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Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

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Thursday, December 16, 2021

Chair: Mr. Robert Kitchen



Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

Thursday, December 16, 2021

• (1110)

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Paul Cardegna): Honourable members of the committee, I see a quorum.

[Translation]

I must inform the members that the clerk of the committee can only receive motions for the election of the chair.

[English]

The clerk cannot receive other types of motions, entertain points of order nor participate in debate. We can now proceed to the election of the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the chair must be a member of the official opposition.

[Translation]

I'm ready to receive motions for the chair.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): I'd like to nominate Robert Kitchen for the role of chair.

The Clerk: It has been moved by Mr. Paul-Hus that Robert Kitchen be elected as chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion by consensus?

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): With hesitation.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Clerk: Seeing no disagreement I declare Robert Kitchen duly elected chair of the committee. I invite him to take the chair.

The Chair (Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): Thank you, everybody, for your confidence in my being the chair.

For those of you who don't know me....

I see Joanne and Parm here, as well as Gord Johns and Julie Vignola at the table. It's good to see you all.

Majid, Irek and Anthony, although we've never been on committee together before, it's good to see you. We have to mention McCauley as well. We can't leave him out.

I appreciate your confidence. As we move forward, for those of you who don't know, I was the chair of the committee in the last Parliament in the second session. We did some great work. It's thanks to the work that we did with our clerk and our analysts. Thank you to Paul and to Raphaëlle and all of the people who did the tremendous work to get that done. I can't thank you enough.

Let me just coordinate things here.

The Clerk: Dr. Kitchen, I've just emailed you some notes that have been prepared for presumptive chairs. You will find that document in your email right now. It indicates that if the committee consents, the next order of business would be the election of vice-chairs presided over by the clerk. You may wish to ask the committee if it wishes to proceed that way.

Thank you.

The Chair: If the committee is in agreement, I will ask the clerk to proceed with the election of the vice-chairs.

I see the nodding of heads.

Mr. Clerk.

• (1115)

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the government party.

I'm now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

[English]

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): I just want to begin by first congratulating Dr. Kitchen on assuming the position of the chair. I really enjoyed working with you, MP Kitchen, in the last OGGO session. I'm very much looking forward to working with you moving forward.

It gives me great honour to put forward for the position of vice-chair the MP for Richmond Hill, my colleague Majid Jowhari.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

It's been moved by Irek Kusmierczyk that Majid Jowhari be elected the first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion by consensus?

Seeing consensus, I declare Mr. Jowhari duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Congratulations, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, and thank you to my colleague Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Congratulations, Dr. Kitchen.

It's good to be on this committee.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the second vice-chair must be a member of an opposition party other than the official opposition.

I'm now prepared to receive motions for the second vice-chair.

[English]

Mr. Housefather.

[Translation]

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Clerk, I'd like to nominate Julie Vignola for the role of second vice-chair.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

It has been moved by Mr. Housefather that Julie Vignola be elected as second vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Mr. Housefather nominated Ms. Vignola as second vice-chair of the committee.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Clerk: I declare Ms. Vignola duly elected second vice-chair of the committee.

Congratulations, Ms. Vignola.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you, my fellow members, for giving me this honour once again.

[English]

The Clerk: Dr. Kitchen, I turn the meeting back over to you.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Congratulations to Mr. Jowhari and Ms. Vignola. I look forward to working with you as vice-chairs as we move forward with our agenda.

With that, I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number one of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

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

I take this opportunity to remind all participants to this meeting that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from public health authorities as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19 to remain healthy and safe, the following is recommended for all those attending the meeting in person. Anyone with symptoms should participate by Zoom and not attend the meeting in person. Everyone must maintain two-metre physical distancing, whether seated or standing. Everyone must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is recommended in the strongest possible terms that the members wear their masks at all times, including when seated. Non-medical masks, which provide better clarity over cloth masks, are available in the room. Everyone present must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer at the room entrance. Committee rooms are cleaned before and after each meeting. To maintain this, everyone is encouraged to clean surfaces such as the desk, chair and microphone with the provided disinfectant wipes when vacating or taking a seat.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank members in attendance for their co-operation.

I would suggest that as the next order of business the committee now proceed to consideration of our routine motions.

In preparation for this, the committee clerk has circulated a list of routine motions that the committee adopted in the last parliamentary session. The committee clerk can also answer any questions about the routine motions that you may have.

Mr. Clerk.

• (1120)

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I believe Mr. Kusmierczyk has raised his hand.

The Chair: Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Chair, if it's the will of this committee, I can read the routine motions into the record.

The Chair: Yes, certainly.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I'd like to put forward the following routine motions. I will read them out from start to finish, and then, again, if it's the will of the chair and the committee, we can maybe discuss each individually after that.

Analyst Services

That the committee retain, as needed and at the discretion of the Chair, the services of one or more analysts from the Library of Parliament to assist it in its work.

Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five members; the Chair—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, may I suggest that once one of them is read out, we see if there is any discussion and then vote on that one? Then we'd move to the next one only at that point, instead of reading them all out and coming to them one by one. I'm thinking that once he's read one out, we should stop and vote on that one and then he can move to the next one. That's the way I've always seen it done.

The Chair: Okay. Let's deal with them one at a time then. I think that will be good.

Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Is there any discussion on the first motion? As I look around the room I'm not seeing any hands up. Is the committee accepting of this motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The next motion is with respect to the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure:

That the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure be established and be composed of five members: the Chair, one member from each recognized party; and that the subcommittee work in a spirit of collaboration.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Is there any discussion on this motion? I do not see any. Is everyone in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The next motion deals with meeting without a quorum:

That the Chair be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and to have that evidence published when a quorum is not present, provided that at least four members are present, including two members of the opposition parties and two members of the government party, but when travelling outside the Parliamentary Precinct, that the meeting begin after 15 minutes, regardless of members present.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion on this motion? Not seeing any, is everyone in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The next motion deals with the time for opening remarks and questioning of witnesses:

That witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statement; that whenever possible, witnesses provide the committee with their opening statement 72 hours in advance; that at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows for the first round: Conservative Party, Liberal Party, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party. For the second and subsequent rounds the order and time for questioning be as follows: Conservative Party, five minutes; Liberal Party, five minutes; Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes; New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes; Conservative Party, five minutes; Liberal Party, five minutes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Is there any discussion on this motion? Not seeing any hands up, are all in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

● (1125)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The next motion is on document distribution:

That only the clerk of the committee be authorized to distribute documents to members of the committee provided the documents are in both official languages, and that the witnesses be advised accordingly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Is there any discussion? Are all in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I'd like us to really bear down on this next one. It's the critical one. It's on working meals.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Donuts.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:

That the clerk of the committee, at the discretion of the Chair, be authorized to make the necessary arrangements to provide working meals for the committee and its subcommittees.

The Chair: Is there any discussion? I'm not seeing any. I know in the last Parliament we worked around that. The clerk did a very diligent job of asking whether people would be there, to cover when we were in person. I appreciate that.

All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The next motion deals with travel, accommodation and living expenses of witnesses:

That, if requested, reasonable travel, accommodation and living expenses be reimbursed to witnesses not exceeding two representatives per organization; and that in exceptional circumstances, payment for more representatives be made at the discretion of the Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Is there any discussion? I'm not seeing any. All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The next motion deals with access to in camera meetings:

That, unless otherwise ordered, each committee member be allowed to be accompanied by one staff member at in camera meetings and that one additional person from each House officer's office be allowed to be present.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any discussion?

All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The next motions deals with transcripts of in camera meetings:

That one copy of the transcript of each in camera meeting be kept in the committee clerk's office for consultation by members of the committee or by their staff; and that the analysts assigned to the committee also have access to the in camera transcripts.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Is there any discussion?

