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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Our meeting is under way. Welcome to the 20th meeting of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. This is our fourth and last meeting as part of the plastics study.

For the benefit of witnesses, the way we proceed is that we have five-minute opening statements and then go to rounds of questioning.

You of course may answer in either official language. When not speaking, please put yourselves on mute. That covers pretty much all of the procedural aspects.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Chair, you said that this was the final one. We still have—

The Chair: I meant second to last. There's one more, which will be with the departmental officials.

Mr. Dan Albas: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: There are all kinds of things going on in the House, of course. There are a couple of votes planned, so I propose the following, and I hope you'll agree.

What we could do is that when the bells start—I'm monitoring this and I know that the clerk is probably monitoring it—we could continue with our meeting until there are five minutes left before the voting starts. Then we could put ourselves on mute, turn off our cameras or whatever, and vote. When the 10-minute voting period is over, we can come back to the meeting. It would be a maximum 15-minute interruption, probably twice. We'll be interrupted twice. We'll be able to end our meeting at a reasonable hour.

Does anyone object to this approach? No? Okay. Great.

We have with us today, from the Canadian Beverage Association, Mr. Jim Goetz, president. From Environmental Defence Canada, we have Karen Wirsig, program manager, plastics. We will have the Honourable Sonya Savage, Minister of Energy for the Province of Alberta, joining us shortly. From Oceana Canada, we have Joshua Laughren, executive director, and Ashley Wallis, plastics campaigner. From the Regional Municipality of Peel, we have Mr. Norman Lee, director of waste management.

We shall begin with a five-minute opening with Mr. Goetz, please.

Mr. Jim Goetz (President, Canadian Beverage Association): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We really appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee today.

My name is Jim Goetz. I am president of the Canadian Beverage Association, an organization representing the majority of non-alcoholic beverage companies in Canada.

CBA members directly employ over 20,000 Canadians in more than 200 facilities nationwide, in every region of the country. The refreshment industry supports jobs directly and indirectly in retail, food service, vending, convenience and restaurant channels.

The CBA and our members share the Government of Canada's goal to reduce plastic waste, increase recycling and transition to a more robust circular economy.

Our beverage containers are made to be remade. The plastic materials used are designed to be recycled and repurposed. Beverage containers are collected at high rates and recycled at high rates, and are valuable within the collection stream and circular economy value chain. They are not intended to be disposed of as waste. Not only is PET, the plastic that beverage bottles are made of, recyclable, but it can easily be recycled to achieve food-grade quality through mechanical or advanced recycling, and be made back into a bottle or other food-contact packaging.

The government's discussion paper defines single use as “designed to be thrown away after being used only once”. Distinguishing between true single-use plastic and PET beverage bottles and HDPE caps is critical to facilitating informative and accurate future discussions.

Beverage containers are collected, recycled and processed here in Canada, supporting jobs within the circular domestic economy from coast to coast, including large recycling facilities in Quebec, British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta.

The CBA and our members play a leadership role to manage and strengthen regional recycling programs, mostly at the provincial level. These programs currently achieve beverage container recycling rates averaging 75%. Some jurisdictions reach 85%, a robust recovery rate compared to other plastics overall.

CBA is actively engaged in extended producer responsibility recycling programs, either in place for decades or in development, which will work to increase harmonization and efficiency and invest over \$300 million in beverage container recycling programs nationwide. We believe EPR is the appropriate management tool for beverage container packaging. This approach is instrumental to achieving current and future material collection targets, which we support and advocate in favour of reaching higher targets.

As you consider a new plastics framework, such as the recently announced list of banned materials from ECCC and recycled content standards, we ask that you study and account for the complexity of the detailed planning and overall material engineering and replacement projects that industry will have to carry out, including supplier capacity; lead time; technical support capabilities, depending on how many industry lines need to be changed; the cost of converting, retooling, and downtime; back-up contingency planning; and establishing an appropriate and workable phase-out period.

We believe that recycled content standards legislation should allow flexibility on how our members achieve an overall recycling content percentage required to meet set targets.

While Canada has high recovery rates on beverage containers relative to other materials, we must be mindful of the amount of recycled material that will be available domestically to meet recycled content targets. We want to get to those targets, but there has to be the material available to do it, particularly if it's set in legislation.

In summary, we are proud that beverage containers have the highest recovery and recycling rate for plastic packaging in Canada. Our members have made commitments to increase the recycled content of their PET plastic bottles in the coming years and will continue their contribution to a circular economy.

• (1540)

We will carry on building and supporting recycling programs in every jurisdiction across the country to keep beverage containers and caps out of the environment and retain their value by increasing rates of recovery and recycling across Canada.

I thank the committee and especially the committee staff. I had some technical problems, and the staff were excellent in helping me to get connected.

Thank you to the committee. I look forward to any questions.

The Chair: Yes. We're very fortunate to have the great support of the House of Commons staff at all levels.

We will go now to Environmental Defence Canada with Karen Wirsig.

Ms. Wirsig, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Ms. Karen Wirsig (Program Manager, Plastics, Environmental Defence Canada): Thank you very much, and thanks to the committee for the invitation.

Environmental Defence is a Canadian environmental charity. We work on a number of federal and provincial environmental issues, including protecting Canada's fresh water, fighting climate change,

urging sustainable land-use planning, eliminating toxics and ending plastic pollution.

We would like to cover four points in our testimony today: one, that CEPA is an appropriate tool for dealing with plastic pollution in Canada; two, that recycling alone is not any kind of solution to the growing tide of plastic pollution; three, that the government must be more proactive to support reuse systems that replace single-use materials and especially plastics; and four, that the government must end subsidies to the petrochemical industry and focus on workers and communities in the transition towards a low-carbon economy.

On CEPA, I hope the committee members have had an opportunity to read the written brief we submitted a few weeks ago, in which we recommended specific federal action to stop plastic pollution.

Of those recommendations, I would like to highlight that we support the listing of plastic manufactured items to Schedule 1 of CEPA, which is the most effective way to address upstream and downstream plastic pollution in Canada.

Plastics are toxic to the environment, and it is wholly appropriate to regulate them under Canada's Environmental Protection Act. We also support banning single-use plastic items, including the six proposed in the government's discussion paper of last autumn. As well, we support establishing a recycled-content requirement for new plastic products.

We're calling for a comprehensive set of tools to manage plastic pollution that require the government to use its regulatory authority. Industry commitments to addressing plastic pollution are most welcome, but voluntary efforts and partnerships alone will not solve this crisis.

Environmental Defence supporters have sent more than 40,000 messages to the government in support of action on plastics pollution. I can tell you from my own interaction with supporters that there is a high level of frustration about the amount of plastic we as consumers have to deal with, concern about the damage this plastic is causing in the environment, and anxiety about the impacts on our health.

Polling from earlier this year confirms that there is a very high degree of consensus among Canadians across the political spectrum that the federal government must act to protect our environment from plastic pollution. The public is expecting the federal government to do something about the plastics crisis.

With regard to recycling, it's an important aspect of a circular economy, but frankly it has limited use for plastics under current market conditions. We reject the contention stated repeatedly during these hearings by representatives of the plastics industry that poor waste management is to blame for plastic pollution and that the solution is better behaviour by consumers and more innovative recycling, including so-called advanced thermal and chemical processes subsidized by governments.

Recycling, and particularly so-called "advanced recycling", will not save us from plastic pollution, and pretending it will is a mistake we urge the government not to make.

On reuse, we were surprised to note that no organizations currently involved in reuse systems to replace single-use plastic materials have appeared during this study. We urge Environment and Climate Change Canada to host a round table for reuse companies and organizations to learn more about what infrastructure is needed to support reuse across the country.

We have talked to a number of reuse organizations, and they tell us their service is popular and important to both the environment and the economy, but supports are needed to scale it up in communities across the country. We note that it takes relatively little investment to create good local jobs through reuse systems. These are jobs involved in logistics, sanitation, and technology that could support communities and workers suffering right now due to COVID-related job losses.

One of these organizations, DreamZero, reports that the infrastructure for manufacturing and effectively recycling durable plastic containers in Canada is sorely lacking. Plastics manufacturers here are focused on the production of linear single-use products, the vast majority of which end up in landfills or incinerators, or go directly into the environment at end of life.

Despite seeking local manufacturers, DreamZero has been forced to get supply from China and Europe of durable takeout containers that can be reused hundreds of times. DreamZero is currently storing its containers at end of life in order to find a local recycler able to reliably turn them back into new food-safe containers. Reuse systems in manufacturing are the kind of green technology that the federal government must support as we move to a low-carbon economy.

Finally, we're asking the government to end subsidies to the petrochemical industry. Plastics are a segment of the oil and gas industry, and Canada has committed to ending fossil fuel subsidies. It makes no sense to support the petrochemical and plastic industries with grants and tax breaks that ultimately serve to increase production of plastics when we're trying to stem the flow of plastic products into the environment.

• (1545)

Instead of supporting environmentally problematic petrochemical projects, we urge the government to adopt a just transition plan for chemical workers and plastics manufacturers that shifts the focus of manufacturing to durable products, develops widespread reuse systems and invests in mechanical recycling able to turn durable materials back into reusable products of a similar value. This type of plan will avoid stranding workers and infrastructure in the kind of economy we're trying to get away from.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Wirsig.

