



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Health

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 018

Friday, February 12, 2021

Chair: Mr. Ron McKinnon



Standing Committee on Health

Friday, February 12, 2021

• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody. As we know, the weather across the country is varied, but we're here today and ready to do some good work.

Welcome to meeting number 18 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health. The committee is meeting today as requested per Standing Order 106(4) and a letter dated February 9 by four members of the committee to discuss their request to undertake a briefing on the emergence of COVID-19 variants in Canada.

Ms. Rempel, I believe it's your motion, if you wish to move it. I believe we all have copies of the letter, so I don't think you need to read it unless you wish to.

Please go ahead.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

This has been another week in the health committee during the pandemic, and there have been big changes. In the last week, a few concerning things have happened. First of all, we have had more reports of the British variant in Canada, and I will remind colleagues that this variant was detected in a very tragic and severe outbreak in a Barrie area long-term care facility. Through that tragedy, I think we all saw what this variant could do in Canada.

The South African variant has also been detected in Canada. I think a lot of Canadians are bearing with these long dark days that are cold, but they're also bearing with, in most parts of the country, a second significant lockdown. With provinces looking at potentially lifting some of these restrictions, I think it's incumbent upon our committee to get a briefing on some very pertinent technical information.

In the last week, countries around the world have started to report their concern with this, particularly regarding the ability of domestic vaccination programs to outpace the spread of the variant. Without getting overly partisan here, I think everybody would agree that Canada is behind the rest of the world right now in terms of vaccinating our population.

CNN is reporting on Canada's vaccination status. We have less than 3% of our population vaccinated, while the Americans are at over 10% now, on track to have over 150 million people vaccinated within the first 100 days of President Biden's administration. The U.K. is at 20%.

I think we really need to know a few things. We need to know what the federal government is doing to detect and monitor variants and how they're communicating with the provincial governments on this.

With regard to the efficacy of our vaccine portfolio, in terms of when these vaccines are scheduled to be approved, or the assumptions, we know that the regulator does that. Politicians don't do that, but we need to know what assumptions the government is making with regard to approval of different vaccine candidates in the context of their efficacy, including against some of these variants, particularly given that epidemiologists around the world are concerned that these variants could become dominant strains. I know that the Americans are particularly concerned that the British variant could become the dominant strain by the middle of March, which is why they're accelerating their vaccination plan.

I'm looking at reports. There are concerns. I know there are different schools of thought. I've seen different reports in the last week about whether or not the AstraZeneca vaccine is effective against the South African variant. It's incumbent upon the health committee, to put it mildly, to understand what the federal government is doing. There hasn't been a lot of information from our government put forward yet with regard to these issues, and I would hope that we could all ask the federal government if it has put sufficient resources in place to monitor these issues and what the curve is, or what it's anticipating in terms of our capacity to vaccinate the population versus its modelling for the spread of the variant.

That was the genesis of using Standing Order 106(4). I know that with Family Day on Monday, we weren't scheduled to meet until Friday next week, but every day counts right now, and our committee is in the belly of the beast.

For the record, Chair, just so that it is moved according to all procedure here, I move:

That the committee invite the following representatives from the Public Health Agency of Canada to give a joint presentation of no more than 15 minutes:

Roman Szumski, Senior Vice President of the Vaccine Acquisition Branch

Gina Charos and/or Stephen Bent, Director General level official for the Centre for Immunization and Respiratory Infectious Diseases

Bersabel Ephrem, Director General of the Centre for Communicable Diseases and Infection Control,

Cindy Evans, Acting Vice President of the Emergency Management Branch

Kim Elmslie, Vice President of the Immunization Branch

That Dr. Caroline Quach-Thanh, Chair of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization be invited to give a presentation of no more than 7 minutes;

• (1110)

That the above witnesses be asked to present on the following:

- a. current outbreaks, occurrences, and modelling for COVID-19 variant spread in Canada as it relates to projected vaccination rollout timelines;
- b. capacity to surveil the emergence, prevalence, and spread of variants;
- c. current federal government assumptions regarding vaccine effectiveness on variants in the context of the federal government's vaccine portfolio;
- d. Canada's procurement of variant related booster shots;

That the witnesses remain available for question rounds after their presentations, that the meeting be no less than two hours duration, and that it be held no later than February 19, 2021.

I have a few things to say to, hopefully, pre-emptively answer questions colleagues might have.

We've asked for specific director general-level persons within the Public Health Agency of Canada, because I'd like to get more technical-level information than what is typically provided at high-level media briefings. This is why we'd like to have representatives who we know are actually doing the technical modelling and the technical work right now on the ground.

Chair, with regard to putting the time limits on the presentations of 15 minutes and seven minutes, we've asked for a lot of witnesses, and we don't want to eat up the whole two-hour meeting with presentations. We would hope that the people who are requested to come to committee will be able to provide written briefs to the committee in both official languages prior to the committee meeting as well.

Really, what I'm trying to get at here is information. Beyond the high-level messaging that reporters and parliamentarians are getting on a daily basis, I really want to know what the federal government is doing with regard to this. I've also heard from provincial colleagues across the country that they would like to hear this as well.

I really think that this is where we need to be managing to as a committee. I think the context of the rest of our COVID-19 study also needs to be urgently framed out into this information, given the level of urgency that has been expressed by media and by epidemiologists around the world and the fact that, frankly, putting it mildly, we are behind in vaccinating Canadians. Given that provinces are looking at lifting provincial restrictions in the coming weeks, and given that we are behind in vaccinating Canadians right now, I would like to know how that fits with the spread of variants.

I also think that we have to start giving Canadians some hope that Parliament is finding a way out of this. I know it's a shifting situation, but people who are at home and who are being asked to sacrifice a lot, be it their jobs or their mental health, and in many situations, front-line health care workers.... We need this information.

I think this is fairly non-partisan. I think this is in the best interests of Canadians, and I think this is what our health committee should be doing: being nimble and watching where the pandemic is going and coming up with smart motions that provide information to Canadians so that we can provide a path forward. We're a year into this now. We should have systems in place to deal with these

issues. If we don't, it's incumbent upon Parliament to ensure that we do, and that's the job of each of us here.

Thank you, Chair. I hope that all of my colleagues of all political stripes will support this motion today, that we can quickly pass it and that we can move on with business.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

We will undertake debate on this motion.

I have Mike.... Sorry, Mr. Kelloway, please go ahead.

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): You can call me Mike any time, Mr. Chair.

Happy Valentine's Day to everyone.

I understand that there's going to be a birthday soon. Happy birthday this weekend, MP Rempel Garner.

I don't disagree with this motion. It's something that I'll support.

I think what I'd like to talk about a bit—and I think Michelle highlighted some aspects of it—is just about the committee. My experience over the past year and a half—and, for that matter, over 30 years in community development—is in terms of the ability to work collegially and respectfully together to get to a particular item, in terms of picking up the phone and establishing a rapport with each other individually or collectively offline. In this case, we have an existential crisis that every country is battling, and every country is doing its best to ensure hope, health and safety.

As for what I see here—again, in my interpretation of this—what I'd like to see is more of the collegiality in terms of the connectivity between each other, and not to even get to this point of issuing a 106(4), even though it's the right of every parliamentarian to do so. I think that when you have an existential crisis like this, Canadians expect us to get together and to iron out this particular item—the one in question—together. I don't know if it needs to get to this point, because we all have a stake in it. It's not a political issue. It's not a Conservative, New Democrat, Bloc or Liberal issue. It's a Canadian issue. This is a war that the world is fighting. Canada is fighting it. We're active participants in that battle, and we're trying to do our best to help each other.

Again, my hope is that we can do a lot better on that front. Instead, I think we're doing a lot of talking, but I think we need to do a lot more sharing in terms of looking at the shared ideas and common paths. That could be a Zoom call offline with Michelle or John—sorry, MPs Rempel Garner and Barlow or MP d'Entremont or whomever. I get a sense that—again, it's my opinion—sometimes we're over-politicizing this, and I think what we need to do is bear down and do a lot better job so that we don't get to this point before meetings.

That's my take on it, Mr. Chair. I'm not against this motion at all. No one would be. When I see this motion, I'm not against it. We'll support it, but it seems like, I don't know.... There seems to be some degree of political posturing and whatnot, and I think we can do better than that. I think we need to do better than that in going forward, for the betterment of Canadians. Whether it's the inner workings of managing...our personal management of each other and the committee and looking at the things that are related to hope, we can do that, in my opinion, without a 106(4), but it's the right of every parliamentarian to do so. I think we can get more accomplished by doing that, so that we're not at this point.

Again, everyone has the right to do so, but I think that on this committee we're sometimes politicizing what's not political. We can ask the tough questions. We can debate each other, which it is our job to do, to do the best for Canadians, but there seems to be an over-politicization of it that I wish we would change. I wish we could move forward from today and make a renewed commitment to work better together, to work together in dyads and triads with the common purpose of putting things together that do not require this. There are times when they will, but I think we need to do a better job on that front.

I'll leave it at that, and I thank you for your time.

● (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

We go now to Mr. Davies.

Go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Thank you.

I think I can be quite brief, and I'm hoping that the meeting can be brief. It appears to me that we have broad agreement on the substance of the matter. I wholly support the motion, for all the reasons that Michelle went through.

I would also just note that the variants, as I think we're all starting to become aware, are becoming a much more prominent and much more concerning issue. I personally don't know a lot about it. At the time we put in our priorities to continue the COVID study, I don't think the issue of variants had prominence, or at least it didn't in my mind. Similarly, even with our vaccine witnesses—although I'm interested in part of the variants issue, besides understanding what they are, how deeply they have penetrated Canada and what the considerations are—even though there is an aspect of vaccines and whether or not the vaccines will be successful or partially successful against variants, I don't think we knew that at the time we put in our witnesses, so I think having a special meeting on variants

is really timely and really important. That's all I have to say on the substance of it.

I have just a brief comment on the process. The Standing Order 106 process is a completely legitimate process. I think it's really appropriately used in this kind of situation. In fact, I think this is exactly the kind of situation it's used for. We have a period of time when we're not sitting and it appears to four members that the health committee should be called together. I think it's an important right that all of us have. Any four of us together can exercise that right. As a matter of right, the meeting is called to put business before the committee. I think in this case it is very appropriately used.

One thing that's been going through my mind is that for quite a long time, we have not used the subcommittee on agenda. That has representatives from each of the parties. In answer to Mike's comments, I am wondering if that might be something worth revving up again. Maybe the subcommittee on agenda should be meeting somewhat regularly. When we come to that committee, of course I for one bring the full agreement of my caucus. Luc can speak for himself as well.

If the Liberals and the Conservatives come to that committee with the agreement of their colleagues, we can actually determine these things at the subcommittee. I know that maybe we have to come back to the meeting and formally pass it quickly, but if we have the agreement worked out in advance, we can save these kinds of meetings and have it done in a subcommittee way. That's just a suggestion for folks to think about.

Finally, I have a question for Michelle. I am not clear on how long the witnesses have to speak at this meeting. Am I understanding correctly that all of these witnesses together, collectively, will have 50 minutes and then we move to questions? I want to make sure we have lots of time for questions, so if Michelle could clarify that for me, that would be helpful.

Thank you.

● (1120)

The Chair: I just want to make a comment about the subcommittee. The reason we haven't been using the subcommittee is that it takes up a meeting slot, and we have a very limited number of slots. It takes up the same slot as a regular meeting. As a personal observation, all have the opportunity to participate in a regular meeting.

In any case, that's just a by-the-way.

Dr. Powlowski, please go ahead.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I support the motion. I think it's a good one.

We have to be concerned about the variants. Certainly, there's a possibility with the variants, and specifically the South African variant, that they will knock us back to square one. I don't think that's the case, though. It seems like some of the vaccines are probably effective against it. Even Johnson & Johnson's, although only 50% effective in preventing disease, was 100% effective in preventing hospitalization and mortality. It is essentially going to be a big issue, because we thought we had this solved.

I would highlight a couple of things, and I don't know what witnesses you have and whether they're going to be answering these things. One of the questions I asked at the last meeting was what the regulatory process is going to be, because both Johnson & Johnson and Moderna are modifying their vaccines. It's fairly easy, seemingly, to do it, because you just have to modify a couple of sequences in a messenger RNA and change the spike protein. Otherwise, everything else is the same. Do they have to go back to phase one, two and three trials, which is obviously going to take a long time? That's a big issue and I'm not sure any of these people can answer that.

The second thing is having somebody discuss what the government may be contemplating in assisting studying the possibility of mixing and matching vaccines, like putting a booster from a second vaccine. I've heard that it's quite possible—even, from an immunological perspective, perhaps advantageous—but the companies aren't going to do it themselves. Moderna is not going to advocate a booster from Johnson & Johnson and vice versa. My understanding is that we need to have the trials and be doing the trials with that kind of thing to see how much we can use boosters from another vaccine.

I don't know if any of your witnesses would be able to answer that question, but I think it's an important consideration and a question we ought to be asking.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Powlowski.

We'll move along to Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Fisher, please go ahead.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As Don has said in the past, it looks like this might be an outbreak of “violent agreement”. I really like that term.

It's been said that 106(4) is everyone's right, and it's absolutely everyone's right, but I think back to a mentor of mine when I was first elected, Bill Casey. He was the chair of the health committee and he talked about how collegial it was, even though it was all political stripes. It was so collegial, with everyone trying to get to a particular place and get the work done.

I feel like we have the ability to get there. I think this is a meeting to hold a meeting, and it might have been done as an email or, as Mike said, maybe a quick Zoom call or something. Whatever, that's fine. We all have lots of things that we would like to do in our constituencies today.

The basis of this motion is fine, with a very founded rationale. I'm happy to support it. I think using 106(4) over and over again is something that.... Again, everyone has the right to do it, but we could get to the same place, that violent agreement. From the comments I've heard so far, we all think this is a good idea. I am happy to support it, and I look forward to hearing the information that this motion is seeking.

Again, maybe I'm an optimist. I would like to get to a point where we could all sit in the same room—virtually, in the same Zoom room—and get all the answers we need and have the witnesses we all seek and want to hear from.

Don brought forward pretty much the only motion yet that we have been totally unanimous on, which was our work plan. It was a good work plan, and I'd like to make sure we get back to that work plan. I also remember that it was done on such a level of fairness. Don, you worked very hard to make sure that it was very fair. I think about you and Mr. Thériault and your priorities. I hope we get to those priorities, because I want to make sure we put the same effort into the priorities you've chosen as the priorities we've chosen.

I am happy to support this.

I hope you all have a wonderful weekend, assuming we're in agreement with this motion and we get the answers we want to get as a committee.

Thanks, folks.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

I would remind everyone to please address their remarks through the chair.

Ms. Rempel Garner, please go ahead.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you, Chair.

You know, I don't do passive-aggressive, I do aggressive-aggressive. I just want to address the comments, for people watching, suggesting that this isn't collegial. I find with colleagues from the Liberal Party that they often say we're not being collegial, or we're not working hard together. But that is actually code for saying, please don't question us when we're failing.

