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Chair: Mr. Sean Casey



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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 87 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

In accordance with our routine motion, I am informing the committee that all remote participants have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), the committee is meeting to consider a request by members of the committee to undertake a study concerning a Public Health Agency of Canada contract.

The floor is open.

Dr. Ellis, go ahead.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you very much to everybody for being here this morning.

This is an exceedingly important time in Canadian history, when we begin to look at the spending of this Liberal government in cahoots with the NDP. We know very clearly that Canadians have had a significant difficulty with the reckless spending of this Liberal-NDP coalition government. We also know very clearly that Tiff Macklem, Governor of the Bank of Canada, said that domestic inflation is related to this government's pouring their inflationary spending fuel on a fire.

We also know very clearly that Canadians are paying the price for that. We know that the cost of housing in this country has doubled. We know that interest rates have gone up more quickly than at any time in history. We know that inflation is at a 40-year high. Canadians cannot heat their homes, feed their families and keep a roof over their head.

We also know very clearly, from conversations with those very important people we represent, that this is not going to change, because the Liberal-NDP government continues to do its dirty deeds with respect to inflationary spending.

Mr. Chair, we hear from the people we represent every single day, and I know that you do too. In P.E.I., you hear from them, telling you exactly how difficult it is to pay their bills. I know that those other members sitting across from me hear from the people they represent in this great nation as well.

We also know that the visits to food banks are at an all-time high. Millions upon millions of people are visiting food banks every single month. In the small town where I live, Truro, Nova Scotia, they have 1,800 people on their list who come to the food bank regularly. Things have gotten so bad that when I spoke to the mayor of the County of Colchester on Friday, he said that the food bank has reached out to the county to ask them to pay their mortgage. They continue to have to buy more food and figure out ways to feed the 1,800 people, including children, who are on their list.

The reason we're here, of course, is the spending of \$150 million by this government on a failed business plan with Medicago. We also know that, realistically, the business dealings with this company were actually over \$300 million. They originally spent \$172 million for infrastructure and building, etc., and then they entered into contracts with this company for another \$150 million. Talk about throwing bad money after good, potentially, or just more bad money after bad money.

Chair, we also know that in 2003, Canada was one of the signatories of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, or as they call it at WHO, the FCTC. Very clearly, Canada was one of the signatories on this. This government should have known that when they were part of a company with Philip Morris International, a tobacco company, there was no way this vaccine was going to be accepted. Therefore, of course, what did they do? They continued to spend more money.

We also know very clearly that they've spent money on a multitude of other examples, such as the ArriveCAN app, colloquially known as the "ArriveScam" app. When you watch some of the testimony that's happening at the current time with respect to that particular app, it appears to me—now, I've obviously never developed an app and I don't really know that much about it—to be two guys in their basement, who didn't even develop an app but acted as intermediaries and took a lot of money, \$54 million, from this Liberal-NDP coalition and then farmed it out to some other people. We now know very clearly from the media stories that have come out that it was possible to develop this app in a weekend. It was that simple to actually do it.

• (1105)

Therefore, when all of this came out, we know that some people got very rich in doing this. That's an absolute travesty, I would suggest.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There's a point of order from Ms. Sidhu.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Is what Mr. Ellis is talking about relevant to today?

The Chair: There is no motion in front of the committee at this time, but the agenda is to consider a request to undertake a study concerning the Public Health Agency of Canada. The letter that compelled this meeting does refer to lost funds. I would say that Mr. Ellis's comments are connected to that concept, so I'm not convinced there is an issue of relevance here.

Go ahead, Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you very much, Chair.

Oddly enough, doesn't it make perfect sense that our Liberal colleagues don't want us talking about these painful issues? I think we established very clearly in this committee previously that when those things that are difficult and hard and painful come up, we continue to get these interruptions over and over again. We saw that when we wanted to bring forward a study on opioids, Chair, and we were interrupted over and over again and asked about the relevance of it. Of course, we do know very clearly that housing and poverty are associated with opioid use and misuse and that this government is actually giving away powerful opioids to Canadians, which are being sold on the street and diverted in terms of their use.

There, Chair, I would say I am digressing a bit and I shall return to the actual motion.

When we look at this, we're talking about \$300 million now. When we look at other scandals this NDP-Liberal coalition government has been involved in, we know that this is a usual thing for them now. The only thing, of course, that is perhaps more expensive is the Trans Mountain pipeline cost overruns, which are at \$30.9 billion. I'll direct people to a Global News article with respect to that.

Obviously that's in a different category, but do you know what, Chair? I would suggest that the difficulty here is that many Canadians are so used to hearing about these scandals and about the lack of fiscal responsibility that they perhaps don't understand or don't want to realize or they get numb—I think that's the better wording, Chair. They get numb to the fact that this is \$300 million, which, of course, is a third of a billion dollars, which is an absolutely incredible amount of money.

Therefore, Chair, the Conservatives believe that it's important that we study this issue, and therefore I would like to move the following motion. I'll read it in English. There are copies available, and we can circulate those.

That given recent media reports that the Public Health Agency of Canada lost over \$300 million on an unfulfilled contract, the committee undertake a study of the Public Health Agency of Canada losing over \$300 million in taxpayers' money for an unfulfilled contract, the committee hold 6 hours of meetings on this matter and that each current meeting of the Health Committee is expanded by one hour, to address this matter and that the committee hear from the Minister of Health, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, President of the Public Health Agency of Canada, the President of the Treasury Board, and officials from the health ministry, and other witnesses deemed relevant by the committee, and that hearings begin at the next available meeting, and that the committee produce a report on its findings and report it to the House.

Chair, I would suggest that one of the other things that would be relevant to point out is that when you look at Public Accounts of Canada 2023—of which I have a giant three-volume copy here on my desk—this ends up in volume III, on page 143. I don't know what the font is, but I would suggest it might be six-point. It might be eight-point. Under this line on page 143 of volume III, what does it say? It says, in incredibly ridiculous terms, “Unfulfilled contract by a vendor” and the “Amount of loss” is \$150,000,000. “Amount not expected to be recovered” is \$150,000,000. It's shameful.

When you think about it, when you look at this giant encyclopedic tome, you understand that this government thinks that the accountability to Canada is related to the fact that they can bury this two-thirds of the way through a four-inch document printed on two sides, and that this is an acceptable way to do business on behalf of Canadians. This Liberal-NDP coalition tried to hide at least that \$150 million.

• (1110)

Again, why do I say it's over \$300 million that this coalition has lost? As I said previously, they also invested in this company, which they knew was going to produce something that could never be used. Their nefarious purpose was to attempt to take this vaccine and shove it into the COVAX program, after they had already taken vaccines out of that. We are the only G7 country to have done so. That's entirely a whole other shady story, Chair.

I believe that Canadians deserve and demand an explanation. How do they believe they could possibly bury, hide and lose \$300 million of taxpayers' money?

I am asking this committee to study this and attempting to be generous with how we might all spend our time doing this. This is exceedingly important. Therefore, Chair, the Conservatives move that the health committee start a study on this, calling the witnesses who are mentioned in the motion and taking a minimum of six hours to study this on behalf of Canadians.