All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The next deals with notice of motion:

That a 48-hour notice, interpreted as two nights, be required for any substantive motion to be moved in committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration, provided that: (a) the notice be filed with the clerk of the committee no later than 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday; (b) the motion be distributed to Members and the offices of the whips of each recognized party in both official languages by the clerk on the same day the said notice was transmitted if it was received no later than the deadline hour; (c) notices received after the deadline hour or on non-business days be deemed to have been received during the next business day; and that when the committee is holding meetings outside the Parliamentary Precinct, no substantive motion may be moved.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Is there any discussion?

That was a longer motion and I'm just giving everyone a little extra time to make sure they are comfortable with it.

All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The next motion reads:

That in relation to orders of reference from the House respecting Bills,

(a) The clerk of the committee shall, upon the committee receiving such an order of reference, write to each member who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee to invite those members to file with the clerk of the committee, in both official languages, any amendments to the bill, which is the subject of the said Order, which they would suggest that the committee consider;

(b) Suggested amendments filed, pursuant to paragraph (a), at least 48 hours prior to the start of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill to which the amendments relate shall be deemed to be proposed during the said consideration, provided that the committee may, by motion, vary this deadline in respect of a given bill; and

(c) During the clause-by-clause consideration of a bill, the Chair shall allow a member who filed suggested amendments, pursuant to paragraph (a), an opportunity to make brief representations in support of them.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Again, it's another longer motion. I'm just looking around to make certain everyone is comfortable.

Is there any discussion?

All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The next motion deals with technical tests for witnesses:

That the clerk inform each witness who is to appear before the committee that the House administration support team must conduct technical tests to check the connectivity and the equipment used to ensure the best possible sound quality; and that the Chair advise the committee, at the start of each meeting, of any witness who did not perform the required technical tests.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Is there any discussion?

All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: The next motion deals with linguistic review:

That all documents submitted for committee business that do not come from a federal department, members' offices, or that have not been translated by the Translation Bureau be sent for prior linguistic review by the Translation Bureau before being distributed to members.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Is there any discussion?

All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk, for helping us get through those routine motions. It's greatly appreciated.

Now we are a committee formed and structured and have some goals.

I would now look to see if there are any motions put forward by any members for us to consider to study.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I believe Mr. Johns would like to intervene.

The Chair: Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, we've circulated in both official languages a motion around committee business and rules around meeting in camera. I move:

That the committee may meet in camera only for the following purposes: (a) to consider a draft report, (b) to attend briefings concerning national security, (c) to consider lists of witnesses, (d) or any other reason that needs unanimous consent of the committee;

That all votes taken in camera, with the exception of votes regarding the consideration of draft reports, be recorded in the Minutes of Proceedings, including how each member voted when recorded votes are requested

Finally, we know that although it is set, we want to remove the final paragraph, which reads:

That any motion to sit in camera is debatable and amendable.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Is there any discussion on this motion?

Mr. Housefather, I see your hand is up.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, Mr. Chair.

I want to mention that on other committees, the chair has ruled this motion not receivable, namely, that it is contrary to House rules that a majority vote of the committee can determine whether or not something is in camera or not. This would impose unanimity, meaning that as opposed to ordinary rules, where a majority of the committee could send something in camera, this motion would require unanimity, meaning that one member of the committee could prevent the majority of the committee from sending something in camera. I have difficulty with that part.

Personally, I think the majority of the committee should determine whether something goes in camera or not. We could set general rules related to in camera meetings, but the majority of the committee should always be able to determine that it wishes to go in camera. This list, which I haven't really had a chance to study, may not be an exhaustive list of the reasons that we may want to go in camera for one reason or another. I don't believe one member of a committee should have the right to block everyone else on the committee from determining that something should be in camera.

For that reason, Mr. Chair, I think it's non-receivable; but if it is receivable in your view, Mr. Chair, I would vote against this motion. I can appreciate that we should only be in camera very sparingly, and if it were something different, I might support that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

I'm looking around the room. I see, Mr. Johns, your hand is up again.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It can't be that easy doing it from where you are, so I appreciate your seeing us.

The rationale here for moving in camera can sometimes.... There have been times in previous Parliaments when the government has tried to move committee meetings in camera to force difficult issues and votes behind closed doors to avoid public scrutiny. Even in minority Parliaments, where the government can't act unilaterally, there have been times when this has been attempted. As a consequence, valuable committee time ended up being wasted in debating this. For that reason, there is value to set out parameters at the front end and in routine proceedings that specify when in camera meetings can take place. Otherwise, we may get into situations where the work of the committee could be wasted in debating frivolous attempts to move in camera.

That's the rationale of this. I just wanted to share that.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, I see your hand is up.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As someone who was on this committee in the previous session, I can tell you that meetings in camera were used sparingly and judiciously. They provided this committee with the flexibility to discuss sensitive matters and issues in camera, so I cannot support this motion. It also allows us to listen to testimony that may be very sensitive as well, and thus is something that allows our committee that flexibility. I can't support this particular motion because I think it would hamstring our committee unnecessarily. Again, in previous sessions, the in camera option was used sparingly and judiciously, I would point out to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Before I go to Mr. Jowhari, I want to thank everybody who is hitting the "raise hand" button virtually, because it is allowing me to see the hand come up. I appreciate that. I have one little picture of the room, which is great. It's focused on the one side where everyone is.

Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations once again.

Mr. Chair, the argument presented by my colleague, Mr. Gord Johns, is not really relevant to this committee. In this committee, the government is not in a majority position, so it will never be able to use its majority to move the committee into in camera.

I'll be opposing it when it comes to voting.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

With that said, we've now had a discussion on the issue. I will entertain a vote on this.

Mr. Johns, as you're the person who put forward the motion, I would give you one last chance to have a word before I call for the vote.

Mr. Gord Johns: We can just vote on it, Mr. Kitchen. That's fine.

The Chair: Thank you.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry to intervene. The House order adopted on November 25 indicates that if there's any disagreement or if there's no consensus, the decision has to be taken in committee by a recorded division. You may want to see if there's consensus on the motion. If there is not, I can do a recorded division.

The Chair: Okay.

Is there consensus on the motion? I'm not seeing that.

The Clerk: Can I do the recorded division?

The Chair: Yes, please, Mr. Clerk.

(Motion negated: nays 9; yeas 1)

The Chair: Mr. Johns, you also had a second motion. Would you like to entertain that?

• (1140)

Mr. Gord Johns: We are not going to move the second motion. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're going to work collegially here. I'm confident with the team here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

Ms. Vignola, you have your hand up. I'm glad you put it up so high that I could see it.

[Translation]

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

I want to move a motion to debate the issue and, if possible, to send a letter to the Speaker of the House on the matter. All the committee members should have received the motion, or at least a hard copy. I move:

That, in light of the Prime Minister's call to the country's businesses to produce personal protective equipment and that since then several Quebec and Canadian businesses have responded, the committee deplores the fact that the masks distributed on Parliament Hill and in the various federal departments and agencies come from abroad and not from local businesses;

That the administration of the House and the federal government take steps to ensure that, as of January 31, 2022, the masks distributed on Parliament Hill and in the various federal departments and agencies come from Quebec and/or Canadian companies that produce this type of personal protective equipment, or PPE.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

I'm seeing Mr. Jowhari's hand for discussion.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. Chair, is it possible for the text in both languages to be circulated by email as well? I appreciate the fact that it was circulated in the committee room. However, all our members are attending virtually and would appreciate if we received this electronically, as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

My understanding is that the clerk is arranging for that to be circulated as we speak. It will be sent out ASAP and hopefully everyone will have received that.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, we have sent them out. We received five notices of motion from Madame Vignola. We've sent all five out, anticipating that if you want to move any of the five of them the text will be distributed to all members of the committee. It should be going out in a few seconds.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is there anyone in the room who wishes to discuss the motion?