It is my job and the job of everybody on this committee to get answers for Canadians. What's been happening during this pandemic is that we've had Parliament shuttered. We've had prorogation. We've had the Prime Minister coming out of Rideau Cottage in the morning and giving out statements that even the media are criticizing him for now. They have to be walked back later in the day.

Mr. Fisher, as the parliamentary secretary, you haven't reached out to me once in the entire time I've been health critic, so there's that. In terms of having a Zoom call, I've tried to have informal meetings and I've been shot down by the chair.

You know what? The Standing Order 106(4) procedure—yes, I'm going to use it. I'm going to use it every single time to make sure we get answers. If colleagues want to be more collegial and do better for Canadians, then I ask them to look inwardly within their own party. The Liberal members on this call—I mean, if there's chastisement about lack of collegiality—need to push back to their health minister and say, hey, I'm getting roasted in my constituency; people are tired of the lockdown and we need answers; it's not acceptable for the Prime Minister to go out and give false information to Canadians in the morning; I'm trying to do this on health committee and, you know, maybe Rempel's got a point.

If we want to work collegially, then the Liberals have to start demonstrating that they're committed to getting answers for Canadians. I am glad there's agreement on this motion and we're going to pass it, but frankly, we're half an hour in here. I've heard two Liberals talk about the need to be more collegial. Kudos to Mr. Powlowski for actually raising pertinent questions. But I have to push back. Yes, I am going to use every procedural tactic in the book to get answers for Canadians. I will do that. I am not going to just let the Prime Minister come out and give the Rideau Cottage thing every morning.

Chair, I just refuse to subscribe to the notion that it's somehow wrong or uncollegial for an opposition parliamentarian to be using parliamentary procedure to get answers for Canadians on the pandemic during the pandemic. You talked about how we can't use the subcommittee because we have only a certain number of slots virtually. Like, we should be meeting all the time.

Anyway, Chair, I don't do passive-aggressive well, but I will do my job well. I think that's what we did today.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

I just want to make a comment about informal meetings. The reason we can't do them is that we don't get translation when we do that, and that's not fair to our Bloc colleague. The only way we can really get simultaneous translation is through a subcommittee meeting or through a regular meeting. That's the way we're trying to work.

Thank you for that.

[*Translation*]

We go now to Mr. Thériault.

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with Mr. Davies, Mr. Kelloway, Mr. Powlowski, Mr. Fisher and Ms. Rempel Garner; I may have forgotten someone. The purpose of this meeting is to decide whether we are going to have a meeting about vaccines and variants. Everyone agrees on that.

I don't think I would be misrepresenting Mr. Fisher and Mr. Kelloway's views if I said that the request for a meeting under Standing Order 106(4) could have been signed by a member of each party. That would have been a very collegial way to proceed. That is not a reproach. That said, if we had wanted to proceed in a spirit of collegiality, we could have called a member from each of the parties to

obtain the necessary signatures to request this meeting. That way, we would already be voting, right now, and we would be holding a meeting on Monday. And that is what I propose we do.

Like Mr. Davies, I have concerns about the wording.

On the one hand, there is talk of delivering a joint presentation of up to 15 minutes, and of inviting up to six witnesses. Is it a total of 15 minutes for all six witnesses or would each witness be allowed 15 minutes? Then it says that Dr. Quach-Thahn could make a seven-minute presentation. So is it 22 minutes for all the witnesses, or do we have to add five or six 15-minute presentations to the seven-minute one? That should be clarified.

On the other hand, I hope that the witnesses will be summoned as soon as possible and that questions can be sent to them. In fact, I hope that they have already been contacted, given the short deadline. Indeed, we should receive these witnesses on Monday and they should be able to address the issues that we want to deal with. How many of them will refuse to speak because they consider that their opinion on these issues is not relevant? These are all questions we are entitled to ask ourselves. We will know on Monday, when we hold our meeting.

Can we vote, once and for all? Yes, our schedules are very busy. Today, we are here strictly to decide whether or not to hold a meeting. We are not here to decide what topics will be discussed, even before we decide to hold the meeting. I would like us to proceed to the vote, since everyone agrees.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thériault.

[*English*]

I would like to just make a comment regarding your question about the speaking time. That is set forth I think reasonably clearly in the motion. Five of those witnesses would jointly present for a total of 15 minutes—that's 15 minutes for all five—and then one of the witnesses would have seven minutes.

We'll go now to Mr. Davies.

Mr. Davies, please go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: Thanks for that clarification, Mr. Chair.

I have just one point, I guess, and a question. I've sat on many subcommittees over the years. We never meet during regular meetings.

I'm just wondering, Mr. Chair, if you're correct on that, because it was my assumption that the purpose of a subcommittee is to deal with these agenda issues without taking regular meeting time so that we can facilitate the more effective use of committee time. Is it a question of you thinking that we can't meet outside of normal regular times? Or is it a question of resources? If it's a question of resources, I think we should be going to our whips and getting the resources.

I'm not talking about the subcommittee on agenda meeting all the time; I don't think we've met since this Parliament. To me, not using the subcommittee on agenda is part of the reason we find ourselves in these situations. It's there for a reason. It's there to work out these issues without taking regular meeting time, without taking the time of all the members.

Again, as I think Mike and Darren pointed out, the main point that I'm hearing them make is that if we can get more effective communication among ourselves, we can facilitate better use of our time. I guess my proposition would be that we should be using that subcommittee, and we shouldn't be doing this in regular time.

The other thing I was just going to mention in terms of getting to the priorities of the NDP and the Bloc is that my first priority was vaccines. It turned out to be the same as the Conservatives' priority, so I've moved to my next choice.

I don't want to cloud the issue at this meeting today, but I think that maybe at one point I want to put the idea into our members' minds as to whether or not we may want to have another meeting or two on vaccines. It does take unanimous agreement, but to me, on vaccines, I think the entire country is waiting with bated breath on vaccines, right up to the Prime Minister. I think we all understand the importance of that. I think that would be one issue in the priorities that we may want to have a fifth or a sixth meeting on. I guess we can evaluate it as we get to the end of that. I just want to get people thinking about that now to see if there are other aspects of vaccines that they may want to delve into.

Again, I don't want to put this on the agenda at this meeting, because I'd like to have this meeting over with, with time to do some other things today for other people.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

I'll just comment further on the subcommittee meetings. Mr. Davies is correct that in other times we would be able to meet much more freely outside the regular course of our scheduled meetings. However, in this COVID world, where we have very much more limited resources in terms of committee rooms and the availability of hybrid resources, the meeting slots are in extremely short supply. They have expanded quite considerably since we started doing this, but they're still not to the point where we were in pre-COVID days with in-person meetings. That's why we haven't been doing it.

During the spring, when we were first undergoing this virtual meeting concept, we did meet as a committee on an informal basis, and we were only able to arrange consecutive translation. Consecutive translation is extremely difficult. It's difficult for Mr. Thériault, and it's difficult for us when Mr. Thériault speaks, because by and large the meetings are conducted in English, so Mr. Thériault is way behind the eight ball on this stuff. It's really not fair.

Anyway, that's kind of why we don't want to go back to informal meetings. The informal meetings we had actually were not sanctioned by the House; they weren't covered under the provisions of the orders of the day. Now, we could conceivably do it, but in order to give full recognition to Monsieur Thériault and the right of every parliamentarian to speak in either official language of their choice, we have to have a meeting slot somewhere. That is the limitation.

Thank you, Mr. Davies.

We'll go now to Mr. Barlow.

Mr. Barlow, please go ahead.

• (1140)

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to reiterate—and I think you've clarified—that we do want 15 minutes total for PHAC and then seven minutes for Ms. Quach-Thanh. There will be plenty of time for questions to meet Mr. Davies...and I could not agree more with Mr. Davies that to have these folks at committee and to have the opportunity to ask some questions is critical.

I do want to just quickly address some of the other concerns that have been raised by some of my colleagues. I find some of the questions somewhat surprising. Now, I am reassured that it seems as though everyone is going to support this motion, but to be asking this committee to have these discussions behind closed doors or not in the open I think is misguided. We have to have these discussions in this committee, in the open, in public, so people know exactly what we're doing.

I agree we were very unanimous in our support of the work plan at the get-go, but I think all of us have to realize that we cannot possibly be that naive, and we have to realize that we're going to have to be agile through this and we're going to have to be nimble. Things are going to come up, as they have over the last few months, that we as the health committee will have to address. For us to say, well, you know, we've supported this work plan and we're going to go A, B, C, and D...when variants come up, there are travel restrictions, no delivery of vaccines, and failure after failure after failure.

I know that I am not the only member of Parliament on this call who is getting calls and emails every single day from constituents frustrated with the lack of information and the inconsistent messages and with not knowing when they're going to get a vaccine, how that vaccine is going to be delivered, what the distribution strategy is or whether there is a strategy at all, and what is going to happen with the variants.

I just have to say that when the Prime Minister announced these travel restrictions, for example, with no details, no timelines, and no assessment of who was going to be impacted and how, I hope everyone understands how his doing that is adding stress and anxiety to Canadians who just don't know what impact this is going to have on their daily lives. I asked the minister the other day how many people are going to have to be vaccinated before life can return to normal, and the minister was unable to answer that. Those are real, legitimate questions that Canadians have.

I understand that we did support a work plan at the beginning of the reinstatement of this health committee; however, I think it is absolutely imperative that all of us—and I am reassured that it seems as though everyone is going to support this decision today—will have to be nimble. When things arise, everyone looks to us to be the ones to react, and those of us on this committee have been entrusted to find the answers to those very important questions. I don't want us to delay having meetings anymore or delay decisions about how we should be meeting.

Our job is to find the critical answers that our constituents, all Canadians, are desperate to know. We've talked about mental health. I know Mr. Van Bynen isn't here today, but this lack of information and misinformation are having devastating effects on Canadians. We have to give them clear, definitive answers, and the only way we get those is by having the experts who can provide that information at committee in the most timely fashion possible. If we have to meet on Family Day or during a break week, giddy-up, I will be here. During a pandemic, there is no time for a break, no time for a holiday—no offence intended. Canadians are looking to us to do the job they've elected us to be here to do. Whenever we can get a slot, I will be here to make sure that we find those answers.

I appreciate my colleagues on this committee who are willing to support this motion, and who are coming here on a day when we did not have a meeting planned, and I hope we can continue to do that. If it means burning the midnight oil, then that is what we're going to have to do.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

Ms. Rempel Garner, go ahead, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I just want to clarify for Mr. Davies that, yes, in fact, PHAC would have a joint 15-minute presentation, and the other witness we've called would have seven minutes, so that we could go right into testimony. I hope we can vote for this motion so that we can get back to work for Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Mr. Davies, go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: I would like to make just one comment on when we have this meeting. The one thing I would say is that we don't have the meeting on Monday, which is Family Day in British Columbia. I know nobody means this, but I don't want anybody to think that the timing of this meeting is an indication of anybody's

work ethic. The motion itself says to have the meeting anytime before next Friday.

I don't think we should have this meeting on a statutory holiday in British Columbia when I, among other people, want to spend some time with my family. I, like everybody on this committee, have been working crazy hours. Last week I did four committees. Here on the west coast, I was up at 5:30 in the morning four days in a row to hit those 8 a.m. meetings that are at 11 o'clock.

I'm going to ask that we don't schedule a meeting for Monday. Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday is fine. It's not because I don't want to work hard or I don't understand the pressing nature of this, but I think all of us, like all Canadians, deserve to have some time with our families and a little bit of mental health relief as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Seeing no other hands, I will ask the clerk to conduct the vote, please.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: Excellent. That brings our business to a conclusion.

Thank you all. We are—

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Chair...?

The Chair: Mr. Barlow, please go ahead.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of my colleagues for agreeing to support this motion, which I think is important, and for making the time to meet, under Standing Order 106(4), to have this discussion today.

As everybody knows, I tabled a motion last meeting. As our committee continues to meet on the matter of COVID, it has become clear that much of the information surrounding the vaccines that Canadians and members of our committee seek may reside in the contracts the government has signed with the vaccine suppliers. We've become aware that other countries have negotiated some better commitments and penalty clauses into their contracts that we have not. I think those contracts should be made public, or as public as can be. Canadians deserve to know this.

We tried to get some relevant answers from the ministers last week. We were met with what I would describe as talking points and platitudes, not real information. The few answers we did get cannot be verified. Journalists have tried. Premiers have tried. MPs have tried.

I think this needs to change. As I said earlier, our job today is to get answers for Canadians and to hold the government to account during what I would describe as the largest health crisis in our country's history. We'll come back to the subject of vaccine contracts later, but we know that the law clerk has received more than 6,800 documents as a result of the order in the House of Commons. Of those documents, the law clerk has only been able to provide about 2,000 to the committee, due to the fact that those documents have to be provided in both official languages.

In terms of the documents provided on Friday, we found out that senior Liberal staffers in the Prime Minister's Office discussed withholding details about COVID-19 from Canadians. The main concern in the Prime Minister's Office revolved around the avoidance of accountability on spending announcements rather than providing real details to Canadians. This is extremely concerning and something we should not take lightly, especially when the government's response to these damning documents has been to blame the public service.

It was also revealed that staff members from the procurement minister's office discussed delaying the scheduled release of information in hopes that more favourable numbers, in terms of PPE procurement, would come as a result of the proposed obstruction. The minister's director of communications, James Fitz-Morris, replied to an email, saying that the plan was "crazy enough it might just work". He then added, "If journos ask where it is—we can say that [Saint-Jean-Baptiste] Day delayed some reporting—so we are holding to early next week. Which also has the benefit of being mostly true!"

He said "mostly true", Mr. Chair. We had two ministers before this committee last week, on record, saying that their government has been transparent with Canadians during the pandemic whether it's bad news or good news. They said it multiple times. We now know this is false. Politically inconvenient facts have been purposefully left out of the public domain, and a pattern has started to emerge.

I want to come back to my motion and the vaccine contracts. I've just outlined two disturbing situations that members of this committee should take seriously and that I hope all of us will reflect upon. We've been told that revealing vaccine supplier contracts would jeopardize our vaccine supply. As I've said, I can't independently confirm this one way or another. However, what we can confirm is that one of the documents provided by the law clerk has revealed internal policy guidance on how to block the release of details related to the government contracts, including sole-source contracts authorized under a national security exemption.

This document reads, "The application of an NSE does not absolve a department of its obligation to proactively disclose contracts; however, the Access to Information Act contains provisions that provide heads of organizations discretion around disclosure".

This should underscore why the House motion adopted on October 26 was necessary, and perhaps why Liberal members are so opposed to passing it. The government can no longer hide behind section 18 of the Access to Information Act on these contract details.

On a final note, there's another document that was released on Friday, a PMO email, that shows the government was able to nego-

tiate a penalty clause into a contract for PPE from China. It reads, "The supplier agreed to pay a penalty fee if they don't deliver in 15 days which is rare but good to see". I trust that knowledge of this detail hasn't put our PPE supplies from China in jeopardy. So we should have the same information when it comes to vaccine procurement and distribution.