Chair, I will leave it at that. I'm sure I'll have other things to say later. I want to make sure I'm back on the list to come back later. I believe the motion is in order, and I would like to hear comments on it.

Thank you.

• (1115)

The Chair: The motion is in order.

I recognize Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Chair, can I cede a portion of my time to Mr. Paul-Hus, and he can then cede the floor back to me? Is that allowed?

The Chair: He is actually number four on the list, so after you I have Dr. Kitchen and Mr. Paul-Hus.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I'll let Mr. Paul-Hus go first.

The Chair: Do you want to cede your time to Mr. Paul-Hus?

Mr. Todd Doherty: We'll just switch, if we can. Are we allowed to do that?

The Chair: I'm advised that this is possible, so we will have Mr. Paul-Hus, Dr. Kitchen, Mr. Doherty, and Mr. Jowhari, and there are more.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Chair, did you just permit a switching of speakers? Is that permitted?

The Chair: I did, after getting advice from the clerk.

Mr. Paul-Hus, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

If I'm here this morning, it's mainly out of geographic interest, since Medicago is located in my town, Quebec. It's also something of a continuation of the work I did for a long time when I sat on the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, which was tasked with addressing various issues related to the pandemic.

Let's recall a certain contract that caused quite a stir at the time, namely the \$237-million contract with former Liberal MP Frank Baylis for the manufacture of 10,000 respirators whose actual market value was \$137 million. No one has ever been able to explain why Frank Baylis had to be paid an extra \$100 million to manufacture these respirators, not to mention that an assessment showed that we would never need that many of them. Indeed, only a hundred or so respirators were used during the pandemic.

This brings me back to the management of contracts and public funds. As it turns out, certain expenses were necessary during the pandemic. Everyone acknowledges the need for them. Let's not forget, however, that the Parliamentary Budget Officer's assessment of the \$500 billion spent over the two years of the pandemic revealed that only \$300 billion could be explained. There wasn't even any way to shed light on the remaining \$200 billion or where that money went. The \$300 billion that we're told can be explained includes contracts such as the one given to Mr. Baylis, as well as other sums that were wasted, which happened in the Medicago file that we're currently looking at.

In February, when Mitsubishi Chemical Group decided to pull out entirely, we were surprised to learn that the federal government had spent \$173 million without any checks and balances whatsoever. The Government of Quebec loaned some money to the company and had means of getting its money back, but in the federal government's case, we learned that the money was wasted, but in the total absence of control mechanisms, we don't really know what happened.

What's more, we've come to learn that Health Canada didn't do its job. Indeed, because Philip Morris was a shareholder, the company shouldn't have been able to get any federal funds. The case before us is even worse: We've learned through Public Accounts of Canada that an additional \$150 million had been sunk into Medicago. From the information available, the amount of money wasted now sits at over \$323 million.

The main issue is the lack of accountability. All they do is write it down somewhere in an 800-page document, as my colleague just showed. One hundred and fifty million dollars up and disappeared

without any explanation given. We're told it's only \$150 million. There comes a point where enough is enough. The needs were real and were understood, but when things are managed in this way, there needs to be some accountability. We already needed answers about the first \$173 million, and now there's more. The amount has doubled.

A company in Quebec simply shut down operations, and people lost their jobs. Some ministers have said they were looking for solutions. Those are the pretty words we expect from Liberal ministers. Not many solutions have been found since February, however. On the contrary, things have gotten worse. We lost \$300 million, but no explanation is forthcoming, not to mention the company shouldn't have gotten that money to begin with.

I believe there's an urgent need to get to the bottom of this. The Standing Committee on Health is tasked with authorizing or denying certain expenses. In this case, it hasn't done its job. This file involved Health Canada directly, but Health Canada didn't do its job. Meanwhile, the Department of Industry releases funds, but we're not even able to get any clear explanations. When the media ask questions, they remain unanswered.

Enough is enough. There comes a point where we need answers. Transparency isn't just for when the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois or the NDP want answers. Transparency is there for tax-paying Canadians. While people are waiting in line for food because they're out of money, while they keep working and paying taxes, there's a company that decided to go back to Japan after having gotten \$300 million. We're told it's not a big deal and we let things go. Quite the contrary, it's very serious. I think there are limits. We cannot accept the unacceptable.

That's why this motion is so important. I hope that the Conservative Party and the Bloc Québécois will have the NDP's support to hold meetings to shed light on this. In the interest of transparency, we want answers about taxpayers' money, because they've had enough.

● (1120)

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

[*English*]

Next is Dr. Kitchen, and then we'll hear Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion.

It's interesting. There seems to be such a huge lack of concern by this NDP-Liberal government about \$150 million. It's just shocking that they think \$150 million is chump change. The average Canadian out there—and I'd say even more than the average Canadian—sits and talks about nickels and dimes. My wife and I have talked about nickels and dimes for years. Continually, we talk around the household, and when we look at families, they talk about where those nickels and dimes are going to come from. They add up. You continually add them up.

Here, we have a government that turns around.... It used to talk about thousands of dollars. It now considers thousands of dollars to be nickels. Now it's talking about millions of dollars and it still thinks they're just dimes. We're talking about \$150 million out there that has been wasted and not accounted for by this government. That's shocking, when we have Canadians who are suffering and struggling to make ends meet and get by day after day, with the huge inflationary costs this government keeps causing with its economic strategy. It just drives up cost after cost. Here we have \$150 million that could go a tremendous way toward helping Canadians.

Take a look at Coronach, Saskatchewan, where this government has been trying to end the use of coal energy and shut down a community. This \$150 million in that community would help tremendously in assisting these people and getting them out of this mess that they're in because of what this government is doing, yet the government just turns around and thinks \$150 million is nothing. It's shocking that the government can actually think that way.

You take that \$150 million and then add to it the \$172 million in infrastructure for a company that.... I get it. During COVID, when we were on the health committee, everything was moving quickly at the very start and things had to be done. At the same time, there had to be some accountability for where that money was going. Somebody had to be accountable for signing those contracts and allowing those contracts to go through.

When we're talking about this government, where there are policies that turn around and dictate what those levels are, they don't get signed off with just a simple, "Here it is. Just go ahead and do it." Someone has to look at them. It's not just the minister who has to sign off on something over \$100 million. There are deputy ministers. There are assistant deputy ministers. They all have to look at them.

We're not talking about one agency. We're talking not only about Public Works; we're talking about other areas we need to look at that are signing off on health, etc. There are probably at least three, and all three of those levels had to look at this and say, "Hmm. We're going to sign off on this without any recognition of what the endgame is if it doesn't transpire."

This motion is asking for these people to come and account for this to Canadians, so that the Canadian public has a true understanding of where that money was spent and whether or not it was spent wisely and appropriately.

When we're signing for something, I don't know anybody in this room who would agree to have something purchased and not make certain that they received the product, or, if they weren't going to receive the product, that they were going to get their money back.