Mr. Kusmierczyk, is your hand up again?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Mr. Chair, I wonder if we can suspend for a couple of minutes for us to be able to review the motions that were brought forward. I had not been able to see those motions until now.

The Chair: Mr. Kusmierczyk, I think that's a great idea. Let's just suspend for five minutes so people can have a look at that.

We will reconvene in five minutes.

• (1140) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, everybody. Hopefully you can all hear me now.

We will resume.

The Clerk: I think, Mr. Chair, you may have to select your microphone.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I was talking into the wrong earpiece. Hopefully you can hear me now.

Having looked at this, and although it does appear to be a little bit outside of the order of the House and it's non-binding, I think we will entertain some discussion on it.

I see that Mr. Housefather's hand is up.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

I really appreciate my colleague Ms. Vignola's comments.

First, I like the fact that the other motions are notices of motion. When we talk about the issues that the committee must address—even though I more or less agree with the four proposed studies—we should all have a deadline in January to submit our motions and to hold substantive discussions after all committee members have seen the motions from all the parties. I would like to see this approach used for future motions.

[English]

When it comes to this specific proposal, Mr. Chair, I would have preferred to have more of a chance to study which contracts are currently in place with suppliers. As we all remember, last March when this issue arose, we were desperate to procure whatever protective equipment we could and we entered into agreements with whoever was then available to supply the protective equipment. I don't know the duration or term of those contracts. I don't know the scope of those contracts. I don't know how much stock we have in place right now in the House of Commons. What if we have stock that lasts us through next July? Does it mean that we have to throw out all of the things that had been purchased from other suppliers already in order to transition to domestic suppliers by January 31? I don't think the committee has knowledge of what contracts are in place in order to adopt this motion saying that by January 31 we're only going to use things that are coming from Canadian businesses.

I would invite my colleagues to consider using this as a notice of motion, keeping in mind that this is our first meeting back. I say this because I just don't have the knowledge. If we do want to consider it now, there are two things I think we would really need to amend. The first is the date, because during the holidays and without knowing the scope of the contacts, it would definitely not be possible to do this by January 31 of next year. I would suggest that we would want to say “as soon as contractually possible”. Basically, we would respect the scope of whatever contracts exist and then say “as soon as contractually or reasonably possible”, or something like that.

Mr. Chair, the other thing I would say about the way the motion is worded, which I really would suggest has to be changed, is the way it makes it seem like Quebec is outside of Canada. It's the way we're saying “Quebec and Canadian businesses” as if Quebec businesses are not Canadian businesses. I think we could easily say “Canadian businesses, including those from the province of Quebec” or “Canadian businesses, including Quebec businesses”, but not make it seem like these are two different countries already with two different businesses.

Those are my main comments. Again, I would invite my colleagues to consider whether or not it's possible to defer this, so we can come back at the first meeting with knowledge of the contracts that exist and what supply the House of Commons currently has. Then we would determine what is realistic.

I'll come back on this, Mr. Chair, if people wish to move forward today and amendments are required. Then I'll propose actual amendments.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Just to clarify, you're not making the amendment now. You're proposing that as we go on you might make that amendment at a later date. Is that correct?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: That is correct. If people wish to proceed with debate on this today, then I will come back with amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. McCauley and then Mr. Paul-Hus. We'll then go to Mr. Kusmierczyk and Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks, Mr. Chair, and congratulations on your appointment again. It's wonderful to see that you've lost some weight as well. Well done.

I agree with Mr. Housefather's comment about the Quebec thing. Obviously Quebec is part of Canada—and a great part of Canada. The motion should read “from Canada”.

Apart from that, I personally do support this motion. We've spent hundreds of millions sole-sourcing contracts to Medicom. Obviously there are masks and the government has paid for these masks. They've been produced for over a year now, so they are in the government system somewhere. Surely these ones should be used in the House and in government departments, rather than Chinese-made ones.

I do support the motion, with the amendment to say “Canada”.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Paul-Hus.

[Translation]

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

I also support the motion, especially since, as we've seen in the media this week, there's a sort of emergency, perhaps even a public health emergency. The masks distributed in the House of Commons are falsely designated as approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration, or FDA. The approval was once in effect, but it has been withdrawn. We don't really know what we're putting on our faces when we wear these masks. We don't know whether the

masks are good for our health. In contrast, here in Canada, we have excellent masks made by Canadian companies.

Regardless of the quantity available to the House of Commons and the Government of Canada for use in government buildings, I believe that these masks should be removed. The FDA stated that the masks aren't good for our health. This is also a public health issue.

I would be prepared to adopt the motion with the proposed amendment regarding Quebec, since we're all part of Canada. I would also add some text to the end of the motion about the person being addressed. I'll read the text that I would add:

That the chair of the committee write to the Speaker of the House of Commons to inform him of the situation and ask that measures be taken to resolve the situation before the date specified in the motion.

[English]

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

Again, are you making that as an amendment at this point in time or as we discuss this further?

[Translation]

The Clerk: If you're moving the amendment now—

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Yes, I'm moving the motion with the two additional amendments. I can include the removal of the notion of Quebec and the addition of the sentence that I referred to. That's my amendment to the motion.

[English]

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, before proceeding, may I ask a question of Mr. Paul-Hus regarding his amendment?

The Chair: Yes. I'm going to ask if the clerk could clarify that for all members so that we know exactly how it reads.

[Translation]

The Clerk: Mr. Paul-Hus, I received the text of the amendment that you wanted to add to the motion and that will soon be distributed to everyone. However, I want to clarify the part concerning Quebec and Canadian companies. Does this mean that you want to remove the words “Quebec and/or” and that the sentence would simply say “federal departments and agencies come from Canadian companies”?

• (1200)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: That's right.

[English]

The Clerk: Thank you Mr. Chair for the opportunity to clarify this.

We will send the amendment out in a few moments. You can entertain debate on the amendment.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're just waiting for that amendment.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, I see your hand is up, but I suspect you're wanting to talk about the motion and not necessarily the amendment at this point in time, so I would just hold off on that.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: That's correct.

The Chair: Likewise for Mr. Jowhari. I see your hand's down, Mr. Jowhari.

We will wait until we get that amendment distributed. Just hold on, everyone, please.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, the amendment has been distributed to the members. You may continue with the debate.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'll give people just a minute to read that.

Mr. Paul-Hus, perhaps you could just clarify where you would like that put in the motion, so we know exactly where it sits.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, my understanding is that the text of Mr. Paul-Hus, which was distributed, would be added to the end of the motion.

[Translation]

Is that right, Mr. Paul-Hus?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Yes, exactly.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification.

I hope everyone has had a chance to read the amendment that's being proposed. We will have a discussion on it at this point in time.

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: I apologize. I have a comment on the motion, not on the amendment.

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

Mr. Housefather, you just raised your hand. Is that correct?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, Mr. Chair.

I would like to have slightly more time to read it. It just arrived in my inbox.

The Chair: Okay. We will give you a minute or two then.

Everyone, we will hold off for a bit.

How are we doing, Mr. Housefather? Are you good?

• (1205)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: For my own clarification, too, Mr. Paul-Hus, in your discussion of the amendment you were talking about the change from "come from Quebec and/or Canadian companies".

Was that correct? Is it just changing that wording? I wanted to be clear that this was part of your amendment as well.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, if I may, I had an opportunity to confer with Mr. Paul-Hus and clarified this.

He suggests removing the words "Quebec and/or" before the word "Canadian", so it would read as "come from Canadian companies". The same change would be made in the French.

