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# Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

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Chair: Mrs. Sherry Romanado





## Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology

Tuesday, December 1, 2020

• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to meeting eight of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of September 23. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. As usual, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entire committee. As we do not have any witnesses today, I will not go over all of the usual rules to follow. However, I will ask members to raise their hand to get on the order of speaking. The committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain the order of speaking for all members, whether you are participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), the committee is meeting today to consider the request of four members to undertake a study of the domestic manufacturing capacity for a COVID-19 vaccine.

With that, I will turn the floor over to MP Cumming, who has his hand up.

Mr. Cumming, you have the floor.

**Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Good morning, Madam Chair.

Good morning to my fellow committee members.

You have all received the motion that I will be putting forward. I do respect the work of this committee and the work the committee is currently on. However, in my mind, with my colleagues who signed the letter, we have a significant issue in front of us regarding the domestic production of vaccines. Earlier in the year, it was announced that Canada would have a production capability of up to 70,000 to 100,000 doses per month. We've seen that the U.K. has already started with making appointments. Here in Canada we still don't know when vaccines will be supplied, when they'll be stored, and when they'll be distributed.

On November 20, Health officials confirmed that Canada did not negotiate the right to domestically produce vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna or AstraZeneca, implying that even if Canada developed the capacity to produce vaccines, we're putting Canadians at the mercy of international production. This is a very significant issue for Canada, because without a vaccine and without rapid testing, it will be very difficult to see our economy return. It's been 11

months, and thousands of jobs have been lost. We've spent billions of dollars. We've accumulated, as we saw from the economic update, significant debt.

Although we have supported many of the programs that have been put forward, we do think the ability for Canada to access vaccines and to have the ability to produce vaccines is critical for the economic recovery for the country.

My motion is as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology commence a study on the emergency situation involving the domestic manufacturing capacity for a COVID-19 vaccine;

That this study examine the May 12, 2020, announcement by the Government of Canada regarding \$44-million to refit a National Research Council facility in Montreal for the purposes of the production of a vaccine in collaboration with CanSino Biologics, and review and examine all related issues, including:

- (a) the investment of \$44-million into the facility and the necessary upgrades to space, technology, equipment and personnel that would need to be made as a result,
- (b) the potential impact of this initial announcement on the government's plans to procure other vaccines,
- (c) the facility's prior capacity to manufacture vaccines, including past delivery orders and schedules, and
- (d) the dissolution of the announced partnership between the National Research Council and CanSino Biologics on August 26, 2020, and its impact on the planned upgrades to the facility; and

That, in order to fully study this emergency situation, the Committee invite the Minister of Health, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, and the President of the Public Health Agency of Canada, each to appear separately before the committee for at least three hours, provided that

- (a) in respect of each of the ministers who does not agree, within one week of the adoption of this motion, to accept this invitation for the length of time prescribed, the Chair shall be instructed to report to the House forthwith a recommendation that this committee be empowered to order his or her appearance from time to time, and
- (b) in respect of the President of the Public Health Agency of Canada, if he does not agree, within one week of the adoption of this motion, to accept this invitation for the length of time prescribed, a summons do issue for his appearance before the Committee at a date and time determined by the Chair but no later than three weeks following the adoption of this motion.

Madam Chair, that is my motion. I do think this is a critical issue for Canadians and a critical issue for this committee to be able to study and to be able to get answers for Canadians.

Thank you.

• (1105)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Cumming.

We already have two hands up on the speakers list. If you'd like to speak to this motion, either use the participant "raise hand" or raise your hand and I'll put you on the list. If you're in the room, I can't see you, so please make sure the clerk sees you and he'll flag that to me.

I will turn now to MP Jaczek. Go ahead.

**Ms. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our Conservative colleagues for bringing the issue forward. It certainly is one of great interest to me. Going back in time, when I was in medical school—and this goes back to the seventies—the Connaught laboratories were such a pride for Canada. Their role in the production of so many products—insulin being the most well known probably, but also on the immunization front—was really critical in providing some very essential pharmaceutical products not only to Canadians, but globally as well.

I also remember in the eighties when I was doing my master's in public health, there was a great deal of conversation on the part of public health officials in terms of what was then the privatization move. In other words, it was selling what was then an organization within the Canada Development Corporation to be transferred to private ownership. Certainly, public health officials at the time were extremely distressed by this particular move.

What I'm getting at is that this issue has a long history in Canada. I think the intent of the motion is obviously to look forward to see what we can possibly do to encourage domestic manufacture. My colleagues may remember that I in fact did question Minister Navdeep Bains on the subject at a previous meeting of this committee.

I would like to propose a broadening of the motion. I would ask MP Cumming if he would find it acceptable to add a paragraph (e) under (d), with add the words, "the evolution of Canada's domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity".

In other words, it's to look a little more broadly at why we are where we are now, and with the overall intent, I assume, that we can move forward and make strong recommendations for the future.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We have an amendment on the floor.