With that, Mr. Chair, I move the following:

That the Chair of the committee write to the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel inquiring on whether or not the contracts for Canada's seven vaccine agreements with suppliers have been provided to his office as part of the motion adopted on October 26, 2020 by the House of Commons.

● (1150)

Should the law clerk have copies of any of these documents, that the committee instruct the law clerk to prioritize the translation of these documents and that these documents be published as soon as possible in accordance with the parameters set out in the house motion.

If the law clerk does not have such documents, that the committee request from the government the contracts for Canada's seven vaccine agreements with suppliers be tabled with the committee, that the documents be vetted in accordance with the parameters set out in the house motion, and that the members of the Standing Committee on Health review these documents in camera.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This outlines the importance of having the details on what these contracts entail. How were they negotiated? Why were they negotiated on a quarterly basis, rather than monthly or weekly as in other countries? What are the obligations of these vaccine manufacturers to deliver these vaccines? Are there cash penalties or any other fines if they do not meet their obligations?

We've seen a substantial reduction in the number of vaccines that have been distributed to Canadians, and we now hear that we may get a massive dump at the end of the quarter. What implications is this going to have for the provinces? Do they have the resources to distribute these vaccines? What are the implications for Canadians going to be?

This, again, Mr. Chair, is just a request to get what I would consider very pertinent information on the negotiation and agreements of these contracts between Canada and the seven vaccine manufacturers. I hope to have the support of my colleagues for some transparency around these contracts, because Canadians deserve to know how these contracts were negotiated and what the details are within them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

● (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

It's contrary to our normal practice of dealing with a 106(4), but the clerk advises me that it is in order and is committee business. You certainly gave notice, so the motion is in order.

I will go now to Mr. Davies, please.

Mr. Don Davies: I had put up my hand previously because I wanted to get agreement or find out where we were on the timing of our meeting next week. I've been texting back and forth with some members and I understand that there is agreement not to hold the meeting on Monday. I don't think we came to a decision on that, so I would like to have that clarified—that the meeting next week, the 106(4), won't be on Monday. If not, I would probably move that, unless we all agree.

I wasn't really prepared to speak to John's motion, so I'll just let my colleagues speak to it first and maybe come back to that. I would say that I'm broadly in agreement with what John has said.

I have to say as well that I'm not going to move anything at this meeting, but I plan on coming back and reading very carefully the motion of the House on production of documents. It seems to me that the government has not complied with what we passed. I'm going to go back and read that very carefully, but there were set deadlines for production of documents. We were told there were millions of documents from the Clerk of the Privy Council, and we have had only thousands that have gone to the law clerk. That is not in compliance with what the House ordered.

I know there was an amendment to the House order to help the government prioritize the production of certain documents, but it didn't eliminate the obligation of the government to comply, with those documents. The other thing I would say is that it's pretty apparent to everybody that the first tranche of documents that came to the committee was utterly useless. The first tranche was no more than public speaking notes that were probably accessible to any Canadian at any time. Now, though, we're starting to see documents released to the law clerk that actually have real information in them that is, frankly, as John just pointed out, revealing some troubling aspects of the handling of the COVID issue.

Anyway, my inclination would be to support John's motion. The more information we have before this committee in unvarnished fashion, the better we as parliamentarians on the health committee can carry out our duties.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Ms. Sidhu, you are next, please.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Having concluded the business we came for here today, I move that we adjourn today's meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sidhu.

We have a motion on the floor to adjourn. I'll ask the clerk to take a vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Thank you.

We go now to Ms. Rempel Garner.

Go ahead, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Well, Chair, so much for working collegially, I guess.

To my colleague Ms. Sidhu, the business of the committee was not complete. There is a motion on the floor that is of material import to every Canadian, given the fact that we are in the middle of a pandemic that has shut down most of our economy and we are behind most of the developed countries in the world in terms of the receipt of vaccine.

I think what my colleague has done with this motion is to put forward a very elegant solution that respects various issues that have been brought up with regard to the release of the contracts. It is in alignment with motions that we've already put forward to this committee and on which we've seen some obfuscation, to put it mildly, from the government.

To my colleague Mr. Davies' very correct point, we have spent a lot of time in this committee trying to compel the government to release information that is of material import to Canadians on how we're getting out of the pandemic. I think Mr. Barlow has begun to address the deficiencies in information that we have received in this committee.

I cannot believe we tried to shut this motion down. I really can't. It's shocking, actually.

That said, I am in full support of this motion. I certainly think every provincial government, most of the press gallery and everybody is asking for this. It's done in an elegant way. I think it's really smart. I commend my colleague Mr. Barlow for putting work into finding a solution, which I will be strongly supporting.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Mr. Barlow, please go ahead.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

To my colleague Ms. Rempel Garner, I don't know if I've ever been called “elegant” before. I will definitely be putting that on my resumé.

To my colleague Ms. Sidhu, we have talked for the last hour about how important it is to get this information and get to work and answer questions for Canadians. To me, your adjournment attempt means that this is something you don't want to talk about.

I want to be clear that we are not asking for anything that is not going to come out eventually. We are asking in this motion if the law clerk has already received the contracts or the documents that are part of the contracts. If he has, this motion is asking him to prioritize the translation and the release of those documents to the committee for us to review. If he has not received those documents, this motion is asking that the government put a priority on providing those documents, those contracts, to the law clerk for review, translation, and again, to come to this committee.

We are trying not to prolong the inevitable. We're actually trying to speed it up. We have now seen that this is a critical issue for Canadians when we see just how far behind other countries we are in terms of accessing vaccines. Even more so, what are the [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] of these manufacturers if they do not meet their obligations with the Government of Canada? Are Canadians assured that the manufacturers are going to meet their obligations and...not do their best but actually have a hammer in those contracts that ensures that Canadians get the vaccines the government has promised them? If not, then what next?

Really, this motion is just to put a priority on the documents that the law clerk is already going to receive. If he hasn't, it ensures that he gets them as quickly as possible and we get them in front of committee. That's really what this motion is. It is not asking for anything different or over and above. This is just trying to expedite or accelerate access to those contracts. I am sure they will be heavily redacted, but some information, as my good friend Mr. Davies says, is better than no information. I think what Canadians are asking for right now is some insights and some transparency on what these contracts entail.

I hope that clarifies a little bit what this motion really entails.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thériault, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with the substance of the motion. However, its wording may mislead us as to the intent of our colleague. I would not want it to allow the committee to circumvent the Official Languages Act or to compromise the ability to obtain documents in both official languages.

According to the motion, "should the law clerk have copies of any of these documents," they should be translated and produced as soon as possible. "If the law clerk does not have such documents," we will have to ask the government to produce them and give us access to them, but nowhere is there any mention of translating them. This could be interpreted as a roundabout way of getting around the obligation to translate them. To avoid this, I would like this obligation to be clarified in both cases: if the law clerk has these documents, he will have to have them translated quickly and give us access to them; if the law clerk does not have these documents, the government will have to table them, have them translated and give us access to them.

The motion is interesting in that the secrecy of industry information will not be an issue, because it says that we will review these documents in camera.

That said, Mr. Barlow would need to clarify his intention. If his motion is that the committee be given access to documents in English only to examine them in camera, I will oppose it unless he decides to make an amendment. I can also propose one, but I would like to hear his response first.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thériault.

[*English*]

Mr. Barlow, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you, Mr. Thériault.

[*English*]

Yes. I'm more than happy to have that as a bit of clarification.

It was my understanding, in the committee's routine motions, that no document could be submitted to the committee without being translated first. However, I certainly see your concern with the motion, so I am more than happy to put that clarification in the last paragraph: that once the law clerk has those documents, they be vetted and translated prior to being submitted or distributed to the committee.

I'm fine with that clarification, if the clerk can add that into the motion, or if Mr. Thériault wants to make a friendly amendment. I'm fine either way, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

I'll let Mr. Davies make that an amendment when he next speaks, if it is his wish to do so.

Mr. Davies, go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: So moved.

Before I get to that, there are two points I want to make. One is just to remind all of us that in the text of the main motion that ordered the production of the documents, the criteria were very clearly laid out to the law clerk as to how redactions would occur, including one specifically to allow redaction to not interfere with contractual relations. I don't have the exact words. I just want to make that clear.

The other thing I want to put on the record is the fact that the translation issue has been commented on by the law clerk. As we all know, the government is sending documents to the law clerk by the thousands and refusing to translate them, leaving that job to the law clerk and the law clerk's very limited resources to translate. Now, if one were cynical or conspiratorial of mind, one might think that this was a way for the government to slow down the production of documents to this committee, because we know that the law clerk is sitting on a mountain of documents and has had to hire extra staff to do the translating.

The law clerk has gone on the record and stated... I don't have the legislation in front of me, but with him being the law clerk, I would imagine he knows what he's talking about, being the chief legal officer of Parliament. He has indicated that he believes the government is in violation of its obligation to do the translation and to produce documents to the law clerk in translated form. I want to note that on the record and raise my concern on that.

I do think the government with its [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] as well as other legal obligations—

• (1210)

The Chair: Mr. Davies, I lost you for a few seconds. Can you maybe back up a couple of sentences?

Mr. Don Davies: I'm sorry. Sure.

I was just saying that the law clerk is the chief legal officer of Parliament. I think it should be pointed out that we're concerned that the law clerk has had to say to the government that they are in violation of their obligation [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] under both the Official Languages Act and other legal obligations to the law clerk, and that this is slowing down the process.

I agree completely that Mr. Thériault has every right to have these documents at the same time as we do in both official languages, but I don't think our committee has had a chance to weigh in or comment on this decision of the government, through the Clerk of the Privy Council, to refuse [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. I was saying that the government, of course, has vastly greater resources with which to do the translation than the law clerk does. I think that's something we should be expressing our alarm and concern about.

By the way, I will move the motion that Mr. Thériault and Mr. Barlow both commented on.

The Chair: Would you please do so explicitly, if you will?

Mr. Don Davies: I don't have the words. I'd defer to Mr. Barlow's words or Mr. Thériault's.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: I have a proposed wording.

[*English*]

The Chair: Let me just clarify this with the clerk.

Mr. Clerk, do you have the wording of the amendment that Mr. Davies wishes to move at this point?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Jean-François Pagé): Is it to ensure that the documents are in both official languages? Is that the amendment?

The Chair: We seem to be in agreement—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, I have wording to propose for this part of the motion:

If the law clerk does not have such documents, that the committee request from the government the contracts for Canada's seven vaccine agreements with suppliers be tabled with the committee in both official languages, that the documents be vetted in accordance...

This is where I would introduce "in both official languages". This clarifies that the obligation to produce these documents in both official languages is the responsibility of the government, as Mr. Davies mentioned, and not of the committee.

That is the amendment I propose. Is that all right with you?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, are we square on what the amendment is?

The Clerk: Yes.

The Chair: Is the committee square on what the amendment is?

Therefore, the discussion is on the amendment. Is there any discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Kelloway, Dr. Powlowski and Mr. Thériault, you have your hands up. Is this on the amendment or is this otherwise?

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Could I clarify what exactly the amendment is? I'm sorry. Maybe I wasn't paying enough attention.

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, would you be able to read that back to us, please?

The Clerk: Yes. In Mr. Barlow's motion, in the last paragraph, we'll make sure that the documents are tabled in both official languages. We'll have, in the second line of the last paragraph, "that the documents, in both official languages, be vetted in accordance".

It's to make sure that those documents will be in both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Kelloway.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: It could very well connect to the motion and the amendment. I'm just looking—for my purposes, in thinking this through—for clarification on whether these things.... Are we suggesting that these go in camera? Is that what I'm hearing? I just want clarification on what it looks like when we consider these documents in camera.

I'm just looking for some clarification through you or through the clerk or from whomever.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

Dr. Powlowski, you're next.

• (1215)

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I was going to speak to the motion itself, but I can speak to the amended motion and we can talk all day—no, no, I'm going to address the amendment that—

The Chair: Just let me clarify, please.

We're not talking about the amended motion, because the motion is not yet amended. We're talking about the amendment now.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Still, I'm going to speak to the same thing. Again, we have all day.

There is genuine concern about revealing the details of the contract. Many of you are aware that I believe in the importance of transparency of government. I believe, as much as possible, in revealing unredacted documents.

However, with respect to the vaccine contracts, this is obviously a very difficult area. Certainly, the pharmaceutical companies and the producers of vaccines don't want these documents revealed. Where they have been revealed, and we've heard that there have been instances where other countries.... The EU has revealed details of its contracts, but in fact those were heavily redacted. There is also the concern that if a vaccine producer finds out the details of the contract provisions of another vaccine producer, they're going to want their contract changed and they're going to want better provisions as well.

This is a very sensitive issue, because we're at their mercy. We don't produce vaccines ourselves. We have put down a lot of money and down the road we probably will put more.... I know the Conservatives have supported some initiatives to produce vaccines in Canada, and it was certainly the desire of Canada. We have put over \$200 million into various producers—I count at least four or five different vaccine producers in Canada—to try to develop our own vaccine. However, we're not there yet. It was a global race. In fact, a whole bunch of companies won the gold medal, but unfortunately none of them were in Canada.

We are dependent on the vaccine producers. It doesn't seem to me very prudent right now to be doing something that could undermine our position with respect to the vaccine producers. We've heard it repeatedly today, and I certainly agree that this is by far the most important issue facing not only Canada but also the world. We want to get this right. I'm not sure this is a really good idea right now—when we're dependent on other people for a very necessary good that all Canadians want—to be doing something that's going to potentially jeopardize our relationship with them.

We're not going to support this underlying motion.

I said, I would eventually get to the amendment. As to it being in French, sure. Of course. Everything should be in both official languages; that's important. We can debate this, and then we can go on to the other motion and debate that for a long time as well.

For genuine reasons, because this is of concern, I don't really think this is an issue that we ought to be politicizing. I don't think this is a good way of scoring points off our government in fighting this fight, because I don't think it is in the best interests of Canadians right now to have this revealed and to create this controversy.

In the last paragraph of your motion as it is, to require the companies to—

The Chair: Dr. Powlowski, I advise you to please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Okay, Mr. Chair. You're perfectly correct.

I would point out that the last paragraph of the motion is requiring the vaccine companies, I believe, to produce the details of the contract. We still have to work out the details of national security interests, about translation and about holding things in camera, but this is going into the bull arena and waving a red flag at the bull that says we want your contractual obligations revealed to the health committee.

Do you really want to do that when we're all depending on the vaccines? I mean, you're all telling us how important it is.

• (1220)

The Chair: Please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Mr. Chair, I would question whether it's really in the interests of Canadians to be antagonizing the vaccine industry at this time. We want to be really prudent on this. I'm not sure this motion is really a good idea and something to support.

In terms of making it in French, absolutely. Let's make it in French.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Powlowski.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thériault, you have the floor.

Mr. Luc Thériault: Mr. Chair, I would not want to do your job, but I remind you that we are dealing with the amendment. Yet, you tolerate a lot of comments that relate to the motion itself.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

I don't want to keep people from talking, but it seems to me that we should focus on the amendment.

Also, I don't know if the clerk has read the amendment correctly so that it is clear where the proposed wording is inserted. I just didn't hear him. As a courtesy, he was speaking French. Since I too use the French channel, that is probably why the volume was not adequate.