Then he is proposing as well adding the text that was distributed to the members of the committee a few moments ago.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Again, I wanted that clarification so that everyone would understand this. Everyone, hopefully, heard the part that we would remove "Quebec and/or". It would say "from Canadian companies" and then the added part you have all received.

With that said, Mr. Housefather, I see your hand is up.

[Translation]

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Chair, in order to reach a consensus in the committee, we could say "Canadian companies, including those from Quebec" so that Quebec is referred to.

Obviously, Quebec companies are also Canadian. In English, we would say: "Canadian companies, including those from Quebec." In French, we would say: "les entreprises canadiennes, y inclus celles du Québec." I believe that this would be closer to what Ms. Vignola wanted and that it would allow for a consensus.

We could see what Mr. Paul-Hus proposes.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

I see Ms. Vignola's hand is up.

Mr. Paul-Hus, are you comfortable with what Mr. Housefather has said on that?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I think that the clerk wants to talk to you.

[English]

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, if I could intervene just to clarify—

The Chair: Does this have to be a subamendment?

The Clerk: I was asking if Mr. Housefather is effectively moving a subamendment and could I get the text of what he plans to move, or if he is asking for unanimous consent for Mr. Paul-Hus to amend his original amendment.

I just want to know what Mr. Housefather—

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I was not proposing a subamendment. I was suggesting to Mr. Paul-Hus that this wording may be preferable to Madame Vignola's and that we may have a consensus on it if he used it. It's totally up to him how he words the amendment.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I would like to say something, Mr. Chair.

I have no problem with that. Of course, we'll be delighted to see in Ottawa the Quebec companies that manufacture masks, if there are any such companies, or companies from other parts of Canada. It doesn't matter.

The important thing is to get rid of the masks that come from abroad.

Thank you.

[English]

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I apologize for intervening again.

Mr. Housefather, could I just get the text of what you had suggested? It went by a little fast for me. I do apologize for that.

What were you suggesting?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I was suggesting that we say "Canadian companies, including those from Quebec".

[Translation]

In French, we would say: "les entreprises canadiennes, y inclus celles du Québec."

[English]

The Clerk: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We sort of have consensus on that wording. We'll have a discussion of the amendment with that wording and the addition from Mr. Paul-Hus.

Ms. Vignola, I see your hand is up. I'm sorry for the delay.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I understand my colleagues' point of view when they tell me that Quebec is part of Canada. Until we have proof to the contrary, we're still part of Canada.

It's not that I want to be stubborn. I just want everything to be clear. It's important for us to include Quebec and Canada. As a nation, we just want to be well represented in the decisions.

That's why we write in this manner, with a reference to the Quebec nation. Mr. Housefather's proposal to state "Canadian companies, including those from Quebec" is perfectly acceptable to me.

I just wanted to explain why we specify Quebec and Canada in our wording.

Thank you.

• (1210)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

Mr. Housefather, just so you're aware, you're not muted. That's just to clarify for you in case you sneeze or something.

We have Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm fine. Let's just move on. This is getting silly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you very much. It's nice to see you, Mr. Chair.

I'm new to this committee. I'm glad to be here.

I'll just say that Madame Vignola made her motion. It was my understanding that they were going to take out "Quebec" and it was just going to be "Canada". Mr. Housefather then inserts "Quebec" back into the equation, which makes no sense to me at all—no offence to him.

I don't know why we wouldn't just leave it as it is. If we're going down this road.... I'm from Ontario, so I'd like that in there. I know Mr. McCauley is from Alberta and I know he'd like that in there too. I know Mr. Kitchen is from Saskatchewan and maybe he'd like that in too.

Let's leave the ridiculousness out of this at the start of this committee. We had an agreement. Let's just deal with it, leave it as "Canada", focus on what the issue is and get rid of the Chinese masks.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lobb.

Is there any further discussion on the amendment?

I'm not seeing any. Mr. Clerk, could you read the amendment as you see it, please? Then we can vote on the amendment.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My understanding is that Mr. Paul-Hus has proposed that the motion be amended by removing the words "Quebec and/or" before the word "Canadian" and replacing them with "Canadian, including those from Quebec". So it would read, "Canadian companies, including those from Quebec, that produce" this type of protective equipment. Then the following text would be added at the end of the motion, "and that the chair of the committee write to the Speaker of the House to inform him of the situation and ask that measures be taken to resolve the situation before the date specified in the motion."

In French it would be adding:

[Translation]

"et que le président du Comité écrive une lettre au Président de la Chambre pour l'informer de la situation et demander que des mesures soient prises pour corriger la situation avant la date indiquée dans la motion."

[English]

That is the amendment as it stands right now, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

That is the amended motion we have in front of us right now. Do we have consensus on this amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: I'm assuming we do. Therefore we will now discuss the motion as amended.

Mr. Jowhari, I see your hand up.

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

I want to bring up a couple of points vis-à-vis this motion and the reasons that I support my colleague Mr. Housefather asking for more time for us to be able to get some facts and data.

Number one, I think we really need to understand the inventory, where we are, and the efficacy of the inventory. As my colleague Mr. Paul-Hus indicated, it would also be good to understand, given the new variant, whether this inventory is effective. Then if we are in a position to be able to replace these, we'll be doing that in a very knowledgeable way. That's number one.

Number two, when we go that exclusive that it will all be produced by Canadian manufacturers, I don't know what the impact on the World Trade Organization is going to be. Are we doing anything that goes against some of the free trade agreements we have signed? Are we going to be in a position where we may have some sort of litigation? Also, we say "Canadian companies". A lot of Canadian companies bring parts from all over the world and then they manufacture here or they assemble here. So the fact that a company is a Canadian company or a company in Quebec that is Canadian does not necessarily mean that it manufactures from A to Z in Canada and has a 100% Canadian product.

I draw my colleagues' attention to our automotive industry and the fact that not all the parts are manufactured in Canada, and I also draw my colleagues' attention to the challenge that we have with the EV situation that we are facing down south with some of the incentives being proposed by our American colleagues.

Please consider these three things as input that we need to consider. I support the idea that we really need some time to be able to study this and to make sure we have all the facts. I would suggest that we conclude by looking at the facts that we need to be provided to us, and that we reach out to PSPC to get some information from them so we can have a lot more substantive conversation around this, because I think this is an important point for us to consider or a study for us to do.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair, but I would like to yield the opportunity to speak to my colleague Anthony House-

father, if that's possible. I'm happy to stick around for some additional comments after that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I circulated further amendments, which I have sent with a red line in the English version, and have translated them into French. I haven't redlined it, but the French translation is contained in the document I emailed to the clerk and the committee. Everybody can check their email.

I don't know, Mr. Chair, if you would like me to read my amendments into the record now and then let the committee look at them. I yield to you as to what process you would like me to follow.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Yes, I think if you would read your amendments, that will, hopefully, give people time to find what you have sent to them. I'm assuming what you are proposing now is an amendment to the amended motion.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, sir.

The Chair: Go ahead and read your amendments. That, hopefully, will give people time to pull up what you have sent them and have a look at it.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the third line of the first paragraph, I would propose changing the words "the Committee deplores" to "the Committee is concerned" before "the fact that the masks". So change the word "deplores" to "is concerned".

In the second line of the second paragraph, change the date "January 31, 2022," to "as soon as reasonably possible", and after the words "Canadian companies including those from Quebec", or however we amended the motion properly in the first go-round, in the second-last line of the second paragraph add the words "to the extent possible respecting all WTO rules".

Mr. Chairman, I will give you the reasons for the amendment.