If you'd like to speak to the amendment, I have MP Lambropoulos and MP Masse next on the speakers list, and I see MP Erskine-Smith. I will turn it over to MP Lambropoulos.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.):** Mine's on the actual motion, not the amendment. I'm good with the amendment.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Masse.

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** I'm good with the amendment, too. Mine's on the main motion.

**The Chair:** MP Erskine-Smith.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** I have an additional amendment, but let's deal with this one first.

**The Chair:** Is there any other debate on that amendment?

The amendment is to add a paragraph a new paragraph (e), "the evolution of Canada's domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity".

Is there any debate on that amendment?

MP Erskine-Smith.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** To the point about where we go forward, "the evolution of Canada's domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity" is good, in that it takes us to where we are and why we are here today.

My interest would be would to look at the steps that Canada can and should take to restore its domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity. Would that be encapsulated by it, or would it make sense to say, "the evolution of Canada's domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity, including the steps Canada can and should take to restore it"? I don't know if that would be a friendly amendment, but I think we should drive a forward-looking question as much as anything.

How do we restore this capacity, so that we don't again find ourselves in the position we're in today?

**The Chair:** Are you proposing a subamendment?

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** I don't know if it's necessary or if Helena is amenable to that. I think we should consider not only the evolution, but also something forward-looking as a useful addition to it. I'm pretty open to the way we go about doing it.

**The Chair:** MP Erskine-Smith, could you give us some exact wording that you would like to add to this, just because I want to make sure it's clear to everyone.

MP Dreeshen, I see you and I'll add you to the list.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** After "the evolution of Canada's domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity", I would add, "and the steps Canada can and should take to address it".

**The Chair:** Perfect.

We have a subamendment on the floor.

MP Dreeshen.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

What is happening right now is that we have to look at exactly the case of today; we can go back into history, if one wishes.

I understand where the Liberals are at this particular point in time. They believe they might be able to find a point in time at which they can blame Harper, but quite frankly, this goes back 20 years, with the issues and problems that existed.

This is not something we need a history lesson on. What we need to do is look at what is happening at this particular point in time. We've had five years in which many different changes have taken place that have put us in a very negative position.

I remember listening last night to Moderna speaking about how they will be able to get us to the front of a particular line in making some of these vaccines available to us. Any major company is going to talk nicely about where the government has been, but quite frankly, I heard from those discussions that we're going to have to depend on other countries.

It's a situation in which we have to look at where we are right now: we have so many great companies that have fallen by the wayside. I think it's important for us to get at this right away and talk about today's issue, not go back 20 or 30 years to try to get a history lesson.

**The Chair:** Thank you, MP Dreeshen.

I have MP Jaczek, MP Cumming and MP Ehsassi on the speakers list.

MP Jaczek.

**Ms. Helena Jaczek:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I certainly welcome MP Erskine-Smith's subamendment. History is obviously very instructive. Notwithstanding MP Dreeshen's comments, I think we can learn from history. It doesn't need to be in-depth in terms of what has happened previously, but it could be very instructive for the way forward, which is part of MP Erskine-Smith's subamendment.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Next I have MP Cumming.

**Mr. James Cumming:** Thank you for the interest in the amendments.

Really, the issue in front of us and the reason this motion was prescribed in the way it was is that we have a crisis in front of us. I don't disagree that we may want to do further study of Canada's capacity, or of the direction it would go in, but this is really a crisis that we're in today.

The intent of this motion was to deal with the now and the specifics now of getting us through this health and economic crisis. Certainly, over a period of time, we could produce another study related to this entire industry.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Next we have MP Ehsassi, and then MP Lambropoulos.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, allow me to start by saying I think it's very timely that we consider this motion. It is imperative that Canadians have a good sense of how our country is doing and how we will be faring in the coming months, so this is very welcome.

What I do not agree with is the member characterizing this as Moderna's simply saying that they will push us to the front of the

line. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our government has been working on this issue for quite a few months. They have negotiated all these agreements.

It's not, then, about a spokesperson for any manufacturer pretending they can do us any favours. This is a reflection of how hard our government has been working on this.

Secondly, insofar as history is concerned, I think Canadians are entitled to know why we find ourselves in the situation we currently find ourselves in. Our job as legislators is to present the facts to Canadians and allow them on their own to decide whether our government has been doing a good and robust job or not. It's not a question of history; it's about putting things in context for Canadians so that they have timely information.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Ehsassi.

Next we have MP Lambropoulos and MP Masse.

**Ms. Emmanuela Lambropoulos:** Yes, I think MP Ehsassi pretty much said it. I definitely think Canadians deserve to know the context to understand why we're in the situation that we're in today, because a lot of them have a lot of difficulty understanding how Canada doesn't have the capacity to produce these vaccines. I think it's definitely something we need to look at.

The subamendment that was raised also really talks about how we can get to a point where we can fix the situation. I definitely think that, combined, these two amendments will make this a much better study.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** MP Masse.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** I just want to make sure that we're all clear. I don't have an objection to (e) provided that the main study that we're doing here will be on the specifics of the motion that we have before us. I take the point that Mr. Cumming is making that we don't want to, I guess, water down the main motion. I think as long as we're all under the same impression here that the focus is going to be on (a) through (d), then part of (e) would happen anyway.