My wife and I are looking at a new kitchen. When I say "new kitchen", I mean a household kitchen, not—

An hon. member: Not a baby.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robert Kitchen: When we're looking at that aspect of things, the reality is that we're not signing a piece of paper to say I'm paying for something until I know there are assurances that it's going to be done. That's just a simple little aspect of Canadians. Ev-

ery Canadian is looking at that, and they need to be responsible in understanding that aspect of it.

When we have a contract with Medicago that eventually gets terminated because of "mutual consent", which releases them from their obligations, how does that answer to the Canadian public?

● (1125)

That's what this motion is about. This motion is there to try to move forward so that we're accountable for where this is. We turned around, we looked and we saw, when we first put this motion forward under Standing Order 106(4), that we had support for that at that time. We had the required number of people to agree to this.

In the news, the NDP turned around and said that, yes, they wanted to know where this \$150 million was spent and what it was spent on...and being accountable for that money. The member here at this table stood in front of the press and told them that, yes, we need to bring this up. These are issues that need to be brought forward. These are things we need to do. This committee needs to turn around and say, "This is something urgent that needs to be brought to the fore, and we need to do it as soon as possible."

I ask colleagues to look at this and support this motion so that we can get on this as quickly as possible.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will cede the floor and potentially come back later.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Kitchen.

Go ahead, Mr. Doherty, please.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For the committee's sake and for those who are listening in, I want to read the motion back into the record:

That given recent media reports that the Public Health Agency of Canada lost over \$300 million on an unfulfilled contract, the committee undertake a study of the Public Health Agency of Canada losing over \$300 million in taxpayers' money for an unfulfilled contract, the committee hold 6 hours of meetings on this matter and that each current meeting of the Health Committee is expanded by one hour, to address this matter and that the committee hear from the Minister of Health, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, President of the Public Health Agency of Canada, the President of the Treasury Board, and officials from the health ministry, and other witnesses deemed relevant by the committee, and that hearings begin at the next available meeting, and that the committee produce a report on its findings and report it to the House.

Mr. Chair, this is shocking. Again, now we're finding out.... It's not new news. It goes along the lines of "same old same old".

I'll go down the list of scandals and wasteful spending: \$54 million on the ArriveCAN app; \$116 million on McKinsey consultants—that was \$116 million towards our opioid epidemic, Mr. Chair; \$26.8 million in bonuses to CMHC employees; a \$30,000 total for Prime Minister Trudeau's London hotel room, booked September 15 to 20 at \$6,000 per night; \$4.6 billion in COVID program abuse; \$210 million in payments to the Beijing-controlled Asian infrastructure bank; \$30.9 billion in Trans Mountain pipeline cost overruns; \$8.6 million in renovations to the Harrington Lake cottage; \$50 million for Mastercard; over \$400 million to change our passport to some woke crap; and \$12 million for Loblaws. That's \$12 million for freezers.

Mr. Chair, I will offer—I've said this a number of times—that this was around the 2017 wildfires, in which thousands of residents in my riding of Cariboo—Prince George were devastated and lost everything: fridges, stoves and all household belongings. Did they get money for the replacement of their equipment? No. However, Justin Trudeau gave \$12 million to his friends at Loblaws. Now he is claiming he called them to Ottawa and laid down the law. We saw how that went. It was a “Stop, or I'll say stop again” type of thing.

Mr. Chair, this is an egregious waste of taxpayer dollars. If you buy a service from a contractor but don't get the service you need, you should have the option to get your money back.

On October 23, 2020, the Prime Minister made an announcement:

The Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, today announced an investment of up to \$173 million through the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) in Quebec City-based Medicago to support Canada's response to COVID-19—

That's \$173 million. Then it says:

The project, valued at a total of \$428 million, will advance Medicago's virus-like particle vaccine, developed on the company's unique plant-based production platform, through clinical trials. It will also establish a large-scale vaccine and antibody production facility to increase Canada's domestic biomanufacturing capacity.

• (1130)

Mr. Chair, who are Medicago, and who are they to the Liberal Party? I can tell you this: They rank enough to get into the 2021 Liberal Party's platform, “Forward. For Everyone.” I turn readers' attention to page 8. Here it is, right here, if everyone can see it. It's on page 8 and it says: “We have completed the new Biologics Manufacturing Centre at the NRC, secured an agreement with Moderna to build a state-of-art manufacturing facility in Canada, and made major domestic capacity investments with AbCellera [and] Medicago”.

They're so big that they warranted getting a shout-out and being promoted in the Liberal Party's 2021 campaign platform and, Mr. Chair, that's just a cursory search. I'm sure that when we do more digging we're going to find connections either to the Trudeau Foundation or to Prime Minister Trudeau himself.

This is shocking. You know, I fight day and night for investments in mental health. In 2021, they also campaigned on a platform to make critical investments—

The Chair: Mr. Doherty, excuse me. I have a point of order from Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): On a point of order, Chair, can I ask my colleague Mr. Doherty not to bang on the table? The interpreters are going to have a problem.

I know you're passionate about everything, and I would just ask you—

Mr. Todd Doherty: I'll wave at the interpreters and apologize to them for that.

Mr. Chair, it is so frustrating for me. How many beds for recovery could that money have built? For three weeks, four weeks, we've been pushing to do something about the opioid epidemic in this country. The hundreds of millions of dollars that this government has wastefully spent.... How many vaccines were created? Not one, and where is this company now? It closed the doors...sunnier climes.

It's crazy that you'd give \$173 million or more to a company that you get squat out of. What else did they get out of this? They must have gotten something. Was that a payoff or something? Again, it's close enough to be listed in the Liberal Party's 2021 platform—page 8, for those who are looking.

This government is just not worth the cost. This Prime Minister is not worth the cost. Canadians have to wake up to this. It's not their money. I bet that, if you do a quick search, this was in some Liberal minister's riding. Well, I did the search. It was in the former health minister's riding, Minister Duclos's riding.

It's \$173 million that we know of—probably more—to a business that is no longer.... The doors are shuttered—doors, windows. Everybody's gone. They're off to sunnier climes, to billionaire island, probably. It's \$173 million.

Billions of dollars.... The former health minister gets it. He is the former minister of treasury, too—Mr. Treasury, the guy who controls the purse strings. This is crazy. You can't write this stuff. You couldn't make this stuff up. It's like a Hollywood movie. It's unbelievable.

I campaigned in 2015, probably one of the most divisive things I've ever gone through—that and the nomination, of course. However, in 2015, I remember that this young guy who had great hair rolled up his sleeves and went all around our country saying that he promised to do government differently. I believe his term was the “sunny way”. He said that he was going to let the sun shine in because sunshine is the best form of disinfectant. He promised not to use dilatory motions, omnibus bills, closure—well, we know how that is. He promised to do things a lot differently. He was going to be.... They were going to be different.