The word "deplores", I think, is far too strong given the fact that these may well have been sourced at a time in the pandemic when we were desperate to get PPE from anywhere and the Canadian companies had not commenced operations. I don't think it is fair to say that we deplore something. I think we could say we're concerned that there are masks being distributed that are not from Canadian businesses.

I don't think January 31, 2022, is a reasonable date given that the holidays are coming up and nobody on this committee knows the terms of the contracts involved. We also don't know how much stock we have from what we have already purchased, and we don't want to waste existing stock. I think putting "as soon as reasonably possible" is a good compromise.

Finally, we can say we want them to come from Canadian companies as much as we want, but we have to respect all WTO rules and rules of agreements that we are part of. It actually is in violation—I know that—of WTO rules to say we simply want it to be only from Canadian companies, so I would like to include the words “to the extent possible that it be from Canadian companies...while respecting all WTO rules”.

If these amendments are adopted, then I will feel comfortable voting for the motion. If these are not adopted, then I will have to vote against it because I don't think at that point that the motion would be reasonable.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, do you want to add anything after? I have Mr. Kusmierczyk, Ms. Vignola and then Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all I just want to begin by saying how much I appreciate the work of Madame Vignola. I'm really delighted that she's back on the committee, because she always brings forward excellent studies and excellent ideas for issues that are pertinent to be studied.

On this particular motion, I'm struggling because the original motion contains the words “deplores the fact”, which MP Housefather's amended motion removes. That's important because no fact has been established by this committee. There has not been a single moment of any testimony by witnesses to establish this as fact. We have not heard from officials to understand what percentage of PPE is derived from where. As a committee, we haven't heard any testimony; we haven't had a single document in front of us to establish this as fact. Yet the original motion states that this is fact. I haven't seen any arguments. I haven't seen any evidence that states that this is fact.

I would support MP Housefather's amended motion as well because it removes that particular statement that I find problematic. I would really implore, or I would ask Madame Vignola to consider giving us a little bit of time to actually look at some of the evidence and to have some of that brought before this committee so that we can establish certain facts. I would really implore my colleague Madame Vignola to consider giving us a little time to actually look at the evidence here before we send this out.

The other part I want to raise—and this is also regarding the amendment—is that we have in Windsor—Tecumseh companies that produce PPE. They don't manufacture all of the components of that particular PPE. They assemble them. They put them together. They alter them. I would hate to see this motion discriminate in any way against companies like ours in Windsor—Tecumseh, which assemble the PPE and put it together but don't necessarily manufacture all of the components of it.

Again I implore Madame Vignola to give us time to properly discuss this, to give us time to properly study and establish the facts to make sure that the motion we put forward is surgical, specific, and rooted in testimony, evidence and fact. I would support MP House-

father's amendment, but I would certainly ask MP Vignola to consider giving us time to properly study this situation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Just to be clear, this is an amendment to the amended motion that we're discussing at this point in time.

I have Ms. Vignola, Mr. McCauley, Mr. Johns and then Mr. Lobb.

Ms. Vignola.

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'll be brief.

I'm wondering about the relevance of voting on a subamendment that amends an amendment that has already been adopted by my colleagues. Can we change a motion that has already been adopted?

Regarding the World Trade Organization rules, or WTO rules, we're talking about national security, public health and masks. With all due respect to my colleague, Mr. Kusmierczyk, I must say that you need only look at the box to know that the masks were made in China. I don't know how many witnesses will be needed to prove that. I don't think that it's necessary.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Julie Vignola: As has been pointed out, companies in Quebec, Ontario and across Canada are making masks. Even though we need to set an example for the Canadian economy, we're using masks manufactured abroad and not at home. We aren't asking to change all mask supply contracts in Canada. At the very least, we're asking that our masks be made at home.

The masks that we make here help maintain jobs in a new time of uncertainty. They help protect people better because our standards are high, strict and recognized. I would be surprised if, in spite of this, a country decides to take us to court to ensure that we use masks made in China or in another country, masks that don't generate any economic benefits in our country, because we aren't manufacturing them. Ultimately, the truck drivers are the only ones who provide an economic benefit by transporting the masks.

However, masks manufactured in Ontario, Alberta, Quebec or other parts of Canada have direct, indirect and induced effects. We must take this into consideration in our decision-making process.

We want to help our people, our economy and our economic recovery. We could do so by setting an example for everyone. Today, in Quebec alone, there are 2,800 new cases. Let's make sure that this rapid spread, which is worse than what we've seen in the past, doesn't keep increasing and doesn't become more serious. Let's use safe masks with recognized efficacy and manufacturing standards. That's what's required. I don't think that we need to call witnesses and officials so that they notice that the masks are made in China. In my humble opinion, we don't need to spend two or three meetings on this issue in January. It would delay our work.

Furthermore, the amendment that I read was drafted quickly and the notions are repeated. I'm criticized for wanting to include the two nations that currently make up Canada at this time, meaning the Quebec nation and the Canadian nation. I could also have added the first nations, which are also part of Canada. That said, the thing that I'm being criticized for is also found in the proposed motion.

For all these reasons, I can't support the proposals of my Liberal colleagues.

● (1225)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

Again, so that everyone is clear, we're discussing the amendment to the amended motion.

We'll go to Mr. McCauley.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I have to say that I can't agree more with my colleague from the Bloc. This is starting to become preposterous. There are 17,000 public servants working for PSPC. To say that we can't get an inventory, especially after the scandal of the government throwing out all the supplies of the national emergency stockpile years ago...I'm pretty sure that even this government caught on that this was a problem and would make preparations to ensure they knew how much was in stock. To say that it would take months of study to figure this out I think is just bogus.

This government also gave a sole source contract to a Canadian company to produce 4.4 million masks a year for the government. These masks are in production and have been for many months, so there are Canadian masks available.

Further, they gave a \$23-million gift to a massive American company with a market capitalization of something like \$33 billion. We gave them a corporate gift to make 25 million masks a year in Brockville, Ontario, so we do have the Canadian masks here. Surely, if the government has prepurchased all of these masks from China, we can certainly shift them to hospitals and other areas.

I will note this in regard to the comment about the WTO: If my colleague had tuned in to any of the previous OGGO meetings, you would have noticed that since the start the government invoked the national security exemption to bypass any trade deals, and also made changes to legislation to avoid having to comply with any of the trade deals when making emergency purchases.

I just can't understand why there's this desire to protect foreign—and especially Chinese-made masks when we have taxpayer-funded masks being made in Quebec and Ontario. It is deplorable that we are not using taxpayer-funded masks made by Canadian companies.

I want to repeat a quote from the previous PSPC minister: "It has become evident that when it comes to long-term solutions to Canada's needs, domestic production is a reliable, important and effective solution and one that must continue to be at the forefront of our minds from a procurement perspective."

This is our own minister saying this. I think my colleagues, the Liberals, should get on board, support Canadians and stop this end-

less filibustering over a very reasonable request from the Bloc that masks for Parliament and for government workers should be made in Canada.

Thanks.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McCauley.

I have Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: First, I really appreciate Ms. Vignola for the spirit of her motion. It's really important, for this committee especially, to be leading in this discussion. If we can't do it here, we're in deep trouble.

I am worried about taking out the word "deplores". I'll give you an example from my riding. We had a local distillery that stepped up to the plate, Wayward Distillery, in Courtenay. They started making PPE and hand sanitizer. They pivoted their distillery to making hand sanitizer during the beginning of the pandemic to support health workers, police, first responders and frontline service workers, and they made a lot of it. They donated \$75,000 worth, and then they started getting contracts to develop it. They couldn't keep up with the demand, and they brought in ethanol and product from overseas to be able to supply it. Then Canada flooded the market with Chinese sanitizer. Now they're sitting on all this ethanol. They brought it in so cheaply, they couldn't sell it. They're sitting on this stuff. This is a business that's hanging on by a thread. They put everything into it to help Canadian companies, frontline service workers, and to help Canadians out. I think that's deplorable—I actually think that's deplorable—that this business is sitting on that inventory, completely stressed out. I have huge concerns about that.

