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Chair

Mrs. Deborah Schulte

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• (1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.)): Welcome, everybody. We'll get under way.

The first thing I want to do is finish up a little bit of business that we didn't do quite right—that I didn't do right—at the last meeting. When we organized to have our routine motion on the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, we appointed the two VCs, MP Cullen and MP Eglinski, but we didn't appoint the ones on the Liberal side. The whip has given us the names, so I want to put that on the record, if that's okay.

The two from the Liberal side will be MP Aldag and MP Amos.

Are you guys good with that? Okay—

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Chair, are they customarily elected here at this table or are they simply appointed?

The Chair: My understanding was that they brought their names forward, but we can certainly elect them. That would be fine.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): They'll have to make a speech.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: As voters, we need to be informed before we make such a decision.

The Chair: The way it worked was that the whip had discussions with the different members, looking at the workload and that. They then came up with the people who were going to bring their names forward.

Do you want to have a...?

Hon. Ed Fast: We should probably formalize it, certainly in the interest of doing what the Prime Minister asked, that these committees be independent.

The Chair: Well, we didn't challenge your side. We just brought your name forward, right?

Hon. Ed Fast: No, we voted.

The Chair: Yes, and I am intending to vote on it; I'm just thinking that we'll bring them forward and we'll vote, sure, but if you want to have any discussion on it, please feel free.

Hon. Ed Fast: No discussion.... Why don't we just formalize it?

The Chair: We should formalize it with a vote.

Hon. Ed Fast: Agreed.

The Chair: Sorry, I thought you wanted to do something else. I apologize.

Hon. Ed Fast: No, we're not challenging it.

The Chair: I wasn't sure.

Would somebody bring that forward, please.

Go ahead, MP Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Are they vice-chairs, or is this for the—

The Chair: No, they're appointed to the subcommittee.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay, so for the subcommittee, Mr. Amos and Mr. Aldag.

The Chair: All in favour?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Great. Thank you very much. That's put us back on track for that.

We had agreed that today we would have our blue-sky round table on all the wonderful things that we would like to have the committee work on and that we are concerned about. I had also sent something on how to go forward for the next couple of weeks, but we'll talk about that after.

Why don't we proceed clockwise and start with MP Eglinski.

Would you like to share with us what you're thinking about the committee, and why you are so happy to be here?

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you.

One of the areas that our side would like to look at is clean air and water.

I think we need to deal with clean air in different ways. There are technologies that are out there today, improved technologies. We should do some research on what is out there in terms of the different technologies and on what are the best practices being applied in Canada, whether in coal-fired electricity or in the oil and gas sector.

In relation to water, our concern is fresh water in Canada. I believe we need to take a very good look at the Great Lakes systems, our rivers, the use of our fresh water in industry, and areas like that.

Ed might want to follow through with a little bit more on that.

Hon. Ed Fast: Madam Chair, given the fact that the government has made a high priority of focusing on and supporting the clean technologies sector and on using clean technologies in achieving the targets that presumably will be set for greenhouse gas emissions, we would like to see a review of the environmental technologies that are available right now and also the economic impact that growing that sector of our own economy could have on Canada's long-term prosperity. Obviously, focusing on alternative energy sources would be one aspect of that.

There's a second area that I'd like to float for consideration. I don't believe this committee has recently done any work in the area of migratory birds and the role that wetlands play in supporting a healthy population of migratory birds.

These are areas that I think would form a very good subject for future study. I'll leave it up to Martin to focus on some of the other issues that he has an interest in.

I wouldn't want to lose sight of the fact that we are very much looking forward to having the minister come in and join us. I'm assuming that work is being done—

The Chair: We're working on that, yes.

Hon. Ed Fast: I'm assuming that work is being done to establish a date sometime in March, presumably. Is that what we're looking at?

The Chair: As soon as possible, but we don't have a date yet. We're looking at early April.

Hon. Ed Fast: The sooner the better.

The Chair: We're not going to be able to see her in March, unfortunately. She has a full agenda. We are trying to get her in early April.

Hon. Ed Fast: Okay, because some of the work we're doing here, the blue-sky work, would be easier to work through if we knew what the minister's priorities are.

• (1115)

The Chair: Absolutely.

Hon. Ed Fast: We certainly know that coming up with a national framework to address climate change is something she's working very hard on. We're very anxious to see what that will look like. I'm assuming we'll see something on March 2, when she meets with the first ministers. The earlier she can appear before the committee I think the better we'll be able to prepare the kinds of studies we want to undertake.

The Chair: Absolutely. Thanks.

I was thinking everybody would have eight to ten minutes, and you guys are moving awfully quickly. Don't feel there's a rush on this. We have a whole hour.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Don't say that.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Ed Fast: Madam Chair, we will engage as this discussion continues.

The Chair: We'll go around, and then we'll do a back and forth on what we discuss. That sounds perfect.

Hon. Ed Fast: That's what we expected.

The Chair: Thank you. I just don't want people to feel that they're under pressure to rush.

Hon. Ed Fast: In summary, the two areas I think we may want to focus our studies on would be clean technology, environmental technologies, and the state of our migratory bird population and how we continue to sustain it going forward.

The Chair: Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Chair, thanks for the clarification on time. I'm sitting here wondering, do I have 30 seconds, one minute? Where are we?

The Chair: No, no.

Mr. Martin Shields: I appreciate that clarification. No, I'm not worried about that.

Anyway, thank you for mentioning water. I have some interest in water. We've developed a lot of rural water systems, and one challenge has always been staffing. In the issues I've come across, how do we develop regional water systems that connect with aboriginal communities when they're involved? It becomes a very dicey situation because of rights for moving pipes on different types of land. There are some issues in developing regional water, which rural municipalities have begun to work at and have been successful at. I think we need to work more on regional water systems.

Then there's the staffing issue that comes along with it. One reason many rural municipalities got into regional water is they didn't have enough trained staff. I think it's one thing to build a lot of water treatment plants, but if we don't have staff able to work them 24/7, we quickly run into problems. One reason rural municipalities moved into regional water systems was the staffing issue. I think it's something we need to look at in the sense of training, whether it's aboriginal, whether it's rural. We need to have that study, asking what does it take to man 24/7, no matter where you are in this country, to maintain safe water? Where are the training programs? How do we facilitate that? I think we should study it in that sense. It has been an issue of finding staff. When you're working with water, if you don't have staff 24/7, it goes sideways on you in a hurry and you get into trouble.

If you're investing in infrastructure for water treatment, it also gets to waste water. We're now beginning to talk about waste water and how to treat it in rural municipalities. It's a very expensive process. How can we deal with rural or aboriginal waste water?

Major cities have done an excellent job, except for stormwater. Whatever's on the streets goes into water waste, and that's a huge issue. We haven't touched that stormwater issue. As we pave more urban areas, we have a lot of stuff going into our water.

That gets to the agricultural sector. The ag sector's very concerned about the water they use. They need clean water for agricultural production in this country, or we'll get into situations where we have health issues that happen in a hurry. Those things are important with water.

That's part of where I come from, the ag sector, urban and rural, in the sense of clean, fresh water, drinkable water, potable water, regional and trained people to do it. If you don't have trained people, we can build everything you want, but without the manpower to run it, it just falls apart.

The last one I bring up is national parks. I grew up beside a national park and I claim it's the best one in Canada. It's Waterton Lakes National Park. If you haven't been there, you should go.

• (1120)

The Chair: It's gorgeous.

Mr. Martin Shields: My grandfather's homestead in 1900 was on the north side of Waterton Park, so I grew up in the park system.

The Chair: It's beautiful.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): I haven't been.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes, you should go. It's where the prairies meet the mountains and it's beautiful.

I've been in many of the parks from one end of the country to the other. They're phenomenal places. But the concern I have is with youth and young families. They're not in the parks. Us old guys like to go and stay in four- and five-star hotels and walk out on the trails on the nice days, but as kids, we were there doing a lot of camping. My kids grew up on the trails in the parks, but they're not there anymore. The average age of people in the parks is well into their fifties.

I know there was a report done in 2012. There was a round table. There was a study done of plans to try to change the use of the parks and bring more people in with immigration and new Canadians, but I don't know what has happened.

I love the free park pass for 2017. That's a good one. I'll be down there buying my two-year pass real quick, but my grandkids spend time in the parks because I take them.

I have one family that can't afford to go, one of my daughters and her kids. They can't afford to go to the park. I think we have to look at that. What are the barriers that are keeping Canadians from enjoying what I think is a phenomenal park system in this country and our national sites? That's an area I have a strong interest in.

Is that enough?

The Chair: Yes, that was great. That's what I was filling in, so that everyone has a perspective on where you lie and what you're passionate about.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes.

The Chair: You can wonder: if the youth had Internet in the parks, they might come, but that's a totally different experience.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes, I have some opinions about that.

The Chair: Yes, me too.

Mr. Martin Shields: I've taken kids all over the world on tour. The most recent one was in April. I had high school kids in the Amazon and there was no Internet.

The Chair: And they had a great time.

Mr. Martin Shields: You bet they did. They saw stuff they'll never forget. They took lots of pictures they could tweet later. Right? Yes, right, we did that.

When youth can experience it, they really enjoy it. You take them to a different place, but we have to get them there and we have to get young families there to enjoy it together.

I believe there are too many barriers, but we need to study this and figure out what those barriers are.

The Chair: Sure, and new Canadians too.