My amendment is inserted immediately after the word "suppliers," then there is a comma, and the text continues.

Is that where it is inserted?

The Clerk: Yes, that's right. It will be "in both official languages."

Mr. Luc Thériault: It's perfect. Then I am ready for the amendment to be put to the vote.

[*English*]

The Chair: Monsieur Thériault, my understanding—and perhaps I didn't hear correctly the wording the clerk read—is that in English the paragraph would be modified to say “seven vaccine agreements with suppliers be tabled with the committee in both official languages, that the documents be vetted”, and so forth.

Is that correct, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes. That's in the French. I'll have to check the English, but the spirit of the motion is to make sure that everything will be in both official languages.

For the French version and the English, I will make sure that everything will be okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Thériault, are you okay with that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Thériault: Yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We go now to Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Fisher, please go ahead.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Still on the amendment, I know these motions and the amendments are read off the floor, but they're not necessarily circulated through email in English, let alone in French. I often think of Mr. Thériault, who, being the sole francophone on the committee, always has to be so patient on this committee with things coming off the floor in English. I have done this in the past as well. I've moved amendments off the floor in English and, of course, not had them written down.

Not to go back and forth with Mr. Thériault, Mr. Chair, but I don't have a sense of what the amendment is saying and where it comes in. Mr. Thériault said it comes after the word "suppliers". I think Mr. Thériault has a handful of motions that he is hoping to move someday at this committee as well to make things more fair and level and to balance the playing field to make sure that everything is in English and in French.

I ask you, Mr. Chair, or to the clerk through the chair, is this amendment, in English and in French, presented to us and to Mr. Thériault? It has been said a few times, but I am not scribbling it down as it's being read. Is there a way of having this sent out in English and in French, or is Mr. Thériault confident in what's there in the amendment?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

The motion was moved orally and read orally, so because we have simultaneous translation, there is no requirement that it be produced in writing in both official languages. If it had been submitted in writing, it would have been translated by the translation services—by the clerk probably—before it was distributed to the committee, but there is no need for that when it is given orally.

The motion basically reads, in the last paragraph, as I understand it, "If the law clerk does not have such documents, that the committee request from the government the contracts for Canada's seven vaccine agreements with suppliers be tabled with the committee in both official languages, that the documents be vetted in accordance with the parameters set out in the house motion, and that the members of the Standing Committee on Health review these documents in camera".

Does that clarify things for you, Mr. Fisher?

• (1225)

Mr. Darren Fisher: Yes, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

We go now to Ms. Rempel Garner, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you, Chair.

Of course, I support the amendment. I believe also, procedurally, in terms of how the standing order works, that any documentation that is circulated to the committee has to be in both official languages. I think this amendment just re-emphasizes a requirement that's already there but, of course, we provide it.

Just with regard to what would be tabled in both official languages through this amendment, I think my colleague Mr. Powlowski suggested that we shouldn't be supporting this motion because we would be mean to big pharma. Something's wrong here. We haven't received doses of the mRNA vaccines that the Prime Minister promised. We're nowhere near being on schedule. It is our job as parliamentarians to be scrutinizing why this happened. The information that we need to do that is in these contracts. It is preposterous to me to be arguing, "Well, you know, the vaccine manufacturing companies might not give us the vaccine if we ask questions."

Think about that for a second. Think about what an average Canadian would think listening to a parliamentarian argue that we shouldn't be looking for information on whether or not a company has broken its contract. It's really one or the other. It's either that the Prime Minister is lying, or that the companies are delivering on schedule and the Liberal government just negotiated a poor delivery schedule. It's really one or the other.

That's the real reason colleagues here are hesitant to support this. I don't care about the politics of the situation; I just want a vaccine. I actually would like Justin Trudeau to get vaccines for Canadians at this point in time. Our job as parliamentarians is to scrutinize information like this so that we can put pressure on the government to rectify situations that aren't working.

Mr. Powlowski also stated a very good fact: We are at the mercy of every other country in the world right now. As a committee, we should be finding out exactly how much we are at the mercy of other countries and then coming up with solutions to solve the problem. In order to solve the problem, we need information to know how bad the problem is. The argument that we should somehow be bending over and not asking questions because big pharma might get mad at us is preposterous, given the scale and gravity of the situation we're facing right now.

Yes, I support the motion. I support the amendment. I hope we can just get on with business so that the law clerk can start producing these documents.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

I would remind you of Standing Order 18, which prohibits us from impugning the integrity of other parliamentary members. To imply that the Prime Minister is lying, I think, breaches that requirement.

We go now to Mr. Kelloway.

Please, go ahead.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Certainly, I'll allow Mr. Powlowski to respond to some of those comments. You know, everybody on the face of this planet wants a vaccine. Canadians want more vaccines. What worries me about loaded words like "lying" is that words matter. We've seen that happen around the world...when you say "someone has lied to me". I think that is a dangerous and slippery slope to play.

When I look at today, I believe the Prime Minister talked about 400,000 vaccines this week right to the end of March. Yes, we then need to discuss and work with the premiers of our country, of our provinces, to get them out. Canadians across this vast country continue to feel the grief and anguish brought by COVID-19. During these exhausting months, more than 20,000 people have died of the virus in Canada. Let that sink in: 20,000 loved ones. They're your neighbours, whether you're in B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec or the Atlantic provinces. We've all been impacted by it.

In my neck of the woods in Cape Breton, we're often told that now is the time to step up, to stand together, to focus our efforts. We've done that on the Island of Cape Breton and in northeastern Nova Scotia for centuries. I think we all can agree, everyone on this panel, that this pandemic has to be one of the longest moments any of us have had to endure, but the seemingly unending nature of this pandemic is precisely why we have to work together as a team. As MPs have said, debate, critique and work together; it can all happen at once.

That goal for us here in Canada is a goal for every country around the globe, in terms of ensuring that we have rapid and safe vaccines and other tests. It's every country. The people who are listening today know that every country wants to protect its citizens. Every country wants to get through this pandemic. Every country wants to kick-start the economy and get through it and restart our lives and continue our lives. Those common goals, folks, are not just a team Canada effort. I know we've talked about that in the past. Some people say there is not a team Canada effort. Some people, like me, say there is. But I think it's actually a global effort.

I think we need to be reminded of the enormity of the many scientific and logistical achievements that have brought us to this place today. From the moment the first novel coronavirus sequence was made public and was discussed in January of last year, scientists across the world have worked day and night to develop a safe vaccine against COVID-19. From the completion of trials to the rapid ramping up of vaccine production, so many individuals have pulled together.

We know there is a worldwide shortage of vaccines, but let me go back to that team approach. It's kind of my zone in terms of forming teams and working with teams. We also know that the companies producing these vaccines are working day and night to ramp up production to levels never achieved before, at least not before this pandemic. We know that the way to get to the other side of this pandemic is to follow the public health advice alongside a successful vaccine rollout.

From the early days of this pandemic, Mr. Chair, the government has had the clear objective of securing safe, effective vaccines for Canadians as rapidly as possible. During this global pandemic, the quickest route for our government to get the COVID-19 vaccines to Canadians was to pursue a diverse portfolio of potential vaccines as

early as possible. The plan was led by science. The work was guided by our COVID-19 vaccine task force. With that expert advice, the government managed to gain access to nearly 400 million doses of potential vaccines from seven different manufacturers, resulting in one of the most robust portfolios in the world. We've heard that before. I won't get into greater detail other than that.

Following Health Canada's approval of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, we've already received about 1.4 million COVID-19 vaccines to provinces and territories. Between those two companies, we're on track to have enough vaccines for everyone in Canada who wants to be vaccinated by the end of September.

Mr. Chair, we also need to continue to follow developments concerning the vaccine candidates of the five other manufacturers we have agreements with. That's exceptionally important.

● (1230)

When it comes to supplies, from day one our government has worked hard to secure the supplies needed to administer the vaccines. As an example, we purchased millions of syringes of varying sizes from a range of suppliers. That included 64 million low-dead-volume syringes, which are extremely limited around the world. A million, I think it is, of those specialized syringes have arrived in Canada.

Canada has a robust plan, which we're rolling out. Yes, there are delays and there were delays. We all know that, in every country across the world, the demand for vaccines outstrips the current supply. Yes, production is ramping up, but we know there have been and will continue to be, as mentioned, bumps on the road, particularly as the production ramps up. We know that in the short term the number of vaccines available will fluctuate a bit. In some cases, in all cases, that's not a good thing. We want to see vaccines come out fast and furious.

Once the higher levels of production become the norm—and this is the reality check—our expectation is that there will be a more stable supply of vaccines. I know that being told there's a delay in delivery is the last thing anyone wants to hear. However, I believe that when you're open and transparent you take the good, but you also need to know about the bad. The promise that we made as a government was to give Canadians the latest vaccine news, whether it was good or bad.

News of a temporary short-term delay in the delivery of the Pfizer vaccine and a temporary reduction of Moderna vaccines has been frustrating for everyone on this panel. Has it been frustrating for everyone in opposition and government? Yes. Every Canadian is frustrated by this.

Let me repeat, and this is important, especially in this world where you can put out any statement you want on social media and anyone can do that. We have six million doses of Moderna and Pfizer vaccines in Canada—we will have them—and 80 million doses by the end of the year. That's important to remember and it's important to repeat. The government's comprehensive and very well-thought-out vaccine strategy means that, when we experience delays such as the one we experienced two weeks ago, we have the capacity to respond.

In closing, because we feel that getting vaccines means that surely an end to this pandemic must be in sight, any delay in the rollout, however short-term, adds to our worry and exhaustion. We're tired and everyone is tired, but there is light at the end of that tunnel and there is a plan in place. Keeping ourselves, our loved ones and our communities safe, from coast to coast to coast, right now is critical in making sure that as many Canadians as possible will benefit from the vaccine rollout.

As the Prime Minister has said, and we've talked about this today and I appreciate the comments from all parties, none of us wants a political battle. All of us want to focus on a solution. Our strategy of implementing a diverse portfolio and receiving commitments early on from the manufacturers—that's my contention at least—is one that will deliver for Canadians.

I just wanted to get that off my chest. Thank you.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

It seems that everybody is determined to speak on the main motion, as presumably amended, but we still have the amendment on the floor.

Can we get unanimous consent on the amendment?

I see unanimous consent.

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

The Chair: Thank you to the committee.

We will resume discussion on the motion as amended. We will go back to Dr. Powlowski, please.

Dr. Powlowski, go ahead.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: That fine, eloquent speech by Mr. Kelloway was very well said and very succinct and to the point. I really have to credit him for that. It may not have been sufficiently succinct, though, because I'm having trouble remembering what Ms. Rempel Garner's accusations were against me. If I remember them correctly, I was being accused of being too sympathetic to the poor old vaccine industry and was told that Canadians wanted to know the details of this agreement.

As I recall, in our recent meeting about the PMPRB, it was I who accused the poor executive from the pharmaceutical company of holding Canadians hostage to their demands that we withdraw the changes to the PMPRB. I don't think I heard the Conservatives having similar concerns about the motivation of the pharmaceutical industry.

I'm certainly not a blind supporter of everything big pharma does. In my past life, in the work I've done in global health, I have at times been led to the conclusion that big pharmaceuticals are not always.... Sometimes pharmaceuticals are great, but there are some bad actors out there, and there are some pharmaceutical companies that aren't always acting in the best interests of humanity.

Here I'm being accused of being too sympathetic with the pharmaceutical companies that don't want their contractual relationship with our government revealed. Maybe I am, but you know what?

When I talked to the ministry of health, they had, it seemed to me, genuine concerns that having to reveal the contractual relationships with the vaccine companies could jeopardize our relationship with the vaccine producers and jeopardize our supply.

Maybe they're lying. Maybe that's not true. I don't know, but you know what? The pharmaceutical and vaccine producers seem pretty worried about revealing these contractual obligations. They haven't made them public anywhere, so maybe the ministry of health isn't in fact lying to us. Maybe there is genuine concern that this is going to harm the interests of Canadians. The Conservatives can stick their chests out and be really macho and say, "Come on. All Canadians want to reveal the terms of this contract." Being macho—which ends up hurting all Canadians because it's jeopardizing our vaccine supply—is not, in my opinion, a good idea.

I go back to the last paragraph of this motion, where you're requiring vaccine producers to—

• (1240)

The Chair: Mr. Powlowski, address your comments through the chair, please.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I'm not sure how to make that through the chair, but I go back to the last paragraph. You're requiring vaccine producers to forward their contracts to a process in which it has yet to be determined what's going to be redacted and it has yet to be determined how this is going to go in camera. The pharmaceutical industry and the vaccine producers are not going to like this.

Again, I don't really know how important it is to the vaccine producers. My understanding is that this could jeopardize our vaccine supply. Does the opposition really want to roll the dice? "Maybe it will; maybe it won't, but let's roll the dice because we're Conservatives and we're macho. Let's play hardball with them."

I don't think this is the time to be playing hardball.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Powlowski.

Mr. Barlow, go ahead, please.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

When I put this motion together, I was hearing from constituents about the concerns they had when they were seeing countries like the United States and the United Kingdom having much better access to vaccines than we had here in Canada, but I had some faith in the Government of Canada and our bureaucrats to be negotiating the best agreement possible.

However, after listening to Mr. Powlowski's comments over the last few minutes, I am extremely concerned by the idea that now, all of a sudden, we're worried that antagonizing the vaccine manufacturers might jeopardize the delivery of vaccines. What kind of agreement did we sign if we have to worry that if we question what is in the agreement they can somehow arbitrarily cut us off if they don't like the tone of the opposition or the government?

Are there zero obligations in these contracts for the pharmaceutical companies to meet their contractual agreements? If there is somehow a bad tone from the Canadian House of Commons, can Pfizer or Johnson & Johnson or AstraZeneca or Moderna say they didn't like the tone and thank goodness they signed ridiculous contracts with the Government of Canada and can just withhold vaccines? That is incredibly short-sighted. If we indeed have these incredible agreements, these iron-clad agreements with these pharmaceutical companies, they should be open for scrutiny.

If my colleague is saying that if we antagonize them it could jeopardize the delivery of vaccines, I'm just thinking, holy smokes, what kind of agreements did we actually sign if a tweet or a Facebook post or an Instagram post is going to cause Johnson & Johnson to cut off our delivery of vaccines?

Now I am all the more ardent that this motion be supported by the committee, because I want to know what is in those agreements. Are there cash penalties? Are there obligations in terms of meeting the agreement on the quotas that the Government of Canada has reached with these pharmaceutical companies? Is there something more stringent or stronger than "best efforts" to meet our agreements?

I agree with my colleague Mr. Kelloway about the number of deaths we've had in Canada. He's right. Obviously I'm a passionate and fiery person, but I don't like to overblow things and say these agreements could have an impact on saving lives, but Mr. Kelloway is right. He nailed it. We are about trying to save lives.