I have no problem leaving "deplores" in there, because Canada still hasn't procured from this company and many other companies that stepped up. A veteran owns this company. He's been let down by his own country. I'm sharing that story because I think this is deplorable.

The other part of this motion that I have concerns about—and this is why, as New Democrats, we like motions to come in ahead of time, so we have time to look at them and bring back some thoughtful, positive contributions—is that the way this motion is written, it doesn't prohibit a Canadian company from procuring overseas. There are a lot of Canadian companies that are bringing in foreign PPE. This motion doesn't cite the fact that the product has to be Canadian made, when we're asking the government to replace the foreign product.

I think the motion should be amended after "Quebec", "and made in Canada" should be in there. I'm hoping that the mover of this motion would be open to that amendment.

I agree; I would love to have all of the PPE replaced by January 31 as well. I don't know how practical that is. I think what is practical is at least having a timeline, where the government can report back to this committee by January 31 on a commitment to and implementation of Canadian PPE. Clearly this needs to be moved on quickly. I think this committee and Canadians need confidence that we're going to have Canadian-made PPE in circulation, replacing the foreign PPE.

Those are our contributions right now. I would ask the mover of this motion whether he'd be open to an amendment after "Quebec", to add "and made in Canada".

That's my explanation, and I'm going against his suggestion to remove "deplores".

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johns.

I take it that you are moving a subamendment to the amendment. Is that correct?

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Housefather, do you accept that subamendment?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I'm fine with it. I think the subamendment is not a problem.

The issue, Mr. Chair.... I just want to deal with both the amendment and the subamendment, if I may, and go through the issues that I see.

Again, essentially, I'm disturbed by the fact that we didn't see this before, because I would like to have had time to consider it and understand all of the issues. Maybe Mr. McCauley is right when he says that the WTO part is not necessary. At first blush, it seems to me that I don't want to pass something without having a proper study and knowledge of whether or not I'm in violation of WTO rules. That's why I proposed to include it: because right now I didn't know enough. I mean, if we had the motion for a few days, that would be one thing. If we're thrown at it in the context of a meeting, we have no time to check anything.

On the word "deplores", I want to explain my logic. Of course, I would like everything as much as possible to come from Canadian companies, and of course we on the Hill, more than anyone in our federal departments, should be using Canadian produced goods as much as we possibly can, but to say that something is deplorable.... I don't know, for example—and none of us do—that those masks were not purchased in some big stockpile in March of 2020 when nothing else was available. None of us knows what the stockpile is. None of us knows when they were actually purchased. To say "deplorable" to people who worked on getting those contracts and sourcing them at the beginning.... I don't feel that it's right for the committee to say that their work was deplorable. We just don't know. That's why I proposed to attenuate the wording.

With respect to January 31 and what Mr. Johns said, I think it's totally reasonable. If the motion said, "Look, we see an issue, we're very concerned and we're upset that the masks used in federal departments and on Parliament Hill are not being sourced from Canadian companies, and we ask that government investigate this and come back to the committee by January 31st with a response that

indicates how quickly all of these things can be sourced from Canadian companies", I would be fine with that. But this motion basically calls on everything to be replaced by January 31. I don't know if that's possible. I don't know if we'd be breaching contracts.

Again, the problem is with something being thrown at us at the very last minute with no ability on our part to research it. So while I have no problem with Mr. Johns' subamendment and I would include it as part of what I'm proposing—I have no problem with that—again, I just don't think that the motion as it is currently worded, without any of my amendments, is plausible. I would ask the committee that we at least change the date or agree to change this to "that a government response be provided by January 31". If the committee is willing to do that, then I'll come back with a different amendment. Because, again, I don't think it's reasonable, with no knowledge of what the contracts are and no knowledge of what the situation is, what the stockpile is or what contracts could be put in place, that we're putting in a date of January 31st for this to happen.

I hope that explains why I put forward that amendment. Again, I'm happy to include Mr. Johns' words as part of whatever amendment I'm proposing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Just so we're clear, we're discussing Mr. Johns' subamendment. Correct me if I'm wrong, but Mr. Johns' subamendment is not to make any changes to leaving "deplores" in. It's about adding to the subamendment "Canadian made". Just so we have clarification. Is that correct, Mr. Johns?

• (1240)

Mr. Gord Johns: Yes. After "Quebec", add "and Canadian made".

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We're discussing the subamendment as discussed.

Is the committee in favour? Do we have consensus on this subamendment?

The Clerk: Mr. Paul-Hus would like to intervene, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I have Mr. Paul-Hus.

[Translation]

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

Things get complicated when it comes to amendments and subamendments. I agree with Mr. Johns' proposal. However, I don't agree with Mr. Housefather's subamendment. We're against the subamendment. We would like to keep the original motion as amended, which is very reasonable.

I want to add that there's a public health issue with the masks currently available here. The masks should be removed, analyzed and used elsewhere. From a symbolic point of view, the employees in the House of Commons and the Parliament Hill buildings should have masks made in Canada.

[English]

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

I'm sorry, I missed Mr. Lobb. I apologize.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I agree with my colleague Monsieur Paul-Hus. I thought it would take two to three minutes to pass Madame Vignola's motion here, and it's going to be 24 hours before it's approved.

Thinking about Mr. Housefather's points on the WTO.... I mean, how many times has Justin Trudeau said "made-in-Canada solution"? I have Doug Ford's "made-in-Ontario solution". I'm sure Monsieur Legault had a "made-in-Quebec solution". In Navdeep Bains' words, "made-in-Canada supply is essential." Minister Anand, who was at that time public service and procurement minister, right here in Ontario said, "Made in Canada. Enhanced Canadian supply." There are 50,000 examples here, and I'm sure they are all well in compliance with what they said.

The other thing, which almost makes me think we should have a study on this now, is that if procurement, or whomever would be responsible for these inventories, doesn't know how many there are, that would raise a serious alarm bell to me, because it would seem that your inventory levels would trigger a purchase. If you don't know what your inventories are and you just keep pumping out these purchase orders, how many gazillion masks are out there and we just keep buying them?

If we're in this disarray in year six of the Liberal government.... I didn't come here to be political today; I came here to pass her motion. Now I'm thinking we need to have a 10-part series on how many masks and PPE are in the country. Now, I'm really concerned.

We'll worry about the motion right now, but this is blowing my mind that Mr. Housefather thinks perhaps nobody knows how many masks there are in this country.

I'll cede my time. I think I made my point.

I see that Mr. Housefather is not happy with my comments. That's fine, but these are all my points. Maybe I took them out of context, but I think that's pretty much what he said. There's no issue with made in Canada, there's no issue with made in Quebec, made in Ontario, where they're made. I mean, the government gave them grants. I say let's get on with it to see if we can't find another thing to look at or conclude the meeting here today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lobb.

Just so we're clear, we're talking about the subamendment by Mr. Johns.

Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Chair, I feel I need to respond to that quite absurd intervention.

What I said was that the members of the committee are not aware of what the stock is. I didn't say that the public servants who are responsible for it are not aware. I said that we are sitting here, having received a motion 10 minutes before we started debating it, and none of us have researched any of these questions as to what contracts are currently in place or when the stock that is currently being used on the Hill—and this is also speaking about other government departments—was actually purchased. We don't know if it was a one-time buy in March or April of last year, or whether there are

ongoing purchase orders and there's another purchase order that could easily be changed to a Canadian company, or if we have stock in place that will not run out by January 31 and may only run out in March.