I don't know if the Honourable Sonya Savage is on the line or if we're still working on connecting her.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Angela Crandall): I just checked and we're still working on connecting her.

The Chair: Okay. We'll move on, then, to Mr. Laughren for five minutes.

Mr. Joshua Laughren (Executive Director, Oceana Canada): Ashley Wallis will be speaking on behalf of Oceana Canada.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Wallis, I'm sorry about that.

Ms. Ashley Wallis (Plastics Campaigner, Oceana Canada): It's no problem. Thank you so much.

Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me today to speak about this important issue.

My name is Ashley Wallis, and I am the plastics campaigner at Oceana Canada. I am joined today by Oceana Canada's executive director, Josh Laughren.

Oceana Canada is an independent charity and part of the largest international advocacy group dedicated solely to ocean conservation. We believe that Canada has an obligation to manage our natural resources responsibly and to help ensure a sustainable source of protein for the world. We work with Canadians coast to coast to coast to return Canada's formerly vibrant oceans to health and abundance.

As nearly every witness has said over the last few weeks, the world is without doubt facing a plastic pollution crisis. Scientists from around the world are ringing alarm bells, with study after study describing the ubiquity of plastic pollution and the impacts that plastic production, use, and disposal have on both environmental and human health. As one of the wealthiest and most economically productive countries in the world, we have a responsibility to end Canada's contribution to the plastic pollution disaster.

Last year, two groundbreaking studies estimated the effectiveness of various interventions and found that predicted growth in plastic waste far exceeds global efforts to mitigate plastic pollution. One of the studies found that implementing all feasible interventions would still lead to 17 million tonnes of plastic waste ending up in the global environment every year by the year 2040. The study also found that recycling alone would reduce plastic pollution by only 45% when compared to a business-as-usual scenario.

Let me reframe that for a second. Even in the best recycling scenario, by 2040, 45 million tonnes of plastic would be flowing into the global environment every year. That is 7 million more metric tonnes than today.

These findings highlight the urgent need to regulate plastic across its life cycle, and that despite what the committee has heard from industry, we cannot recycle our way out of this crisis. Canada needs to reduce plastic production and use, including banning non-essential plastic products that are commonly found polluting our rivers, oceans, parks and wild areas.

To mitigate the impact of plastic on the environment and human health, and to support Canada's transition to a non-toxic, low-carbon circular economy, we recommend the following:

First, expand and finalize the federal ban on harmful single-use plastics. More than 32 countries have already banned or are in the process of banning single-use plastics, including the European Union, Chile, Peru and Kenya. Canada's proposed ban is a good step, but overall falls short of what is needed. The items that the government has proposed to ban are low-hanging fruit, with many cities and businesses across Canada already banning or voluntarily replacing them with non-plastic or non-single-use alternatives.

Oceana Canada polled Canadians in December of last year and found that two-thirds want the ban expanded to include other problematic single-use plastics, like single-use coffee cups and lids and all forms of polystyrene. The government has science and public opinion on its side and should finalize and implement the ban no later than December of this year.

Second, Canada must reject false solutions to the plastic pollution crisis. Incineration, energy from waste, waste to fuel, downcycling and so-called advanced or chemical recycling are just waste disposal in disguise. These false solutions perpetuate a toxic, carbon-intensive, linear economy. For example, chemical recycling technologies face similar challenges to traditional mechanical recycling, including requiring a relatively pure homogenous flow of plastic to be economically viable. They are also immature and energy intensive and often do not displace virgin plastic, making them incompatible with a circular economy.

Lastly, instead of subsidizing the fossil fuel and petrochemical sectors, Canada needs to support the shift to reusable products and packaging. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation estimates that replacing 20% of single-use plastics globally with reusables would generate \$10 billion in economic activity. Therefore, regulations that limit the use of single-use plastics, such as the ban, should be paired with incentives and investments that encourage and support the development of robust reuse systems.

In closing, this past December, scientists found microplastics in human umbilical cords and placentas, meaning that unborn babies are exposed to plastic pollution in utero and that plastic can cross the placental barrier. We are exposed to plastic before we are born. Plastic pollution isn't just all around us; it's also inside us. I urge the committee to recommend that the government institute strong federal regulations under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to end the plastic disaster.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Wallis.

We'll go to Mr. Lee from the Regional Municipality of Peel for five minutes, please.

Mr. Norman Lee (Director, Waste Management, Regional Municipality of Peel): Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to appear before this committee.

My name is Norman Lee, and I am the director of waste management at the Regional Municipality of Peel.

The Region of Peel is home to over 1.5 million people, who generate over 500,000 tons of residential waste each year. We currently divert half of it, including 100,000 tons through our blue box program and another 100,000 tons through our green bin and yard waste programs. We have a target of 75% diversion by 2034 and are making significant investments to reach it.

In Ontario, municipalities manage about one-third of all waste generated, including virtually all residential waste. We also collect much of the litter. I expect other provinces are similar. The municipal perspective is therefore important, and I thank you for taking the time to hear it.

One of the most significant waste management challenges faced by municipalities today is the recycling of plastic packaging, which is becoming lighter and more complex, making it more difficult and more expensive to manage. The lack of mandatory recycled content requirements results in weak demand for some recovered plastics, such as the plastic film used in grocery bags. Messages from brand owners and retailers often conflict with municipal messaging about what can be recycled or composted. This results in materials being put in the wrong bin, which increases cost and decreases diversion.

The Region of Peel supports the use of an evidence-based approach to assess problematic single-use plastics. The region supports the establishment of minimum recycled contents. We support the expansion of EPR programs across Canada. We support the proposed ban on harmful single-use plastics, including the six items identified for the initial ban.

These single-use plastics are often undetected and increasingly difficult to separate in municipal facilities. They contaminate our recycling and our compost, and are a major contributor to litter in our streets, parks and waterways.

While municipalities support the use of environmentally friendly alternatives, we are concerned with the promotion of compostable plastic-like materials until our systems can be changed to manage them. These materials pose a challenge at our composting facilities, because our facilities are not designed to compost them. Nor are they designed to effectively separate them out as contaminants. To retrofit our facilities right now would be prohibitively expensive.

The Region of Peel operates its own composting system. We've worked with a number of producers to test the compostability of their products and packages. At the end of a standard nine-week composting cycle, none of the materials we tested were fully decomposed. They would contaminate the finished compost, reducing its value or, worse, making it unsellable.

The Region of Peel is investing \$100 million to develop an anaerobic digestion facility for its green bin material. This facility will be better at removing contaminants, but our investigations show that most compostable products and packaging would be removed early in the process and sent to landfill.

We think the following measures should be put in place before compostable plastics and plastic-like materials are introduced and supported as an alternative to single-use plastics: national certification standards that ensure that materials marketed as "compostable" can be composted in practice and at scale; national labelling and advertising standards to reduce consumer and resident confusion; and producer responsibility programs for compostable products and packaging, preferably in accordance with national standards or guidelines. These should be accompanied by federal programs to support investment in processing infrastructure for compostable products and packaging, and mandatory recycled content requirements that are sufficiently high and enforceable.

• (1555)

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

The Honourable Sonya Savage is still not on the line, so we'll do like we did at the last session. If she comes on, we'll interrupt the questioning and provide her with five minutes to make a statement.

We'll go to the first round with Mr. Jeneroux, for six minutes please.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I wonder if you'd be open to doing something a bit unusual: swapping our round with the Liberals' next round, perhaps giving Minister Savage extra time. I was hoping to focus my questions on Minister Savage's testimony.

• (1600)

The Chair: What you're saying is that we'd have Mr. Longfield go and then Mr. Saini. Then, in the second round, it would be Mr. Redekopp and you starting off.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): I have questions for her as well.

The Chair: Let me see here if we can figure this out quickly.

Why don't we start with—

Mr. Dan Albas: I can take the round, if that makes it easier.

The Chair: That does, Mr. Albas. Thank you.

Go ahead.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you.

First of all, I would like to thank all our witnesses for being here today and presenting their different viewpoints. I'm sure this is going to be a good discussion.

I'm going to start with Mr. Lee.

Mr. Lee, you've raised a few different points in your presentation. Specifically, we've heard before at this committee—I believe it was in the study of Bill C-204—that in Ontario there are multiple different standards that are followed, and it creates a lot of consumer confusion. Can you state if that's the case?

Mr. Norman Lee: There are many different approaches, especially in the blue box program, where individual municipalities are responsible for the design of the program and for deciding what goes in the blue box. That confuses residents when they travel from one municipality to the next. The same is true with our green bin programs. We each decide what goes in our green bin program. We make those decisions based on a number of factors, including the design of our processing equipment and whether or not we can actually process certain materials. One example that comes up over and over is used coffee cups. Some municipalities allow them in the blue box. Some municipalities allow them in the green bin. Some municipalities allow them in neither. It depends on the types of equipment they use. That causes confusion.

There's also confusion between the messages that municipalities give to residents and the messages that retailers give, sometimes right on the package, about the recyclability or compostability of packages.

Mr. Dan Albas: I'm sure that there are contamination issues and whatnot, but that may be beyond what we're discussing today.