I spoke to some friends of mine in the United Kingdom yesterday. My aunt in Scotland is getting her second dose of vaccine today. I can't help but wonder, if we had been better out of the gate, how many Canadian lives we would have saved if we had had access to vaccines. I know what the Prime Minister said today, but we can't treat this like we're ordering something on Amazon and say, "We've made all kinds of orders. We have a bunch of orders from all these different vaccine companies. We have these contracts." The question is, do we actually have the vaccine? That's what we don't have.

I get that we have the largest portfolio in the world in what we've ordered. That's great, but how many vaccines do we actually have? That is the biggest disappointment, the biggest failure we're facing right now. We don't have those vaccines. I get it that they may be coming, but to reassure and reassure....

As I say that about reassurance, I'm going to read a quote from my colleague Mr. Powlowski, which came up in some of the documents that were found. I know you are laughing, Marcus, but I just have to call you out a little bit on this one:

I, and I think a lot of people, would have more faith in our ability to do this quickly, and effectively, if we know there is a transparent process as to how we are doing things. As I have said it is hard now to accept reassurances that we are prepared, that we are doing all of the right things, when we can never, ever, get any specifics as to what we are doing and how we are going to do it. Compare what we hear about the health response to what we get in terms of the economic response on things like EI, taxes, student loans, business assistance. There we get specifics not just "we assure all Canadians that we are doing the things necessary...."

That's right. I couldn't agree with you more, Mr. Powlowski. Assurances aren't enough, and even the Liberal members of Parlia-

ment wonder why, if our agreements are so good, we are dipping into COVAX to get vaccines.

• (1245)

I know we're going to get the spin that this was part of the agreement and that this is normal. It's embarrassing. It has tarnished our reputation on the global stage—there is no question about it. You cannot spin that. The fact that a G7 country is dipping into COVAX for vaccines that were meant for developing and poorer countries and we are taking those for Canada.... I'm sorry, but as a Canadian citizen, as a proud Canadian, I say that is embarrassing, and there is no question that it has tarnished our reputation on the global stage.

I want to know what is in those contracts. I want to make sure that we are saving Canadian lives and that we don't leave this to reassurances from the government. I think Canadian taxpayers have a right to know how their tax dollars are being spent. We are spending tens of millions, of billions.... Well, now we're getting close to a trillion dollars on this COVID pandemic, and I think the vaccines are an integral part of that. Canadian taxpayers have the right to know what agreements were signed on their behalf.

Saying that we're going to antagonize these pharmaceutical companies and jeopardize deliveries I think is extremely short-sighted, and a horrifically poor argument for patting the Canadian taxpayer on the head and saying: "You know what? You don't need to know this. It's too important for you to know about this. Just sit back and take the assurances of the Prime Minister." That's what we've been doing. I'm sorry, but it's just not good enough.

Mr. Kelloway, you talked about the syringes. I spoke to the Alberta Minister of Health this week, and the Saskatchewan Minister of Health was at committee. They are getting less than 50% of those six doses out of the vaccine vials, even with the label change. As for what we are asking of Canadians, we don't know when the vaccines are going to be here, but for the vaccines that we do have, we're asking them to portion that out, to do everything they possibly can, but at the best of times, in Alberta and Saskatchewan, they're getting 50%. They're getting that sixth dose out of that vial 50% of the time. Not being able to tell them what's going to happen, how do we ask provinces to ration the vaccines they have? This is just getting worse and worse.

I'm not trying to make this a partisan issue, but, no offence, the Liberals are in government. The Liberals have to wear this.

This is your strategy, for lack of a better term, but I would argue that there isn't a vaccine strategy whatsoever.

• (1250)

The Chair: Through the chair, please.

Mr. John Barlow: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

I would argue that the current Liberal government does not have a vaccine strategy.

On the contracts and what we're able to see, as Mr. Powlowski said, all the information we're looking for may not be there. We've structured what can and can't be redacted by the law clerk, and I think it's imperative that Canadians have the answers they want. That is the job we have here.

I will conclude with this, Mr. Chair. I appreciate everybody's insights on this.

The arguments that have been put forward for why we can't support this motion—because we may antagonize pharmaceutical companies and jeopardize delivery—I think are ridiculous. If our agreements on those procurements of vaccines are strong, then we shouldn't worry about that. The second argument is to just be “reassured”, and it just doesn't hold water anymore.

I certainly don't hear from my constituents that they are pleased with “Hey, we just want a reassurance that we're going to get a vaccine.” No, they want to know in detail, or the best detail we can get, what agreements have been signed. Are there cash penalties? Why did we negotiate those on quarterly rather than monthly quotas? What are the ramifications for those pharmaceutical companies if they don't meet their obligations?

I think that is fair. These are taxpayers. These are Canadian citizens whose lives are on the line. I want to know, for me and my family, where they stand as well. We are talking about Canadians' lives. To just pat them on the head and say that this isn't something they are worthy of or deserve to know I don't think is fair.

I'm hoping that my colleagues on this committee will see that. We are not asking for anything that we're not going to get eventually, but we're asking, in terms of what we have seen over the last several weeks, that this be prioritized. The law clerk should have access to these documents, if he does not have them already, and should get them translated and submitted to this committee as quickly as possible for us to review and to provide Canadians the answers they so rightly deserve.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

Ms. Sidhu, please go ahead.

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

We have all heard very clearly that the terms of the contracts are to remain confidential. The opposition may choose to ignore it, but it has been made clear that disclosing certain details will compromise our bargaining position with the manufacturer and their position with other countries. If we were to be in breach of contract and lose vaccines, it would be damaging for our country and for Canadians.

This seems pretty clear to almost everyone except the opposition members, who are apparently not understanding that neither the European Union nor other countries reveal their contracts. Note that violating our agreement could repudiate the contracts. Our opposition members have their turn to ask the companies when they appear before our committee. They could have invited the companies to appear and asked them questions directly. Last meeting, two ministers, General Fortin and Dr. Tam were in attendance. Canadi-

ans have been assured repeatedly that we have a secure vaccine schedule before the end of September.

We know there have been delays. It's a bumpy road. Pfizer is expanding their plant. These delays have been explained. We remain committed to securing six million doses by the end of March. We know what the timeline is, and we have been very transparent on this matter. There are things that cannot be disclosed from the contracts. I know that the opposition likes to wave around contracts from other countries as props, but those are very heavily redacted. That is just a fact. It's not that our government is withholding information they are allowed to give us and are just choosing not to.

Has there been a slowdown of delivery for a few weeks? Yes. But we also have a firm commitment that we will receive more than 400,000 doses every week. We all know this is an evolving situation. There will be bumps. I can understand why that can be frustrating, but we are still on track to deliver enough doses to vaccinate almost half of the country by the summer. We provided to the provinces today confirmed numbers that more than 400,000 doses a week will be delivered, which does get to four million doses.

Once again, starting next week, we'll be receiving tens of thousands of doses of the Pfizer vaccine, with several million more on the way with Pfizer and Moderna alone. We remain on track to receive six million vaccines by the end of March, 20 million between April and June, and a total of 70 million doses by the end of September, just as we promised Canadians.

Mr. Chair, we also continue to follow developments concerning vaccine candidates of the five other manufacturers we have agreements with, including Sanofi, AstraZeneca, Johnson & Johnson and Novavax, with a view of getting more Health Canada-approved vaccines into Canada as quickly as we can. We need these vaccines quickly. We all know that.

You all know how much Brampton has been affected by the pandemic, as has the whole country. It got so sad that the armed forces had to come in. They reported deplorable conditions in our long-term care homes in the first wave of COVID-19. It is without a doubt a tragedy. We all know we are facing that. I think the majority of us can agree with this fact.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sidhu.

Mr. Davies, go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've lost my video. Can you hear me okay?

The Chair: Yes, I can hear you fine. I can't see when you nod and so forth, so I will miss that dimension, but I'm sure you'll overcome that.

Go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you.

I have to say a number of things on this.

First, the contracts are coming. That is the will of the House of Commons. We had this debate, and the motion was duly moved and passed in the House of Commons ordering the government to disclose all of the documents. That includes the vaccine contracts. Really, it's academic at this point to argue about whether the documents should or should not come; they are coming. If we're all democrats here, the majority in the House of Commons voted in favour of that, so I think we need to respect that. The only question really is when those contracts will come.

What I appreciate about this motion is that it posits the thesis that we should have those vaccine contracts sooner rather than later. I support that.

The basic issue, of course, that is underlying this is whether someone believes the contract should or should not be disclosed. I have a ton of respect for Dr. Powlowski, my good friend. I don't want to put words in his mouth, but he seems to be suggesting that it's his opinion that the contracts should not be disclosed, and he gave some reasons why. Again, that ship has sailed. Those arguments were made, and the majority of parliamentarians decided that we did want to see them.

On the issue of redaction, I will repeat that everybody agrees. I think we all understand that there is sensitive information in the contracts that are properly redacted. The motion that was introduced by Michelle Rempel Garner acknowledged that and it allows the law clerk to redact for those purposes, so that issue is already taken care of.

I want to point out again—and I know the Liberals don't seem to like this or they tend to minimize this point—that other countries have released contracts. The United States has released the Moderna and Pfizer contracts. The EU has released the AstraZeneca contract. Brazil has released the AstraZeneca contract, and there are varying degrees of redaction.

In the U.S. it's true that the two contracts that were released were significantly redacted, but they were still released and there was still some information disclosed to the public in the U.S. Brazil's contract was not so heavily redacted. There was a lot of information that the Brazilian government allowed its public to see. The EU, as we know from the minister, last week confirmed that the EU and AstraZeneca had negotiated the release of the document.

To Dr. Powlowski's point that this will anger the pharmaceutical companies, that is contradicted by Minister Anand's own revelation that one of the pharmaceutical companies did agree to release part of the document.

I would hasten to point out that this is not a contract between two private individuals in a commercial transaction. This is a contract signed by the Government of Canada on behalf of the Canadian citizens and it should follow normal procurement rules. No one negotiating a contract with the Government of Canada, which is doing so on behalf of taxpayers, has any expectation that their agreement is totally secret.

I would also point out—I still can't get an answer, and I tried to push Minister Anand last week on this—that, surely, the delivery schedules are in the contracts. Surely the number of doses that have been contracted for are in the contracts. If the Liberal government

has revealed those details, how is it not in violation of the confidentiality clause in the agreement? Do you know what that tells me? It tells me that the government is selectively revealing information about the contracts, information that it wants Canadians to know that might make the government look good, but it doesn't want to reveal and is not revealing any information that might reveal the converse.

On that, by the way, I understand why Pfizer and Moderna may not want the prices to be revealed. I understand why they may not want any technical information that might reveal their production, although I highly doubt that's in the contracts to begin with.

• (1300)

But why would Pfizer and Moderna have any objection to Canadians knowing what the delivery schedule is or the number of doses we're going to get and when? Why would they have any objection to our understanding what the consequential provisions of the agreement in terms of breach of contract say or don't say? Why would that be a matter of secrecy to them? It doesn't make any sense at all.

By the way, I asked Minister Anand last week if she would disclose the confidentiality clauses themselves. Let's see those, because she claims that the confidentiality clauses prohibit the release of any and all information in the contracts. Now, I'm a lawyer, and I was a contract lawyer for 16 years, and I'll tell you that it's not usual that a confidentiality clause imposes a blanket confidentiality restriction on everything in the agreement. Usually, there are sensitive parts that are not...but I may be wrong on this. Let's see the confidentiality clauses. Surely we can see that.

I think Mr. Barlow made an excellent point. The government can't speak out of both sides of its mouth. It can't say "We have secured these doses to the point where we will get six million doses by the end of March and every Canadian who wants one will be vaccinated by September", and then say "If we reveal any parts of these contracts, the pharmaceutical companies may cut off the supply." We either have a contract that secures our obligations or we don't.

I'll tell you what I suspect, but before I get there, I'll just say this. It came out today that Canada is now 47th in the world on the administration of first doses of vaccines. The source of that is Oxford, so I think we can all agree that it's probably a fairly reputable source. I remember that when we were 16th, the Liberals were saying that's not so bad, and then when we were 24th and then when we were 35th.... Now we're 47th, and even as we're slipping to 47th, I still hear people say, "Just wait, it's coming."

The facts are that we have gone from the Prime Minister saying that we have the best portfolio in the world to not being able to get these vaccines into Canadians' arms. I hope that changes. I suspect it will change. I suspect we will get millions of doses. We're not going to be 47th forever, but let's face it, this is not where Canadians expected us to be. This is not where the Prime Minister represented we would be in the middle of February.

I want to say what my suspicion is. I'm curious, because the Prime Minister and this government said repeatedly in 2015 that it would be "transparent by default". They went to great lengths to distinguish his government from the previous Harper government: that they would be science-focused, that they would unleash the scientists and that they would be "transparent by default". But you know what? They're not being transparent here.

With great respect to Ms. Sidhu, Mr. Chair, and her comments when she said the government has been very transparent.... Really? We're sitting here having a fight over revealing even a single word in a single contract that we've signed, and we all know that there are things in those contracts that can safely be revealed. That's not being transparent. That's being the opposite of transparent.

Here's my suspicion. I think there's a reason the government doesn't want to release these contracts and is fighting so darn hard not to do so. It's because of this. Prime Minister Trudeau has given his word on a number of occasions that we will have six million doses by the end of March: four million from Pfizer and two million from Moderna. He repeatedly says that. He has also said, as I said earlier, that every Canadian who wants a vaccine dose will have one by September. By the way, it's not "in September", but "by September". Incidentally, he's been a little slippery on that. First it was that all Canadians will be vaccinated, then it was all Canadians who want to be vaccinated, and now I've even heard him say that all Canadians will get a shot. It's a bit of a muddy target, but in any event, what has been absolutely firmly stated is that we will have doses by September for Canadians who want one.

• (1305)

My suspicion is that if we were to see these contracts, we would see that these contracts contain provisions that are much shakier than that. I think we're going to see provisions that say that these companies will provide doses of vaccines to Canadians, subject to production, subject to availability, subject to all sorts of things, and I think that is understandable and reasonable. The political problem the Prime Minister has gotten into is that that's not what he told Canadians. He didn't say that subject to a number of things, we expect to have six million doses by March. He has not said that subject to a number of exigencies we expect and hope that people will be vaccinated by September. So he's made his bed, and now he's stuck in it, because he can't make a bold claim about the firm receipt of doses and then at the same time refuse to produce the documents that would back that up. I think they will show that his very firm commitments are simply overstatements.

That's my suspicion as to why the Liberals are so reluctant to release what taxpayers have every right to see.

The other thing I want to mention is that there are a few other issues that make me curious about why the government is being so reluctant. This government has repeatedly said that we will have

enough vaccines secured from Pfizer and Moderna alone to vaccinate every Canadian by September, but then a week and a half ago, as we all know, it tapped into the COVAX fund—the main function of which, let's be honest, is to provide vaccines for poor and middle-income countries in the world—for 1.9 million doses, which we will receive in June.

Remember that COVAX is over and above the seven contracts. That is the eighth source of vaccine that Canada has secured. The seven sources we have include 20 million doses from AstraZeneca, and the 1.9 million doses through COVAX are also from AstraZeneca, so I scratch my head and wonder why that is. If we have enough doses from just Moderna and Pfizer alone, and then we have another five vaccine manufacturers, including AstraZeneca, from which we have secured 20 million doses, why would we need to tap into 1.9 million from COVAX on top of that?