I think it will be interesting. There will be lots of subjects that will come up. There have already been books written about this, and how we can get back there is actually a pretty straightforward path. I don't even know how much we're going to get from witnesses for that. Are we going to get some historians or philosophers?

At any rate, I support the motion, but as long as it stays focused, I don't have a problem with the subamendment. I think it could offer some value because it's going to come out a little bit anyway. But we need to focus on the specifics here for all of our interests.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

MP Masse, is there any further debate on the subamendment?

Seeing none, I will ask if we are all in favour, but I'm not sure....

I'm just going to refer to the clerk. Do we want to do a recorded vote or can we just go by a show of hands? Okay.

I'll just start with if it's unanimous. Is it the will of the committee?

All in favour of the subamendment?

I do not see unanimous consent. Hold on. My apologies, as I can't see all of your hands. I cannot see the room. I'm going to ask the clerk if he can do the recorded division just because it's very difficult to distinguish between the room and the....

• (1120)

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Sherry, why not do it in the same way that the Speaker asks for nays in the House? If it's not unanimous, why doesn't somebody chip in with a nay? Then we don't have to have a recorded vote. A recorded vote is fine, but in the interests of time, it might make sense if somebody doesn't agree with the subamendment to say nay, and we can then do a recorded division. We could whip through it a bit faster that way.

**The Chair:** Okay. If it is the will of the committee, all in favour?

Again, could you put your hands up.

Opposed?

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** For everyone's information, only Mr. Sloan and myself are in the room. You can see me. Mr. Sloan voted for the motion.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire.

I can't really see the room, so I can't see you very well.

[*English*]

We'll now go to the amendment as amended. Is there any further debate on it? The motion now reads, with paragraph (e), "the evolution of Canada's domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity and the steps Canada can and should take to address it".

(Subamendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Is there any further debate on the now amended motion?

MP Erskine-Smith.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** I have a question for James on order for ministers to attend. This is for the ministers to appear separately, and there's a proviso that if they don't attend, the committee ought to refer it to the House. I've not seen that before. Is there a precedent for doing this? I understand where witnesses don't attend and then the committee reconvenes and says, "Well, the witness hasn't attended", and then issues some statement or refers it to the House. Is it normal to have...? In five years I've never seen it, so I'm just curious. It's a bit pointed, I would say, as far as it goes, and to pass something like this unanimously, it might be helpful to soften the edges of it a bit. I think the ministers are amendable to attending, so perhaps we can amend it in some way so that there is not

this implicit suggestion that if they're not going to attend, we're going to take some forceful action.

**The Chair:** We have MP Lambropoulos, and then MP Cumming.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** Thank you.

I would just ask about the timing of the study. There's not much mention about timing. We say four meetings, but we are already in December and currently we have until 11 December, I believe, to continue our committee meetings in a hybrid way. We should take that into account as well.

Some parts of the country, such as mine, are in code red lockdown, and although we can come to Ottawa, if we are going to have a chance to spend Christmas with our families, we need to quarantine for one week prior. I just want to take into account those types of restrictions if we are going to go ahead with the study.

As it is an emergency study, it would take precedence over any other study we are doing, and that makes sense, but I just wonder what Mr. Cumming and the Conservatives were thinking in terms of timing and when we would get this study completed.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Lambropoulos.

MP Cumming.

**Mr. James Cumming:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

There are a couple of things.

Mr. Erskine-Smith, the intent of the motion was to put some teeth to it to make sure that we can advance as quickly as possible. It might not be the standard language, but the intent was to make sure that we can get going on this.

It's my understanding that there is an issue with the ability to have meetings after December 19, so I think it's pressing that we should be to try to wrap this up before December 19 if possible.

There is something online that hybrid committees can't meet after December 19. My understanding is that it's a technical issue, that there are some upgrades being made to the services, the servers and that type of thing, so the intent of the motion is to try to move this as quickly as possible.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I'm just going to clarify one point for the members. Currently, the motion that is before the House that allows us to sit in a hybrid fashion goes only until December 11, not December 19, so in order for this committee to meet after December 11, it would have to be in person, unless there is a motion in the House adopted allowing us to do so. I want to make sure that folks understand that we have three meetings remaining between now and December 11, as currently scheduled. Any additional meetings to be added after that would have to be in person, unless there is an order in the House allowing us to sit in a hybrid fashion.

MP Jowhari is next.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm sure the chair and the clerk have had a conversation prior to this. With this motion adopted, how would the committee schedule look given the fact that we are proposing to invite three different ministers, each for three hours, separately, with the number of sessions we are left with and December 11 fast approaching?

If such a conversation has taken place, I would appreciate getting an update on how our schedule would look, given that we move forward with this, and also on the viability of being able to get three ministers for three hours in three separate sessions. What will happen to the other witnesses we want to be able to bring? If we are limited to three meetings and all those meetings will be consumed by the ministers, how are we going to get the witnesses into that?