One of the things we've also heard is that, largely, the producers, as well as those who package and those who want to reuse these materials, such as the coffee cup container lid, have said there's value to that, and that if there's not a standard practice, let's say, within a geographical area—such as Peel, Durham and other areas around the GTA—they are unable to get enough scale to actually create a market. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Norman Lee: I would agree with that. If a product is recyclable but is not accepted in enough places, they won't have the scale to attract the investment in the downstream processing. That's one of the reasons Peel supports producer responsibility, where producers would then be in control of the design of the blue box across the province of Ontario or any other province and, hopefully, consistent across the entire country, so that if they decide to put something like a coffee cup lid in the blue box, they can do it everywhere and generate the scale that's needed to attract the investment and make it viable.

Mr. Dan Albas: I'm from British Columbia. As you know, there is one single EPR regime for British Columbia, and the rates of recycling are massively different and create different opportunities for the private sector to work with municipalities, which are mainly in charge of collections.

Do you think the federal government, even if it's not in its jurisdiction to force municipalities to, because obviously they're creatures of the province, should be taking this to, for example, the national table for environment ministers, and working with them?

Mr. Norman Lee: I think it would be helpful, through the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, to develop EPR guidelines that could be put in place across Canada to help guide EPR programs, so that there is consistency across the country and it doesn't change dramatically from province to province.

● (1605)

Mr. Dan Albas: That obviously is different from what this federal government is calling for. It is a very simple thing to say, a simple idea, but by actually working on getting standard national regulation that allows for a better pickup of these materials, do you think that's really going to help municipalities like your own, or your county, to be able to deal with this and to see recycling go up?

Mr. Norman Lee: If there are harmonized EPR programs across each province or across the country with sufficiently high targets set for them, that will certainly help with the capture of these materials. However, I don't think it would be the full solution, because there are materials—items in the initial ban, such as coffee straws—that tend to contaminate everything in the blue box. They're very difficult to separate out, and they tend to end up in the litter as well. Plastic grocery bags, which are accepted in many recycling programs, including the one in Peel, still end up in the environment.

There are some materials where we in Peel believe a ban is still appropriate if the material is not being recycled effectively.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Albas, you're just out of time.

I know Mr. Longfield would rather switch, and even though we're—

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: I have some municipal questions as well.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thanks.

I want to tie some of the federal, provincial and municipal themes together, but I think I can work with what we have.

Mr. Lee, I'll just continue with you. As you are a graduate of the University of Guelph, it's always good to see an alumnus on the panel.

Guelph also does a lot of work with Peel. We've had the Partners in Project Green from Pearson airport come out to our municipality to show how they've created a circular economy within the businesses in Peel.

Could you maybe comment quickly on that view, of waste being a resource?

I'll tag on a bit to that as well that you talked about an increased facility that you're looking at putting in, to be able to attract composting from other communities. Guelph has something similar, whereby we increased our composting facility. We've also increased our recovery systems and now have contracts with Waterloo. We take their waste as a resource for us to use.

I'm saying there are some economic opportunities, not only between businesses but also between municipalities.

Mr. Norman Lee: Through Mr. Chair, I think I have all the questions down here, and if I've missed any, the member can ask again.

As far as the resources are concerned, humans consume a lot of resources, and if we don't get those resources from our waste streams, we have to go back out to the forest and the mines and such to get them. Therefore, I believe strongly in capturing as many resources out of our waste stream as possible and keeping them in use to reduce the need for raw natural resources. Of course, we do that with the recycling program. The more of that material we can capture and keep out of landfills and the environment, the less extraction is needed.

Peel is building an anaerobic digestion facility that would have enough capacity in it to serve our needs and to also allow for some other municipal green bin material to be processed there. We just completed upgrades to our blue box recycling facility; we spent over \$23 million or \$24 million to increase its capacity and improve its performance. Again, we'll be able to bring materials in, which helps efficiencies and keeps costs down.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: It really points to the need for standards, as you've already mentioned in your testimony. I appreciate that. I'm feeling like we're competing in the market, and that's always a good thing.

I would like to shift over to the Canadian Beverage Association. In your testimony, you're talking about recovery rates. One of the partners in Project Green in Peel is Coca-Cola. Of course, they're looking at reducing their costs on waste, but also using waste as a resource for inputs for other businesses.

What's the relationship between the manufacturers, the association and the users, in terms of who bears the cost when we look at putting in an EPR program?

Mr. Goetz.

• (1610)

Mr. Jim Goetz: Yes, Coca-Cola is one of our members in Peel and Mississauga. We have several manufacturing facilities there that are members of our association. Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Refresco employ hundreds of folks in that region.

The beverage sector is in a unique situation. When you look at overall plastic production that either goes out in waste or is recycled, the beverage sector actually represents a very small percentage of that. Yet, over time, in various provinces, there has been a focus on our containers, which we have accepted, and our member companies want to make sure our products are collected, are not seen out on the street and are recycled at a high rate.

There are problematic plastics, which Norm commented on, that are harder to recycle. With beverage containers, there seems to be a bit of focus on them, but they are not those products. PET plastics, which are what our containers and lids are made of, are recycled. There's a market for them, and they are bought and sold as a commodity.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: We have limited time; thank you for your testimony. It was the cost piece I was searching for.

I have to flip over, because I have only 30 seconds, to Environmental Defence Canada. In your report, "No Time to Waste: Six Ways Canada Can Progress to Zero Plastic Waste by 2025", solution five uses economic instruments, like the ones I was mentioning, but who bears the cost for those?

Could you expand on that in the few seconds we have left?

Ms. Karen Wirsig: Obviously, governments can help support the transition to the kind of circular economy infrastructure that's going to be needed, but we believe producers should be responsible. We agree with the assessment by the region of Peel that producers should be primarily responsible for making this happen. They produce the materials; they choose the materials. They have the direct relationship with their customers, and they should bear

the responsibility and the full cost of the full life cycle of the products.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I have just been informed that Ms. Savage is not likely to join us, because of ongoing technical problems. However, a brief will be sent to us.

The bells are ringing, but there are 22 minutes left before we suspend for the vote in the House.

We will continue with Ms. Pauzé.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have questions for all our guests, but I won't have time.

Let me start with Ms. Wallis, from Oceana Canada.

You stated that we need to reduce our plastic production and use. You said that the ban in the study is essential, but is not enough. You even listed what must be added. You stressed the urgency of federal regulations and you reviewed what other countries have done. That's what I'm particularly interested in.

I share your view that we need to reduce our plastic use and redirect petrochemical sector subsidies elsewhere.

Could you tell us which state has made the most progress in this area? How long did it take to achieve this? How can Canada learn from it?

• (1615)

[*English*]

Ms. Ashley Wallis: Obviously, as I stated, other countries have already made progress on this issue. Only a couple already have their laws in place. The EU, for example, proposed their law in 2018 and it will be coming into force this summer, so this summer we'll start to see the real impacts of the European Union's proposed ban.

They did some really comprehensive analysis, though. It was done for them by Eunomia, and I would be happy to share that report with the committee afterwards, for your review. They did some complicated analysis and found exactly how much that was going to reduce plastic pollution. They include other important items as well, though, like litter abatement and the collection of plastics that would otherwise end up in rivers and then eventually in the ocean.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you very much. We will gladly accept the complementary document that you are offering.

I would now like to ask Mr. Lee a question.

Mr. Lee, thank you for joining us. In particular, I would like to discuss the initiatives that you are involved with in the Circular Economy Lab.

During our study, we found that almost everyone involved was supportive of the circular economy. This is what all the witnesses who came to tell us about it said. However, there is collective criticism about the worrisome delay in the circular economy being implemented. Someone from Unilever Canada pointed out that you have a collaborative and co-operative forum. You have that forum, but it seems that the conversations are not prompting any tangible action. That's why I'm concerned.

Can you tell us what tangible results are emerging from these conversations and what sustainable progress you have seen from your partners?

[*English*]

Mr. Norman Lee: The economy is a pretty big ship, and it takes a long time to turn it. While these things seem to happen very slowly, we are making progress in some regards. We are adding items to our recycling program to get them back into the circular economy. We're adding items to our green bin programs; we're adding new recyclable items. Some folks are looking at mattresses and furnishings, to get them back into the circular economy.

Some of the policy items we talked about today, I think, would be helpful too. A move to stronger producer responsibility, or more producer responsibility, would allow producers—as Mr. Goetz said—to implement programs that are maybe more efficient and more effective in capturing more materials and getting them into the circular economy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Earlier, you mentioned that you have been working to extend producer responsibility.

I will now ask Mr. Goetz a question.

First, you know that websites are one of the main sources of information. There is a lack of recent content on yours. The scourge of plastic bottles is a major issue.

You say that your members are committed to increasing the recycled content of plastic bottles in the coming years. In your documents, you do mention that this will be done in the coming years, but we agree that it could take a long time. Could you share the terms of these commitments and the implementation target dates?

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Goetz: Thank you for that. If any information is missing from our website, we'd be happy to provide that to the committee afterwards.

We generally rely on audited reports that are approved by provincial governments. For example, in British Columbia or in Quebec, through our recycling programs, we have to submit a report to the provincial government. It is audited first and then submitted to the provincial government, and they sign off on the recycling and collection numbers we are achieving.

To answer your question, we have programs in place in almost every province. Two examples I would talk about as far as where we're trying to achieve even higher targets are Ontario and Quebec.