All these facts together come and spell one thing for me—that the political commitment that's being made by Prime Minister Trudeau is not backed up by the behaviour and the actions of this government. If he came clean and said that maybe he overstated things, that he can't be sure we are going to get those vaccine doses by March, or by September, that would be honest, but it would also show that the commitments he has repeatedly made, up to now, have not been entirely truthful.

For all of these reasons, we, as health committee members, are asking the law clerk to receive the contracts, to redact them according to the criteria that have been given, and to send them to the health committee here so that we can see that whatever is unredacted is absolutely responsible.

Frankly, I don't understand why anyone would argue against that. Certainly I've seen no evidence that any of the vaccine manufacturers have withdrawn supplies from the EU or from the U.S. or from Brazil because they have released redacted contracts, so that academic fear that's been expressed is actually completely belied by the evidence we have seen.

With great respect to all of my colleagues, there are many reasons why we should be in support of this motion and see these contracts in redacted form, and there are, in my view, very few reasons that would properly ground opposition to this motion. It's quite clear to me that the government doesn't want to pass this motion.

• (1310)

At the end of the day, I think we come to the fundamental question of whether or not Canadians have a right to see any part of these contracts. What I'm hearing is that Liberals are taking the position that Canadians don't have a right to see a single word of these contracts. The opposition, for our part, is saying that this is not a tenable position. I am happy to take that discussion to the public and get their views on that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

We will go now to Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I always enjoy listening to Mr. Davies' rationale, but there has been a lot of talk about the House motion. Let me read the following from the House motion:

(y) an order of the House do issue for all memoranda, e-mails, documents, notes and other records relating to the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force and its subcommittees;

(z) an order of the House do issue for all memoranda, e-mails, documents, notes and other records relating to the Government of Canada's COVID-19 vaccine distribution and monitoring strategy, including, but not limited to anticipated timelines for the distribution of an approved COVID-19 vaccine across Canada and the prioritization of population groups for vaccination;

(aa) all documents issued pursuant to this order (i) be organized by department and be provided to the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel within 15 days of the adoption of this order, (ii) be vetted for matters of personal privacy information, and national security, and, with respect to paragraph (y) only, be additionally vetted for information the disclosure of which could reasonably be expected to interfere with contractual or other negotiations between the Government of Canada and a third party, by the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel within seven days of the receipt of the documents, (iii) be laid upon the table by the Speaker, at the next earliest opportunity, once vetted, and permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Health;

I don't want to put words in Mr. Davies' mouth, but I thought I heard him say something along the lines that the House motion was going to dictate that we would get these anyway. I am not a lawyer. I know that Dr. Powlowski and Mr. Davies are both lawyers, so those statements would have meant a lot more to them than they did to me, but I don't see the mention of contracts in there.

Mr. Chair, transparency and accountability, as we've said many, many times, are extremely important to this government. Minister Anand and others have also said that we're committed to releasing as much information as possible on all of our efforts throughout this pandemic, without putting access to supplies, including vaccines, at risk. We're providing information publicly on the vaccine delivery schedules.

I have to tip my hat, if I may, to Major-General Dany Fortin. Every day he is in front of the press and in front of Canadians, stating that, with the best information he has, this is what's coming out this week and this is what's going to be sent, as working numbers, to each province and each territory. I understand that there is not a single country out there doing that level of work. I don't think that's something he had to do, but I do think it's something he chose to do so that provinces could be as prepared as possible, knowing full well that there could be bumps in the road and knowing full well that the numbers were working numbers.

Speaking of numbers, we hear now that after the 15th we'll start to get 400,000 to 470,000, or something like that, per week until the end of March so that we can hit those totals that we need to hit. Providing those deliveries week by week to provinces and territories gives them a chance to plan for their delivery operations. Again, no other country is putting out publicly the weekly delivery schedules.

The minister spoke about this heavily at her appearance and she explained why. I think she also mentioned, although I don't want to put words in the minister's mouth, a non-disclosure agreement. We've heard comments about copies of contracts in other countries that were released. I was told by someone that the entire contract was just about completely redacted and blacked out to the point that there was very little information in that contract. A contract is an

agreement between two parties. One party can't choose to arbitrarily, in my opinion, share that information until the other party suggests that is okay. I believe there is a non-disclosure agreement within that.

Mr. Chair, we've all lived our lives in the shadow of this virus over the past year. Canadians have experienced isolation, uncertainty and heartbreak. All of us on this committee can talk about how we've missed seeing our friends. We're all type A personalities. We're huggers. We're high-fivers. We're handshakers.

• (1315)

Like all of you, I'm locked in a small room and on Zoom all day long. I miss family. I miss friends and extended family. We have communities that have lost businesses or have businesses that have trouble making ends meet. We've seen communities band together. Here in Nova Scotia, we have our own little bubble, and we've been very successful, because the members of our communities bought early into public health guidelines. They truly did, because they love their neighbours, they love their communities and they love their families.

They're taking it so seriously that we've had extremely low numbers, but again, many businesses have gone out of business or have had trouble making ends meet, and we have lost many loved ones to this horrible pandemic. We're seeing the pandemic continue, and we're seeing it continue to take a toll on Canadians, but we are seeing the numbers go down. We're seeing the numbers go down since the increase in January—and that's a good sign—and we're seeing safe and effective vaccines being rolled out across the country.

We know how difficult this has been, and we all just want this pandemic to end. As vaccinations roll out among those in our communities who are most at risk of infection, we need to keep following the measures that prevent the spread of this virus and its variants. We know what worked in the first wave. We just need to buckle down and continue to do that.

Mr. Chair, from the beginning of this pandemic, the government has been keeping Canadians safe by acquiring PPE—we've talked about that at our committee in the past—and supplies in a very competitive worldwide market. I think we all heard very clearly that every country was staking out their territory to get as much PPE as they possibly could in the early days.

We continue to work non-stop in negotiating access to hundreds of millions of doses of vaccines. We heard Mr. Kelloway talk about this, and we heard Mr. Barlow reiterate what Mr. Kelloway said with regard to the portfolio of vaccine companies that we've dealt with, and again, in an atmosphere that is very volatile and very complex, with a bunch of countries staking out their claims.

Mr. Chair, Canadians across the country have been taking to heart the guidance from our public health officials and, as I said for Nova Scotians, truly putting it into action. This spirit of co-operation has been crucial as our first line of defence to keep our neighbours and communities safe.

We all know that the only way to get us through this marathon of the pandemic is to get vaccines to all Canadians who want one. Every member of this committee understands that and knows how important that is. That has been the goal of our strategy: making sure that safe and effective vaccines can be delivered, distributed and administered as soon as we could acquire them.

Mr. Chair, it's a strategy that we've been putting into action for a long time. The fact of getting these vaccines to Canadians in a timely manner means that we are competing with that entire world, that market, that competitive market of countries of the world again staking out their claim to vaccines, showing that vaccines are such an incredibly precious commodity.

We've been approaching companies from around the world. As soon as their vaccine candidates began to show some promise, we would ink a contract with them, knowing full well that there could be bumps in the road and not knowing in advance, way back in the early days of the pandemic...because, Mr. Chair, I don't think there's much evidence in history of vaccines being developed, approved and sent around the world and to the provinces and territories 11 months after a pandemic has hit. Again, I'd like to give some kudos to the scientific world. It's absolutely incredible what this world was able to accomplish in getting vaccines developed, approved, manufactured and sent out to countries all around the world.

We knew that an approach based on the most recent scientific developments...and thanks to the COVID-19 vaccine task force, we had access to advice from leading experts in vaccines and immunology to alert us to the best candidates. Of course, we've signed with seven of those best candidates. We got commitments and signed flexible agreements with seven vaccine manufacturers, starting with Moderna in July, a long time ago. Again, I'm going back to the point that it was July, six months after a pandemic hits. That's absolutely amazing.

This government then went on to get access to millions of doses, to put in options on our purchase agreements for millions and millions more. By ensuring access to nearly 400 million doses of potential vaccines from seven different manufacturers, our strategy is set to deliver for Canadians.

• (1320)

Mr. Chair, I'm proud to say that experts across Canada and around the world agree with this approach. These include Dr. Zain Chagla of McMaster University, Dr. Jason Kindrachuk of the University of Manitoba, and health law professor Lorian Hardcastle at the University of Calgary. Susan Athey of Stanford University has called Canada a "role model". By building, as Mr. Kelloway says, that diverse portfolio of vaccines, we have positioned Canada to be able to deploy vaccines as quickly as possible.

Mr. Chair, this approach is providing much-needed security to communities across Canada. Shipments of Moderna and Pfizer vaccines have been arriving. Our most vulnerable people in long-term

care homes and health care workers are being vaccinated. Working together with the provinces and territories, we've received and distributed a total of 1.4 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, with Canadians getting their first dose and more being inoculated every day. However, the road continues to be long. We do need to anticipate that things can go wrong in what is proving to be an unstable and unpredictable marketplace. Countries are clamouring to get the doses they negotiated for, as I said earlier, as fast as possible, and Canada is no exception.

Again, it's an extremely pressurized environment. We know and we've seen that there will be bumps. I think the Prime Minister and the government have remained vigilant. They have been in contact nearly every day with the CEOs at these companies. They've reassured us that they will meet their commitments for the first quarter of this year. That means Pfizer will still deliver a total of four million doses, and Moderna two million, by the end of March.

Mr. Chair, Canada is hardly alone in facing obstacles in receiving vaccines, but this is what our strategy was designed for. Having a number of agreements in place, building a diverse portfolio and keeping arrangements flexible are helping to bring stability to a really chaotic situation. While the numbers may fluctuate in the short term, manufacturers will continue to find efficiencies as they produce. We've seen already that Pfizer has had to upgrade their facility in order to be able to produce more and more doses for distribution around the world. This government remains committed to sharing accurate information as soon as we get it. As more doses are produced, the system for manufacturing and distributing vaccines will stabilize.

Mr. Chair, I know that every member of this committee, just like all Canadians, wants to see an end to this terrible pandemic. Any time we hear of delays in getting vaccine shipments, the frustration grows, but we've put Canada on the right track with a strategy for acquiring vaccines that combines diversification, flexibility and aggressive negotiating. When setbacks occur, we're committed to keeping Canadians informed and redoubling our efforts to get shipments back on schedule.

As we've said before, the race to end this pandemic has been a marathon more than a sprint. Now more than ever, all the members of this committee need to conserve our energy for fighting the virus for Canadians, and not each other. If we work together now, we'll be able to get together soon—I like that line—and more safely. We will get through this.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

• (1325)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Powlowski, please go ahead.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Thank you.

I have to thank my colleague Darren Fisher for his very succinct examination of the vaccine issue.

I have to also thank my Conservative colleagues for citing me, so that way I get my voice in twice. Not only do I say it myself, but I get the Conservatives to say what I said earlier, which is great for me.

Let me clarify something about that. That was early on in the pandemic. That was in an internal email which came out, I gather, because of the House motion, but it was from one Liberal MP to the Liberal COVID committee, and that was related to the ventilator issue. I was concerned that we didn't have enough ventilators. Am I going to say something to my own government, to my own party, when I have the health concerns of my constituents in mind? Damn right I am. Do you know what? No one in the party has yet given me much grief over that. Certainly, it would be a sad state of affairs if you couldn't send emails making suggestions to your colleagues and to people within the party. What is criticism? Criticism is just saying, "I think there's a better way we can do things than the way we are." We then have to worry that potentially, because of these kinds of motions, it will go public. What are you supposed to do, not send such things to your own party? Are you supposed to stay quiet when you see things happen? I don't think that's in anybody's best interests. I will continue to look after the interests of my constituents.

Let me just clarify another thing, as per Darren Fisher's comment. I'm not a lawyer. I was never called to the bar. I did do my law degree and I did a master's in law—in fact, in global health law, which was, up until the pandemic, a particularly obscure area of law but now it suddenly seems to be fairly important.

With respect to the vaccines, I'm going to speak a little bit more about that. To go back to the issue at hand, the Conservatives say, "Well, why can't we know the details of the contract? Is the contract that flimsy that if we were to reveal the details it would jeopardize our supply?" It's been a long time since I did contract law, I have to admit. I never practised contract law as Mr. Davies did, so I can't say I'm any great expert on contract law. You know, I was probably, at the time, a pretty poor student of contract law; however, there is something called breach of contract, as I recall. I mean, there are contractual obligations that one is required to follow, and if you don't follow the contractual obligations, you're held in breach of contract.

One of the contractual obligations in our contract with the vaccine producers is a privacy clause, a confidentiality clause. Don Davies, in what I think was perhaps one of the most brilliant questions I've heard anybody ask, not just in these kinds of meetings but ever, said, "Can you reveal the terms of the confidentiality clause?" which I thought was an absolutely brilliant question. That just goes to show that we don't even know what is in that confidentiality clause.

Even through a committee like this, through the Government of Canada, would revealing at least parts of that contract put us in breach of the contract? I don't know. My guess is that, since there hasn't been a pandemic before and there hasn't been an issue like this before, that kind of issue, whether we would be in breach of contract, would be something that someone like the Supreme Court of Canada would have to come up with an answer to. Do we want to chance it? Do we want to roll the dice? Maybe we would lose but maybe we wouldn't.

The other thing I was going to say about this was that, regardless of whether or not you're in breach of contract, this market for vaccines at the moment is absolutely 100% a seller's market, and certainly the vaccine companies could find other buyers for the vaccines. Do you really want to give them an excuse and an opportunity?

My guess is that right now—given that vaccines are such a hot commodity that in places apparently trucks containing vaccines are being robbed as people try to get them—the vaccine producers could find a higher price for the vaccines, so do you really want to give them that opportunity? Do you want to give them the business case? Do you want to give them the legal case to say we are in breach of contract and the Government of Canada hasn't been very favourable to the vaccine companies? Do you want to give them the opportunity?

● (1330)

I don't think so. You quoted me earlier about criticizing my government. I'm not just saying this because I'm a Liberal. I'm saying it because I believe it. I don't think this is the time to get macho and start demanding things of people we are dependent on. We are dependent on the vaccine producers and that's unfortunate. We are dependent on them, but let me say a bit about the fact that we are dependent upon them.

Why are we dependent upon them? Why would that be? In fact, there was a time in our history when we would have been in a much better position in terms of producing vaccines. We had Connaught Laboratories. I went to U of T. I don't know who else went to U of T, but I recall I used to run by Connaught Laboratories regularly. It's on Spadina Avenue. Connaught Laboratories, for many years, produced vaccines. I think it produced diphtheria antitoxin. It produced insulin at cost and sent it around the world. It sounded like, to begin with, it was maybe the only place in the world that produced insulin. It was a non-profit organization.

Subsequent to that, Connaught for a while was owned by the Government of Canada. Guess who sold it off. It was Mulroney who originally sold it off. The Conservatives are asking why we don't have the vaccine-manufacturing capacity. Look in the mirror. Maybe you'll see the answer.