I would appreciate some feedback on it.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Before I turn to MP Lemire, I'll just explain that this motion has not been adopted yet, so we have not invited anyone until it is the will of the committee to proceed. Then we will invite witnesses accordingly.

We have three meetings scheduled between now and December 11, and my understanding is that there are no additional slots available to accommodate additional meetings between now and December 11.

However, if this motion is adopted and it is the will the committee to commence this immediately, we will reach out to the witnesses who have been asked. There are four witnesses identified, and three meetings left. Therefore, obviously, in order to get those folks in, we would need to pair up some additional witnesses, again depending on the availability.

It's something the clerk and I would work on immediately once it's passed and is the will of the committee.

That's just to explain that we cannot invite witnesses until a motion is actually adopted in this committee.

I'll turn to MP Lemire.

[*Translation*]

The floor is yours, Mr. Lemire

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I just wanted to explain the Quebec government's rules.

Technically, you have to be in quarantine for a week before December 24, if you want to be able to visit your family. That would bring us to December 17. So it would be possible for me to meet in person, here in Ottawa, on December 14, 15, or 16. Even though Parliament is closed, it would not prevent us from being able to take part in the work of the committee.

As for the number of meetings, that would depend on the will of the committee. I should mention that we wanted to propose other topics. The emergency motion is certainly going to make us use up all our time today. I was counting on today to really be able to report on Internet access, and on Bell representatives being here. You

know that I find this issue extremely important. I wanted to show you how much of an impact it could have on the motion we have already passed.

Can we meet with the representatives from Bell earlier than scheduled? If not, I will live with it. We are in the politics business, not the certainty business. Unexpected things happen, but this issue concerns me and I would like the committee to recognize that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire.

Yes, indeed, we were scheduled to meet with witnesses in sessions that we have moved today, in order to deal with this emergency motion pursuant to Standing Order 106(4). So the decision is the committee's. If the committee wants to push the other study back to next year, that is what we will do. In this specific case, it's really up to the committee to decide, and the clerk and I will act accordingly.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Is there any additional debate?

MP Masse.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** I have a couple of quick points.

I support the wording as it is, because we don't have time to have another meeting to try to force things to happen. I know it's a bit more direct, with the path, but that's because of the time that we have in those three meetings. We don't need to have another meeting to try to get the things going again.

I do support returning and finishing the rural broadband study later on. I'll just remind everyone that this committee—and I think there were a couple of members who were here—passed a rural broadband study unanimously just a few years ago and most of those recommendations were never followed through on. A lot of work has been done on that and there are some things that could happen. I do support finishing up that work, and then moving on. Mr. Lemire is making a good point because we have invested in it, but with the timing of the stuff, I support it as it stands.

Lastly, there's no way we can meet in person.

**The Chair:** MP Ehsassi.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Just having heard from everyone and the challenges that we're facing, given there are only a few time slots left and the reality that the members from Quebec have to go into quarantine, I was wondering if I could bring a second amendment, which would say that each of the ministers do not have to appear separately.

I think perhaps that would allow us to expedite the work on this study and ensure that all of the clerks and the members are capable of doing this in a timely fashion.

**The Chair:** Okay, we have an amendment on the floor.

I see MP Jowhari has his hand up.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I definitely support that amendment.

If we have three ministers and three meetings left and if we get the three of them coming in for one hour each, or all three of them at the same time for one meeting, that leaves us with two other meetings where we could bring other witnesses, given that I'm sure other party members also want to put their witnesses forward. That would be a workable schedule and we'd then finish, hopefully, before December 11, so we don't have to go into post-December 11 and the challenges that would be there. I definitely think that's a great amendment.

**The Chair:** MP Dreeshen.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think it's critical that we be able to speak to any minister separately. We've seen in the last little while cases in which two ministers would come, and the discussions would then end up becoming confused somewhat.

I think it's very important, however we do it, that it be one minister at a time, so that we can all direct our questions specifically to that minister. Keep their speaking time limited to five minutes or whatever to just get the general high points that they feel we need to have.

Certainly, any kind of combination that would put two ministers together when we try to discuss this is going to be counter-productive. It ends up pushing one back and forth, the discussion between one minister and the other, or to their both wishing to talk about something and running out the clock.

I think it's important, then, that whatever we finally end up with is with only one minister at a time.

**The Chair:** MP Erskine-Smith?

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** I have two questions, I guess, for those who support the wording as is.

One is this. If we are holding separate meetings for each individual minister and the president of PHAC, that would represent four meetings, by my count. How are we going to hold four meetings before December 11? I just don't understand.

Second, to speak to the point about urgency, I'm struggling a little bit to understand, as I read the motion.

There's a strong accountability function, unquestionably, that if a decision were made and it impacted in any way the vaccine rollout, we should be asking those tough questions. However, I don't understand, based on the text of the motion as is, how anything that we learn or recommend is going to be actionable in an emergency way by the government going forward.