Mr. Martin Shields: You bet.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Those are great. I like a lot of what's being said. I would add to Ed's comment about clean tech that I think the preponderance of news around the environment this year will be around climate. As we come out of Paris and the ministers meet, what's the plan? What's the target? All of those questions will be coming forward.

I'm sensing a different approach from government. It was a lot more sectoral in the past in how much reduction was coming sector by sector, what plan, and what to reduce. This time it seems to be a lot more regional and province by province. Who's contributing what seems to be how the debate is framing up. Ottawa is going to play some role. We don't know what yet until that meeting happens, but I think this committee in terms of looking at what the challenges are, what the solutions are, and what the potential is around climate, will be very important.

I think the CEAA 2012 review is going to be important. The government has made some commitments along those lines, but how it manifests and what that means for proponents and for communities is going to be hugely important. A couple of sub issues on that seem to be coming again and again, one around cumulative and one around GHG contributions, where the government has made some comments, but they're not necessarily clear yet.

We're in camera here and so it's easier. I'm disappointed we're not going to see the minister until April because, as was said, it sets in the past—

The Chair: Are you—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Why are we not in camera?

The Chair: No, we're not in camera, sorry. Remember we had that discussion and everybody felt it was not necessarily the way we wanted to start off our committee meeting.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm not that uncomfortable with it being.... I'm disappointed because the minister's own work, and her decision to focus on different issues, is very informative and helpful to the committee to be able to know what other agenda items will be coming up. That's a bit late, but it is what it is.

On the water side, I think water is great. I may tuck in because it comes up every few years when bulk water exports pop up on the radar for people. We get sued by somebody and people want to know how firm the law is and if there's any progress on that.

My only caution would be Ottawa's jurisdiction on water in terms of municipal waste water treatment, some of the standards, and where our jurisdiction ends.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The first nations piece is for sure one of them. There are many communities in rural Canada that are cross-jurisdictional and it gets to be a total mess. The government has made commitments to end all boil water advisories by a certain date and that may fall here. Indigenous Affairs may want to pick it up, I don't know. A lot of these issues are going to crossover.

On clean tech, the industry committee might want to get all excited about that and then sort of push us out of the way, but we'll set our own path.

• (1125)

The Chair: I think that's going to be a bit of a challenge for our committee. A lot of things are going to cross over into the other, so we're going to have to find a way to work that in with the other committees and cross-pollinate.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's always true in environment. One advantage is starting first.

The Chair: That's fair.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: If we get into a clean tech climate change kind of discussion, and show this committee to be the place... Depending on how important the issue is to Canadians, the environment committee cycles up and down in terms of prominence. My ambition would be for all of us to cycle it up. If we take on the issues of the day, and they resonate with what a lot of Canadians are concerned about, then we'll have that. It's not that we're being adversarial with the other committees, but we don't want to launch into a 5- or 10-day study that almost exactly mirrors what another committee is doing, because that quickly gets very repetitive.

The Chair: I agree.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Chair, you and I talked earlier about one issue that is time-pressing, and that is nuclear waste disposal. That issue has come to us, and we are going to address it with the committee members. We're only bringing it up because it is time-sensitive. We don't get to put it off for three months. If we don't look at it until three months from now, that will be too late. It's something that's in front of the U.S. Congress as well. I'll speak to that later maybe, once we go around on the blue-sky piece, if that makes sense.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay. That's it for me.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mark.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Chair, just by way of introduction, prior to being elected a member of Parliament, I was mayor of the City of Kingston. I also own a business in the city of Kingston, and I have a degree in economics.

It's very interesting. I think there are two parts to our committee that we really need to focus on. I think it's really easy to get lost on the environment side of things, but at the same time we have to pay attention to the sustainability part. I think that's equally important, and I'll get to that in a second.

When it comes to our environment, I strongly believe that whatever we do needs to take an approach that becomes fair to everybody. I believe in putting a price on carbon. I think it's the right

thing to do, but I also think it has to be done in a fair and equitable manner so that all businesses are treated in the same way. I get annoyed when I go to buy a piece of electronics and I have to pay a \$40 end-of-life fee on it. Nothing stings more than that, but at the end of the day, it is a cost that we probably should have been building into the economic model from the beginning, and we haven't, and now we have to play a little bit of catch-up on that. As much as it pains me sometimes, I see the value in that and I think it's important. From an economist's perspective, I think that if this is done properly everybody can be treated in a proper manner, which will result in a benefit at the end of the day.

When I was mayor of Kingston, we had set out on a path to become the most sustainable city in Canada—not to be confused with the greenest city, which Vancouver had, and Mayor Robertson and I got into a couple of debates over it. Sustainability, I think, is quite different from just environmental sustainability. If you want to be a sustainable community, you have to look at four important pillars, one of which is the environment. You also have to consider the economic sustainability, social sustainability, and cultural sustainability. It's the idea that unless all four are prospering, none of the individual pillars will be able to prosper on its own. You can't protect the environment—it'll be the first thing to go—if you don't have a strong economy, because people will be easily able to dismiss it. You can't have a strong economy unless you have the right social and cultural elements in communities. The number one question our economic development agency was asked when we were trying to recruit businesses to Kingston was not about the prices or our taxes and everything, but about what the quality of life was like. If we don't have strong quality of life in our communities to attract investors, we're not going to have the economic sustainability in order to be able to protect our environment. You can see how all four of those pillars need to act and be strong on their own in order to contribute to the greater good. I'm really interested in the sustainability aspect of this, as you can imagine.

Back to the environment side, I'm very passionate about renewable energy and what we can do. I've personally invested in a number of microFIT projects in the province, which have possibly contributed to the increase of electricity in Ontario, but nonetheless, I think that's the right thing to do. I know even some of my own colleagues don't necessarily agree that solar panels are the right answer, but I do believe that they're a stepping stone. The next evolution of the solar panel will be clear glass that you can just put in a window of a house and the energy will be produced that way, and I'm very much looking forward to that.

We need to fuel the opportunities that can come from the renewable energy sector. I think we're just seeing the beginning of it. I'm very passionate about pushing forward on that agenda as well.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1130)

The Chair: Mr. Amos.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. Thanks, colleagues. This is a really great start. I appreciate hearing the different issues being raised.

I've just reread the mandate letter this morning and I appreciate... I mean, I'd love to see the minister before this committee, too; I think that will be a good conversation. But we have a solid two pages which are quite detailed, and there's more than a smorgasbord in here to choose from, let alone what we might be interested in. I hope that we'll be able to identify items that are of group and personal interest to put before her.

I note too that the minister represents the executive and we represent the legislature. It's our job, not only to be focusing on matters that we can study and report back on to Parliament, but also to act as legislators, considering the mandate letter and providing advice to this government on how we'd like to see the government's priorities move forward.

We've already had one example that was raised by the member for Skeena—Bulkley. We have the CEAA 2012 review which is part of our agenda. I think it would be helpful to understand more from the minister on where the government sees itself moving forward on that. We also have in the mandate letter mention of water, which has been brought up, and clean air as well. That goes to the heart of federal environmental protection of water and air under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

From my perspective, I'd like to see an in-depth legislative review of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999. The legislation itself provides for five-year reviews, and we haven't done one in years and years. It seems to me that is a requirement. I would suggest that also aligns with the priorities of the members of the loyal opposition. We could actually get into the guts of the regulatory and legislative regime that impacts clean air and clean water.

That allows me that focus on the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, which is the cornerstone of federal environmental protection legislation. It also enables a discussion around a topic which I think has been under studied nationally and where we as a committee could provide some leadership, and that is on the topic of environmental justice.

There are communities across this country, indigenous communities leap to mind, but there are others on the so-called wrong side of the tracks which have borne the brunt of industrial development, and past generations weren't considering the impacts of polluted air and water on communities. As an environmental lawyer, in the past I've represented individuals and groups and communities who have suffered in terrible ways because they happened to be next door to the dump and their water was polluted, or they live in indigenous communities and don't have access to clean water and are under permanent boil water advisories.

These are circumstances that I know as human beings we care to see resolved. I'm happy that our government made a commitment around aboriginal clean water, and I hope we can work on that aspect, perhaps in the manner of a study around the issues pertaining to environmental justice, particularly how pollution can disproportionately impact particular underprivileged members of Canadian society. There's a historic dimension to that, but there's also a very present-day dimension.

I think that aligns well with a CEPA legislative review, because it can help inform some of the lacuna in that legislation, particularly

around the lack of a specified right to a healthy environment at present. Specific communities are suffering as a result of that lack of specified legislative right under CEPA. I think that the two would mesh well together.

• (1135)

To segue into the indigenous theme, as a government we've obviously committed on the water side, but there are all sorts of opportunities. Member Shields made reference to—or maybe it was member Fast—wetlands. That's definitely an issue near and dear to my heart. The good people at Ducks Unlimited have been working hard for many years on issues like this and have come before this committee many times in the past. I think the wetlands issue as well as the national parks issue and engagement in the national parks were addressed in part, at least by certain witnesses, in the context of the previous government's national conservation plan initiative. There is a report that's available for us all to review, and I wouldn't want to re-engage in the studies of the past, but I do think we could focus on opportunities for conservation, not just the environmental protection aspects, but also the sustainable development aspects.

We have so many opportunities across this country to achieve environmental protection and to achieve conservation values, and at the same time reap economic opportunities, particularly around tourism and on lands that are claimed by indigenous peoples across the country. There are so many avenues for discussion around how we could achieve better land-use planning, better conservation outcomes, including, say, wetlands. We should also look at how we might engage indigenous communities in the protection of those lands while building ecotourism and while maintaining opportunities for employment in those areas.