They absolutely have been different. Our colleagues across the way.... I say this all the time: I know there are good people across the way. This has to be tough. I see the look in their eyes when they sit in the backbenches, and they just shake their heads when another scandal comes out—WE Charity, SNC-Lavalin, Jody Wilson-Raybould, “elbowgate”, billionaire island, dividing Canadians, asking Canadians whether we should even tolerate these people. I look at my colleagues across the way and I ask, “Is this leadership?” When the going gets tough and it's time to stand up and be counted, where is he?

• (1135)

As you can see, I'm deeply frustrated, Mr. Chair. I'm going to go over the list again: “elbowgate”, cash for access, Aga Khan, cultural appropriation, SNC-Lavalin, SNC-Lavalin election donations, blackface, WE Charity, interfering in RCMP investigations, the ArriveCAN app and Chinese interference. I'll bring you back to one that I worked on, the “clam scam”. Another minister took millions upon millions of dollars and redirected it to his own family, his wife's cousin and former Liberal colleagues. It's absolutely shameful.

I hope my colleagues will see it fit to vote in favour of this motion, so that we can once and for all get to the bottom of this wasteful spending. The scandals are unbelievable, Mr. Chair.

With that, I'll cede the floor.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Jowhari is next, please.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's good that the election is in 2025, so that my colleagues have a long runway to be able to get on the soapbox.

Let's get back to the facts.

I have fundamental issues with this Standing Order 106(4) motion for a study, starting with the fact that the motion says, “given recent media reports that the Public Health Agency of Canada lost over \$300 million”. I'll stop there.

Our colleagues are constantly referring to the media. I'm going to go back to the media report that was out on November 3:

In a statement to National Post Friday, the press secretary for Health Minister Mark Holland, Chris Aoun, said the government made a \$150 million non-refundable advance payment to Quebec-based Medicago early in the pandemic to fund development and reserve a number of doses of its eventual COVID-19 vaccine.

Then it says:

The “advance purchase agreement” was one of seven the government signed early in the pandemic with vaccine manufacturers to secure vaccine doses as soon as they were ready. At the time, it was not known which, if any, of the vaccines would pass Health Canada's approval process (most of them did).

I also want to refer back to the note that was sent to the committee, signed by five of our colleagues across, stating that the “Government's Public Health Agency is unable to explain how the agency lost \$150 million”. The fact is that the explanation is there. It was not \$150 million lost, but invested into research and development. It was not for an unfulfilled contract, because when you look at it, what was delivered was....

Again, since our colleagues refer to the media, I'd like to bring to the attention of our colleagues an article dated February 24, 2022. It says, “Medicago's plant-based COVID-19 vaccine is now approved by Health Canada, which will soon give Canadians the option of getting a homegrown shot against SARS-CoV-2.”

Now, my colleague across the aisle was bringing up the Auditor General. I'd like to acknowledge that the Auditor General reviewed all of the contracts and confirmed that there was no issue with any of those contracts being executed.

It was not \$300 million. It was two investments. One was for \$150 million for research and development, which resulted....

Dr. Ellis, would you like me to do exactly the same thing to you when you have the floor, laugh at you?

• (1140)

Mr. Stephen Ellis: If it's funny, you can.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: It's not funny. It's fact.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Are you saying it's okay to lose \$150 million on this?

The Chair: Dr. Ellis, Mr. Jowhari has the floor.

Everyone listened patiently and attentively when you had the floor. Please offer the same courtesy.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: He's addressing me.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: The \$150 million is not lost. It resulted in a vaccine approved by Health Canada.

What happened subsequently is of interest. Again, since my colleagues like to refer to the media reports, I'd like to quote a February 2, 2023, report from CBC. It reads:

Then in March, the World Health Organization decided not to accept Medicago's COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use, citing the company's ties to big tobacco. Marlboro cigarette manufacturer Philip Morris International was once a shareholder of Medicago, but divested all of its shares in late 2022.

Can the \$150 million be accounted for? Yes. What was it invested in? It was invested in R and D. Did the R and D result in a vaccine being developed that was approved by Health Canada? Yes. Did the business go forward? No. Why? The World Health Organization didn't approve it because of ties to a tobacco organization, which meant that the vaccine that was manufactured was available domestically, but not internationally. That's therefore a business decision by Medicago and Mitsubishi, which is probably worthy of a study.

Now we come to the other part of this. There was \$173 million also invested in Medicago for the site expansion, after the approval of the vaccine by Health Canada. It is worthy of study to see whether the \$173 million actually went to the site expansion and what the status of that site expansion is.

When we look at this motion and see it's talking about "lost" rather than a business loss, it raises questions. When we see unfulfilled contracts, there are grounds for us to look and see whether the contract was fulfilled or not. The AG has done that. Whether it's \$300 million.... It's not.

Also, the public accounts committee is actually doing this study. The notion of this study as it is in the motion is not acceptable to our side. Based on referring to the media, there are areas that the media has not had the opportunity to explore and that may potentially lead to misinformation.

I'm not going to make any comments on the other.... My colleagues talked about many other items, which we will deal with in the election in 2025.

I want to close by saying that I believe this is another tactic by our Conservative colleagues to delay the study of women's health. Today we were supposed to start the study of women's health. We have the children's health report that is not completed. We have the breast implant report that is due for its second version, with some very good recommendations, which we need to finalize. We have the PMPRB study, which is now going to get pushed back. We have the PPE study, and we know the fate of Bill C-293.

Mr. Chair, there are areas of concern in this motion. I'd like to look at a modified or amended version of this motion for us to be able to bring total clarity to the issue of where the \$150 million was spent—we know who spent it and what it was spent on—and the state of the \$170-million site expansion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

Dr. Hanley, go ahead, please.

Mr. Brendan Hanley (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Delay, delay, delay. That's what I'm hearing from our Conservative colleagues across the way.

Just one meeting ago, we were hearing how urgent it was that we speak to the opioid crisis in Canada, with several hastily constructed motions in that regard. Suddenly, it appears that's no longer urgent; that's no longer an urgent issue.

In my mind, this is where we wanted to bring this committee: to look at the study that is already in the queue on women's health, a study of deep concern to all of us and to Canadians, and then to proceed to the opioid crisis study, which was moved by me some time ago. We have been waiting to proceed to that study so that we can make some new and informed recommendations for how much more we need to do to address the crisis that is killing 20 Canadians a day.

Here we are now, with a Conservative revisionist history, delay and smoke and mirrors, pushing for accountability on a non-issue.

I have two important points to make. I know that my colleague, Mr. Jowhari, has made those points, but I think they are worth reiterating. There is no lost money. The \$150 million is money that was part of Canada's vaccine acquisition strategy in advance purchase agreements. There has already been full transparency with these contracts, with the Auditor General and with the public accounts committee. Parliamentarians from all parties have reviewed these contracts. The money spent, the \$150 million, was part of a highly successful strategy to actually lead us to deliver vaccines and save thousands of Canadian lives, a strategy that led to Canada's vaccine rollout being one of the most successful on the planet.