On the idea that we're going to jam ourselves before December 11 with four separate meetings on an emergency basis, I would ask, for what? What are we seeking to learn that is going to be actionable by the government?

When the Conservatives were banging the drum on rapid tests, I understood that there was something that could potentially change in the government's approach that would maybe make a significant impact for Canadians. But what, out of this, is going to lead to a positive impact for Canadians, other than the accountability function—which is important, but it's important in January, it's impor-

tant in February, it's important in December. It doesn't make a lick of a difference, as far as it goes.

First, then, how are we going to do separate meetings before December 11? Why separate meetings on this particular issue? What's going to come of this that's going to be actionable for this committee and Canadians?

• (1135)

**The Chair:** I have MP Lambropoulos, then I have MP Jaczek and MP Ehsassi.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** In order to accommodate everybody—I know Monsieur Lemire has one more day to do his study on telecoms, and then we have four ministers whom we're going to be asking to come in—I would suggest adding an hour to two of our meetings, making them two meetings of four hours' length, instead of four meetings of three hours, at which we can combine two ministers. We'd at least be adding time, so that we have more time to ask witnesses questions, and then we get to really do everything we need to do with regard to both studies before we break, before December 11th.

I'm just wondering what people think of that.

**The Chair:** To clarify, we cannot actually extend our meetings more than an additional hour. Our current slots are Tuesday and Thursday from 11 to 1. We could possibly go from 11 to 2, but then we have question period, and we cannot add an hour earlier in the morning because of other committee slots and time differences.

Unfortunately, then, we cannot add a fourth hour to our current slots, just to clarify so that folks are aware.

We now have MP Jaczek and then MP Ehsassi.

**Ms. Helena Jaczek:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to ask whether three hours per minister is really reasonable. It strikes me that we can hear salient points in less than three hours. I'm wondering why the specificity—"for three hours". It seems an invitation for repetition, and frankly, I just cannot imagine that even with the most intense questioning there will be a need for three hours per minister.

I would prefer to have the kind of flexibility that I believe is being proposed—that essentially we have each of them appear before the committee—and not necessarily tie ourselves down to a three-hour time slot.

**The Chair:** Next we have MP Ehsassi, and then MP Cumming.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to reiterate the point that Mr. Erskine-Smith made. The math simply does not add up.

Also, having heard my colleague Dr. Jaczek, I wonder whether I could propose an amendment. I can provide you with the wording right now.

The motion currently reads, "each to appear separately before the committee for at least three hours, provided that". I would say we take that out and just simply put in, "each to appear before the committee, provided that".

I think that would give us all the flexibility we need to examine this emergency motion, provide information to Canadians, but also ensure that scheduling can proceed smoothly and that we can hear from all the ministers.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** MP Cumming.

**Mr. James Cumming:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's important that we have the ministers independently. That's a critical component of this.

Also, what we haven't discussed, and I understand it hasn't been decided by the House, is that there is the potential that hybrid sittings will be extended for the week of December 11, which could give us some opportunity to extend into that period in hybrid fashion and will give us ample time to be able to get all the witnesses in place.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Cumming.

I want to make sure that everyone is clear.

Right now we're asking for three ministers, plus the president of PHAC, to come for three hours before December 11. There is a possibility, and again, I don't know what the discussions are amongst the parties, to extend hybrid sittings to the week of December 14. That has not been decided as of yet.

I'd ask the clerk to jump in here in terms of the logistics, because I want to make sure everyone understands what is possible before you make agreements as to what the committee would like.

I'll turn it over to the clerk to clarify what is possible for this committee between now and, say, December 18.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Michael MacPherson):** Basically what we have are the time slots that we were provided that were agreed to by the whips. That's Tuesday to Thursday, from 11 until 1. We have three such time slots left.

Outside of that, we don't really have any time. There are possible evening sittings, but my understanding is that they've already been booked by other committees.

If it is the will of the committee to try to take one of those spots, basically it would be up to the whips to decide which committee is going to have that event.

Aside from that, even pushing a meeting to three hours is a bit problematic. It's not a guarantee that we can run right until 2 p.m. I'll have to double-check on that, because I don't want to leave the committee with the impression that it is something that's doable. There are impacts that follow. Every single time a committee runs over its allotted time slot, there is an impact on resources that cascades throughout the day. I will get back to the committee on whether even pushing for a three-hour meeting is indeed even possible.

With that, we have three meetings. The issue I'm going to run into, as clerk, will be inviting four separate people for three meetings. The committee would have to specify who would be invited for

which day. If a person I invite for this Thursdays says they can't come on Thursday but are ready to appear on Tuesday, if Tuesday is the preferred day of a different witness we're going to run into some scheduling issues in that sense. It's not that someone wouldn't be declining the invitation; it would just be a matter of scheduling, and then we're looking at our motion there and the parameters that kick in with regard to reporting to the House or even issuing a summons. I'm going to need significantly more direction from the committee in order to set up these meetings.