I don't know those answers. I might know them if I had a day to study this, but I never saw this motion before, and so I am not the person who would be aware of that. There would be many people who would be aware of that, and the committee, if we really wanted to do our proper due diligence, would ask about it. We didn't ask. We're now voting on things where we don't have a basis for understanding the contract that is currently in place and when the stock that is there will run out.

Again, if this were a motion to say we would like an answer because we're very concerned about the situation as to when we can replace these masks with Canadian masks, I'd have no problem with it. I tend to not be a very partisan person, and I don't really think this is a great way to start, but I never said what I was alleged to have said.

Again, I continue to support Mr. Johns' subamendment. Thank you.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Mr. Jowhari.

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

I want to echo what my colleague Mr. Housefather said. I don't think our intent was to say that PSPC does not know the level of inventory; it's just that we've not been furnished with that information in this meeting. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jowhari.

All right. Is there any more discussion? I'm not seeing any hands up.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, just before we vote on my subamendment, I believe that the amendment put forward by Mr. Housefather is not going to pass. Therefore, I'm going to withdraw my subamendment. Let us vote on his amendment, and then I will come back to the committee.

The Chair: I think we need to have unanimous consent for the withdrawal.

The Clerk: Yes, Mr. Chair. Pursuant to the Standing Orders, to withdraw a motion requires unanimous consent of the committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Do we have unanimous consent to withdraw the subamendment? I see that.

(Subamendment withdrawn)

The Chair: Okay. The subamendment is withdrawn. We are now discussing the amendment to the amended motion, namely, Mr. Housefather's amendment to the amended motion.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, I see that your hand is up.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again I would ask that we adopt MP Housefather's amendment and remove the language about "deplorable". Again I emphasize the fact that we don't have the facts in front of us.

Really, this is an inauspicious start to this committee. When I was reading out the routine motions, they talked about the "spirit of collaboration". We haven't even discussed the basis of facts. We don't have those facts in front of us. We do not have a single testimony. We do not have a single document that tells us anything about the numbers of PPE that were procured, how it was distributed, what is the plan moving forward—nothing. This is not how a committee is supposed to work. We're supposed to work from fundamental facts, establish those facts and then communicate them.

I'll be honest with you. I feel broadsided by this motion in general. Again, I want to debate. I think it's an absolutely critical issue to debate, but we need to have the time to debate it and have the proper facts before we make a statement.

As of July, there were 2.7 billion pieces of PPE that were procured by PSPC—2.7 billion pieces of PPE that were procured—and they were procured because we needed PPE en masse and we needed it quickly to protect the health and safety of Canadians and to protect the health and safety of our frontline workers. There were 190 million N95 masks procured, 77 million non-medical masks that were procured by this government, 11 million cloth masks that were procured by this government and 450 million surgical masks procured by this government to protect Canadians—those in hospitals, those in homes and those on the Hill.

To MP Housefather's point, we should have a discussion about Canadian-made PPE and promoting Canadian PPE, absolutely, but we need to have some facts here as to how that PPE is procured and how that PPE is distributed. Is it purchased in bulk?

What was the rationale? Are these masks the masks that were purchased six months ago when there was a dearth of PPE or 10 months ago when there was a dearth of PPE and a fierce competition for PPE across the world?

• (1250)

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I apologize for intervening.

Mr. Lobb has raised a point of order.

Mr. Ben Lobb: I have a point of order for my colleague.

The point of order is that he is now presenting how many he has ordered, and I never disputed the order. I'm saying, how many are in inventory now to continue on with these orders? He's presenting some facts, not all the facts. I understand that they have ordered a lot of masks and PPE, and I think we all agree that's great. Now, I think we're at the point where that is irrelevant, unless he knows how many are in inventory and what is triggering future purchases, which I don't think either of us knows.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lobb. It is a matter of debate.

Mr. Kusmierczyk, you have the floor on the discussion on the amendment to the amended motion. Let's try to stay close to that and focus on the issues, please.

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk: Absolutely, Mr. Chair.

What I'll say is that the amendment by my colleague MP Housefather encapsulates the spirit of Madam Vignola's motion. I think the spirit of the motion, which I think is supported by everybody around this table, is that ideally we would want to see made-in-Canada PPE procured. But at the same time, it doesn't establish a fact or use the language of fact. When no fact has been brought forward or been established at all, what are we working from as a committee?

I would implore committee members to adopt MP Housefather's amendment, because it captures the spirit of what we're trying to accomplish here. We want to promote Canadian-made PPEs and support Canadian-made companies, but it doesn't state that we established as fact something that has not been established as fact, because we haven't had the opportunity to actually have that discussion here.

That's what I would bring forward. That's why I would support the amendment put forward by MP Housefather.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kusmierczyk.

Mr. Housefather, I see your hand up.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

I guess my point is that I'm trying to listen. I always try to see if there is consensus. I'm trying to listen to the members of the committee. I think the issues we've raised are real and legitimate. Nobody knows what the stock is right now. At the very least, we need to amend the date of January 31, 2022. I mean, that's at the very least, because nobody knows when it would be possible to accomplish this. We need to use the words "as soon as reasonably possible".

Mr. Chairman, maybe I made an error in trying to put together multiple components into one amendment. If there is unanimous consent to withdraw the amendment, I'd be prepared to move simply the timeline as an amendment. Then we could take things one by one. I don't think the word "deplores" is right, but I can make that a separate issue.

For me, if we want to not prolong this meeting forever, I would be okay with withdrawing the three-part amendment that I put forward and simply proposing to amend things by removing the date of January 31, 2022, and saying "as soon as reasonably possible".

I would need unanimous consent to withdraw and then remake that simple smaller amendment. If my colleagues want to do that and we want to try to foster a spirit of collegiality, I would be prepared to do that.

• (1255)

The Chair: Boy, this is.... Which one are we looking at?

Okay. Right now Mr. Housefather is asking for unanimous consent to withdraw his amendment to the amended motion. Do we have unanimous consent for that to happen? We do have a time limit today and we still haven't even got through this motion. We want to at least give us some action so that we can move forward.

Is there unanimous consent to withdraw Mr. Housefather's amendment?

I see no hands saying "no".

(Amendment withdrawn [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Mr. Housefather, I'm going to give you a very quick second to propose what you are suggesting.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Basically, the amendment I am proposing is that we remove the date, "January 31, 2022", and instead say "as soon as reasonably possible".

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We now have an amendment to the amended motion. It would change "January 31, 2022" to "as soon as reasonably possible".

Is there any discussion on that amendment?

I do see hands up. I think Mr. Paul-Hus was first, and then Ms. Vignola.

The Clerk: No, Mr. Chair, I believe it was Mr. Johns and then Madame Vignola.

The Chair: Okay. I've got to get my eyes checked too.

Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Before I move anything, is it possible for the clerk to read the motion where we are now? I'm getting a bit lost.

The Clerk: One moment please, Mr. Chair. I will pull up the motion.

I'm pulling up the amendment that was sent. There was one amendment already adopted to the motion. I will read what I understand to be the motion as amended at this point: "That, in light of the Prime Minister's call to the country's businesses to produce personal protective equipment (PPE) and that since then, several Quebec and Canadian businesses have responded, the committee deplores the fact that the masks distributed on Parliament Hill and in the various federal departments and agencies come from abroad and not from local businesses; that the administration of the House and the federal government take steps to ensure that, as of January 31, 2022, the masks distributed on Parliament Hill and in the various federal departments and agencies come from Canadian companies that produce this type of personal protective equipment; and that the chair of the committee write to the Speaker of the House to inform him of the situation and ask that measures be taken to resolve the situation before the date specified in the motion."