In Ontario we advocated in favour of an 80% target for collection, which we hope is going to be included in draft regulation in Ontario.

• (1620)

The Chair: Unfortunately, we'll have to stop there, but you'll have a chance to provide that information in response to other questions.

I have good news, colleagues and witnesses. The Honourable Sonya Savage was able to connect.

Welcome, Minister.

Hon. Sonya Savage (Minister of Energy, Government of Alberta): I apologize for this. They said it was a technical infrastructure problem. It's probably our Government of Alberta platform with its firewalls. In any event, I've logged in on an iPhone—good old iPhone technology.

The Chair: It's great that you're here. We'll have you give your five minutes of opening comments, and then we'll go back to the questioning. We have to break for about 10 minutes for a vote, and then we'll all come back and finish off the meeting.

Go ahead, please.

Hon. Sonya Savage: Thank you. I'll try to be quick.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. It's a pleasure to be here on behalf of the Government of Alberta.

Our province has a long history of pairing responsible resource development and the development of our natural resources with sound environmental stewardship. When it comes to the plastics industry, that combination remains our primary focus, and we believe that it's the best long-term solution to the issue of plastic waste.

As a government, we recognize the immense danger that plastic waste can pose to the environment, not just in Canada but for the whole world. However, Alberta's position is quite easy to summarize. Plastic itself is not the problem—the problem is waste. For instance, in 2016, Environment and Climate Change Canada estimated that 86% of the plastics in our country were sent to the landfill. This represents not just an environmental waste, but an economic one as well. That same amount of waste could have been recycled and resold, with an estimated value of \$7.8 billion.

It is that future that we are pursuing, in coordination with our partners in industry, academia and environmental groups. Collectively, we need to capture that lost value and avoid the plastic waste that can harm our lands, oceans and waterways.

We understand that Alberta has a central role to play in the future of plastics in Canada. That's because we house the largest petrochemical manufacturing sector in Canada, and our goal is to be able to diversify our economy and to grow this industry further in the coming years.

When considering the effects of banning single-use plastics, please know that the decision will undoubtedly impact the future of Alberta's economy and environment. We expect the immediate impact of such a ban on our existing plastics manufacturing sector to be significant.

Alberta companies produce a wide variety of plastic products, including many multi-use plastics, and our single-use plastics will remain in demand in international markets. The Chemistry Industry Association of Canada estimates that between \$100 million to \$500 million in sales are at risk, representing between 500 and 2,000 jobs.

Our longer-term issues with the ban are of greater concern.

First, the opaque process by which plastics are being treated under the Canada Environmental Protection Act is troublesome. This approach, we believe, intrudes into provincial jurisdiction and overrides our responsibility to manage waste within our own province. If individual provinces wish to proceed with bans of materials that they view as harmful, that should remain a provincial responsibility. A federal ban announced through changes to a regulatory schedule is a one-size-fits-all approach that quite simply doesn't fit all needs. As we have seen during the COVID pandemic, plastics of all kinds are often vitally important to daily life. When it comes to the management of single-use plastics, provinces—and even municipalities—are in a better position to decide what should be allowed or banned.

More concerning is the long-term signal that this sends to our potential partners in building a truly circular economy for plastics. The Chemistry Industry Association of Canada again warns that there are significant risks to the larger plastics supply chain, especially resin producers in Alberta and Ontario.

Banning plastics outright instead of working with industry and consumers to establish the kinds of advanced recycling techniques and practices needed to push the sector forward, ironically, wastes an enormous opportunity for Canada. Establishing ourselves as leaders in plastics recycling, as Alberta intends to do, not only will take plastic out of landfills and oceans, but will provide much-needed jobs across a range of industries.

My colleague, the Minister of Environment and Parks, is overseeing the policy initiatives to lead the way in Alberta by bending the curve on plastic use towards a circular economy. We're in the process of introducing extended producer responsibility, EPR, which we believe is the most effective way to deal with plastic waste. EPR accounts for regional differences when implemented at the provincial level, while furthering collective action on reducing waste.

● (1625)

Going further and building on an innovative hub of recycling know-how and connecting it with the large-scale petrochemical manufacturing that we have available in Alberta gives us a unique opportunity. We are well positioned to become a global destination for green investors while simultaneously enhancing Canada's reputation as a steward for our planet's pristine environment.

That's the future that Alberta is trying to build, but such a move will be possible only with the coordinated efforts of industry, researchers and government. Banning plastics, with the opportunity to arbitrarily expand that ban to more items in the future, will instead remove the very investor interest that we need to build a positive future for plastics in Canada.

Here in Alberta, we're aiming to attract \$30 billion of new investments in the petrochemical sector over the next decade, and this ban reduces the attractiveness of Canada as an investment opportunity.

In summary, Alberta does not support the plastic ban as planned, not necessarily because of any immediate impacts on our industry or environment, but because it implies a short-term thinking that will be detrimental to the innovation needed to reduce plastic waste.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll continue finishing off our first six-minute round, with Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for their testimony so far today.

My first question is for Ms. Wallis.

We've heard from the plastics industry—and I think we heard some of this in the minister's comments a moment ago—that plastic isn't the problem but waste is.

I wonder if you could comment on this perspective on the issue and provide your view on it.

Ms. Ashley Wallis: For more than half a century, the plastics industry has been touting recycling as the solution to our plastic pollution crisis, yet globally, only 9% of plastic waste has been recycled and 91% has ended up in the environment. That is 5.7 billion tonnes of plastic. It's a huge amount.

Our recycling systems, as Mr. Lee was mentioning earlier, were never designed to handle the volume or complexity of the plastic materials on the market. I think it is short-sighted to assume that we could be able to handle this through recycling and that it is just a waste issue. Frankly, consumers have been told for years that if we just did a better job of putting stuff into the right bin and cleaning things before we put them into the bin, this wouldn't be a problem at all, but it obviously is.

I am particularly concerned about the recurring narrative about chemical recycling saving us from all of this, because the vast majority of chemical recycling systems that exist today are not actually turning plastic into new plastic. They are turning plastic into fuel, and that fuel is then burned, which means that plastics are really only a pit stop in a fossil fuel's existence from extraction to tail pipe.

The priority here really needs to be reducing plastic use overall, and an obvious place to start would be eliminating these unnecessary single-use plastics, including the ones that the government has proposed in its ban.

• (1630)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Picking up where you left off—the topic of the plastics proposed for the ban—I don't think anyone likes the idea of products being banned. It seems like a policy of last resort.

Why is it such an important piece of the puzzle when it comes to addressing the global plastic pollution problem?

Ms. Ashley Wallis: There are a few reasons. In general, the way we have looked at this problem in the past has been as a kind of end-of-pipe solution. We already have a bathtub overflowing with water, so let's get a mop, but we're not willing to turn off the tap.

Bans are an example of a way we could help reduce plastic use overall. That's important, because as I said in my opening remarks, the modelling shows that plastic production is expected to increase

significantly by 2040. If we don't meaningfully reduce that, all of the potential interventions we can put on the table will not be enough to stop the flow of plastic into our oceans.

Bans are a critical piece. They also signal that Canadians are unwilling to accept unnecessary single-use plastic; they prioritize plastic for the places in our society where they might have real value, for example, in the medical space.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: One of the other issues we've heard a lot of contention about from the plastics industry over the course of these hearings is the inclusion of plastic under CEPA's definition of toxic substances.

I'm sure you've followed this debate. Why do you feel it's appropriate—and I believe from your introductory remarks you indicated it was—that plastics be listed under CEPA's definition of toxic?

Ms. Ashley Wallis: I think plastic manufactured items absolutely meet the definition of toxic under CEPA. I'm not going to read the definition again because I know that Ms. Curran from the Environmental Law Centre at the University of Victoria already did that, but I want to reiterate that CEPA is the federal law that the government has available at its fingertips to regulate plastic production, use and disposal.

We've heard a lot from industry and other folks who have presented to the committee about how this shouldn't just be about bans; it should also be about recycled content requirements. It should be about maybe reuse or refill targets. Those are all things that can also happen under CEPA once this listing is final. Really this is a necessary step for the federal government to establish its jurisdiction and take appropriate actions to keep plastic out of the environment.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you. I will shift briefly to Ms. Wirsig.

We've heard the topic of fossil fuel subsidies already raised. Could you speak to the role that Canada's fossil fuel subsidies play in the plastic pollution problem?

Ms. Karen Wirsig: Unfortunately, Canadian public coffers are paying subsidies both for the production of plastics and also for these untested and, frankly, not environmentally sustainable processes to try to deal with plastics at the end of life, usually through some manner of burning them or thermally treating them and turning them, as Ms. Wallace mentioned, back into fuel. Fossil fuel subsidies are a much bigger problem than subsidies for plastics, but plastics should not be forgotten when we're talking about the need to transition away from subsidies and from carbon in general.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I was going to try to fit one more in.

The Chair: Unfortunately, Mr. Bachrach, you were already over six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That's okay. I appreciate it.

The Chair: I think we're going to cut everybody off for a few minutes, because it's time to vote. Our apologies to the witnesses, but we have to leave the call for, at most, 15 minutes. We have to vote with our iPhone voting apps and then come back.