What happened in the end is that we did not see a vaccine produced and ready to go from the company in question, Medicago. Yes, that's unfortunate, but \$150 million, as my colleague said, was spent on research and development and infrastructure development in Canada. More importantly, at the time, of course nobody had the ability to know in advance which contracts were going to result in vaccines ultimately being delivered to people. Obviously, if we had the ability to predict the future, we would be in a much better place from all kinds of points of view. You make decisions at the time based on best estimates of success. Advance purchase agreements were made with vetted companies through vetted contracts.

In my previous role as the chief medical officer of health in the Yukon during the pandemic, seeing Canada come through with vaccines was literally a lifesaver for my citizens in the Yukon and also for Canadians around the country. It was welcome relief.

Accountability is fully there, to the point where the Auditor General has reported on and approved the process. I can quote the Auditor General's finding:

We found that, although a non-competitive approach was taken, Public Services and Procurement Canada exercised due diligence on the 7 vaccine companies by conducting assessments to examine the companies' financial capability to meet requirements and by conducting integrity checks to mitigate the risk of unethical business practices. We found no issue with the delegation of authority because the Minister of Public Services and Procurement signed the 7 advance purchase agreements.

• (1150)

Mr. Chair, if we reflect back to the time not that long ago, just over a couple of years ago, when this very committee was meeting in February 2021, what were our Conservatives colleagues saying then? There was statement after statement urging the government to step up in vaccine acquisition. There were statements such as, “That is a question the government cannot answer. It has not received enough supply to deal with this question. This is why it is so imperative for the government to get us more vaccines.” There was statement after statement urging Canada to step up and acquire vaccines.

Again, as outlined by the Auditor General, this was Canada's role, and it was verified through the Auditor General's approval that this was one of the seven vaccine companies selected based on financial capability, integrity checks and the viability of the company. Once again, we are using committee time to address issues that are spurious and delaying the earnest work that we are all waiting to proceed with on behalf of Canadians.

Now, given that there is a need for information as to some of the details of the contract, which are not at the moment at the disposition of this committee, I would be willing to support, and I think my colleagues would be willing to support, some amendments to this motion.

I therefore propose an amendment. The wording of the amendment would be that we delete everything after the first “the committee”, which is in the third line, and replace it with the following: “hold four hours of meetings on the government's advance purchase agreement for vaccines with Medicago and invite officials from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Public Services and Procurement Canada, the Auditor General and Medicago.”

I think that would fulfill some of the unanswered questions that members have brought forward, and it would allow us to proceed with the most efficiency possible in order to get on to some of the urgent committee business that my colleagues have also expressed.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1155)

The Chair: The amendment is in order.

The debate is now on the amendment.

Mr. Davies, go ahead, please.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you.

A lot has been said. I do have, I suppose, the privilege and the advantage of having served on this committee since 2015. I was on this committee when we first heard the word “COVID-19” back in the early days of 2020, so I want to put a little bit of context to the motion and the history. At that time, as an NDP health critic, I worked very closely with the Conservative health critic, Michelle Rempel Garner. We worked very closely, both parties in tandem, and very strongly on the concepts of transparency and accountability.

I think Dr. Kitchen was there with us at that time on the Conservative side, so he would remember that. I think Monsieur Thériault was there as well. The Bloc, I think, participated—

Mr. Stephen Ellis: I'm sorry. I have point of order, Chair, if I may.

The Chair: Go ahead on your point of order, Dr. Ellis.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Maybe it just needs clarification. I was actually part of the PACP committee that looked at these documents. There were significant non-disclosure agreements around it. I'm wondering if that's going to play into the utility of Dr. Hanley's motion. Are we actually going to be able to examine these contracts? Are we going to have in camera meetings, or will they be in public?

I certainly think this is an issue that the public wants to know the answer to.

The Chair: Dr. Ellis, that isn't a point of order, but it is something that would be entirely appropriate for you to raise when you get the floor three speakers from now. It is relevant to the discussion, but it certainly isn't relevant as a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you.

At that time, the NDP, the Bloc Québécois, and the Conservatives joined together to demand transparency and accountability from the government in all aspects of the way it handled the COVID-19 issue. That included demanding all documents, including contracts with vaccine manufacturers at that time.

We were successful, actually—partially, I should say. We got a procedure. A motion was passed by this committee that required the government to send all documents to the law clerk of the House of Commons, who would then vet those documents for a couple of key factors, including national security interests and legitimate commercial confidentiality issues, and then provide those documents to the committee. We did get a number of documents coming here.

I want to remind all committee members, including those speaking today who weren't here at the time and who may have forgotten that the NDP played a key role in that transparency and accountability.

We believe that Canadians have a right to know how their government is spending their money. Frankly, given that it was the biggest pandemic of the century, we felt it was important that Canadians have a first-hand look at how their government was responding to the pandemic. Even though there may have been some small reservations for true commercial confidentiality considerations and maybe some national security, we felt the government was not anywhere close to being as forthright as it ought to have been, and that's the record of the NDP on this issue.

I'm going to get to this in a moment, because there have been a few inaccuracies stated this morning in that regard that really need to be cleared up at this committee.

We know that the government did contract with a number of potential vaccine manufacturers, and one of them was Medicago. We knew—before the meeting today and before this motion—that the reason the contract with Medicago never panned out and was cancelled before it even got off the ground was that the World Health Organization refused to accept its vaccine for emergency use in 2022 because it was partly owned by tobacco giant Philip Morris International.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, of which Canada is a signatory, contains clear direction, stating that signatories should avoid all operations that would, in effect, give a positive impression of big tobacco in the public health. Second, it contains guidelines for implementing the treaty, stating that government “should not accept, support or endorse partnerships...with the tobacco industry or any entity or person working to further its interests.” That’s the crux of the matter here.

There are some very important questions that arise from that, and that’s why I very much support—as I’ve said publicly, and as I will say here today—the sentiment behind this motion today.

Was the fact that Medicago had commercial relations and an ownership relationship with Philip Morris International disclosed to the Canadian government? Was it known? If it was known, why was the contract signed by this government? Why would the government go ahead and sign a contract with a company it knew had associations with big tobacco, when it was also a signatory to a convention where it agreed to do precisely the opposite of that?

If they did know and they signed a contract, why was there no escape clause in the contract with Medicago that would indicate that if it turned out that Medicago, or any other commercial vendor for that matter, was in breach of a significant policy or issue, the government would have the ability to cancel the contract on those grounds? Was there such a clause? If not, why wasn’t there such a clause? If the government did not know that Medicago was involved with Philip Morris, how was that missed?

● (1200)

These are all extremely important questions, because the NDP very much agrees that giving \$150 million away to a corporation and getting nothing in return is bad governance. It cannot happen and we need to get to the bottom of it.

Even worse, what ended up happening here, if you think about it, was that the taxpayers of this country and the Government of Canada gave \$150 million to a company that’s associated with big tobacco for nothing. That is a gross violation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. I’m very much in favour of getting to the bottom of it.

I’ve already mentioned that the government was very reluctant to be wholly transparent on accountability throughout the COVID pandemic. It resisted the opposition’s attempt to have it disclose documents. We had to bring motions to force it to do that and, frankly, even when it produced documents, most of the documents that were presented came slowly, and most of the documents were of a very standard form, like press releases, speaking notes and such. It took a long time to get any real documents of any value, and even then, we got very few.