Our House order only covers up until December 11. It would be extremely difficult to try to book witnesses for dates after that time, because we have absolutely no guidance from the House and no authority to meet in a hybrid fashion. As well, starting on December 19 and running until January 17 inclusive, there is a massive shut-down of the House of Commons infrastructure on the technical side due to upgrades, and I'm told that is not negotiable. Those upgrades need to occur.

Thanks.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mike.

MP Masse, and then MP Jowhari.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** I'm going to try a compromise here to see if this could potentially get us moving along. Maybe we just move it to one and a half hours to at least get this going. Two hours was the tradition for a minister to actually appear before a committee. That's tradition used to be in place until the last six or seven years. I'd say that's a friendly amendment because I'd like to see this get done.

It will allow the facilitation of the clerk and perhaps this is a way of compromise on both sides to get it going forward.

I would ask the clerk if that would potentially work. If not, what else would we have to do to make this happen?

**The Chair:** Okay.

I have a few speakers on the list. I have MP Jowhari, MP Lemire and MP Rempel Garner.

**Mr. Majid Jowhari:** I just want to build on MP Masse's comment. Given the fact that we can go three hours with three meetings, if we go to one and a half hours for each minister and then one and a half for PHAC, that would give us two meetings of three hours and four witnesses. Then we'd be able to go back and finish Monsieur Lemire's study, which will be our third one. I would suggest that if the ministers cannot come on short notice, we'll go to the study that was in front of us, get that completed and then push those two meetings back.

Thank you.

• (1145)

**The Chair:** Next we have MP Lemire.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, our former colleague is back to visit us, and I would like to welcome her.

I am really looking forward to what she has to tell us. Before that, however, I would like to check with the clerk whether it is possible for our meetings to start earlier than 11 a.m. Is it possible to start a four-hour meeting at 9 a.m., so that it would then finish at 1 p.m.?

**The Clerk:** It's a matter of human and technical resources.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** As I understand it, the leaders and the whips are having discussions. It's possible that what we are talking about at the moment will become moot and that we will have to start the discussion again shortly. Perhaps this is not the ideal time.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lemire.

[English]

Next is MP Rempel Garner. Welcome back.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** It's a pleasure to be back, Madam Chair.

I think that we can come to consensus here.

I have a couple of things just for my colleague's edification. It's my understanding that the motion that was passed by unanimous consent in the House, which allows for virtual or hybrid sessions, expires on December 11. That's under renegotiation by our parties right now. I anticipate that there will probably be some capacity for us to meet over the break, I would hope, even within the bounds of whatever IT is saying about whether we can or cannot meet.

What I would suggest is this. If I understand what my colleague Mr. Masse is saying, the ministers would appear for one and a half hours each by themselves with some ability for the clerk to finagle when that happens. I think that would be sufficient.

This motion shouldn't be rejected just because of scheduling issues. Again, I would put on the record here that I think it is incumbent on the whips of our parties to figure this out. If we were in a normal situation, this wouldn't be an issue and we would just be scheduling meetings. We shouldn't be getting into a situation where technical issues supersede our rights as parliamentarians to conduct the business of the nation through this committee.

I would support giving the clerk some latitude with an hour and a half per minister by themselves to be slotted in as is possible with the current technical limitations, but which shouldn't be an excuse for us to not be able to do this in a timely manner given that this is, I think, the number one topic on most people's minds in Canada right now.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Rempel Garner.

Next I have MP Erskine-Smith.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** I think we maybe have a path forward then. It would be great if we had one and a half hours per minister and we were able to get it done in, effectively, two meetings by extending our meetings a little bit. That seems more reasonable as far as it goes.

I still question.... It looks a little like partisan jabbing to see the language that if the ministers don't attend, we're going to do something, that is, by referring this to the House. It is what it is.

I think that, effectively, two meetings to combine the four witnesses would be useful. I'm comfortable with that.

**The Chair:** Are there any other comments?

Right now we have a proposal for one and a half hours per minister. Obviously, if this motion passes, the clerk and I will immediately contact the offices of the ministers requested to see their availability to schedule all of these things in.

In the event that the parties do negotiate a capacity for us to have hybrid meetings the week of December 14, we can let you know once that is possible. I understand that the December 19 to January 17 shutdown, though, is non-negotiable. The actual House has to do upgrades, but the week of December 14, if the capacity for the committee to meet in a hybrid mode is there, is something we can look at.

Is there any other debate on that amendment to replace "each to appear separately before the committee for at least three hours" with "each to appear before the committee for one and a half hours"?

MP Rempel Garner, I see that you have a little blue hand up, but I don't know if that's left over from last time.

• (1150)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** It's left over. I apologize.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there any further debate?

MP Lambropoulos.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** I just want to be sure of this. Obviously, at this point, we would be seeing all four ministers in two meetings, which would free up one meeting, correct? So, we would be able to finish the telecom study.

**The Chair:** Just so that you know, we also have the competition commissioner scheduled. I'm not sure if it's the will of the committee to keep that one on, or to reschedule that. That would be an instruction to the clerk. We would need clarification on that.