I guess you can tell that I represent a rural riding. My rural riding has significant aboriginal populations, and they have an interest in proper land-use management. They want to have a say in how conservation is achieved and how sustainable development is achieved. It's a backyard interest, but I know that it translates nationally.

I will try to wrap up quickly.

The entire issue of nanomaterials fits into the technology field and it also fits into the CEPA review aspect. I know that the government is at present consulting on a new regulation around micro-beads, and I think that's positive. It remains to be seen what other work we can do but I think nanomaterials is a separate issue from microplastics. These are federally unregulated, and it's pretty clear there are new technologies and new products being invented all the time.

One of the big challenges we face goes to CEPA, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, generally. I don't mind revealing some of my feelings about CEPA more generally, but I think this nanoparticle stuff is a case in point. We have a system which presumes that technology should be allowed to be used and that products should be allowed to be developed, and then we figure out how to regulate them after. I think we need to shift so that we're not finding ourselves behind the eight ball and not finding ourselves with polluted waterways or polluted air pursuant to the use of new technologies. We don't need nanoparticles of metals in our waterways if we can know in advance that there are ways to prevent that kind of contamination.

There are two more topics I'll mention.

● (1140)

One is the issue of federal enforcement. I have published studies on that topic in the past. It's a challenging area.

I would be interested to know if the opposition is interested in environmental enforcement issues. It should be recognized that the previous government did invest in enforcement and did make legislative changes to increase penalties related to non-compliance. There are certain aspects of the previous government's performance that I think are to be commended, and others on the enforcement side less so. There may be a point in time when we would want to examine the federal enforcement regime. That could encompass both water and air pollution, but also things such as fisheries. I would put that on the table.

The last issue is an obscure one. It comes with a story, because I know I've been so dry and people are falling asleep. Canada's bankruptcy and insolvency legislation and how it does or does not incentivize the cleanup of contaminated sites is a matter of some concern and has actually been debated before the Supreme Court of Canada in the last couple of years. If people are familiar with the Newfoundland and Labrador v. AbitibiBowater matter, they'll know that it's a really important case. There was not a lot of public attention. You get the news hit on the day the case is argued, and on the day the decision is rendered. I represented intervenors in that matter.

The lesson I draw from it is that federal legislation around bankruptcy and insolvency does not necessarily put front and centre the environmental interest in ensuring that contamination is dealt with. In that case, there are some checkered.... It was an interesting fact pattern. It involved challenged relations between former premier Danny Williams and AbitibiBowater Inc. in the context of a business that was in very difficult economic straits.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador ultimately had a very difficult time putting itself at the front of the queue when it wanted to issue a remediation order to save the company, which was going through insolvency restructuring. It could not go into the proceedings and say, "Listen, there's about 100 million dollars' worth of contaminated site here and we want to make sure it's dealt with first and foremost." The law does not allow for that. There are all sorts of creditors, debtors, and liabilities that have to be taken into consideration.

The Chair: The environment comes last.

Mr. William Amos: It doesn't come last per se. The legislation does provide for a certain degree of protection, but it's not perhaps the protection that Canadians might want if they were presented with the full array of facts. There are other issues as well with this kind of insolvency, of course. There are pensions. There is the maintaining of a business as a going concern, which is obviously an economic and sustainable development consideration. We can't be blind to the fact that it's not just about the environment.

However, I think the decision merits review by the legislature. I don't see it in any of the mandate letters right now. It's not a high-profile issue but it is an important one, and I think that sometimes legislators in committees such as these need to take the bull by the horns, recognize where there may be a public interest, and determine whether we can do something about it and bring it to the attention of the legislature and the relevant ministers. It wouldn't be just for the environment minister, of course. This would be for Finance. This would be for Innovation. I think this is a whole-of-government concern. How do you deal with companies that are on the downturn in a context where they've been operating for many years in industries that are polluting?

I'll leave it at that. That's a lot of substance.

● (1145)

The Chair: To pick up on that—because I'm sure MP Gerretsen has seen it, too, from his experience, and Darren as well—as municipalities we see these bankrupt companies that have left all of their stuff and the barrels are leaking. There are serious issues for the community and there's no money. Nobody has any money to fix that. It's a real challenge, so it's a good point.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It's buried underground or [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: It's a problem if they happen to be sitting on a wet area that's leaking into a significant waterway, which is often where they got their location, because it's close to water. We have these problems all over Canada. I think it's a good point.

Thank you very much.

Mr. William Amos: I recognize my constituents would be very frustrated with me if I didn't raise the issue of Gatineau Park as a federal area worthy of enhanced protection. I would point out to this committee, not on behalf of the committee because I wasn't mandated to do so, that on my own behalf last week I held a consultation session at a cabin in Gatineau Park. People had to cross-country ski to attend it, so we didn't have huge numbers, but we wanted to make a point. We wanted to give people in the Ottawa-Gatineau region and in my riding an opportunity to provide their input into what this committee should study.

I heard people tell me that they want the committee to look at issues relating to food consumption, climate change, and protection of federal areas such as Gatineau Park.

The Chair: I'm glad you brought that up, because we had someone from the Cattlemen's Association in the back of the committee room listening to us. I don't think they're still here. Anyway, they were here earlier to see if we had any of this coming up on our agenda, so it's good you brought it up.

Mr. William Amos: It was raised.

The Chair: Okay.

MP Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Chair, I have to tell you that it is extremely exciting just listening to some of the comments from some of the folks around the table. This is really encouraging stuff. We're going to do some really great things together and I'm looking forward to it.

In 2009, I was elected to Halifax Regional Council. Almost immediately, I requested a seat on the environment and sustainability standing committee. For six years, a small group of intrepid councillors and I dealt with dozens of presentations on topics such as solar power and extended producer responsibility. We have an aging landfill so we talked about multiple energy-from-waste technologies, and we talked about how to be more sustainable with the landfill.

Much of our energy spent within the last six years was on the award-winning solar city program. Before solar city, Nova Scotia had the lowest number of domestic hot water panels in the country, even though, ironically, one of the largest manufacturers of solar panels in North America is in my riding in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

In order to get the program off the ground, we needed to change provincial legislation and we needed to change our municipal charter. Essentially what solar city did was allow the municipality to install domestic hot water panels on residential homes, put it on the tax bill, and spread the payments over several years so that it could be paid off in four, six, or eight years.

This wasn't considered within our traditional mandate so staff were not really in favour of our council and our committee moving in this direction, but we did convince the general council that this was a good idea. It took us a couple of years. The province agreed; council agreed, and we moved forward and won some major awards with solar city.

Solar city is going to continue. Phase two is happening now and they're considering photovoltaic technology. They're considering just about anything that will allow constituents to produce energy in their own homes and have it put on the tax bill. It's quite a clever idea and it has spread. It's taken us from worst to first in solar panels for domestic hot water.

If a small province like Nova Scotia can do this, and obviously we have the technology and the knowledge, all we really need is the political will. That particular case shows that we had to push the envelope a little bit to get it done.

Essentially what solar city taught me is that no one seems to want to go first. No one seems to want to break the ice. Everybody wants to wait to see what so-and-so does. I think we're past that point now and it's time to charge forward. I'd like to see cities, towns, and municipalities big and small make those bold moves and I'd like to see us help. Certainly we can benefit from that.

I've heard it said within this committee and with some of the individual members of the committee that the environment is our biggest issue. I think that's true, and as I've said to you, Deb, and to Mike, it's also our greatest opportunity. This is our time. We can diversify. It's time to step up. If we do this right and we take better

care of our environment, we really do create a new economic reality. That's something I'd like to see this committee focus on.

Speaking of solid waste, most of the country buries its waste. We spend billions of dollars a year on liners and clay cover. We know there are many waste-to-energy technologies out there that are improving every day. Perhaps there is more investigation to do but it seems they're more cost effective and safer for the environment, and they are getting better every day.

It stands to reason that if we can generate energy from our garbage, it's something we should look at. We can convert trash to fuel. There is plasma gasification. There is anaerobic digestion. There is fermentation. All these technologies are improving every day. I think we need to have a national discussion on some of these so that we can look towards the future and stop burying our waste.

We dump millions of mercury-bearing light bulbs in the landfills all across the country. Unacceptable. In my riding of Dartmouth—Cole Harbour we have a facility that will take a light bulb and recycle every single piece of it, and there is a next use for every piece.

What do we do? We just throw them in the garbage. I think we need to have a national strategy on what to do with mercury bearing light bulbs. Mercury is very dangerous, extremely harmful. If mercury gets to the waterways and to the groundwater, it's devastating.

I think we need to partner with the provinces and territories to have that conversation.

● (1150)

Finally, I don't want this to be seen as a dig against the former government, but we specifically didn't fund recreation facilities for the last 10 years—unless you used the gas tax, of course, and I think most municipalities used their gas tax for transit. I'd like to see the federal government become a funding partner again in building new recreation facilities, if only to ensure that every avenue of energy efficiency is looked at and considered fully.

We now have municipalities building multi-pad ice rinks. They're building them in isolation. When they combine with a pool, or connect to another development close by, such as a condo project or an apartment project, they can use every ounce of wasted heat from that four-pad, two-pad or three-pad facility. There are municipalities out there that are doing that. They're heating the dressing rooms, or heating the meeting rooms, and things like that. But they're just scratching the surface. We as a federal government are able to help those municipalities: maybe they get that grant or that rebate towards making sure they're absolutely energy efficient and every bit of waste energy is utilized. I think that's a part we can play as a federal government in ensuring that those extra steps are taken.