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Mr. Johns, that is the amended motion that we have. Mr. Housefather has proposed that "January 31, 2022" be changed to "as soon as reasonably possible", in my slang.

Go ahead, Mr. Johns.

Mr. Gord Johns: I would like to move an amendment to the original motion. After "masks", I would like to add "and hand sanitizer" before the word "distributed".

Moreover, after "steps to ensure that, as of January 31, 2022", I would like to add after the federal government and the House provide a timeline that mask and sanitizer that can be distributed on Parliament Hill and in the various federal departments and agencies come from Canadian companies, the following words, "and made in Canada that produce this type of personal protective equipment".

● (1300)

The Clerk: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Clerk.

The Clerk: I believe Mr. Housefather moved an amendment to replace the date "January 31, 2022", with, I believe, "as reasonably possible". That is the amendment on the floor.

I'm not sure if Mr. Johns is moving this as another amendment that he wishes to consider after Mr. Housefather's amendment is dealt with. I'm just seeking clarity.

The Chair: My assumption is that he's going have to make that amendment to the amendment that we're discussing—Mr. Housefather's—which is "as soon as reasonably possible".

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, could we suspend so that I could speak with you privately, please? Thank you.

The Chair: Certainly.

We'll suspend for five minutes.

● (1300)

(Pause)

● (1300)

The Chair: Sorry, in Saskatchewan, five minutes goes by very quickly. We will resume.

Mr. Johns, unfortunately, we're discussing an amendment by Mr. Housefather, which is a very small amendment. Your proposal is actually outside the context of Mr. Housefather's amendment.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'll withdraw it for now, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, if you would just hold off on that for now, you may be able to bring it up at a different point in time, but this wouldn't be the time for that.

Thank you.

Everyone, I'm just clarifying that we are talking about the change by Mr. Housefather to the date, changing "January 31, 2022" to "as soon as reasonably possible" in the amended motion.

Go ahead, Ms. Vignola.

• (1305)

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: This is particularly unclear. I was criticized earlier for a lack of facts in my motion. However, it's easy to see that the masks aren't made in Canada. My motion is very simple. It's about supporting our workers and companies and setting an example on Parliament Hill.

I never, ever thought that I would face so much opposition or filibustering in order to protect our workers and companies. When I'm told "as soon as reasonably possible," what does that mean? Does it mean February 1, 2022, 2023, 2645? It's remarkably unclear. This is about our workers and our health, because the masks made here meet our high standards.

That's what this motion addresses. It's about protecting our people.

Why is there so much opposition to this? Why are there so many barriers to protecting our people?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vignola.

I see Mr. Jowhari.

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

I just want to reassure Ms. Vignola that nobody is trying to push back, and we are not trying filibuster.

We are trying to make sure that we work in a very collaborative way so that the motion that's going to get the unanimous support of this committee is really well-thought-through. That's all we are asking, and I—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Jowhari.

Unfortunately, our phone lines have dropped, and we have to re-set those.

We're going to have to suspend just briefly. I apologize for interrupting you, Mr. Jowhari, but the phone lines are down, so we will just suspend for a couple of minutes while we try to get the phone lines back up.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Mr. Chair, we are already past one o'clock, which is the regular time of this committee, but that's fine.

The Chair: Hopefully we will be able to get this done as quickly as possible, but if not, we can continue without the phone lines. It's up to the committee if they'd like to do that.

Is the committee okay with our continuing without the phone lines? We don't know how long it would take to bring them back.

I'm seeing no nods against, so let us continue.

I'm sorry, Mr. Jowhari, go ahead.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: As I was saying, we appreciate the motion and its intent. We totally support making sure that all of our Canadian manufacturers are considered first and foremost.

The fact that we are having this much conversation about this motion in itself is evidence that we really need to take a step back and look at the content of the motion to ensure that, once passed by this committee, it has teeth and can benefit us.

I suggest that we consider this as a notice of the motion, and, in the spirit of collaboration, we will go back and work with all members to ensure that we have a motion that's agreeable to all that we could table on the first meeting we come back and that it will have unanimous support of all the team members.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Just hold on for a second, Mr. Jowhari, while I figure this out. To my understanding, what you're proposing is that the motions be withdrawn.

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Yes, I'm proposing that we withdraw the motion. Consider it as a notice of motion, along with all of the amendments proposed, so that everybody, all of the team members, are in a position to be able to table a lot of notices of motion. In the spirit of not wanting to reject this motion, we want to make sure it's considered as a notice of motion. It should go to the subcommittee on procedure to be studied and modified, so that we can come back to support it in January.

• (1310)

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, I can support that if the priority is that this be the first motion that we bring back to this committee to discuss. Does that sound reasonable?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Okay, I support that.

Mr. Gord Johns: I'll wait for Ms. Vignola to give her feedback on that suggestion.

The Chair: In order for us to do that, we would need—

Mr. Gord Johns: The spirit of your motion is fabulous. It's critical, and we need to show leadership here at this committee.

The Chair: In order for us to do that, we would need unanimous consent to withdraw this motion at this time in the understanding that we would bring it back.

Correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Clerk, the amended motion would not be brought back, but the initial motion.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, it may be worth your while to clarify what the committee is actually.... Is the committee wishing to withdraw both motions, which is to say the motion proposed by Madame Vignola as amended, and the amendment proposed by Mr. Housefather, or just the amendment proposed by Mr. Housefather?

The Chair: Okay. We want clarification as to whether it's the motion as amended or Mr. Housefather's....

Mr. Housefather's motion was actually withdrawn with consent.

The Clerk: If I may, Mr. Chair, there was an amendment by Mr. Housefather, which was withdrawn.

The Chair: Yes.

The Clerk: Subsequent to that he moved another.

If the committee is not interested in dealing with the issue today, it could decide to withdraw both the motions. Alternatively, the committee could also decide to adjourn the debate on it and pick up the debate, which would include Mr. Housefather's current amendment and the motion Madame Vignola has moved, which has already been amended.

It's entirely up to the committee. To withdraw either of the motions requires unanimous consent, and any member can propose to adjourn the debate if they so choose, or to adjourn the meeting.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Housefather, I see your hand is up.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. To again explain, I think the intention of what Mr. Jowhari was suggesting—and Mr. Johns, I believe—was that the core motion, the base motion, as well as any amendments to it be tabled to our first meeting when we are back in January, giving people the opportunity to discuss it in the interim and try to find a consensus so that we could adopt it, given that we, right now....

I want to clarify, Mr. Chair, that this motion doesn't just deal with the parliamentary precinct, but with all federal departments across the country, and we have no idea, again, what inventory is related to masks and hand sanitizer. Again, I accept Mr. Johns' addition if he proposes it.

I think the right motion, Mr. Chair, is that I move to table discussion on the motion as well as any amendments to the first meeting of the committee back in January. I think that's the right motion to put forward based on the clerk's advice.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Housefather.

Just to correct this again, my understanding, Mr. Housefather, was that this was just with regard to the parliamentary precinct, but I may be misinterpreting that as well.

Ms. Vignola, would you clarify that as well?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: The French version of the motion refers to masks distributed on Parliament Hill and in various federal departments and agencies.

I suggest that we suspend the motion that I moved. That way, we can discuss it again as a priority at our first meeting. In the meantime, we can discuss it further, as we will at the next committee meeting.

As I said earlier, this is an important issue. It affects public health, our companies and our workers. It's inconceivable that federal employees are wearing masks manufactured outside Canada.

• (1315)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there agreement to adjourn the debate?

Mr. Majid Jowhari: Yes.

The Chair: I am seeing agreement, and nothing against.

That said, the debate is adjourned, and we will bring this up at our next meeting in January. It will be first on the agenda.

Thank you, everybody. Have a good day. Merry Christmas and happy new year to you all.

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