MP Erskine-Smith.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** We're not going to conclude our work on the wireless study any time soon. We're going to come back in the new year, and there are going to be recommendations that we make. I don't think we have to be too intense about the schedule to make sure that we get one final meeting in.

The competition commissioner, on the other hand—and this follows on from our work in July on the grocers—literally attended a national grocers innovation conference, highlighted the work of this committee and said that he shared our concerns. He subsequently published very late last month—I think it was November 27 or November 28—an interpretation bulletin of sorts as to wage-fixing in Canada. I think it would be very useful for us to revisit that with the competition commissioner, following on from our work in July. That is timely in a way that.... With regard to Brian's point, we studied the issue of wireless services a great deal in the last parliament at this committee. I don't dismiss the importance of it, but it's not going to go away tomorrow. We should make sure that we do that right, but I don't think that one meeting before we rise has much magic to it.

I would certainly encourage us to keep the competition commissioner.

**The Chair:** Okay.

MP Lemire.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to add one factor to this parallel debate.

As I see it, we have one essential meeting left in order to comply with the spirit of the motion we as a committee have adopted. It is to have a minimum of two meetings to conclude the topic of high-speed Internet access before December 14. In that way, we could produce a report that would be finished and translated during the break, ready for our return in January. Then we could table it in the House in February.

The potential election window would not make our work null and void. In my opinion, it is critical.

In my view, we absolutely must have a meeting, the one that we had scheduled for today. We have an elephant in the room, and its name is Bell. Having players like Telus, Videotron and Rogers at its side seems essential to me.

I do not feel that we can complete the subject if we have not met with Bell. Consequently, my wish for us is to be able to table a report, as we had the opportunity to do on Friday. I was very proud when Ms. Romanado rose in the House to say that our committee had submitted a report. That is why we do the work. That is why we invite witnesses and make recommendations. We must be able to get this done.

I feel that it is extremely important to invite the Competition Commissioner. I will have a lot of questions for him. If I were to establish an order, because that's what this time issue is all about, I would like us to finish what we voted on previously: the study on Internet accessibility and affordability, and the cellular network in rural regions.

After that, if we have meetings in the week after the 14th, we can hear from the Competition Commissioner then, or in January.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I would like to clarify one thing. We have already had the two meetings about accessibility and affordability. We were supposed to hear from the Bell representatives today. However, today, four members of the committee asked us to move the meeting with the Bell representatives.

[*English*]

Right now, we have a lot of scheduling issues. We have the motion before us and the amendment to the motion to invite ministers for one and a half hours each. The problem is that we're running out of runway.

I need to get some clarity. Right now, we have the competition commissioner scheduled, I believe, for this Thursday—the clerk is nodding his head. We're also assuming that all the ministers happen to have free agendas for the next times that INDU is meeting.

I want to make sure that I'm managing expectations appropriately. If it is the will of the committee to reach out to the ministers to invite them, but they do not have availability for this Thursday, but we're able to continue to keep the competition commissioner.... I don't want to cancel a meeting and not have anyone.

I want to make sure that folks are understanding. We have multiple studies ongoing right now. We have multiple requests for those meetings to be allocated to specific studies, so I need clarification from the committee on what the committee wants to be doing between now and December 11, again assuming that the week of December 14 we can add additional meetings. I do not have confirmation of that, but we will get back to you. However, I need to get clarity for the clerk.

We have an amendment to the motion that we're discussing today: to invite the ministers for one and a half hours each to come and speak to the committee with regard to the study proposed.

Is there any further debate on that amendment?

MP Dreeshen.

We don't hear you at all, MP Dreeshen. I'm not sure if your microphone is no longer plugged in, but it's not working at all. Do you want to try to maybe unplug it and plug it back in? I know the famous IT solution is to reboot.

• (1155)

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Can you hear me now?

**The Chair:** Yes. Thank you.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** I'm going to take off my headphone.

I guess the one point that I was trying to make is that from December 14 to December 18, if the other committees haven't scheduled meetings—because they are as concerned as we are about whether or not that is possible—would that be an opportunity for us then to expand the time? Instead of being restricted to two hours, we would be able to do three or four hours at that point in time because there won't be all of the other issues with regard to question period and so on and so forth.

**The Chair:** I'm going to ask the clerk to pipe in here, and then I will go to MP Lemire.

**The Clerk:** Basically, the issue would be that the committee does not have the House's authority to hold a hybrid meeting during the period from December 14 to December 18. Absent that authority, you would be looking at possibly having an in-person meeting, which would bring into effect a lot of the quarantine issues, even just the issues in the room of how our rooms are set up physically. I would have to find, perhaps, a bigger room that would accommodate 12 members, which would be rather difficult at present.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Madam Chair, if you can still hear me.... In response to the question, I understand that, but my point is that, if we can get authority—and I understand that we can't make decisions without having that authority—to have hybrid meetings from December 14 until December 18 and there is not the added pressure of other committees' being held, that should allow us to expand the amount of time we would have. I know this is all speculative, but I'm wondering if that might help us to be able to alleviate some of the concerns we have.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Dreeshen.

