mr. Lake.

Hon. Mike Lake: I thought we were close because there was nobody on the speakers list when I was saying that we were so close to passing it and that it would be nice to just finish it. I was going to weigh in and say that, given that it was just for one study and that I'm new to the committee, I didn't want to get in the way of agreement, so I was going to nod to Don's idea for this study in the hope of moving forward and having a little bit of a plan. However, it sounds like there may be more discussion that needs to be had, which is probably going to take us longer than we need tonight, so I move that we adjourn.

The Chair: That motion is not debatable.

Is it the will of the meeting that we adjourn, or do we require a standing vote?

I'm not sure that I see a consensus.

Mr. Clerk, I would ask you to conduct a standing vote on Mr. Lake's motion that we do now adjourn.

The Clerk: I will do so, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I apologize, Mr. Chair.

If there are no further discussions on the main motion, can we vote on this motion and then vote on Mr. Lake's motion?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, I will take your advice on this, even though we had not yet dispensed with the motion that was before us. We do have a motion to adjourn, which I understand takes precedence, isn't debatable and has to be dealt with. Am I off base?

• (1745)

The Clerk: Just a moment, Mr. Chair. I need about a minute, and then I'll get back to you on that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: My question was purely rhetorical. If we have to vote on Mr. Lake's motion first, I have no problem with that. I understand that the discussion on Mr. Berthold's motion is probably not over. I just wanted to get a clarification so I can understand better.

The Chair: Yes, that was also my understanding, but I asked for an expert's advice, which we will follow.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, such a motion is a privileged motion, and it is dilatory, so it goes to question without debate.

The Chair: I don't believe we have consensus in the room, so I would ask you to take a standing vote on whether we do now adjourn.

The Clerk: The vote is on the motion by Mr. Lake, that this committee do now adjourn.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 9; nays 2)

• (1750)

The Chair: See you Monday.

Thanks, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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