That’s why, by the way, the NDP moved an amendment at this committee just weeks ago to have a full, public, independent COVID inquiry that would look at every issue of the way this government handled COVID. I want to point out that only two parties supported that: the Bloc Québécois and the NDP. The Conservatives, who now claim to want to get to the bottom of this matter, sat on their hands. They abstained on a motion, but if they had voted for it, we would have had a majority and we would be well on our way to amending legislation that would be tabled in the House of Commons to create an independent, public COVID inquiry under the Inquiries Act, led by a judge with powers of subpoena and the power to compel the attendance of witnesses and documents, to be conducted in public on every issue, including mandates, masking and vaccine contracts—everything.

The Conservatives, at the height of hypocrisy, did not support that. Here they are, two weeks later, waxing eloquent—at least in their minds—and pretending they want to get to the bottom of this matter. They’re grandstanding on a contract to which, by the way, we already have the answers now.

I want to stop and say that the response of the Public Health Agency of Canada when the National Post began asking questions of it about this \$150-million loss to an “unfulfilled contract by a vendor” is absolutely unacceptable in a modern democracy. What did the Public Health Agency say? It refused to disclose any information whatsoever on the loss, such as the identity of the vendor, the nature of the deal or even the product or service that wasn’t received.

That is shocking. It’s unacceptable. That’s not protecting commercial confidentiality. That’s avoiding public accountability. Surely, Canadians have a right to know, and PHAC easily could have said it was the Medicago contract and it had to do with vaccines. They could have said that the nature of the deal was to procure vaccines from Medicago and we never received the vaccines. They could even have given the reason why. What commercial confidentiality is involved there? There’s nothing. We knew Medicago had a contract. We knew the contract was cancelled. We knew it was because of its affiliation with Philip Morris, yet here was the Public Health Agency of Canada, last week, not telling a reporter, or journalists, or this committee anything at all about the \$150 million.

I agree with my Conservative colleagues and Dr. Kitchen. Frankly, I think that for most Canadians \$150 is a lot of money, so \$150 million is a substantial amount of money.

• (1205)

I want to pause and say a few things now about.... I very much support this motion and having meetings to call the Public Health Agency to the carpet here and have them explain the details of how this happened. Clearly, someone made decisions that were wrong and bad and resulted in a significant loss to taxpayers, and we have an obligation as parliamentarians to get to the bottom of it.

Someone told me a long time ago, when I was first elected—and I don't know if this is true or not—that the number one duty of parliamentarians, the reason why we're elected here, our first duty, is to serve as a scrutineer of executive spending. That is actually the duty of parliamentarians of all parties, and this is a classic example of that, so I support the motion.

By the way, I would have signed it had I been offered it, but I was in the air at the time. When I landed in Vancouver on Thursday night, I saw this motion come forward.

Now, there are a few things. Accountability and transparency are based on truth. I see Conservatives nodding, so let's start telling some truths here too, though, because grandstanding, political myth-making and spreading misinformation, especially by people on the health committee in this time of health.... Well, frankly, it's appalling. Saying “the NDP-Liberal”—

• (1210)

Mr. Shivaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): I have a point of order.

The title of the section is “Losses of public money”. That's not misinformation.

The Chair: That's not a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: I'll very carefully detail the misinformation.

Throughout Dr. Ellis's comments, and I think they were repeated by Dr. Kitchen.... Frankly, Dr. Kitchen was at this committee, so he should know better. At the time these contracts were let, the NDP was not in any kind of agreement with the government whatsoever. The NDP signed a confidence and supply agreement in March 2022, so when Dr. Ellis repeatedly states that “the NDP-Liberal coalition” was in any way responsible for losing \$150 million, that is just simply false.

By the way, it's also not a “coalition”, but I'm prepared to let that go. I mean, you'd think that as parliamentarians they'd understand basic terms like what a coalition is and isn't, but I guess it makes better sound bites for Conservatives to say “NDP-Liberal coalition”, even though there isn't one. It's a confidence and supply agreement, and the NDP has no ability to influence government decisions or government spending in any way, other than within the confines of the confidence and supply agreement. Even then, it is a government decision, but the Conservatives know that—they just don't care.

I do think, though, that while it may suit their temporal political benefits for the moment, I just want them to be aware of the long-term damage they do to democracy in this country by spreading

misinformation at this committee and confusing Canadians about the way politics works.

Back in 2021, when this government was letting these contracts, the NDP had zero to do with this government, and that needs to be clear. I would hope and ask my Conservative colleagues to at least have enough respect—

Mr. Stephen Ellis: I have a point of order, Chair.

Mr. Don Davies: —so that they can discontinue that kind of misinformation to Canadians.

The Chair: Mr. Davies, please wait a second. We have a point of order from Dr. Ellis.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: I guess someone brought up relevance before, but realistically, looking at relevance, this motion doesn't mention the NDP at all. The member continues to talk and wax on about the NDP. Maybe he could bring it back to the centre again.

Thank you.

The Chair: I hear Mr. Davies responding to points that were raised in your intervention, Dr. Ellis.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: We have a point of order from Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I was going to say the exact same thing. I hear Mr. Davies speaking on all the things that have been said today, but what I would say is, if possible.... When the Conservatives were speaking, we were utterly quiet, including Mr. Davies, and now there are chuckles and giggles. I would just suggest, Mr. Chair, if we could all just listen to whoever is doing the debating and whoever is making their important points, if we could all—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Darren Fisher: I can't even get out my point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I acknowledge Mr. Fisher's comment with respect to only one person having the floor, and that is Mr. Davies.

Go ahead, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you.

This is the kind of absurdity the Conservative position is being reduced to, where Dr. Ellis talks repeatedly about the NDP and “the NDP-Liberal coalition” in his remarks, but when I respond to them, he says it's inappropriate for me to mention the NDP, after he mentioned it 22 times in his talk. That lack of good faith at this committee makes one wonder how far we're going to get on this.

By the way, I also want to say this. The Conservatives brought up—I think it was Dr. Kitchen—the very real point that Canada was left in a position where we couldn't produce vaccines. I think it's important for all Canadians to know why that's the case. It's because the Conservatives, under the leadership of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, sold the Canada Crown corporation Connaught Labs, which had been producing vaccines and other medications in this country. Had that decision not been made, Canada could very well have been in a position to produce vaccines and wouldn't have had to rely on companies like Medicago or others. Of course, we were placed in that position of vulnerability because of bad, poor policy decisions made by the Conservatives back then. Canadians need to know that, as well.

The situation Canada found itself in, in early 2020, was a bad one. We were unprepared. We had poor personal protective equipment. We were unable to produce vaccines. All of that is shared by consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments that came before this, as documented in repeated Auditor General reports going back decades. Lest the Conservatives get completely sanctimonious, they claim to be the party of accountability and responsibility, but they sure don't take it when there's any placed in their lap.