I would ask that the committee members just put themselves on mute, stop the video and vote on their phones. Apparently, we can't start until the voting period is over. Once we have the result of the vote, we can all unmute and turn our cameras back on, and it will be seamless, if that's okay with everybody. I'll suspend the meeting for about 15 minutes, and again, apologies to the witnesses.

• (1630) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: We'll continue and start the second round of questioning. It's a five-minute round.

We'll start with Mr. Redekopp for five minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Redekopp.

• (1655)

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thanks to all the panel members for being here today.

I want to speak with you, Mr. Goetz. I think you probably deserve the gold star for the most recycling—and we've talked a lot about that today—at 75%, I think you said, in your industry.

I was looking on your website, and under the “Initiatives” section, you talk about the Canada Plastics Pact, and it makes note that your members are part of the Canada Plastics Pact, which is an industry-led initiative launched in 2018, well before the Liberals decided to come out and declare plastic as toxic.

In your opening statement it sounded like you were clearly suggesting to the committee that we stay the course rather than go down a magical Liberal red brick road.

I just want to ask: Do you believe that the Liberal government took into account the work that you and your partners have been doing with the Plastics Pact since 2018, prior to their recent announcement that plastics are suddenly toxic?

Mr. Jim Goetz: Many of our members, I will say—not all of them—are members of the Canada Plastics Pact, and it is an initiative that the Canadian Beverage Association is supporting.

This is a place where industry, recyclers, processors and even some environmental groups have come together and said, “Let's work together collaboratively to try to remove more plastic from the environment,” which is what we all want to do.

My only concern at the federal level, when it comes to the beverage sector in particular, which I represent, is that there is a bit of a lack of understanding about what goes on in every single province when it comes to beverage container recycling.

Again, we have programs in place in every province. Some are EPR and some are run by industry, which is, of course, what I think almost everyone around this table has said we need to support. Some are government controlled, which we are not as much in favour of. We want to take responsibility for our containers, but there needs to be collaboration around the fact that these files lie at the provincial level.

Obviously we appreciate the idea of harmonization on a national level; we would like that. It's hard to work in every province and every territory with a different program, but perhaps, through CCME, we really need to take that idea of harmonization to a new level. Simply having the federal government weigh in with new rules that are not coordinated at the provincial level, which is where waste and recycling is handled, is problematic.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: If I might ask that a different way, does the government's ban on plastics reflect the desires of your association?

Mr. Jim Goetz: No, it does not. Again, with the plastic we use in our industry, it's PET. I'm not going to get into technicalities; I'm not a scientist, but it is highly recyclable, recycled at high levels domestically and not shipped overseas, so we would ask the federal government to be very careful on putting rules in place that are not reflective of what is going on in the domestic market and some of the plastic markets here in Canada. Fully recognize that some plastics are much harder to recycle, but make sure to coordinate with the provinces on this in the programs that are already in place across every region in the country.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Going back to your website again, I noticed on that same Plastics Pact page that you referred to a Deloitte study that was undertaken for the Government of Canada. It talked about the economic risks and rewards of the approach of the pact, versus the government's outright ban.

Are you familiar with that? Can you briefly tell us if there is anything of value for us in that report?

Mr. Jim Goetz: My comment on that would be that the government, at one point, is saying it wants to ban certain products, but is also saying it wants to increase the circular economy. I think—and I'm sure we'll disagree with certain witnesses on this committee—that there is a real value there to try to build that circular economy.

In particular, jurisdictions—the Europeans, and even certain large jurisdictions in the United States, like California—are starting to talk about recycled PET content. Because we have fairly robust recycling programs here in Canada, that is a real opportunity for us if we are serious about building the circular economy instead of just banning material. There is an economic opportunity there.

• (1700)

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Could you provide that study to the committee, please?

Mr. Jim Goetz: Absolutely. We'll follow up on that tomorrow, a hundred per cent.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Saini now for five minutes.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you very much to all the witnesses for coming today.

Ms. Wallis, we've looked at the environmental impacts, but there's also the human impact, the terrestrial impact and the animal impact. We know there are long-term effects of bioaccumulation of microplastics in the food chain. What toxic effects of that apply to the animal world?

Ms. Ashley Wallis: If you really want to get into the deep science I would recommend Dr. Chelsea Rochman, who already spoke to the committee. She is an expert in all the current and upcoming science demonstrating impacts that microplastics have on wildlife, fish and potentially even us.

You brought up a great point about microplastics. Some microplastics are designed as microplastics. Those would be things like microbeads, which the federal government has already banned, but some microplastics come from the fragmentation of macroplastics. Larger plastic items, when left to wear in the environment, break into smaller pieces, and then those smaller pieces are easily consumed by wildlife. They're almost impossible to remove from the environment, and those are the kinds of plastics that are showing up inside our bodies.

I want to point out, and I know I mentioned it in my opening remarks, the study that recently found microplastics in human placenta, but there also was a recent study put out—pre-published, so it's still pending peer review—that found that microplastics impede our respiratory cells' ability to repair themselves, which is terrifying to begin with, but particularly terrifying in the middle of a respiratory pandemic, when as much as possible we want to make sure our respiratory systems are fully functional.

I think this is a new area of science. These two studies I just mentioned have come out in the last six months, since the federal government's science assessment on plastic pollution, and I am sure we are going to hear more and more of these kinds of stories. If we are following the precautionary principle, we need to do everything

we can right now to keep these plastics out of the environment and out of our bodies.

Mr. Raj Saini: Basically, what I'm hearing from you is that microplastics can affect the food chain, which will affect animals on one end, but also that our consumption and non-consumption of microplastics could also have a biological effect on our bodies.

Ms. Ashley Wallis: Microplastics can be ingested directly. Fish could ingest microplastics when they're eating something else. We could ingest microplastics by ingesting a fish that has microplastics in its tissue. We could also ingest microplastics directly from the air we breathe or the water we drink. These microplastics are everywhere, and as I said, there are definitely studies showing that they are having a negative impact on wildlife, including behavioural changes and changes in reproduction. We're just starting to hit the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the potential impacts on human health.

Mr. Raj Saini: I was reading an article in *Nature* on a study done at the University of Utah last year, and one of the findings was that they found nanoparticles in different parks, on different parts of our Earth, being carried by the air or being aerosolized. Can you comment on that?

Ms. Ashley Wallis: Yes, I have read that study as well. What's happening is the plastics are breaking down into really small pieces. Nanoplastics are smaller than microplastics, and plastics were showing up in wild areas in the United States, for example, far away from civilization, suggesting that these plastics were being picked up by the wind and the air and being redistributed. Plastic has literally been found everywhere on the planet, including far Arctic regions and Mount Everest. We know these plastics are not just being deposited in these locations as litter. They're ending up in these areas because they are travelling on ocean currents and winds, etc.

Mr. Raj Saini: It's not just an ocean problem, then.

• (1705)

Ms. Ashley Wallis: No, it is a ubiquitous global environmental problem.

Mr. Raj Saini: Mr. Lee, very quickly, what would the municipal recycling programs look like under an extended producer responsibility regime?

Mr. Norman Lee: I can give you the example in Ontario, and I think it could be a good example. The province would set targets for the collection of various materials and they would, of course, oversee and enforce us. The producers would have the ability to implement that and achieve those targets generally as they see fit, as long as they meet accessibility targets for all people. Then producers perhaps would hire municipalities to provide service to them, or they would hire private sector [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to provide service to them. They would collect, they would communicate with the public and they would report on their, hopefully, success.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't have much time, Mr. Goetz, but I would like you to finish the answer you started to give me earlier, at the end of my previous turn.

You said that there were higher targets in Ontario, set at 80%. What is the figure for Quebec?

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Goetz: Thank you for following up. I really appreciate that, because I was cut off a bit there.

I'll be very quick. Our target for beverage collection in Québec is 75% by 2025 and 90% by 2030.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Okay.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Goetz: We're already hitting about 75%, but the province, working with industry, has announced an expansion of the deposit program in Quebec. We are currently working with the provincial government on building that expansion. You'll see announcements about that coming out in the very near future, but that program is going to be dramatically expanded.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Okay. I have to stop you there, because I have only two and a half minutes.

I would like to point out that your website is only in English, which makes it a little difficult for us.

I have a question for Ms. Wirsig from Environmental Defence Canada.

Ms. Wirsig, you talked a lot about the just transition for workers, which I really appreciate. Actually, 86% of Canadians support a national ban on single-use plastics. We heard the honourable minister talk about job losses. You talked about a just transition. Could you elaborate on that?

Ms. Karen Wirsig: Thank you for your question. I will answer it in English.

[*English*]

It's a little easier after all the research I've done in English.

We've heard a lot in this study about potential job losses, and we've heard some today about potential job losses related to the bans on single-use plastics. We would argue that there are immensely more job opportunities available with getting away from single-use plastics, getting to the manufacturing of more durable containers, including durable plastic containers, and setting up reuse systems.

I believe the witness from Recyc-Québec talked about that last week; that is, about the potential of job creation through other kinds of programs that are key to a green economy. They also provide, if I could say, safe and toxic-free jobs to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Bachrach.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a question for Mr. Lee.

Mr. Lee, we've heard from the industry about the promise of chemical recycling.

Can you share your perspective on the potential of chemical recycling from a municipal view and what you see any of the challenges being?