That's all I have, Madam Chair. I appreciate the time.

Again, I look forward to working with all of you and getting to know you a little bit better. When I listen to some of the comments around the table, it's very encouraging. I think this could be a very groundbreaking committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Madam Chair, to try to frame my thoughts on this, I also went to the minister's mandate letter. Like many of you, I share a lot of things coming out as well, the whole climate change agenda and being part of that is very important. There are items in the mandate letter on freshwater protection. There are pieces on climate change related to infrastructure. There's the endangered species act. As a federal government worker in my previous life, I've had to deal with a lot of legislative pieces; some work as they're intended and some have issues and unintended consequences. So I'd like to be able to look at some of that legislative framework and what it means when it's actually enacted.

The piece I'm particularly interested in—and I think, Martin, you'll appreciate this—is simply the Parks Canada piece, in particular national parks. I've mentioned before that I worked for Parks Canada for 32 years and have been in many parks and national historic sites across the country.

My fear when I got elected and saw that we had changed the Minister of Environment to Minister of Environment and Climate Change was that given the importance of climate change in society right now, it may overshadow a lot of these other things. So I want to be, along with others, the voice of parks to make sure that we don't forget that piece of an important environmental agenda for our country.

I pulled out a number of items. There are at least eight or ten from the minister's mandate letter that relate specifically to national parks. What's silent in here are national historic sites. I'd like to talk a little bit about that, because it does fall under the Parks Canada program. I have a real interest in things like the development of the national parks system plan. There were objectives set in the 1970s with the systems plan, and I'm interested in hearing from Parks Canada as to where we are in the completion of those.

I was working for Parks in 1985, and I remember the Brundtland Commission, which fell under the United Nations, where a call was made to protect 15% of Canada's land base. I think at last calculation we're under 3%, and I believe the current target is somewhere in the range of 3.5%. I think we need to have some discussions on what our objectives are in society for the government in protection of resources.

I believe that in some cases our legislation has worked to protect, but we've also alienated our population in many protected areas. There's always that balance between use and conservation. In Parks we always talked about the pendulum swinging from heavy on conservation and therefore exclusion of the public to including the public but then sacrificing conservation. I'd really like to see us hit that middle point of the pendulum's swing and have sustainable use

of parks. I'm really excited about the opportunities that things like free access for 2017 hold.

I was the manager of Lake Louise and Yoho and Kootenay national parks for six years. Anybody who's visited Lake Louise in the summer months knows it is completely overrun. We piloted a transit system for two years and had some success in trying to shift some vehicular traffic out of a grizzly bear habitat. It's a fairly important corridor for movement of grizzly bears during the summer months, yet you have this wall of steel, as it's referred to. So along with use, I'd like to see what kinds of things we could perhaps pilot and implement in park systems to make visitor use sustainable so that we don't have negative impacts on the resources that, in fact, we are protecting. Without the protection of the resources, we don't have parks, so I think there is a great agenda there.

I've experienced first hand the loss of some of our younger people. I've had school groups who refused to sit on the ground on tours because they didn't want to wreck their designer jeans, couldn't get grass stains on them. How do we reconnect youth to our natural spaces?

I am passionate about historic sites. There's some literature I've recently come across that talks about the amount of energy that's embodied in historic spaces, and we're losing a lot of buildings that are being landfilled. In Parks Canada we ran a national cost-share program that was to invest in heritage buildings across the country. Instead of owners and operators saying landfill is the only option, we can increase the environmental efficiency of these buildings while maintaining the integrity of these historic structures. I think there's a lot of attention to be paid there, particularly for infrastructure investment.

● (1155)

I believe that historic sites should be the heart of communities. A lot of regulation and legislation works against that, similarly with national parks. Parks should be the heart of the communities they are involved with and yet we haven't found that balance. With my more than three decades of experience, I can bring some of that voice and discussion to this table, things like the federal heritage buildings review office.

Another one which I think the federal government has opportunities to demonstrate real leadership in is environmental sustainability in the management of heritage buildings. There are things on the expansion of the marine conservation areas which I think are really exciting. That's really my interest, although I want to be part of the other discussions on climate change and other things. But it really is my parks experience that I remain passionate about and hope that I can further that agenda but from a different seat now on the government side than where I was previously.

On a bit of a different topic, the last thing is that one of the municipalities in my riding has won awards on brownfill development reclamation. In talking to municipalities, I've heard there are a lot of these contaminated sites. I have another municipality that has had development hindered because of contamination from a former dry cleaning operation. I wonder what sort of leadership role the federal government might be able to play in the redevelopment or rehabilitation of sites in municipalities across the country.

•(1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity.

I'm excited by everything I'm hearing around this table. This is fantastic. This was a great idea to go through this process to get a sense of where we're all coming from.

I come from a bit of a different angle as well. It's wonderful that we're finally taking climate change seriously and wanting to deal with carbon, which is what we see as the main instigator of climate change. The elephant in the room that many don't talk about is consumption. Consumption, to me, is the cause of climate change and the cause of a lot of other things we have to deal with in our society, in that it's unsustainable at the levels where it is today.

Given where we are today, and given where everybody else on the planet wants to go to meet where we are, I don't think you can get there from here.

How do we deal with consumption? Our society today is predicated on a mathematical construct called economics, which is a fallacy because it doesn't take into account the true cost of consumption. We look at every other angle in economic theory. Economic theory does look at consumption, but we choose to avoid that piece of it. I think we need to look at the social and the environmental costs of consumption in order to properly look at the true costs of what we're doing in society from an economic, social, and environmental standpoint.

Part of the problem we have with consumption is that for the last 60 years, advertisers have been telling us to consume, consume, consume, and to consume as quickly as possible. The taxpayer has been responsible for dealing with the end of life of that consumable good or product. When we're dealing with end of life from a consumer standpoint, and the consumers have been convinced they should consume, nothing is ever going to be done with consumption unless we take a different approach to it via stewardship and make producers responsible for what they produce. If we make producers responsible for what they produce, they're the ones who, through their market-driven ability, will find ways to do it in a more efficient, effective way so that it mitigates the impact of end of life. Instead of looking at end of life from cradle to grave, we should be looking at it from cradle to cradle.

Everybody looks at stuff today that we consume and they say, "Yes, but it's recyclable." That seems to be the first point they go to, when the first point should be to reduce. The second point, I think, should be repair. The third point should be reuse. The fourth one, recycle, should be changed to upcycle rather than recycle. The second we think of recycling, we automatically think of down-cycling, that it doesn't have as much value as it should, in my view. I think that if we change it, and if we frame it in this way, we'll go a long way to mitigating the impacts of consumption and we'll do it in a more responsible way.

How do you implement something like that? You look at it and think that's a complete shift in our whole economy. We need to start

somewhere. If we're not willing to start at this level, then where is it going to start?

Everybody talks about packaging. I know the provinces have all been looking at it. Municipalities have been looking at it. There are a few key areas you can identify initially. Packaging is certainly one, but so are durable goods. Why is it that a washing machine only lasts five years? They want it to last for five years so that you buy a new one. Why is it more expensive to repair than it is to buy a new one?

We're now looking at pricing carbon, the cost of carbon. If we find ways to price in the quality of a good, or the lack thereof, then it makes the higher-quality products cheaper to consume than the lower-quality products. I think we need to shift, and that shift has to happen here around this table. This is where the leadership is in our country. This is why we chose to be on this committee. It starts with us.

It creates a different direction of growing as well. It's an economic shift.

•(1205)

Another aspect that is affecting our society today is this transformation of labour. We're automating. We're moving from the third wave to the fourth wave of the industrial revolution, and it's highly automated. It's eliminating jobs far faster than it's creating them. We need to be able to find ways for individuals to create employment. If we start thinking about different ways of manufacturing and consuming things, all of a sudden we'll start manufacturing things closer to home because—guess what—it's cheaper to do it that way given the new way of looking at things through stewardship. Also, if we start repairing things, all those repair jobs that we had a generation ago, which went away because we decided it was cheaper to buy a new item than it was to fix it, come back. That creates a whole level of employment within our society that we had lost, and it creates a whole level of experience in skilled trades that we had lost and which we need to come back, because that's once again the only way we can be sustainable moving forward.

Then if we look at things from an upcycle standpoint, all of a sudden things become more modular. The only thing that has changed in a washing machine in 30 or 40 years is the electronics in it, the control systems. Instead of throwing away the whole machine, if you just replace the control systems, you make it modular, and you take that out and you unplug a few electronic components, plug them back in, or if they're broken you replace them, or if it's completely obsolete you bring it back to the factory and the factory rebuilds it as a modular unit and then turns around and sells it again.

We have to start thinking in this way now if we're going to achieve any kind of sustainability within our society.

There are a number of examples of companies that are already doing this. I don't know if any of you have ever come across a Herman Miller chair. They're the ones with all the hydraulics in them and the mesh seat and back. They're beautiful chairs. They are the most expensive ones, but when you're finished with your Herman Miller chair, they will take it back for free. They will pay for the shipping. When it gets back to the factory in Illinois, they completely disassemble that chair in 15 minutes and they reuse every single part in a new chair, except for the foam armrests. Doing that has increased their margin by 25%, because they're no longer paying for a new part for a new chair. They're reusing a part from an old chair. It makes total economic sense to do that. They manufacture their parts in such a high-quality way in the first place that they have far greater longevity than you would typically find.