I'm going to go to MP Lemire.

[Translation]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** I just wanted someone to confirm to me that timeslots are still available and that it will be possible to request additional meetings before December 12. Perhaps one or two meetings could be held. This would allow us to concentrate all our interests together into more intensive sessions.

**The Chair:** So, Mr. Lemire, your proposal is to add more meetings between today and December 12.

Is that correct?

• (1200)

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Since it is possible, yes, that is what I am asking for.

**The Chair:** The clerk has just explained to me that we have no more room available for additional meetings before December 11.

After December 11, we are no longer allowed to hold hybrid meetings. If the House passes a motion that allows us to hold them in the week of December 14, then we could add hybrid meetings.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Would it be possible to check once more that no timeslots are available?

I was told that slots were available.

**The Chair:** I will ask the clerk to check that. We can send you an update about the possibility.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** MP Lambropoulos.

**Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos:** I'm sorry to be annoying, but I think we should maybe move the meeting of the competition commissioner, considering the fact that today we had a meeting scheduled and we pushed them.... I would suggest seeing whether they're available to come on Thursday instead, if it's the will of the committee. I really think that's a priority of some of the members on this committee.

As much as we can get some great information from the competition commissioner, I think telecoms are really important as well, and the quicker we could get on with the study and the quicker we can have a report made for our committee to consider, the better.

**The Chair:** Right now, there are many invariables before us.

MP Cumming, I'll get right to you in a moment

To the folks on the committee, know that I will do my best, if this motion is adopted, to schedule according to the wishes of the committee. However, I do not have control over schedules for ministers and agendas and so on and so forth.

If it is the will of the committee, what I can do is immediately get in touch with the ministers to check availability. If there is no availability for ministers this Thursday, what we could do is verify who is available.

Right now we have the competition commissioner; we could verify whether Bell is available—again checking availability, so that we do not lose any additional slots—and I can be back to the committee with a little draft schedule with respect to what is possible between now and December 11, if that is the will of the committee.

Right now, we're getting into a lot of the weeds on logistics, and I want to express to the committee that you have my commitment that whatever is the will of the committee for us to do, I will do my best to do, working with the constraints of the House and with the clerk to schedule accordingly.

I want to make sure that folks know that. Rest assured, we will check all of these things before booking; I do not want to lose any more meeting dates. If we do not have any ministers available, if this motion passes, for this Thursday, I do not want to have a situation in which we're cancelling a meeting. I wanted to clarify that with folks.

MP Cumming.

**Mr. James Cumming:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Well said.

All I was going to say is, let's get this motion passed. Let's deal with this, as this is the greatest emergency.

I completely agree with member Lemire; we would like to be able to see Bell and others. You may have some added flexibility, if we're extending hybrid meetings up to the 18th. I think the point the member was making was that it may give us an opportunity to have another telecom meeting during that week.

I'd suggest, let's get this passed and leave it in your very capable hands to make sure we get everything scheduled.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Is there any further debate on the amendment that we replace “each to appear separately before the committee for at least three hours” with “each to appear before the committee for one and a half hours”?

[Translation]

Mr. Lemire, is your hand up?

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Would it be possible to read the motion again in its entirety? And does the interpretation that I'm hearing faithfully reflect what we are going to pass?

Actually, a lot of shades of meaning could be included. I have full confidence in the translation that the interpreters are providing, but I just want to make sure of the wording.

If ever we had a little adjustment to make because of the language, could we come back to it?

• (1205)

**The Chair:** I do not have the amendment in French, but I will read it in English. I apologize. It was submitted in English.

[*English*]

I would like to replace the second part of the motion with the following:

That in order to fully study this emergency situation, the committee invite the Minister of Health, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, and the President of the Public Health Agency of Canada, each to appear before the committee for one and a half hours

Then it would continue, “provided that”, followed by paragraphs (a), (b), etc.

Seeing no further debate on that amendment, all in favour? All opposed?

(Amendment agreed to)

**The Chair:** Now, I'd like to go back to the motion as amended. Do we have any further debate on the motion as amended? There is

no further debate. Is it the will of the committee to adopt the motion?

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

**The Chair:** Perfect.

With that, I will work with the clerk to see what we can do to schedule the witnesses who have been identified in this motion.

With respect to the other studies that are currently ongoing, we will verify the availability of the others—for instance, the telecom witnesses, as well as the competition commissioner—and get back to the committee.

We will also get back to the committee to let you know if there is a possibility of adding additional meetings between now and December 11, if any slots are available.

Also, of course, we will get back to the committee should the House adopt a motion allowing us to have additional meetings in the hybrid format for the week of December 14.

I'm going to turn to the clerk to see if there are any other outstanding action items coming out of today's discussions that I'm missing. No? Okay.

Perfect. Are there any other questions or comments?

Seeing none, I will now call this meeting adjourned.





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