Mr. Norman Lee: We have been tracking chemical recycling and other advanced recycling technologies over the past couple of years. They hold some promise or potential, but in practice they're still not there.

We have worked with some other municipalities on some pilots to recycle plastics in these new advanced technologies. They're still very sensitive to any contamination on the plastic stream and to any changes in moisture content. It's going to take some work to get them to the point where they can be developed at scale to tackle this problem.

Alberta has a very large chemical facility in Edmonton. They tend to begin producing ethanol or methanol-type products, or, as some of the witnesses have said, some fuel products, to get their chemical reactions going well. Scientifically, I'm told, they can eventually switch over to producing new plastic polymers that could be used, but that has to be proven still.

● (1710)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you.

You mentioned earlier that one of the challenges for municipalities and local governments is the lack of consistency in recycling standards from community to community.

We heard earlier some concerns about a one-size-fits-all approach. Are there times when a consistent approach federally makes sense and would maximize our waste diversion and recycling rates?

The Chair: Please be brief.

Mr. Norman Lee: Yes, I think it would. Certainly provincially it would help, and federally as well. It would help especially producers and organizations like the members that Mr. Goetz represents. They need scale to achieve some of their objectives and to pay for the investments they would have to make.

The Chair: We'll have to stop there.

I believe the next questioner is Mr. Jeneroux. Go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A number of my questions are for Minister Savage, going back to some of the testimony she gave a while back.

Based on some of that testimony, I would tend to think the Government of Alberta wasn't necessarily consulted on this ban. However, if you were consulted, were the recommendations provided from the provincial government to the federal government followed?

Hon. Sonya Savage: To start with, we're concerned with the overreach—the overextension of the federal government's reach into provincial jurisdiction, which is in the area of waste management—by designating plastics as a toxic substance. It really goes right to the heart of what is provincial jurisdiction.

The recently introduced Bill C-28 changes don't change the position that the provinces have. I think this position is shared by a number of other provinces. My colleague, Minister Nixon, our environment minister, has signed a joint letter with his colleagues from Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, addressing some of those concerns.

Fundamentally, provinces are the main jurisdiction, the main actors, in any sort of plastics product management. It's within provincial jurisdiction that each of our provinces is taking action to reduce plastic waste. We all are taking this seriously and taking steps to reduce the waste. We don't want to see the federal government duplicating the outcomes of provincial programs. We want to continue working with the federal government, but the current proposed approach to plastic products interferes with the outcomes in our programs here in our provinces.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Right. You kind of answered my second question, which I was going to tie in to some of Minister Nixon's letter with his colleagues.

Maybe we could talk about what you just hit on in your testimony. The federal announcement on plastics was made, from my recollection, the day after Alberta announced its plan to grow the economy by becoming a recycling hub. Can you tell us again how the government's plastics ban proposal would affect the Alberta economy, and in particular how it would impact jobs that could be lost in the province?

• (1715)

Hon. Sonya Savage: I guess there are two areas there, really, that it would impact. That's with our petrochemical sector and with our goal to become a global centre for a plastics circular economy. It impacts both areas. Both of those areas are key factors in our natural gas strategy, which is part of our diversification strategy in Alberta and our efforts for economic recovery post-pandemic. It really does strike at what we're trying to do in Alberta to diversify and to recover.

From the petrochemical perspective alone, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, this is potentially a \$30-billion industry by 2030. We know that the global demand for petrochemicals is growing and companies are looking to invest. They have billions of dollars to invest. We believe this could drive investment away from Canada into other jurisdictions. Companies will look for jurisdictions that are the most competitive and that are not hostile to the business the company is trying to do. We're concerned that it will drive that investment to jurisdictions that don't have the same high standards we have here in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It will drive it to jurisdictions that aren't trying to establish a circular economy.

We see that as being really concerning with respect to what we're trying to do to diversify our economy and attract investment. The same goes for our efforts to set up a circular economy and become a North American centre of excellence. There is a huge opportunity there as well to reuse the plastic waste.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Can I sneak one last one in, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: We're pretty much out of time. You can sneak in a comment, maybe.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Okay. I'll ask a “yes or no” question, then, Mr. Chair, if that's fine with you.

The Chair: Okay. Ask a yes or no question. I hate to tell the minister from Alberta that she has to limit herself to “yes” or “no”, but anyway, go ahead.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Right. I'll do my best.

Would you agree that the label of “toxic” under the CEPA is unnecessary?

Hon. Sonya Savage: It's absolutely unnecessary.

The Chair: That sounds like agreement to me.

We'll go to Mr. Bittle now.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Since Mr. Jeneroux brought up the subject of toxic substances, I'll speak about another toxic substance.

Minister Savage, this isn't a trick question, because I enjoy the products myself. Have you ever had a soft drink or a beer?

Hon. Sonya Savage: Have I ever had a soft drink or a beer? Yes.

Mr. Chris Bittle: In those products—again, products that I enjoy and my doctor would probably tell me to drink less of—there is a toxic product under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, called carbon dioxide. It's toxic.

I see that you're a member from the Calgary area, and I notice that there are a lot of breweries in the Calgary area. Has the toxic designation of carbon dioxide impacted the beverage industry in Alberta? It hasn't seemed to in Ontario, but I'm curious as to whether it has impacted the beverage industry in Alberta.

Hon. Sonya Savage: I think you'd probably have to ask the beverage industry that question. I know I—

Mr. Chris Bittle: As a member for Calgary.... I'm looking at the Calgary beer map, and I see dozens of breweries that have popped up in the Calgary area. Despite this being a toxic substance within a beverage that we consume, isn't it fair to say that consumers know that carbon dioxide in a beer or a soft drink is safe compared to if I filled this room up with carbon dioxide—then it's toxic? Isn't that the same with plastic?

I appreciate the talking points—I'm a politician myself—but isn't it fair to say that, within the definition of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, plastic is a toxic substance similar to carbon dioxide, but that consumers and industry are smart enough to know the difference?

Hon. Sonya Savage: I think you're comparing apples to oranges here, and your analogy completely fails.

What we're dealing with here is trying to attract international investment into a sector that those companies can invest in anywhere in the world. The reputational harm that they look at with regard to labelling plastics as toxic.... Those companies can invest anywhere on the planet, so I think you're trying to compare apples to oranges.

What we're dealing with here is international investment that can pick and choose jurisdictions to invest in. What we're going to do and what we're going to see is that investment going to other places in the world and not to Canada, certainly not to Alberta, where we're trying to diversify our economy and attract new investment outside of oil and gas. We're able to do that in a way that has a low carbon footprint and is at the highest environmental standards. That investment is going to go somewhere else, so it's an entirely different analogy from beer and soft drinks and consumer choice.

● (1720)

Mr. Chris Bittle: I appreciate that, Minister.

I will go to Ms. Wallis and Ms. Wirsig.

Am I comparing apples to oranges? I wonder if you can respond to the minister, because we've heard these talking points from the plastics industry a lot.

Are consumers and sophisticated industry, from your standpoint, able to deal with this designation? It seems that the plastics industry is suggesting that we're not smart enough to understand, even though we drink products, consume products and have products in our home that are labelled "toxic"?

Ms. Ashley Wallis: I'll jump in first, if that's okay.

I agree. I think Canadians are smart enough to be able to understand this nuance. I also think that industry is smart enough to be able to understand this nuance. Industry has told us about the huge innovative capacity it has.

We also know, as I mentioned earlier, that rules like this are coming down the pipe in numerous jurisdictions around the world, so this isn't going to be Canada as a lone actor while every other place in the world is super excited to increase plastic production and use. Plastic is on its way out, and Canada really needs to get in front of a circular economy that is focused on using plastic when absolutely necessary and otherwise transitioning to other materials.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Ms. Wirsig, please.

Ms. Karen Wirsig: I think you won't be surprising, shocking or scaring any Canadian when you tell them that plastic is toxic to the environment. They've been telling us that; they've been telling pollsters that, and they've been telling politicians that. It is the most evident thing that we can say about plastic right now, that plastic pollution is toxic to the environment. This is not something that will surprise anybody.

The toxic label under CEPA is a legal question, and it's not going to be labelled on any materials unless the federal government ever chose to do that, which we don't believe is in the plan.

It's a necessary step to make the regulations that Canadians are asking for, and it is perhaps a signal to investors. Hopefully, as we've mentioned before, the green transition will also be a signal to investors to have clean, carbon-free production and manufacturing in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to the third round.

I had Mr. Albas, but he switched with Mr. Jeneroux, so I don't know if it's Mr. Albas or Mr. Jeneroux who wants to speak. Maybe you could inform me.

Mr. Dan Albas: If you wouldn't mind, Mr. Chair, I'll start and then I'll pass it over to Mr. Albas.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Dan Albas: I would like to go back to the minister.

Minister, you were presented here with an apples/oranges kind of presentation by MP Bittle.

What I'm hearing from industry is the fact that the term "manufactured plastic" could refer to any type of plastic that shares the same qualities. Under CEPA, by being designated under schedule 1 as toxic, it's not only negativity to the consumer, but, in fact, there is no certainty or scientific basis that an application being used for a single-use form of plastic—let's say, a syringe to give a vaccination—has the same molecules as some of the products the government is banning.

From a business perspective, investors would say they don't know what is going to be regulated or in what circumstances, because with science you can't tell the difference between the two. That sends a chill on investment.