As I said, there are a multitude of other companies out there. Ford Motor Company itself actually built a car in this way. It's a concept car in which they can actually reuse every part within the vehicle again, except for the typical things like brake pads and oil and that sort of thing. It can be done. We just have to decide that's the way we're going to move forward as a society.

There are a number of things we as a government do that kind of bother me. Here we are talking about climate change and everything, but as MPs we are flying all over the place or taking trips here and there. A number of us have to commute from our home ridings, which is completely understandable of course, but why is the government not looking at carbon offsets to offset that footprint for flights? Why is the government not using electric buses? There's a company in Quebec that actually manufactures electric buses and we should be buying those. They're selling them all over the world, and we don't even buy them here in our own country.

It starts with us. We need to set the example in this country if we expect others to follow.

I know it's the first meeting, and I hate to do this to my colleagues, but at one of the first meetings we had as a group, somebody brought a paper coffee cup, and I had my steel mug, and I said, "You know what? From now on if we're going to come to these meetings, could you please buy yourself a steel mug and reuse it." If we're not going to set the example, then who's going to? It's the same thing with the limousines parked in front of Centre Block on Parliament Hill idling for hours on end. That makes me insane. Every time I walk out of Parliament, I see these limos idling away and away and away, and it makes no sense. Why are they not electric? Why are they not hybrid vehicles? Why do we keep going down this same path?

I know there is no free ride, but at some point we have to figure out better ways to do things, and doing that starts with us. We have to lead if we expect others to follow.

• (1210)

Another topic I want to discuss is energy subsidies. We're pouring billions of dollars into subsidizing large corporations to build solar and wind projects. Yet the people who can least afford the high cost of energy are also the same people who can least afford to retrofit their homes in order to make them more energy efficient, to offset that carbon but also to help offset that cost. I think we should look at a study to determine how we can go back to something that we've done in the past and need to go back to. Instead of pouring those

large subsidies into large corporate interests to build these, we should be pouring the money into two areas.

On clean technology, I completely agree that we have to look at better ways of doing things, including better ways of doing solar and wind.

We also have to look at low-income and fixed-income individuals. You know, I met so many of them on the campaign trail. That's why this is so important to me. When you meet people and they say to you, "I'm trying to determine, do I heat or do I eat?," there's something wrong. In this country, that people have to make that kind of a decision because they can't afford to live in their homes because the energy costs are too high and they can't afford to get new windows and doors in their homes, or insulate their homes.... We can kill two birds with one stone if we decide, once again, that we will lead and make this a reality.

Conservation is really the direction we should be heading in first. I talked about consumption. Well, let's stop thinking about how we produce more to consume; let's figure out how we can conserve more so we consume less. It all comes full circle. If we start to think this way at the front of our brains all the time, on how to consume less and reduce our footprints on this planet, we will follow the mandate of this group, which is looking at how we can leave this world a better place for not just the next generation but for two or three or four generations, or as the indigenous communities say, seven generations ahead.

It really does start with us. I think we have the right kind of group around this table to start thinking in this way. I don't expect we'll make these changes here overnight, but we have to start to plant the seeds as a group. I will continue to work very hard on this, to try to figure out where we can plant the seeds and how we nurture them to take root and take on a life of their own.

It took a long time to get climate change to the point where it's accepted as real, but consumption is the one we need to work on today if we want to really save this planet for future generations. We need to look at the social and environmental costs but also at the ultimate cost, that we live on a finite planet.

Thank you.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I move that we do all that by next week.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Don't you do that. If you move something, I'm in trouble.

Now it's my turn. Most of what I had on my list has already been touched on by many of you. I think only a couple of things might not have been mentioned.

To touch on waste management, because we just had that discussion, there is a lot of research that's done. Obviously, the economic model of today is to try to drive consumption. It's about how much you can sell, about how many pieces you can sell. It's nice if you have a lot of money and you're in good shape and you're in that top 1%, because you can make the kinds of decisions that you're talking about. I do that. I pay.... I'm not in the top 1%, but I definitely take the time to buy something that's going to last my lifetime and to invest in that, but most people really can't spend that kind of money at the front end.

One book, which I think you've read, is *Cradle to Cradle*. It talks about how if we're actually acknowledging that it's not going to be the majority of the population, if we really want to make change, we have to address that majority. It gets back to using the waste soap out of one product, not necessarily downcycling it, but using it as input to the next manufacturing process. It gets back to trying to couple these opportunities. I think it was MP Gerretsen who mentioned coupling the heat out of one—the waste out of one is to the benefit of another—and bringing these things together. Well, that's true of a manufacturing process as well.

I think the government has a chance to move in this direction with incentives and where we are going to spend our money. That's something that I'd like us to be thinking about as we work through these. How do we tweak? How do we give that little bit of an incentive to move things? I think there are a lot of companies that are interested in doing this. I'm aware of a carpet manufacturer that is taking carpets—not wool carpets but the polyester ones and what have you—and completely recycling them and bringing out new carpets. So there are companies trying to do it, and they're actually economically viable, but how do we help move that? They spent a lot of money because the owner had a vision for this and he made that investment, but how do we help other businesses make those investments and make those changes? That's something I was thinking about.

Number one is climate change and how we transition to a low-carbon economy, or to a post-carbon economy, as people are saying. If you read Jeremy Rifkin's *The Third Industrial Revolution*, you see that carbon is going the way of the dodo and we're going to have to really make that huge transition. How do we do that?

How do we examine this? Maybe this committee will look at raising awareness of how climate change is affecting our different ecosystems. How do we manage that? I mean, it's coming. What do we do and how do we help communities deal with those changes that are coming? That is something I will put in the climate change bucket there.

For me, endangered species and species at risk are about habitat protection. From my experience in watershed protection in the Humber River watershed, it's about finding places that we need to protect, but it's not just that. Will there be adaptation as the climate changes? Also, it's about having a crucible of species that can exist. If they are in isolated little pockets, species sometimes will die out eventually because they'll get a disease or whatever, or because there's no influx of new genetic material or adaptation just doesn't take place and they die off.

How do we make networks? It's not just about protecting a little space, but about protecting a whole network. How do we do that? We haven't done it very well. We have wonderful parks, but they're isolated. This is looking at it on a larger scale. It's sort of like how water is looked at on a watershed scale. How do we look at a larger habitat protection network to allow species to exist and continue with the changes that are coming? That ties into marine protection, national parks, and all the things that you talked about and that I think MP Fast talked about as well. How do you make improvements in those areas so that we can encourage the protection of habitat?

• (1215)

I love the conversation about how we get the public and those who are affected and living around the park more engaged in that process, because that's the way it's going to be successful. I'm excited about that.

I had hazardous products and microplastics on my list, too. I also had pesticides. It didn't come up in anybody's conversation. There's the auditor's report, which we will have next week, and there are some issues there that are really concerning to me.

How do we turn it around so that manufacturers...? It's like we have to provide the burden of proof that we created a problem before we realized it was one and now we have to deal with it, rather than just give the companies licence to put products out there and then we have to come along and say there's a problem. Microplastics are an example of that. There are a lot of other examples as well, where there's innovation going on in products, but we're not really managing that until it becomes a problem or we're aware. It's the reverse; we have to turn that round.

From my background in volunteering with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and sitting on its board, sitting on regional council.... Obviously, with watershed protection, best practices in waste water, protecting fresh water...there is so much technology out there now that leads to the different processes that we have today, and we should be trying to find ways to encourage that.

York Region is a very wealthy region to a certain extent, so it's able to spend the money to invest in these things. We have energy from waste. Our new facility has just opened, and I think it is one of the highest operating in Canada in terms of air output, reduction in air contaminants.... It's good technology that we need to encourage for other areas that don't have that kind of money to do that.

Burying it all in the ground is crazy. Not only are we wasting resources for future opportunities, but we're also creating a disaster that just sits there forever. It's there for hundreds of years and becomes a problem.

There's one last thing that I have which nobody mentioned. It comes into sustainable development. I was frustrated when I saw all of these microFIT opportunities, and then I looked at my roof and I couldn't do it. The slope of my roof is in the wrong direction for me to properly take advantage of it. I wondered why we wouldn't, to a certain extent, change the building code to make sure that not only are the roofs structurally able to do this so that if homeowners wanted to do it, they wouldn't have to do major renovations to their roof, but also that their roof would be oriented in such a way that you could do it fairly well. It's an architectural detail, but if it were fundamental that designers needed to think about, why wouldn't we do that? We know in the future this is something we're going to have to do. We're going to go toward individual homes providing their energy, and a distributed network of energy.

I thought about looking at the federal building code and seeing what we might be able to do with that to encourage innovation. In terms of that sustainable development, how do we go about—and many of you have mentioned this—a national building retrofit strategy and encouraging those things to happen in an environmentally sustainable way? I was even thinking about the retrofit that's possibly coming up on the Prime Minister's residence.

We need to make sure that we are innovating and leading, and providing opportunities for others if they should desire them.

I just mentioned supporting green infrastructure investment and building that into the urban environmental agenda. There's a lot of building going on in our cities, and we need to up the ante on those buildings, because they are opportunities for the future, not only with solar, but with ground heat. There are a lot of opportunities that we can build in the new urban areas if we incentivize it, I think.