Also, subsequent to that, there were a whole bunch of pharmaceutical companies that had a presence in Canada and that closed. For example, there was AstraZeneca in 2007, Johnson & Johnson in 2010, Teva Pharmaceuticals in 2011, and Boehringer Ingelheim in 2013. I had to look this up on Wikipedia. Who was Prime Minister during that period of time? I think it was a Conservative. Former prime minister Harper was there.

Now, I don't want to play the political game too much and say that the fact that we have no vaccine manufacturing capacity is all because of the Conservatives. For all I know, had the Liberals been in power, the same thing would have happened. I don't know, but I would note that it seems there was a massive loss of companies that could produce pharmaceuticals and vaccines that occurred under Conservative governments.

Furthermore, what did we do when this started? From that letter you cited me on, I was right there at the beginning, advocating—

• (1335)

The Chair: Speak through the chair, please.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Mr. Chair, I was there, right at the beginning, advocating for things that were, in my opinion, as I said in that letter, in the best interests of Canada. In fact, the people from VIDO-InterVac, at the University of Saskatchewan, contacted me, because they wanted, through my membership on the health committee, to get out the idea that they wanted the government to help them build a facility that could produce vaccines. The company rightly identified the fact that we would eventually get to a point where there would be a vaccine, but Canada had no vaccine-producing capacity. They asked our government for assistance and, subsequently, we funded VIDO-InterVac at the University of Saskatchewan for \$46 million.

In addition, our government gave \$170 million to the National Research Council in order to build a large-scale biologics manufacturing centre. We invested \$25 million in Precision NanoSystems, a Canadian biotech firm, in order to improve our capacity to produce RNA vaccines. We gave VBI Vaccines in Ottawa up to \$156 million and gave money to IMV, a Dartmouth pharmaceutical, and Medicago, which is in the process of developing a vaccine. We gave money to all of these various vaccine producers to try to get out of the position we are in now, which is dependent upon foreign companies, foreign pharmaceuticals and this kind of rat race where everyone in the world is trying to get hold of the vaccines.

We wanted to be able to be in a position where we had control over our own supply of vaccines, but unfortunately, science isn't something that happens overnight, and production takes time, and we are in that situation. We are dependent on these companies. Again, do we really want to roll the dice?

As for the public, whom do you want to believe? Do you want to believe a government that says we'd be in breach of contract? Do you want to believe a government that says that revealing these details could harm our vaccine supply, or do you want to believe the opposition? I don't want to roll the dice. My parents are waiting for the vaccine. My brother has some serious underlying health issues, and I want him to get the vaccine. It's in the interests of all Canadians to get the vaccines, and I think doing anything to jeopardize that supply... I think that this motion, in antagonizing the vaccine producers, is something that could potentially jeopardize our supply of vaccines.

Once again, I do not agree with this motion.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Powlowski.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mrs. Vignola.

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like us to look at the situation from another angle.

Suppose you are on the verge of retirement. You go to your financial advisor to tell him that you need to buy shares that will

grow in value quickly, so that you can retire soon and lead a normal life. Your advisor tells you that you will have shares in a number of companies and that this will allow you to lead a normal life once you retire. You then ask questions about those shares, just as we do now with vaccines: what is the vesting schedule, how will the shares be acquired, how much will it cost in the end, and whether you are getting a good deal. Each time, your financial advisor tells you that there is nothing to worry about and that you will be able to retire without any problems, but doesn't give you any more details. What will you do? Are you going to trust him blindly or are you going to ask questions to get clear and precise answers? He has given you acquisition targets, but you have no idea what the overall plan is.

That's a bit like what is required in this case: we want to have an idea of the overall plan, to know where we are going and whether we are really getting a good deal, as customers. After all, we are clients of pharmaceutical companies, and as such, we have a right to these answers.

This is not our money, it is taxpayers' money, and not just the current taxpayers. Given the debt accumulated since March 2020, it is also future taxpayers' money.

We depend on foreign companies because bad decisions were made in the past about patents, university research and production plants. We need to look at these decisions clearly, admit that they were wrong and improve things by investing and taking care of our people. The effects will not be immediate, but they will be felt later.

In the meantime, the fact remains that we are clients of these foreign pharmaceutical companies, and as such, we are entitled to get answers and to be treated well. Of course, we depend on these pharmaceutical companies, but they too depend on us. After all, the expediting of their research has only been made possible by public funding. So we are paying for two things, both research and vaccines, without even knowing whether the price we are paying for these vaccines is fair.

If we see the contracts, we will be able to get a better idea of the situation and get the answers that will allow us to look ahead. I don't see this as a way to hit anyone over the head, but rather as a way to reassure people. When people don't have information, they start to make assumptions, and that's when we see the most conspiracy theories coming out. Having clear, frank, honest and straightforward answers allows you to answer people's questions, to calm them down, to reassure them.

Access to contracts will facilitate the work of all MPs, regardless of party, and allow them to better intervene with their fellow citizens.

• (1340)

We should not act like a financial advisor who hides information. We must act like a financial advisor who has an excellent plan so that we can live a normal life after we retire, that is, withdraw from the current situation marked by COVID-19 and return to a normal life.

This is my comment. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Vignola.

[*English*]

We go now to Ms. Sidhu.

Ms. Sidhu, go ahead.

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

As I said earlier, this is an always-evolving situation. It is evolving even now. Since we started this discussion a few hours ago, the Prime Minister made an important announcement. He announced that Pfizer would be delivering millions more doses in the spring. Deliveries that had been scheduled for the last quarter of the year are being moved up. We will see even more in the summer months.

The Prime Minister also said that we will soon share the schedule with the provinces and territories so they can prepare to get all those doses into people's arms. He also announced that we would receive an additional four million doses from Moderna and nine million doses from Pfizer, which will arrive over the summer. We are now on track to receive 84 million doses by the end of September from just these two manufacturers, Pfizer and Moderna.

Another point I want to make is that the big difference between other countries and Canada is that they had domestic capacity before the pandemic. This is to echo Dr. Powlowski's point about pharmaceutical manufacturers repeatedly pulling out of Canada on the Conservatives' watch. Remember that New Zealand, Australia, South Korea and Japan have barely even started vaccinating and are countries with an at-home industry. What are [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]? Minister Champagne announced on Tuesday that Canada has reached an agreement in principle with Novavax, directing that leading developer to manufacture their vaccine at the expanded Royalmount facility, starting potentially in late 2021.

The point is this, Mr. Chair. Not only has our government been able to adapt to this ever-changing situation, but in doing so we are also reversing the trend of manufacturers leaving Canada. We are rebuilding our own capacity to sustain ourselves. All Canadian vaccine developers supported by our government are making progress through their clinical trials. Medicigo is launching phase two or three trials in November. This is all good work that is happening.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1345)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sidhu.

We go now to Mr. Davies.

Mr. Davies, go ahead.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have just a couple of things.

Interestingly, Ms. Sidhu just commented on this figure in terms of the Prime Minister announcing that we're going to get 80 million doses. I noticed that she said "by the end of September". Again, this is part of the confusion I have about whether it's "by September" or "by the end of September" and this increasingly ever-changing target. It's hard to get clear communications from this government, and I think clarity is very important to Canadians in a time of crisis.

What's interesting.... There is a point I wanted to make in terms of scaring off these pharmaceutical companies. One thing we all have to remember is that the money that went into developing these vaccines was, by and large, public. In fact, if I understand correctly, Moderna was 100% funded by United States taxpayers. This is not a question of these pharmaceutical companies having spent billions of dollars of their own money and spending years on their own in taking risks to develop these vaccines so that they'd have an expectation of private development and hoarding of the technology and information. These vaccines were developed through public dollars, by and large. We're not talking about hypertension drugs or baldness cures or any of the private ones where you could legitimately argue that these pharmaceutical companies developed these on their own and have a right to control them.

We have a worldwide pandemic, and I'm hearing Liberals talk about the private pharmaceutical development model standing in the way—as basically a boulder in the stream—of this development, as the whole world breathlessly waits for more vaccines and we're waiting to see if Pfizer, Moderna or AstraZeneca can produce enough.

Some of my colleagues on this committee and I have had a lot of talks about the concept of compulsory licensing, which is exactly what should be used in this situation. Compulsory licensing means this: When a private patent holder has the patent to a life-saving medication and is either unwilling or unable to make that medication available and life or death is on the line, governments have the right to act on those patents.

Here, we are talking about the normal right of expectation of a couple of pharmaceutical companies that might get mad at us if we reveal the contracts they signed, when we reveal the contracts to produce life-saving medication that the whole world needs, which we paid for. That's a shocking abdication of public responsibility. If this government did negotiate such a right with these companies, I think Canadians have a right to know that. I think Dr. Powlowski overstated my brilliance on this, maybe, but I will reiterate: Let's see the confidentiality clauses, then. Let's see exactly what this government agreed to.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this, but I just have to if we're playing the blame game. The Conservatives did, in my view, make a terrible mistake in privatizing Connaught Labs in 1986, and they deserve every legitimate criticism that can be levelled against that. For decades, Connaught Labs had provided cheap insulin to Canadians.

By the way, I'm going to stop for a moment and note that here we are, in 2021, at the 100th anniversary of the Canadian discovery of insulin in this country at U of T, by Dr. Banting and Dr. Best. I want to throw out some thanks to my colleague Sonia Sidhu for her championing of the diabetes strategy. It was Connaught Labs that made sure they honoured the objective of Dr. Banting and Dr. Best to make insulin available not for private profit, but as a discovery for the world. That saved millions of lives by allowing diabetics to get access to cheap insulin.

Connaught Labs also, by the way, played a role in vaccination—I believe for diphtheria. Dr. Powlowski is a doctor, so I'm not going to go further because he'll know what the other diseases were. This was a public manufacturer, so what a colossal policy failure for the Conservatives to privatize that and to begin the process of leaving Canada—to this day—in the position that we never should have been in, which is that we don't have domestic capacity, as a G7 country, to produce life-saving vaccines and medications.

• (1350)

I'm going to turn my attention to the Liberals, because they play their role in this too. Since 1986, by my count, Liberals have been in power 19 years, 13 of them in majority governments, over seven terms. What did they do? Did they bring back a public drug manufacturer? No. Did they do anything to change that neo-liberal course of pharmaceutical policy that was set in motion by the Mulroney government, where we gave longer patents to pharmaceutical companies and signed trade deals that protected, globally, pharmaceutical profits?

The Liberals won't even go ahead and implement their own PM-PRB reforms that they know are the right thing to do. They backed off three times because of big pharma pressure. There has been zero change by the Liberal government since 1986 to address the problematic situation that the Mulroney government put us into. I don't think it lies in the mouths of any Liberals to point fingers at Conservatives. A pox on both the Conservatives and the Liberals for this position. For 150 years, these two parties have been in power in this country.

Here we are, in 2021, and we don't have the ability to produce a life-saving vaccine. Do you know who does? Argentina, Mexico, India, Australia and Japan do. Argentina was an economic basket case 10 years ago. We're a member of the G7, the most exclusive economic club on earth. We're one of the wealthiest nations on earth. We're one of the best societies on earth, and our successive federal governments have let us get into this position. Frankly, that's a shameful abdication of responsibility for which both the Conservatives and the Liberals owe an explanation to the Canadian public.

I think that's all I want to say, at this point. My final conclusion is that nobody wants to see vaccine production or distribution delayed or interrupted, but again, I don't think having us see delivery schedules and some basic provisions of the contracts that this government has signed on behalf of Canadians will do that. Also, I'm not hearing any real response to the governance value of transparency. At one time, this government really believed in that. In fact, they used that as a significant wedge issue to convince Canadians as to why they should reject the previous Conservative govern-

ment. They made a pledge to be more transparent. Again, by default, we don't even have....

We shouldn't have to explain why we want transparency. Mr. Trudeau said it's an expectation. If the only argument I'm hearing from this government is, oh, my goodness, the big bad pharmaceutical companies might not give us our doses of vaccines if we reveal redacted contracts to Canadians, then I'm going to say that those contracts were horrifically negotiated. Also, do you know what you tell those big pharmaceutical companies? You tell them we'll compulsory-license them and we'll produce those vaccine doses here in Canada. Do you know why? I'll tell you what's more important than big pharmaceutical profits and interests—the health and lives of Canadians. That trumps privacy and private profit.

Quite honestly, where I'm going to conclude.... We haven't talked about this in this committee either. I still have not received a real answer from this government as to why Canada is opposing India, South Africa and Brazil's request to the WTO to temporarily relax TRIPS rules to make this technology and intellectual property available for the entire world to start producing. We could unleash the massive ability of the Indian and Brazilian pharmaceutical industries to produce vaccines by the billions, but they just don't have the technology and IP.

Why are we continuing to use a private sector drug development model in the context of a global pandemic, when we know that to do so...? The whole world is waiting for these private companies to ramp up production. Why are we restricting production just to them? Why aren't we busting open the industrial capacity of the entire world to produce vaccines? Lest you think this is an issue only of economics, it's not.

• (1355)

I'm going to conclude by saying this. This is a global virus. We just passed a motion in this committee earlier today to study dangerous variants, variants that, if this virus mutates, could render the vaccines that we have less effective or even completely ineffective.

Do you know what? Making sure that high-risk individuals in every country of the world are vaccinated is not just a question of morality; it's a question of self-interest. All it takes is one person from Cameroon with a dangerous new variant to hop on a plane and get off in Toronto to become a super-spreader and globally infect and introduce a dangerous variant into Canada against which the vaccines that we have may be less effective or even ineffective.

I want to hear from my Liberal colleagues as to whether they support their Liberal government's opposition at the WTO to making the global COVID vaccines widely available or they agree that this is really the private preserve of the Pfizers, Modernas and AstraZenecas of the world.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Mr. Kelloway is up next, but I'm going to propose right now, since we've been at this for three hours, that we suspend for a few minutes and let committee staff take a bit of a break, perhaps a bio break. I suspect we could all use a bit of a break. Is there any opposition to suspending for 10 minutes?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: That's for 10 minutes.

The Chair: Yes.

Very well. We will suspend for 10 minutes. We will resume at 11:08 my time. Thank you.

• (1355) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1410)

The Chair: We're back.

Mr. Kelloway, I hope you're ready to proceed. Please go ahead.

Mr. Mike Kelloway: I am, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the 10-minute break. It's much appreciated.

I want to take a quick moment to recognize the House staff and administrators and the translators for their work today in terms of time they're putting into this. Also, I'm not sure if MP Powlowski is here, live and in the flesh via Zoom, but I also want to give him a shout-out before I talk about vaccines for a moment. I really value Marcus's approach. I know he's not a lawyer and didn't go to the bar, but he has legal experience and is obviously a committed doctor. What I like about Marcus, or MP Powlowski, is that he challenges the status quo. He's not a lemming. He's not someone who goes with the flow. He is someone who challenges us in caucus, in a good way, and as a government. I appreciate you, Marcus, for doing that for us.