I would like to end here by saying that we should look at this issue. I appreciate that this motion tacks on an extra hour after regular meetings. I want to second what my Liberal colleagues said and point this out, as well. You know, I've been on committees for a long time. I'll tell you that every party can throw a monkey wrench into the machinery. For every action of dislocation, confusion and delay that can be thrown into this, there's an equal one.

By the way, I will also say that the Conservatives, who have pretensions of being government next time, may want to file away this point for their government, because they may face this, as well. I have found that, at committees, we have to work together to some degree. Every party at this table sat down and agreed—in a sub-committee meeting on the agenda, and then in open committee—on what the agenda of this committee would be. Then, one party, the Conservatives, took it upon themselves—after they had agreed to it—to come forward and continue to disrupt the agenda they themselves agreed to. Now, they can continue doing that, I suppose, but there are countermeasures that can happen. You know what happens: Canadians suffer, along with the very real business.

The Liberals had a study on the health professionals human resources crisis. The Conservatives had their study on children's health. The Bloc had their study on the breast implant registry. We have not even completed the children's study report yet, nor have we completed the very important report on the breast implant registry. I've been waiting patiently. I'm now into my third year on this committee waiting for the first NDP study, on women's health, which for some reason the Conservatives appear not to want to get to. I hope that's not the case.

Speaking to the amendment, what I will say is this. I think this motion is sound. I think it's well founded. I want to thank the Conservatives for moving it. However, I don't think we necessarily need six hours of meetings on this matter, which is the equivalent of three meetings. So far, the women's health study—if we ever get to it—is between six and seven meetings. Are we really saying we need three meetings to discuss this matter, when we already know

the basics of it? Yet we're going to spend two meetings on women and cancer. Really? Is that how the Conservatives would allocate the time of this committee?

• (1215)

I'm not sure if I can make a subamendment to this motion, Mr. Chair, but I would amend it to say “That the committee hold up to six hours of meetings” and that way we could gauge. We can get the answers we need. If I'm wrong and it takes six hours of meetings to get the answers we need to the questions, then so be it, but if we get that answer in two meetings or two hours or three hours, then that will save all of us time.

I want to say this. I want to give my Conservative colleagues one bit of credit. I want to ask and hope and give them credit that they are interested in women's health. Mr. Doherty has often been very good at giving credit to everybody. I want to assume that all of us want to get to that.

I was going to say as well that in terms of a Standing Order 106(4) meeting, they are generally reserved for emergencies. I'm not really sure that this topic, important as it is, constitutes an emergency, but because I appreciate the Conservatives' tacking on the extra hour, I think we can look at this issue without disrupting the regular agenda.

I implore all of my colleagues at this table: Let's get back and respect the agenda we've agreed to. We can tack on this subject. I would agree to support this and tack on an hour after each meeting for up to six hours until we're satisfied that we have the answers we need.

The last thing I'll say is that it would be nice if we could get to a vote on this. I think the issue has been well canvassed. We've heard from all sides. We've heard four Conservatives speak. We've had two Liberals speak. I don't want to take away Mr. Thériault's ability to speak, so after we hear from Mr. Thériault, I'm hoping we can vote on this, but I would move a subamendment to the main motion that we just change the words and add “up to” in front of “6 hours”.

• (1220)

The Chair: Mr. Davies, you can't move a subamendment to the main motion, because there is an amendment under discussion.

You can move a subamendment to the amendment, but not to the main motion.

Mr. Don Davies: Well, could I move a subamendment to delete the amendment and instead replace the main amendment with the words “up to” in front of “6 hours”?

The Chair: I'm advised that this is also not in order. If you don't like the amendment, the right way to go about it is to defeat it, and then the main motion can be amended anew.

Mr. Don Davies: Could I ask for unanimous consent? If there is opposition, that's fair enough, but if everybody agrees to get to that, could we ask for unanimous consent to that if that would provide a motion that everybody could live with?

The Chair: I think there is a request for unanimous consent to withdraw the amendment and to replace it with what Mr. Davies is putting forward.

Is there unanimous consent to proceed in that fashion?

I don't see unanimous consent.

Are you ceding the floor, Mr. Davies?

Mr. Don Davies: I am ceding the floor. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Powlowski, go ahead, please.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): I've been frustrated listening to all of this conversation. We are the health committee, and yet we've heard about everything, especially from the Conservatives, other than health. We heard about WE Charity, SNC-Lavalin, billionaire islands, the cost of housing. We even heard about Mr. Kitchen's kitchen.

I would implore the committee to get back to health. That's what we're here for. I've been on this committee for four years, and I think that, compared to a lot of committees, we've actually done a pretty good job in being non-partisan when we had to be non-partisan. For example, on the workforce shortage study, I think we came up with some good recommendations, and in fact I think the government has gone with a lot of those recommendations. I think the breast implant study—thanks to Mr. Thériault—was a real success, too, and we were coming up with some recommendations, if we ever get to them.

Now, we have a couple of studies that are in line for us to deal with, such as the opioid crisis, which the Conservatives certainly agree is a crisis. I mean, here we are holding this emergency debate to deal with this issue that was basically before us two years ago. I feel like we're turning the clock back.

I know that Mr. Davies was here. I know that Mr. Kitchen was here. I know that Sonia was here and Darren was here when we dealt with this two years ago under COVID, when there was the question of revealing the contracts with the vaccine manufacturers. We dealt with all of that two years ago. Here we are, and suddenly this is a big emergency.

Well, I would support the Conservative position to begin with, that the opioid crisis is far more of an emergency than this is. I would also say that the women's study is more important than this. As Don said, I don't think the health committee has ever studied women's health before.

Instead of doing all that, we're going back and we're turning the clock back to the issue of what was in those contracts. I reluctantly support the amendment to limit the number of sessions we're going to hold on it, but I really do think this is interrupting far more serious work.

Let me go to the actual issue of those contracts. Like some of the other people here, I was on the health committee during the time of COVID. For those who weren't there, let me tell you, when we first talked to scientists about how long it would take to get the vaccines, almost everybody was saying something like five years. A few people thought it might be as short as two years. However, the

fact that we got the vaccines out as quickly as we did was a real accomplishment. It was a real horse race back then. We were all globally looking for whoever could come up with the vaccines the fastest.

You know what? I was somebody who was critical of my own government at the time on various things in response to COVID, but in terms of the vaccines and our ability to get the vaccines out, I think we did really well. If you look at the ones we chose—Moderna, Pfizer, AstraZeneca—we hit the nail on the head. Yes, there was also Medicago, but that was one of many. We had advance purchase agreements for those, and it served Canadians very well. When we look back at it, I think that our response to the COVID pandemic was pretty good.

As for Medicago, to Don's point, my understanding is that 21% of the ownership was Philip Morris, and I certainly understand WHO's position in not supporting anything done by big tobacco, but I'm not sure if the government even knew of the 21% ownership. Back at the height of COVID, I don't know how much that mattered, because if Medicago came up with a vaccine and was the quickest to produce the vaccine, are you really going to tell me that nobody would have accepted it because 21% of the ownership was with Philip Morris?