The last one is obviously environmental assessment processes. It's a hot topic, and we're going to be seized with that soon. That is on my list.

There are air quality standards and supporting investment in that, and protecting and enhancing national parks, and Parks Canada, but that came back around to my bucket of endangered species and species at risk and how we make sure that we have habitat protection in place. We can enhance that through our marine parks and natural parks, and connecting those places so that they function properly. It's great to have a national park, but if it's isolated, it doesn't work as well as it could, so how do we connect that to another park or a boreal patch, or whatever it is in your area that makes that function better for species?

• (1220)

I really loved the discussion on the wetlands, because I have a particular passion for wetlands and making sure that we try to address that here somehow.

I have a ton of fantastic points, but I wondered, there are a couple of things we need to do in committee business. I had put forward a proposed agenda for this week and next. I know MP Cullen mentioned something as well. I'm thinking about how we want to go through the next bit of time we have. We had talked about going back around the table and having some cross-pollination and figuring out how to prioritize. If we get into that, which I think we should, because that's what we set ourselves for, I want to make sure

we put aside some time for making sure we set the agenda and bring some things to your attention.

If we do this back and forth, how about we give ourselves 20 minutes? That's not a lot of time. If we give ourselves 20 minutes we still have enough time to do some more work on it, just the committee. Okay, so we have a 20-minute open discussion on what you've heard.

Mr. Eglinski.

• (1225)

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Thank you. I didn't say very much initially—

The Chair: No, you didn't, and that's why I wanted to come back around.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: I was just starting to lead off and I didn't know you guys were going to go into that much detail, but that's great.

The Chair: Yes, you'll get used to us.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Being a former Parks Canada person there are a few areas I'd like to address: parks and the environment, and parks versus development. One thing we're finding very frustrating in Jasper National Park, which you're very familiar with, is the greater use of our old parks. Close to a million people are living in Calgary and Edmonton now, and they're using that as their playground.

We have the environmental people living in those communities or working in that environment who are opposing future development and future development is needed if we're going to continue to encourage people to go into the parks. That's something we need to really work at and balance, and I think you brought that up. It's very important, because our national parks are struggling within the organizations themselves. How do we deal with the environment? How do we get the public in? How do we serve both? Our national parks are very important to us.

Thank you for mentioning historic sites. I've been involved for quite a few years, and when Fort St. James National Historic Site was restored, it was very important to the communities to get that history in there. We can do so much.

I think somebody else mentioned—I'm not sure who it was—that when we're dealing with our parks we need to bring more land into use. Jasper National Park is at capacity. Banff National Park is at capacity and just outside the parks on the eastern slopes of the Rockies on any long weekend we probably get 100,000 to 150,000 people camping randomly. We need to look at that. In a lot of those areas we should be developing parts of our parks so we can take the pressure off the main parts.

On technologies, as a former city mayor I led one of the first cities to ban plastic bags. I thought we'd have a big fight over it, but it wasn't a big fight at all. We just said no more plastic bags are allowed in the city.

Mr. Mike Bossio: What city is that?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Fort St. John.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Well done. Good for you.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: We need to address those kinds of things and the different technologies. Most of it, if you look at a solar panel in your house or thermal energy, it just doesn't pay today for an average person to upgrade their house with modern technology to make it energy efficient. They won't recover the cost. Most of the time it takes 25 to 30 years to recover that cost, so most people won't invest.

As a government we need to encourage industry to develop these technologies and bring the costs down. It's not going to happen unless we work at it that way to get those things.

There's another thing I wanted to mention. Mark, were you the one who talked about contaminated sites, or was that your partner next door to you?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It was Will.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Yes.

As a mayor, I was frustrated. Anyone else who has been a mayor or has lived in municipalities knows this. We have these brown sites all over this country. There are probably thousands of them. You can't force the companies to do anything with them because there are no laws. The municipalities are sitting on these vacant lots throughout the cities, and the companies will not do anything about them because it's cheaper to pay the taxes and leave the lot sitting the way it is.

We have many municipalities, smaller and larger ones around this country, that are screaming for space and for development within their communities and we have these vacant lots. You can probably relate to this, but I checked with our environmental lawyers, and they said we couldn't take those sites over, clean them up ourselves, and make little parks out of them because then we're taking on the liability factor of the old contaminated sites.

This is something that needs to be looked at, because there are thousands and thousands of acres of land in our municipalities across this country that are contaminated sites. The companies would rather pay taxes on them than do anything to reclaim them or help the municipalities.

I'm supportive of a lot of those things.

• (1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast: I also got great value from the discussion around this table.

In terms of process going forward and how we want to frame any future studies, I think we want to make sure that the studies we undertake are significantly focused so we actually get the value out of them. In other words, there's a suggestion that we do a review of CEPA, and maybe that wasn't the full suggestion, but if we were going to do a review of CEPA, with all of the different headings that William mentioned, for example, it could take years for us to complete. Most studies take five or ten sessions and they're done. So they have to be very focused.

I appreciated William's comment about the bankruptcy legislation and some of its shortcomings when it comes to environmental protection. That's something that could be undertaken in a relatively

short study. You could get that accomplished and then move on to something else, rather than doing a comprehensive study of a larger and broader piece of legislation.

As a note to Darren, we did actually fund recreational infrastructure under the rink program. You may remember it.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Light refittings and stuff—

Hon. Ed Fast: No, it was a pretty significant program across the country.

I have one question.

John, you mentioned a SARA review. My understanding from the minister was that at this point, government is not considering to undertake a review of SARA—CEAA, but not SARA itself. If we do that here, it will be an interesting discussion.

I also embrace Mike's suggestion that we look at the whole issue of energy subsidies, especially in the alternative energy sector. I think we as a country and as provinces can do better than we've done so far. Driving up the cost of energy unnecessarily is a challenge that we face, and it's a study that I think we would embrace.

Also, there is a suggestion that we talk about a change in our building codes to take into account the technology that is already available and that is becoming available in the future. We allow houses to be built. They're there for 40, 50, or 70 years. Once they're built, to reorient them, especially in terms of rooflines, is very difficult if not impossible to do.

The Chair: On that one, were you agreeing or not?

Hon. Ed Fast: Yes, I'm agreeing.

Those are the kinds of studies that are specific enough that we can actually get them done in a reasonable period of time and move them forward for consideration by government.

Mr. Mike Bossio: I'd like to add something.

I wonder if we have the mandate for that. I agree with it 100%. The building codes are so outdated. They're still building houses like they did 100 years ago when so many improvements could be made. However, the building codes themselves are driven by the provinces. We'd have to do that as a study that hopefully the provinces would buy into.

I don't know how that would work, but that would be something for us to look into further. I think it's a great idea, but—

The Chair: Are you okay if people jump in?

Hon. Ed Fast: Yes.

There is a federal component to the provincial building codes.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Is there?

Hon. Ed Fast: Yes.

The provinces are actually adopting national standards.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Are they? Okay, good. Thank you. I think that was—

The Chair: Is that what you were going to say, MP Gerretsen?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I was just going to make the comment that my understanding is that only two provinces, Ontario and Quebec, actually have provincial building codes. Does Alberta have a provincial building code?

Hon. Ed Fast: B.C. does.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: B.C. does.

An hon. member: Everybody does.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Everybody has their own? I thought that a number of the provinces just take the national standard as theirs.

Thank you for the clarification.

• (1235)

The Chair: Mr. Amos, we don't want to steal the show from Mr. Fast, but go ahead.

Mr. William Amos: I just want to go straight to a point that Member Fast raised. I actually think that we don't have a choice to do a CEPA review. I think that the government is going to determine that it has a legislative responsibility that previous administrations have been ignoring—

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. William Amos:—for years and that we have no choice but to review the legislation holus-bolus, and I know that will take days upon days. It would have to be one of the most important endeavours of this committee.

Hon. Ed Fast: It won't be driven by this committee. It'll be driven by the government—

Mr. William Amos: No, it will be driven by the government.

Hon. Ed Fast:—so it's quite different from what we're discussing here.

Mr. William Amos: Exactly, but it may or may not be one of the minister's priorities and we, as legislators, have free rein to choose what we do. So I'm suggesting that, yes, and that it not be five or ten meetings. I'm talking about a major enterprise that involves clause by clause.

The Chair: Okay.

You mentioned SARA, not CEPA, so that was a different one that you were talking about.

Hon. Ed Fast: SARA was a different issue. I understand there was a suggestion that we actually do a review.

The Chair: I threw it out there.

Hon. Ed Fast: Yes. That would be initiated here, because I understand that the minister has the desire to open that up right now.

The Chair: Okay, it's something we can consider.

Hon. Ed Fast: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields: Madam Chair, it's an interesting discussion, and there are lots of good ideas out there. The bankruptcy one is one which I would agree we should look at, because that involves some things that are really interesting to municipalities. They get the brunt of that, so I think that's a good one to follow up and see where that is.

You talked about retrofitting or new recreation facilities. I think one of the challenges that municipalities have is retrofitting, and that's something we can look at and study. Okay, what does retrofitting...? We all have recreation facilities, and we are all challenged to build the new ones, and we seem to, but we always have the old ones. If we can look at retrofitting rec facilities, I think that would be a good one to look at.

We can look at historic sites, absolutely, but let's not save the architecture from the 1960s and 1970s. Maybe we can say that is what we shouldn't build because.... Anyway, 1960s and 1970s architecture is brutal. Historic sites and buildings is a great topic.