Hon. Sonya Savage: I would agree with that. We've certainly heard from investors. Of course, we're trying to attract \$30 billion of investment to Alberta, and we have a lot of economic and competitive advantages with a skilled workforce and an industry that's committed to carbon reduction.

We've heard from investors that there is a great cloud of uncertainty in Canada over what this means. That's piled on top of a lot of other uncertainty that's out there. Remember, we're still dealing with Bill C-69, which gives us regulatory uncertainty on even getting a project through a regulatory process. You add on this piece of legislation and the labelling that plastic is toxic, and it adds on a whole new layer of uncertainty. Again, those investors have choices of where to invest in other jurisdictions.

In fact, we've seen a huge investment of a petrochemical facility going into Pennsylvania. That facility would have been nice to have in Canada, because there were jobs. To give you some perspective, the opportunity in Alberta for jobs is, we believe, to create 90,000 direct and indirect jobs over construction and operation. Those are 90,000 jobs that Alberta desperately needs, and those are 90,000 jobs that Canada desperately needs. They are also 90,000 jobs that could go to some other jurisdiction with lower environmental standards.

I would agree with what you just said, and it's a very significant concern for our province.

• (1725)

Mr. Dan Albas: At the last meeting we had Professor Curran, who said that designating this into CEPA allows the government to regulate, and regulation can take many forms, including bans, such as we've seen from this government.

Other witnesses today have said that there could be other forms of regulation once this gets put in. That kind of regulatory uncertainty, especially considering you've said that primarily provinces have been the ones to regulate on this and know exactly the challenges by both industry and by reusers and processors of plastics in the municipalities....

Do you feel that this could not just result in an investment chill, but also lead to "who's on first?" in dealing with plastics?

Hon. Sonya Savage: I would also agree with that, because, as I said earlier, we're trying to start a plastic circular economy. We see a tremendous opportunity there as well. This is going to create uncertainty in being able to achieve our goals. For instance, we know that the global demand for these types of recoverable waste materi-

als has been reduced and there are fewer countries accepting waste. North America has that problem. We believe we can be a centre of excellence here in the province of Alberta. Again, much-needed jobs and much-needed diversification are required.

This piece of legislation and uncertainty puts a cloud on whether we can achieve that type of circular economy, create the plastic feedstock to start a circular economy and achieve our objectives there. It creates a tremendous amount of uncertainty. That's why we've seen five provinces jointly sign a letter, reminding the federal government that this is provincial jurisdiction and that the provinces are acting. It's not a failure of provinces to act. You have at least five provinces that are taking initiatives.

The Chair: Mr. Baker, go ahead.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of our witnesses for being here.

I would honestly love to ask all of your questions, and of course I won't have time to do that.

Specifically, Mr. Goetz, we worked together well in the past on other issues, and I hope you won't hold it against me if I direct my questions elsewhere.

Mr. Lee, I am not a University of Guelph alum, and I hope you won't hold that against me. I'll try not to hold it against you. My questions will be for you.

There are a number of insights that I drew from your presentation. I took away that we can take many steps regulating and modifying the materials we use in packaging, but we do little to help the environment if we don't do a few things.

One is creating standards that must be adhered to regarding what can be recycled and what can be composted. A second is communicating clearly, in a consistent fashion, what can be recycled and composted and what can't, so that consumers can make the right choices when purchasing and trying to recycle their compost, and so that processing facilities, like the ones you run, can sort and process recyclable and compostable materials effectively. A third is equipping our processing facilities, whether that's recycling or composting, to be able to manage that waste appropriately. Those are some of the key take-aways from your presentation.

Are these the key points I should take away?

• (1730)

Mr. Norman Lee: Yes, absolutely, they are. Whatever the government implements, as far as legislation and regulations, it has to be implemented in practice and must be practical. People need to understand what to do and what bin to put different packages and products into, and we need to be able to upgrade our facilities and invest in them. You're absolutely right.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I have a two-part question.

What are the consequences for compostable materials entering your processing facilities for municipal recycling systems like the ones you run, but also for the environment?

Mr. Norman Lee: If compostable plastic products and alternatives like that end up in our blue box recycling facility, they'll probably end up as contamination in many other streams. Sorting is never perfect in these streams. For example, if you combine compostable plastic bags with fossil fuel plastic bags, they're no longer recyclable if there's enough of them in there.

It's the same thing if you put these compostable products and packages into our composting system. If they don't fully break down then, they contaminate the finished compost and make it unsellable.

For the environment, most of these products coming into our system now, as our facilities are designed, would end up pulled out as residue and sent to landfill. They would not be diverted without additional investments in our facilities.

Mr. Yvan Baker: And that, of course, is harmful to the environment.

You proposed a number of solutions to the problem, and I realize I have under two minutes left, so I'll ask for your response to be as concise as you can, Mr. Lee.

One of those solutions is producer responsibility for compostable products. What should those responsibilities include?

Mr. Norman Lee: They should be the same as any other producer responsibility program. They should be responsible for operating and funding the program to meet high targets.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Another one you recommended is mandatory recycled content requirements. What do you think should be included in those requirements?

Mr. Norman Lee: That's going to drive demand for the recycled commodities to be collected and produced. One of the things is that there should be a minimum post-consumer amount in there to make sure that the materials that consumers put in the blue box get recycled back into products.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Another one you recommended is federal programs to support investment in processing infrastructure from compostable products and packaging. Can you describe how you'd recommend those programs be designed or what they should look like?

Mr. Norman Lee: There are a couple of options from the municipal perspective. We're quite familiar with stimulus-type funding, where the federal, provincial and municipal governments all contribute, so we'd be in favour of those as long as all three parties agree.

There are also direct grants, perhaps as part of a climate change plan. We've taken advantage of some of those in the past, so those work for us.

My understanding on the private side is that for those service providers to make investments, they are pretty receptive to some tax programs that incentivize investments.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baker. Your time is up.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I don't want to lose some of my time by pointing this out, but the interpreter tells us that Mr. Lee's microphone was too close.

The Chair: Yes, I noticed the same thing.

Mr. Lee, please raise your microphone a little.

You have the floor, Ms. Pauzé.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you.

My question is for the Honourable Minister of Energy for Alberta.

You talked at length about the fact that other countries have less stringent standards. Ms. Wallis, from Oceana Canada, was saying that the European Union and other countries have increasingly stringent standards. I was wondering if we should compare ourselves to some of the African countries or to China, for example. But I think that's sort of a flawed comparison.

You also said that recycling is a provincial responsibility. I totally agree with that, but Mr. Goetz said that the targets are higher now in Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba. Shouldn't all the other provinces have higher targets, when Alberta seems to be leaning towards standards that are lower than those of other countries?

According to the Alberta Plastics Recycling Association, Alberta manufacturers are not required to contribute financially to recovery. The Recycling Council of Alberta says Alberta will continue to be the largest per capita producer of this waste in the country if nothing changes.

Could you talk about the possibility of that changing? In that regard, you are talking about working with industry, but also with those other organizations I just mentioned.

• (1735)

[*English*]

Hon. Sonya Savage: I'm sorry. I'm having some technical difficulties here, and I think it's because I'm on a phone for the translation feed. I didn't hear a thing in either language, so I missed...

The Chair: We're having problems. It's obviously not your fault.

[*Translation*]

You can continue, Ms. Pauzé, but maybe you'll have to go to someone else, because Ms. Savage can't hear the interpretation.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, I have a suggestion. Perhaps the translator who translated into English simultaneously with Monique could just pose the question in English to the minister.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Yes, that's a good idea.

[*English*]

The Chair: I don't know how we do that technically. Does the interpreter just cut in, or how does that work?

Madam Clerk, is it possible to have the interpreter—

Ms. Elizabeth May: He's doing it now.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Ms. May.

[*English*]

Hon. Sonya Savage: I'm not sure if others can hear anything. I still can't hear anything.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: It still doesn't seem to work.

Ms. Pauzé, could you ask another witness a question? The last comment will not be subtracted from your time.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: In that case, I'll ask Ms. Wirsig one last question.

As a comparison, it is said that some countries have fewer regulations. However, does this mean that Canada must follow those countries?

In Canada, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec are making an extra effort. It seems to me that all the provinces should make an extra effort, based on a country that has regulations.

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Wirsig: I'm not sure Canada can really boast of having better environmental protections than many countries out there. We've not been a leader on climate change. We're not a leader on plastics. The Alberta government has just handed more than \$400 million to a virgin plastics producer that will make polypropylene out of propane. I'm not sure why we consider that to be an environmentally friendly economic development project.

If we can regulate proper reuse and recycling of plastics, I would suggest that this plant could contribute to durable plastic products that could be used for reuse systems, but unless we have a regulatory framework—which currently doesn't exist in Alberta, Ontario or Quebec, to be frank—that won't happen. We will just be producing virgin polypropylene that will end up in the world's oceans. It will end up in our landfills. It will be burned in the Edmonton Enerkem facility and we will end up breathing in dioxins and furans that are created through the burning of plastics.

We can live up to environmental standards only if we create those standards. That's why we applaud what the federal government is doing. It's trying to create some standards around plastics in Canada.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Could the clerk supply the question from Madame Pauzé in writing to the minister? I think it was a really good question and it would be great to get a written response.