I ask the Conservatives, the NDP and everyone else: Who owns shares in Pfizer and Moderna? Do we know? Have we looked into that? Would we contract with those depending on who owned shares in that?

• (1225)

Yes, in terms of accountability, \$150 million is a lot of money, but hindsight is 20/20. We didn't know who was going to win the horse race and who was going to be the first to produce the vaccines. I think it was a sound policy decision for the government not to put all its eggs in one basket, not to invest in just one vaccine manufacturer but to invest in a number of vaccine manufacturers. That's what we did. Not everyone was going to win this race. It turned out that some of the companies we invested in didn't. It turned out that Medicago, for \$150 million, did do the work. They did produce a vaccine, so the money wasn't really wasted per se.

As for looking into it and as for transparency, my understanding is that the public accounts committee has looked at and is continuing to look at those contracts. The Auditor General has looked at those contracts. We, ourselves.... Don will remember this, as he was part of the motion to procure all relevant documents related to the contracts with vaccine manufacturers. We fought this battle two years ago and those contracts were revealed. It is not as though there's been no transparency on this issue.

For us to spend another two or three sessions on this rather than dealing with the opioid crisis and women's health is wrong, I think. It's unfortunate that yet again the Conservatives seem to want to impede our ability to actually deal with the real issues we ought to be dealing with.

I would urge everyone on the committee... We are the health committee. We should be looking after the health of Canadians and not wasting our time. Yes, it isn't a waste of our time, but as I'm sure Dr. Ellis will realize, in medicine you have to triage things according to importance. Are we really going to put this in front of, for example, the opioid crisis? I don't agree with that.

Be that as it may, if we can confine it to as few sessions as possible, I'm in favour of that.

Thank you.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Powlowski.

Dr. Ellis, go ahead, please.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you very much, Chair.

It's interesting. I'll try not to inflame the situation any more. People are obviously very sensitive around this topic—as well they should be, with \$300 million in Canadian taxpayer money.

That being said, I'd like to propose a subamendment that would also suggest that the Conservatives are quite happy to say “up to four hours of meetings”, but the Minister of Health needs to be included as one of the witnesses.

I'm happy with Dr. Hanley's amendment, but we'd change it to “up to four hours”, with the Minister of Health being one of the witnesses.

Thank you.

The Chair: As I understand it—

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

The Chair: Mr. Davies, go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: I think it would help all of our committee members.... The main Conservative motion says to add an hour to regular meetings, which I think is a good idea, but we're not sure if that can be done or not.

Does the committee have the resources to add an hour to meetings? I think that would help all of us make up our minds as to which way we go. If it turns out we can do that or we can't, it makes a difference.

The Chair: First of all, the amendment removes adding the extra hour, so that isn't what's under debate right now. I think you're asking for some advice from the clerk as to whether, if we defeat the amendment and come back to the original motion, it's doable from an administrative perspective.

The answer is that we don't have an answer now, but we can look into it and get back to you. At this point, we don't know. It isn't an unreasonable request, but that doesn't mean it's going to be granted.

I do have Mr. Thériault on the list, but I want to get clear on this subamendment before we get there. I want to clarify something in connection with the subamendment, but the speakers list is Ms. Sidhu, Mr. Thériault and Mr. Fisher at this point.

With respect to the subamendment, Dr. Ellis, I believe there are two things you want to amend in the amendment. One is that the amendment calls for four hours of meetings, and you want to insert

the words “up to”. On the list of witnesses contained in the amendment, you want to add the Minister of Health.

Do I have it right?

Mr. Stephen Ellis: That is correct, Chair.

The Chair: The subamendment is in order.

The debate is on the subamendment.

Ms. Sidhu has the floor.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to speak on the whole main process today, but certainly I support Dr. Hanley's amendment, which we agree on.

Mr. Chair, I'm disappointed today. I really want to say to all my colleagues that I'm really disappointed today. This motion today, which we are looking into, was brought forward through an urgent measure, Standing Order 106(4), which we are discussing today. Like Mr. Davies, I have served on this committee since 2015. This standing order is only used to bring experts on emergency issues. We heard from experts in 2020 and 2021, and we had this motion triggered for emergencies for the long term. I know that many of us, like Mr. Davies, spoke on that issue during the time of COVID.

Today's matter is in front of another committee, the public accounts committee. Yes, accountability and transparency are important. It was full transparency when the agreement and other...happened. This issue is in front of the public accounts committee. Unredacted documents, due to significant confidentiality procedures to protect commercial sensitivities in this matter, have already been examined by the Auditor General. Another committee is working on this with more resources and more information.

In this committee, when my five colleagues from the other side...and I'm the only woman on this health committee. Today we were to discuss a women's health study, and we're not. But it's important to me. For many women, this is important. Last Saturday, when I was meeting with many women, they said, “Oh, you are doing the study on women's health.” A tweet on it went wild over the weekend. But the women's study is not happening today.

I want to thank Mr. Davies for bringing up the women's study. I have been waiting for it for a long time. But it's not happening today. This is not right. That's why I'm disappointed. I understand that accountability and transparency are important, but another committee is looking into that. This is the health committee. We should study women's health. I'm the only woman here, and I've been waiting for it for a long time. It's not happening today, and it is so sad.

Canadians expect us to do good things and not just do what we're doing here, making clips. There's another time to make all these clips. Let's do the work that Canadians expect us to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sidhu.

Mr. Thériault, the floor is yours.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Chair, I've been patient and have listened to my colleagues. When I signed the letter calling for a meeting pursuant to Standing Order 106(4) on November 2, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the media had already been attempting to get answers for a week. We requested a meeting and, all of a sudden, the next day, the minister started making revelations. How can one treat an institution like the Parliamentary Budget Office in such a way?

As for me, I have the utmost respect for these institutions, because they ensure the proper functioning of our democracy. This isn't a partisan issue. The identity of the company in question is of little importance. Even if it's a Quebec company, that doesn't mean we will remain silent. The issue is not whether we intend to filibuster the committee—

The Chair: I'm sorry Mr. Thériault, but the bells are ringing for a vote.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Okay. I can't say I was saved by the bell.

Voices: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Chair: Colleagues, the bells are ringing.

Therefore, we require the unanimous consent of the committee to continue the meeting.

Do we have unanimous consent to continue the meeting until, say, 1:50? I'm asking for another 20 minutes so we can deal with this, if possible. Do we have unanimous consent to continue for 20 minutes?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: We do not have unanimous consent.

I am therefore obliged to suspend the meeting, colleagues. It is quite clear that there is a willingness to continue this discussion. There are two ways this could be done. One way is to suspend this meeting, which means that the next time we come together we'll pick up where we left off. The other way is to adjourn the meeting and move to resume debate.

I'm told the committee can agree now to resume debate on Wednesday. We can do that and adjourn. It would simply require us to amend the notice of meeting for the next meeting. The effect is the same.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Therefore, Wednesday's meeting will be dedicated to a resumption of this topic.

The meeting is adjourned.

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