Talking about protection of animals and wildlife, my fishing buddies always like to go with me in the national parks because they can all run faster than I can from the bears. I've had many close encounters with grizzly bears and survived because I grew up understanding what the environment is. Most people don't get into the parks and don't understand it. We can live with a lot of the species if we experience and learn how to deal with them. Grizzly bears I've experienced close up many times, but I've known how to deal with it. Most people don't because they don't experience it. If we segregate everything out as an isolated piece of our world that you look at on a video, that's not experiencing our national parks. We need to find ways that people can experience and understand what's in our environment more than they do now. That's where I'd like to be going.

Mr. Mike Bossio: I'm not going then unless you're with me.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Martin Shields: I'd love to go with you, but yeah, I think you could probably run faster than I can. I've saved a few people who were pretty stupid in national parks with grizzly bears. It just wasn't because I could run faster; you just have to be smarter and understand the environment you're in.

On the wetlands, I totally agree with you. They're the sponge that creates our environment, which is what people don't understand. The wetlands, and all the aspects of them, is a critical piece that I've been involved with for years.

The Chair: And water, all that stuff, yes.

Mr. Martin Shields: Yes, it's what makes water safe, and we need to make sure we understand it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Great. I tried to catch the themes running around the table.

Chair, you have a bit of a built-in environment for the first few meetings, with the commissioner coming, Parks—

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —and CEAA. I think with Parks and CEAA showing up, and the commissioner as well, it'll form some of the frame around what I think are probably five main categories that people have raised. One was around parks. The historic, marine, and wetlands issues are sort of offshoots of that. Another category that came up was water. The third one around contaminated sites, maybe study some aspect of bankruptcy, or what processes are going through, and what role the feds play. There was a large conversation around climate that had offshoots around energy, subsidies, clean tech—

The Chair: Innovation.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —building codes, innovation, that sort of thing.

The last one around CEAA will be informed by their coming to the committee with their report.

I think Ed's right. Some of these you can dive into for the entire session, and while increasingly engaging you start to see sawdust after a while if you're not careful. The committees can get so into the minutiae, and every single group wants to comment on something like climate, or CEAA, or any of these. Any of these committee studies can go, not off the rails, but so deep as to be not increasingly effective.

I don't know how you want to handle this, Chair, but I think when you get down to brass tacks, it starts to be about what the priority is for each of the committee members and where the consensus is. If there's a consensus or a near consensus, then what comes first, what comes second, third, and so forth, and then what amount of time is available to us in this session until the summer, and how much time we want to spend on each. Do you want to try to get all...what I have here is five. There may be more or less depending on how you break it up. It would be probably unlikely to do all five, I would guess, based on previous experience, because it's not that heavy a sitting schedule.

• (1240)

The Chair: Well, we do have budgets...we haven't a lot of time and estimates are coming.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, estimates aren't big.

The Chair: One meeting.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's the sitting schedule we have. It's two weeks on and one week away. It's very scattered and that's not going to allow for a lot of meetings. Some are going to get bumped. There are going to be emergency resolutions people bring forward from time to time because of some panic or crisis going on in the news.

All I would put to committee members is that I don't look at this list with a big bias one way or the other, but think about what your priority is and then allocate time to it. When you start to add up the committee days between now and summer, at a rough guess, there are probably 15 days.

The Chair: Are you talking about meetings?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes.

The Chair: We're doing the math here. If you consider it's nine weeks then we have 18 meetings and one of those is going to be for estimates, right?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, and then one's for the commissioner and Parks and CEAA.

The Chair: Yes, and we have next week—

Hon. Ed Fast: Then we have the minister.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Then we have the minister

The Chair: We're not including that week in the number.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The minister blocks off one.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is the commissioner coming down with another report later this spring? I can't remember. Anyway, you run down to about 15, give or take, without breaking a sweat.

Committee members should think of it that way. You have 15 meetings. You have four or five main thematic topics. You're probably not going to get them all, unless you do two or three meetings per topic, which would be for some of these things probably a challenge. I might as well stick my vote in while we're talking—while I'm talking.

Climate seems to be pressing and important.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Contaminated sites is a topic that's popping around on the news right now, which is kind of interesting to me. That could be a niche one. That could be something pretty tight and bright that you get through without going on forever.

Water is big. As soon as you start to get into water, it gets big, although it's incredibly important. For CEAA there's going to be some sort of requirement, and parks can also go because every national park has a constituency group around it that will want to come talk to us about why they're the best, but also in the greatest need.

I put some caution around that.

One last thing I'll say before I stop talking, Chair, is that I wouldn't mind if before the end of the meeting we could at least speak for a second to the motion that I have, and I have a recommendation to it. I notice on the 18th you have the commissioner coming along with Parks and CEAA—

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: —and then on the 23rd the commissioner again on the audit report. No?

The Chair: Remember that what I sent out yesterday was proposed. We didn't agree on anything.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes.

The Chair: We haven't invited her yet.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: To your proposal, the commissioner is going to speak to her audit. That would be what the commissioner speaks to.

The Chair: Right. Absolutely.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: To have her in twice, unless there's some nuance about it... The way I read it, I could have been reading your proposal wrong.

The Chair: Why don't you let me quickly explain what we had in mind, and then you can go from there.

What we had in mind is on Thursday, two days from now, we're going to have the commissioner in to give her overall mandate. She's going to have Environment and Climate Change Canada, Parks Canada, and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency come in to talk to us. That's what we're going to have. For that whole day, the whole meeting is for her and those three—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: On the 18th.

The Chair: —on the 18th.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: And then the 23rd?

The Chair: It's not the report. It's not her audit. She's talking about her department.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Okay, is it like an intro to the environment commissioner?

The Chair: Yes, it's like a one-on-one.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Oh, I see.

The Chair: It's like a one-on-one. You see, some of you have more experience than others around the table, and a lot of us are new. We thought it would be helpful, before we start deciding, to hear from her what her issues are with the department, what they are doing, and what way they're going. It's a 101 basically, and then we're having the agency and the departments come and talk to us.

• (1245)

Tuesday is when I propose to have her back. In essence, those departments she did the audit on would also be present so that if we had questions we'd be able to talk to them, too.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's normal and I think it's good, because she's going to have critiques of certain departments, and officials are going to want to tell us why she's wrong.

The Chair: Exactly. They're going to want to talk.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: On the 101 piece, I'm going to respectfully disagree about the idea of having her twice. It's not complicated. The commissioner is a part of the Auditor General's office. She has a brief on it.

The Chair: She's not the main piece. She's going to come in and do a quick presentation, and then the departments are going to talk to us about what they're dealing with.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This is the second one.

The Chair: No, that is on Thursday.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's the first one. So she will say hello as if she were a department, and then CEAA will say hello.

The Chair: It's really about bringing us up to speed.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I rarely want to dive in. This is why I like subcommittees; you can actually start to move around the little pieces to determine what's what. I'm running out of time here, but I've made a commitment to have us discuss the idea of this motion before the minister decides on a nuclear facility, and the clock is ticking.

The Chair: Okay. I said we'd have a discussion for 20 minutes, and we're now at 20 minutes. Let me just make sure I get a couple of things done.

Normally we have a subcommittee for agenda and procedure but we're early and we haven't...so I'm just trying to get going, and then we'll have that little committee meeting and work from there. We may spin off into subcommittees as well, but we're not there yet.

Can I get agreement on the Thursday agenda from the committee? I also need to ask, can we have more than 10 minutes?

Right now we have 10 minutes for Environment Canada. They would like to come but they have more to share with us. They'd like about 20 minutes to talk to us, to present.

Hon. Ed Fast: Is that inclusive of all their officials?

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Ed Fast: Do they have the commissioner coming?

The Chair: Just Environment and Climate Change Canada want to come, and they have a 20-minute presentation to give us.

Hon. Ed Fast: All right.

Mr. John Aldag: Is that also the day the commissioner is coming? I'm wondering if we couldn't have the commissioner do her 101 piece, if it's 10 minutes, at the beginning of the day that she comes on her own to do the report. It would then free up that slot for the department to do 20 minutes. I don't know if that would address the

The Chair: We worked it out. We thought it would work, but I don't mind if she comes later. It would be the following Tuesday. She could come do it all at once. That's fine. The idea was for her to introduce the departments that are under her authority and then have them do their presentations. One of them has asked us to extend the 10 minutes, because they have a presentation that's longer than 10 minutes. I didn't think it was a problem but I have to put it to the committee. We've passed some rules, right?

Hon. Ed Fast: What's the total amount of time?

The Chair: The total amount of time would be 20 minutes for Minister McKenna, 10 minutes for Parks Canada, and 10 minutes for the Environmental Assessment Agency.

Hon. Ed Fast: That's 40 minutes of presentations, and then there would be questions after that.

The Chair: Yes, and then she was going to do 10 minutes.

Hon. Ed Fast: Okay, so that's 50 minutes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I like the combo idea. Fifty minutes is not that unusual.

The Chair: Yes. We figured it would be in the first hour and then there would be questions back and forth.

Mr. Mike Bossio: What would the second hour be?

The Chair: Discussions. They do their presentations and then there's discussion.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: As long as we have an opportunity to ask questions.

The Chair: Yes, absolutely.

Rather than just having the departments come in her absence, the idea was to have them come and set the stage with her so that they are under that framework. But I don't mind. I'm open to the suggestions of the committee. It was just a suggestion that she come to frame it and that the presentations come from those three departments and agencies we talked about. We can move it to Tuesday. I don't mind. It's up to you guys.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You've done some thinking and work on it. I don't want to disrupt it. I think that's fine.