The Chair: Sure. Can the clerk work with Madame Pauzé to craft the question and then the minister can respond in writing?

Hon. Sonya Savage: Yes, that works with me.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Yes, of course. It is a good idea.

The Chair: That's great.

We'll now go to Mr. Bachrach for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question for Ms. Wirsig.

We've heard a lot of talk about the circular economy. My understanding is that if we move successfully to a circular economy, there is going to be significantly less demand for virgin resin, which is used to make plastic. That has implications for employment.

Could you offer your thoughts on the role the federal government should play in ensuring a just transition for workers currently involved in that industry?

Ms. Karen Wirsig: Through you, Mr. Chair, the federal government needs to ensure that Canada's economy will be up to supporting workers in the green transition. For what that means in concrete terms, Environmental Defence has worked with economist Jim Stanford on a report that I'm happy to share with the committee.

It's actually not a very complicated transition, because so many jobs are created in Canada all the time. The service industry creates lots of jobs. With reuse systems, we're talking about creating lots of jobs through reuse and repair systems and those kinds of things.

The circular economy will create jobs, but we need to transition workers from what stands to be a stranded economy involved in the carbon economy. We will risk stranding workers and stranding huge amounts of infrastructure and capital in that industry. This is what investment analysts are warning investors about right now.

We need to build the transition and ensure that older workers have an opportunity to retire with dignity and that younger workers get the training they need to shift industries if necessary. We need to put all that wonderful Alberta know-how—the technology, the logistics, the engineering and the maintenance—to work in industries that build our economy for the green future.

We need to put workers first in that priority list and shareholders second.

The Chair: You have time for a 15-second comment, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I actually have a quick question for Mr. Goetz.

Do any of your members currently engage in providing reusable beverage containers?

Mr. Jim Goetz: Our packaging is Tetra Pak, aluminum and PET, recycled at very high levels.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Ms. McLeod for five minutes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Chair. Thank you to all the witnesses.

Chair, just to make sure I don't erode Mr. Jeneroux's time—I want to share my time with him—would you cut me off at two and a half minutes? That will save me from what happened with Mr. Albas.

I'm going to start with Minister Savage.

You talked about both sides of the equation, both the petrochemical and the opportunity to become world leaders in the circular economy. I'm just trying to remember, but do not recall whether you have some significant first nations' partnerships in these jobs and opportunities.

Hon. Sonya Savage: We set up a Crown corporation called AIOC, the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, and in every major project we're encouraging indigenous ownership and indigenous equity, whether it's a natural resource project or in the petrochemical industry. In fact, we just recently announced participation in a natural gas processing facility, Cascade, in which there was significant indigenous equity. They would be eligible for the petrochemical sector and to be participants, to be owners, to be equity owners in the plastics circular economy.

• (1745)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Great. We know, as we strive to create equal economic opportunity, that Alberta is leaps and bounds ahead in that area.

What I worry about is this banning and perhaps the extension of bans. On international exports, do you have any quick comments in terms of how you might worry about what happens to products that are perfectly legal, for example, in the U.S. but that, because of Canada's moving in this direction, might create some problems for your industries?

The Chair: As Mr. Jeneroux's advocate, I must tell you you have 25 seconds.

Hon. Sonya Savage: Yes, we would have concerns. I think that would drive investment in petrochemical facilities and other facilities into other jurisdictions, just because of the uncertainty. The manufacturing would still happen, just not in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With friends like you, I don't know....

I quickly want to get a question to the Beverage Association, but before I do, some of the comments made by Environmental Defence Canada blow my mind. They want to support their workers, and they've heard about all the work Alberta is doing to transition workers, and yet they support this plastic ban. Again, I just want to get that comment on the record.

To the Canadian Beverage Association, Mr. Goetz, thank you so much for joining us here today. Let's talk a bit about the circular economy, if we can, how beverage container recycling relates to that, and maybe even what's needed to increase beverage container recycling rates in order to get us to that. If you could expand that argument for us, that would be great.

Mr. Jim Goetz: I just want to go back to a comment that was made earlier by the honourable member from Quebec. I left Alberta out of the comments before about recycling rates, but when it comes to beverage containers, Alberta actually has one of the highest, if not the highest, collection and recycling rates in Canada. That's just a fact, and it's backed up by the provincial government.

To the question on the circular economy, I live in downtown Toronto. I know, for example, that there are recycling companies that are on the very edge of Toronto that want to collect and buy from the City of Toronto every piece of PET plastic they can possibly buy in order to produce it, recycle it and sell it into the Canadian and North American markets. This is a real opportunity, especially, quite frankly, as governments move toward recycled PET content and recycled plastic content in material.

This is an opportunity. It's a huge opportunity for Canada. I would say we are way ahead of the United States on this—on the processing, on the marketing and what we're collecting—and I think we really need to harness that opportunity.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That was my only question. I'll cede back my time.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Did you cede it to me? Just checking.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Yes, directly to Ms. May.

Mr. Dan Albas: I think he wanted to cede it to me, because then I could apologize once again for being so uncharitable and irresponsible and taking up so much time.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: I don't think there's any time left now.

The Chair: We're going to Ms. Saks now.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Albas, while you are ceding time and being apologetic, thank you for making sure I have mine as well.

We've talked a lot about costs. We've talked about the cost to industry, and we've talked about the cost of jobs. The minister herself referenced a potential loss of \$500 million in sales by the potential uncertainties of labelling plastic as toxic.

I'd like to direct this to Ms. Wallis and Ms. Wirsig.

What's the economic cost if we don't do this?

Ms. Ashley Wallis: According to the federal government's own assessment, there's nine billion dollars' worth of plastic pollution, plastic littered or plastic in landfill every year, which means that it is plastic that we are creating, using once most of the time and then disposing of. There's a huge opportunity if we can do a better job of either reusing those plastic materials or actually effectively recycling them in a closed-loop system.

Then there are also the costs that are hard to articulate right now in terms of the financial costs to our health care system should these plastics prove to actually be harmful to our health—since we know we are ingesting them—as well as the impacts on our fisheries and our oceans as we continue to inundate these ecosystems with plastic trash.

• (1750)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: With the costs of \$500 million in sales versus \$9 billion in economic costs in addition to health costs, I think the math's pretty clear.

Ms. Wirsig, did you want to add to that?

Ms. Karen Wirsig: Maybe Mr. Lee would be better positioned to speak to this, but I can tell you that Ontario municipalities alone spend \$150 million on the blue box program. That is to try to deal with the recycling of materials, including plastics, which, as he pointed out, often contaminate other waste streams, including both the recycling stream and the composting stream.

Right now, without acting—without doing the kinds of things he's suggesting with better definitions, without putting in producer responsibility and without banning those difficult to recycle items—basically we're going to see rising costs to the municipalities to deal with the mess and the rising costs of pollution.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: There's one more cost I'd like to wrap my head around if we can. Perhaps Mr. Lee can best answer this.

What's the cost of landfilling single-use plastics?

Mr. Norman Lee: Right now our cost of landfilling in Peel region is about \$70 per tonne. That's maybe on the low end, but typical for landfilling costs in Ontario.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: How much landfill costs are you, just even in your own region, dealing with on an annual basis?

Mr. Norman Lee: Right now we send about half of our waste to landfills, so about 250,000 tonnes. I'm not good at math, but if you multiply that by \$70 it gives you a ballpark. It's a big number.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: I'm sure we can square that out a little later. Thank you for that.

My next question is for Ms. Wallis again, if I can shift back to her.

We talked about plastics being unfavourable and toxic and not good for us on many levels of the food chain and our health. What substitutes would be most favourable?

Ms. Ashley Wallis: As much as possible we want to be moving away from single use altogether, so I am not super keen to give an-

other recommendation for a single-use product for some of the reasons that Mr. Lee brought up. Switching to supposed compostable materials presents new challenges to our waste systems. I think really what we want to do here as much as possible is transition to reusable containers, especially when it comes to packaging and single-use products.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Okay. I have one last question to interject on my time.

I grocery shop. I'm a mom. It gives me anxiety—Ms. Wirsig mentioned that—I am one of those people.

In addition to the six items that we have on the list, is there anything else that you would potentially like to add, for the record, that we should be considering?

Ms. Ashley Wallis: Oh my goodness. There are so many things. I am also a mom who gets very anxious when I go grocery shopping, with all the plastic.

My top items would be single-use coffee cups and lids, because we know they're so challenging to recycle and they are consistently found in the environment.

I would like the government to do a full assessment of cigarette butts and alternatives to them, because we know they are also one of the most commonly found littered items in the environment and are contaminated with toxic chemicals from cigarette smoke.

Another is all forms of polystyrene, because it fragments into small pieces and ends up all the places it isn't supposed to end up. I would love to see a ban on that.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: That's perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: That's it for our meeting today.

I thank the witnesses for their insights and answers to the excellent questions from all the members.

We have one more meeting left in this study. On Monday, we will be having a steering committee meeting to try to regroup and set a direction for the next few weeks, because there's a lot coming at us.

Thank you to the clerk, the analysts and the support staff in the House of Commons. I don't think I've forgotten anyone to thank.

It was a great meeting. We've had some really good meetings as part of this study.

Again, thank you to the witnesses and Minister Savage. It was nice to have you with us today.

We'll all see each other soon enough.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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