Then on February 25, you propose that we discuss possible motions and set priorities and an action plan for the committee. I don't know if we need two hours for that. I think people should come prepared with some sense of what we said today and...

The Chair: I've taken copious notes. We'll put something together and send out to you what everybody said. If there's anything we didn't capture correctly, we can have that updated in preparation for February 25.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm going to seem obsessed. This isn't my thing, but I said I would move this at some point.

The Chair: Hang on. Let me just make sure that we are okay with that framework we just put out.

We do need to make the invitations.

• (1250)

Mr. William Amos: Yes, but I have a question.

The Chair: We'll make a motion to go forward with the plan that was just discussed.

Mr. William Amos: Part of Jim's motion...and I'll accede to it, I'm sure. I did want to know what we are asking from these various presenters in terms of written briefing materials beforehand. I think we're going to find that we really just get into the surface. I think Nathan's point earlier about the commissioner saying what the problems are, and the defence sort of standing up and providing that input.... We'll end up not necessarily that satisfied. We do want to have the ability to get more than just, say, a PowerPoint presentation deck provided to us earlier. I wonder if there's a mechanism by which we could provide questions in advance, if we have them, so that they would come prepared for some questions in advance and we would have written materials. Or should we just wait for it, and they'll do follow-up?

The Chair: They weren't planning on giving us something ahead, but they will have speaking notes. We will have some information that we can provide. You're asking if we can have something so we can be prepared ahead of their presentation. I can certainly ask, but I don't think that was the intent. The intent was to basically come and familiarize us with things. So if you have some interest in that area, can we do a little bit of that work ourselves to kind of just...? If you have some ideas, some detailed discussion points, just jot them down.

They weren't prepared to come ahead with a deep.... It's really just a 101—here's what they're all about; here's what they're dealing with; here's what their problems are, the concerns, the issues; here's what they're focused on—so that we have a sense of what they're all

about and what they're doing and where they're going. It's just a briefing.

I don't want to get it too deep right off the bat. It's really a briefing to get us to set the stage, so that as we have discussed our vision, we would see the vision and direction of the different departments that we have some influence on.

Hon. Ed Fast: By the way, I appreciate your bringing up that point, because from my experience, having chaired before, we typically asked delegations that came to present to us to provide us with materials ahead of time. In the case of the commissioner, it's different. This is basically her opening presentation to us. I totally understand. As long as we don't discount the value of having material ahead of time. It will help us with our questions and engagement.

The Chair: Okay. I don't have any problem with asking. We'll ask them if they can provide it to us ahead. That seems fair to me. We'll see what we can get.

I think it's a good idea.

Hon. Ed Fast: Most delegations are quite prepared to do that.

The Chair: Okay, so let's do that.

Mr. Eglinski, you've made a motion—

Mr. Jim Eglinski: That we invite them and ask them for prior information, if they have it.

The Chair: Absolutely. I'll add that, and that we will extend their time, the one department that needs to extend it to 20 minutes. It may not take 20 minutes, but we'll give them up to 20 minutes. That's great. That includes the Tuesday of the following week, the audit and the two agencies that are in that.

So it's moved.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We have that done. Great.

We have five minutes. Go ahead, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The motion's in front of people. I think it's been sent around.

Are you just getting it now?

The Chair: It was emailed, but I—

An hon. member: We're just getting it. You really surprised us.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Boom, just dropping a hammer—like a bomb going off.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Wait, bad joke; wrong time to joke about bombs.

This is with regard to the environment minister's desk. There's been a big reaction to this proposal from a bunch of folks on this side of the border and in the U.S. OPG wants to put a deep geologic repository in Kincardine, Ontario. The motion in front of you is pretty straightforward. In terms of groups, I'm suggesting a one-meeting shot at this. A lot of those mayors, regional district groups, and some on the U.S. side of the border are quite concerned about it as well.

To be quite clear, I've dealt with the waste commission before. The process they're using for their long-term disposal has actually become a lot better in terms of consulting with communities and whatnot. That's a different track. This one is a more immediate, short-term thing. This is the low-level nuclear waste stuff, which is way better for you than the really intense stuff. The siting and the location and the consultation process so far on this have been really disappointing to a bunch of mayors.

The happy thing on this one is that it's very cross-partisan. People from all political parties are raising issues on this. It would certainly be a good thing for our American neighbours. When this was proposed on the other side of the border, the then Conservative government way back in the day—it was Mr. Clark's time—raised huge concerns from the cabinet level on down, and I believe rebuffed the U.S.'s efforts. They stood down. That may be a little cross-border friendliness.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, God help us if Donald Trump hears about it, because we'll be in big trouble if we don't have some hearings or something. Even if we do, we probably are.

That's it.

•(1255)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Thank you for bringing it up.

I am interested in whether or not we have a national policy in place. If we're going to have a discussion, perhaps we could have some information on the national policy so that at least we know where we're going with this and what the past practices have been.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm no expert on the national policy. We've seen it before. The nuclear waste commission has two tracks. One is long term, which they're in the process of right now. I think they're down to five or six communities that they've figured out for the long-term stuff, mostly mining.

This is quite a bit, at 400,000 cubic metres, of nuclear waste, and the site is just a little shy of a kilometre from Lake Huron. They've passed a resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate, and have called for reconsideration, so it's reached a pretty high level. I have no idea which way the federal government will go on this, but it is in front of the minister right now. I wouldn't suggest that this would be political cover of any kind, but it would certainly....

This is something the committee does. This is something we've engaged in before. We've had the nuclear commission in front of us a number of times over the last 10 years. My first time with them was probably 10 years ago.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: The only reason I'm bringing it forward today, Madam Chair, is the timing. Normally this would—

The Chair: Yes. We do know that the minister is seized with it, and she has to make a determination—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: She sure does.

The Chair: —by March 1.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: That's right.

The Chair: We do have a commitment and people lined up for this coming Thursday, so....

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I was just going to ask if it might be premature to start this course of action before getting a better understanding of what the minister might be planning.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I could speak to that, if you want, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's cart-and-horse time. Once the decision is made, whether the committee would take hearings on it would be much more doubtful. As soon as the commissioner renders her decision, then it's more political, in a sense, particularly if the committee hears the strong opposition or concerns that I think are being raised and heard from the American side.

I won't speak for your side, but it would be more fraught for you to accept such a motion once the minister has already decided. Do you see what I mean? But again, it's your call and your decisions.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen: As I said, this is not a trap motion or something that would make it much more difficult, but after the fact would probably be more difficult for your side.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I appreciate the candour.

The Chair: Obviously, it's kind of new to everybody; not everybody, but some of the people on the committee.

Go ahead, Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast: I just want to confirm this is simply a notice of motion. We're not actually debating this motion today, correct?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We certainly can. It's only on the timing.

Hon. Ed Fast: I would want to look at that a little bit more.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You'd want to take it away? Sure.

Another option, Chair, is when we reconvene on Thursday to take whatever time, like 15 minutes out of our schedule, to weigh the motion. It can go very quickly, and if it's obvious that the committee is not seized with this, then that goes very quickly as well.

The Chair: I'd like to make a suggestion. I think we have a pretty full agenda on Thursday based on what we've already talked about, and if people want to ask questions, we're going to run out of time. Tuesday might be not quite as heavily loaded with the audit and I wonder if we could give the time to do some research and potentially bring it forward and discuss it on Tuesday.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'd be fine with that if I could ask for a favour, then, in the meantime, just on the potential that the committee accepts it, because we're going to have a very short runway at that point if we wait another week. It's to have your staff contact some potential witnesses just to check their availability. It doesn't commit us to anything.

• (1300)

The Chair: I think that's fair.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's just that if we decide on Tuesday and then start calling potential witnesses, which wouldn't be until Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning, then we'd get a very sparse chance.

The Chair: The challenge is, which witnesses and who's picking them?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Typically, for something like this, all parties would contribute some ideas for witnesses.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm happy to be totally public with other members on the committee with some of the witnesses we would line up. We would seek the non-controversial ones that can speak with authority, one of them being the Nuclear Safety Commission, of course, because they're the ones handling the file.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Maybe a couple of mayors on our side, maybe teleconferencing a couple of folks on the U.S. side, that would be the range of what we're thinking about right now.

The Chair: Let's just be clear. The motion is not officially on the table. Maybe what we could do is by Thursday if people could let me

know who they might consider bringing forward as witnesses, if we were to be seized with this matter—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Correct.

The Chair: —then we could try to do some preliminary work.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It obligates us to nothing and I would suggest, through you to your staff, that we've done these invites before. We say the committee is considering this, and would they be willing to present for seven minutes, and it may not happen, that kind of thing.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: To that end, because I only really heard Mr. Cullen speak of mayors in communities, would the idea be to have some experts on this particular topic that could answer real questions about safety implications as opposed to just political mayors?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Were you about to say “just mayors”, Mark? We are in public, sir.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Well, I was one of them—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I know.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: —and I realize how hot-headed they can be at times.

The Chair: We may be getting a little ahead of ourselves, which we are, but what I do think is that if we are thinking of being seized with this matter, which we have not decided yet, and will not decide today, then just give some suggestions on who you might think would be appropriate, and we will do some exploratory digging to prepare in case it should be a matter for this committee to seize.

Thank you.

I'm just noticing the time, and believe it or not, we are past time.

The meeting is adjourned.

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