MP Davies talked about the momentum of the pandemic, with the variants that are quite distressing for us all. We are seeing that current momentum of the pandemic, unfortunately. We're going to continue to see high rates of infection in many areas of the country until we make significant progress to interrupt that trend. COVID-19 is spreading among people of all ages. However, nationally, our senior citizens continue to be at the highest risk of severe outcomes. Likewise, outbreaks have occurred in high-risk populations, many of whom, sadly, have historically experienced systemic stigma and discrimination. They include prison populations and indigenous communities.

We're continuing to see and experience the downstream impacts of weeks and months of elevated disease activity. We're still seeing high numbers of severe illness and death, along with significant disruptions to health services. We're seeing a range of ongoing challenges, Mr. Chair, especially in areas that are not adequately equipped to manage complex medical emergencies.

The scale and impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic have presented us with some daunting challenges. We've been talking about them all afternoon, but they're marked by deep complexities. Therefore, the response to this pandemic, Mr. Chair, has to encompass a multitude of perspectives and has to be adaptable. We've talked about being flexible and adaptable today as well.

Despite the enduring difficulties afflicting the global community, Canadians should be heartened by the progress that has been made. Passionate global and domestic communities of practice in a range of disciplines have come together to draw on the cutting edge of science, along with a host of other science and medical experts.

Vaccines have been developed at record speed. I know the anxiety that every community in the country feels with respect to that statement. Vaccines have been developed at record speed. They have. I know it feels like multiple years rolled into one, but to put it in perspective, this time last year there wasn't a vaccine. What we've been able to do as a global community is historic, really, but we need to do better and we know that.

Through the strategic advance purchase agreements we talked about with the seven vaccine manufacturers, Canada has procured sufficient vaccine doses to vaccinate all Canadians during the coming year. We've heard that, too. In fact, taking into consideration the possibility of supply chain interruptions—of which we've had some—and of some of the vaccines not graduating from clinical trials or being authorized for use by Health Canada, the federal government has taken the strategy of diversifying its vaccine purchases and securing more than enough vaccines for Canadians.

Mr. Chair, Canada is committed to donating any surplus doses to countries that are struggling to vaccinate in their own jurisdictions. The pandemic—let's make it clear—is a global problem requiring a global solution.

Recognizing the urgent need for COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics, the Minister of Health, Minister Hajdu, signed an interim order respecting the importation, sales and advertising of drugs for use in relation to COVID-19. The order allowed the Government of Canada to speed up the review and authorization of drugs and vaccines for COVID-19 without compromising safety and quality.

• (1415)

Also, Mr. Chair, on December 8 Canada published "Canada's COVID-19 Immunization Plan" on the Public Health Agency of Canada website. The plan outlines the most ambitious vaccine program in Canadian history and was developed in consideration of all levels of government, indigenous leaders, stakeholders, international partners, industry, and medical and science experts, among others.

The complexity—and I've talked about this—of this operation makes it remarkable, given the ongoing global procurement and relentless demand for the vaccine. With the expansive geography of our country and the unique storage and transportation requirements of the vaccine, which are many and varied, the coordination required between both levels of government and indigenous communities, I think, is something to hold up with pride. But we always need to do better.

The immunization plan, to go back to that, is predicated on six core principles that govern the planning, decision-making and actions of all those involved in the pandemic process and response—and there are many. These principles are science-driven, thank goodness. They are based on science-driven decision-making; transparency; coherence and adaptability—we talked about that today—fairness and equity; public involvement; and consistent reporting.

The plan, Mr. Chair, also lays out seven steps in the rollout process. These include communicating and engaging with Canadians throughout the campaign, obtaining sufficient supply of vaccines, obtaining regulatory authorization from Health Canada to ensure the safety and efficacy of vaccines, allocating and distributing vaccines efficiently and securely, administering the vaccines according to a sequence of priority populations identified by health experts, and collecting data to monitor vaccine safety, effectiveness and coverage. All of these steps are well under way, and work is ongoing on each of them.

The vaccine doses, Mr. Chair, are being distributed according to the federal, provincial and territorial plans to ensure fair and equitable allocation. To manage the distribution of vaccines, the Public Health Agency of Canada formed a vaccine rollout task force and established a national operation centre under the direction of General Dany Fortin.

The operation centre is staffed with planning and logistics experts from the Canadian Armed Forces and other government departments. They're responsible for distributing the vaccines across the country. As well, private sector logistics service providers have been enlisted to help with the very ambitious undertaking.

The Canadian government strategy is informed by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization, an independent committee made up of medical and science experts. Its goal is to vaccinate those people who are most vulnerable to the infection and who, if infected, would be the most vulnerable to developing severe illness or, worse, succumbing to death. These initial priority populations are seniors in congregated living arrangements and the staff of those facilities, whom I know well in my riding; health care workers and seniors over the age of 80, like my mom, and seniors under the age of 80, in five-year increments; and indigenous adults in remote communities.

Mr. Chair, it's anticipated that three million people from these priority populations will be vaccinated by the end of March. The provinces and territories have the daunting job of storing, administering, monitoring and reporting on vaccines within their jurisdictions. The federal government has said from day one that it stands ready to assist where it can.

Mr. Chair, in fulfilling its commitment to transparency—and we talked about that today—the Government of Canada has begun to post updates to its website, canada.ca, on vaccine administration and coverage. The government is also reporting on any adverse events that occur following vaccination and will ensure that these are investigated to determine if they were caused by the vaccination. Finally, the government has published the number of doses that have been distributed to each province and territory. The canada.ca website is a great source of current science-based information and data around COVID-19.

● (1420)

It provides Canadians with a way to follow the response to the pandemic. Any vaccination plan with this many moving parts—and there are many—must be adaptable so that Canada can learn from the real-world experience and refocus its efforts to obtain desirable results from its actions, particularly with regard to vaccine safety, effectiveness, coverage and adaptability.

Adaptability relies on feedback mechanisms, and the plan has been to incorporate a number of these, including commitments to collect data through surveillance and research—again, science—to provide reporting on the vaccination campaign progress and to communicate with and engage Canadians throughout this campaign. Surveillance data is being provided from the vaccine registries of the provinces and territories and then retriangulated with sources domestically and abroad. This work will take the measure of vaccine coverage to its fullest extent.

Finally, working with scientists and experts across this great country to develop a plan, the federal government has identified four key ways to measure success. This is important. The immunization plan will be successful when, number one, everyone in Canada has access to a vaccine, and we are working on that; when we are immunized to protect those who are not; when we reduce the number of people getting sick and dying from COVID-19; and when we have strengthened Canada's immunization infrastructure. In the event of a future outbreak or a pandemic, we need to respond quickly, efficiently and effectively.

We've all said this afternoon, and in previous meetings since last February or January, that COVID-19 poses the greatest pandemic threat to the lives and livelihoods of everyone in over a century. The world is still grappling with the devastation that is the scourge wrecking our society and many aspects within it—our health sector and our economy. It is a global problem of significant complexity, and it will take all of us to work together to resolve it.

In closing, though, I believe we can be optimistic that our collective efforts will start to pay off in the coming months. I think we have talked about that today, around the rollout of 400,000 vaccines per week until the end of March. I'm optimistic by nature. I'm an informed optimist. I'm certainly not a pessimist, but I'm an informed optimist. I don't have rose-coloured glasses on, but I look around at where the strengths are, where the assets are, and where people are working to make a difference in health care, in research and in government at all levels, and I believe we are going the right way to come out of this better than we did coming into it—much better.

I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the time. I'll pass it on to the next speaker.

Thank you.

• (1425)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelloway.

We go now to Mr. Long.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon to all of my colleagues. It's certainly a pleasure to be here and to bring greetings from my beautiful riding of Saint John—Rothesay.

I have to say that I'm thrilled to be subbing in on the health committee this afternoon. I can't think of a better way to spend a Friday afternoon than with all of you talking about the urgent pandemic we are facing and the critical time in our country to act. I think as a government we are doing a commendable job for Canadians, acting and dealing with issues that come before us and representing Canadians very well.

Mr. Chair, I also want to say very quickly that I'm thrilled by the Atlantic Canadian flavour of the committee. I see my friends and colleagues MP Fisher and MP Kelloway, and on the opposite side I see MP d'Entremont. This afternoon we have four Atlantic Canadian MPs. That can only make the committee a lot better and a lot stronger.

I want to start by making a few points. Obviously, it's amazing how things can change so quickly in our world and certainly in our country. One thing I always take pride in is talking to students at high schools and students at universities about our country and our history. I'm always...not warning but certainly cautioning the youth of today that things can change in an instant. We can never really take anything for granted. Lo and behold, little did I know last January or February that we would be faced with really a once-in-a-generation, life-changing event that the whole world would be grappling with.

The pandemic has changed how we view things, how we look at our friends and our family, and how we want to change things into the future. Little did we know last February, when we were all in Ottawa and at our committees doing work that's important to Canadians, and certainly important for our constituents, that we'd

be...not rushed back to our constituency offices, but on March 13 we came back, and here we are.

I remember coming back, meeting with my staff, and saying, hey, we have to be here for Canadians. We have to respond to Canadians. We have to roll up our sleeves and be here for our riding. Those were scary days in the early weeks of this pandemic. In this office, we got our PPE up. We got our plastic barriers up. We wore our masks. We came in and faced basically 400 to 500 emails, calls, questions and inquiries on a daily basis. I'm really, really proud of the work we did and how we stood up for our constituents and delivered unbelievable programs for Canadians to help them. We had their backs.

I have a few other points that I want to state for the record. Obviously, as a government we share the urgency of Canadians to ensure access to life-saving vaccines as rapidly as possible. Our government is operating with a sense of urgency every single day. We take hundreds of calls daily in this office about the vaccine and the vaccine acquisition and distribution. People are concerned. But when you cut through the smoke, if you will, and clear the air, and you talk about what we're doing, how we've sourced, what we've done, and how we've distributed more than 1.4 million vaccines in Canada to date.... Today we have more good news that more are on the way.

• (1430)

Let's be clear and let's state for the record that even if no additional vaccines are approved by Health Canada, which we all know isn't going to happen, we remain on track to receive six million doses of vaccines by the end of March, 20 million between April and June, and a total of over 70 million doses by the end of September.

Again, Mr. Chair, with Pfizer and Moderna vaccines alone, just with them alone, we're on track to have doses in this country for all Canadians by the end of September. Let's be very clear: We will deliver that. If you want a vaccine, you can have one by September. When we relay that to Canadians, they are very, very happy with the work that we as a government are doing. They are very, very relieved. They are very, very pleased with how we have stepped up, procured, sourced and will deliver vaccines. Look, we remain wholly focused on getting vaccines to Canadians. We're on top of the file and we're not going to stop until the job is done.

Mr. Chair, if I may, I will go back to one of my jobs. It really wasn't a job; it was a love I had, years before I became a member of Parliament. I know MP Barlow is probably sitting there thinking right now, "Oh, no, he's going to talk about the Saint John Sea Dogs again. We're going to hear about major junior hockey again. Oh, no." Even though that team, I will say, in 2011 won the Memorial Cup, the quickest an expansion team has ever gone from being on a piece of paper to winning the cherished Memorial Cup, I will give MP Barlow a little bit of relief, because I'm not going to talk about the Sea Dogs right now.

I am going to talk about another job I had, which was teaching international logistics and international sales and marketing for the New Brunswick Community College. You know, being a teacher at the community college was an amazing experience. To be able to take a textbook and shut it and say, look, this is theory—and actually, I also worked in international sales with Stolt Sea Farm, a salmon company—and this is how it's done. This is how logistics happens. This is how you source. This is how you procure. This is how you distribute and this is how you start from here to get to there, if you will. I do want to take some time to talk about our acquisition strategy.

Again, Mr. Chair, since the beginning of the pandemic, the Government of Canada has been committed to working with the provinces and territories, indigenous leaders, health professionals and all stakeholders on a pan-Canadian response to protect the health and safety of all of us from coast to coast to coast. We take that responsibility—especially now, given the pandemic we're in—extremely seriously. The aim of Canada's public health response has been to minimize serious illness and overall deaths related to COVID-19 while minimizing societal disruption.

With regard to COVID-19 vaccine acquisition, the Government of Canada has been driven by the principles of science-driven decision-making, transparency, coherence and adaptability, fairness and equity, public involvement, consistency in reporting. As part of the focus on science-driven decision-making, the Government of Canada is continuing to consult expert advisory committees and seek advice from public health leaders across Canada and experts in vaccine science, industry and research.

● (1435)

This includes seeking advice from the national advisory committee on immunization and the COVID-19 vaccine task force, as well as input from chief medical officers of health across Canada. In line with advice from these experts, the government has developed a vaccine acquisition strategy to ensure safe and effective vaccines across Canada as soon as they become available, all with the goal of providing enough vaccines for every person in Canada free of charge. In fact, we have sourced and procured more vaccines...realistically, enough vaccines for every Canadian four or five times over.

As you know, Mr. Chair, a central component of the government's current vaccine supply strategy has been coherence and adaptability, to position Canada to be able to mitigate the uncertainty that exists around vaccine development and the very real potential for disruptions that can occur in the supply chain.

One of the things that certainly I always taught in international logistics when I did teach it at New Brunswick Community College in St. Andrews, which was an unbelievably rewarding experience, as I said earlier, is that you need to be ready for the unexpected. You need to be able to adapt. You need to cover all your bases per se. Sure, it's great to look on as an armchair quarterback—they coulda, woulda, shoulda—but we're in unprecedented times. We are turning over every rock and making sure we have every scenario covered, and so far what we're doing is working.

As per the experts, we could not expect that all vaccines would be successful in clinical trials. At the same time, the government

could not reliably predict which vaccines would be the first to be successful in reaching regulatory approval. Nobody could, Mr. Chair. Again, we needed to make sure that we had every base covered, and in fact we did that. With this in mind, Canada was an early investor in vaccines and secured agreements with seven—seven, Mr. Chair—of the leading vaccine candidates when they were in the early preliminary stages of development.

Canada's portfolio of vaccine candidates was sought with purpose, ensuring to secure vaccines from a number of different companies with a broad range of vaccine technologies and sourced from diverse supply chains. To date, two vaccines—Pfizer and Moderna—have successfully been authorized for use in Canada.

The government has secured enough doses for the entire population, which are scheduled to arrive in Canada by September of this year. Again, the commitment: If you want a vaccine against COVID-19 by September, you can have that vaccine. Let me again state very clearly that when we relay that to our constituents here in Saint John—Rothesay, they are extremely grateful. The Government of Canada is working diligently across departments with their provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure there are no unnecessary delays in getting these doses to health authorities as soon as shipments arrive in Canada.

Canada's commitment to an evidence-based supply strategy means that Canadians will have access to the most promising vaccines at their earliest availability, and Health Canada's robust process for regulatory authorization provides assurances that the vaccines available to them are safe and effective. The government wants everyone who receives a vaccine to know that they can have full confidence, knowing we have undertaken rigorous review.

● (1440)

Mr. Chair, the government is confident the current vaccine strategy will serve Canada in managing the challenges in the world of vaccine development. However, the nature of the virus and this pandemic necessitate that the federal government continue to actively manage the strategy closely. In fact, we are doing just that. That is why the Government of Canada is continuing to monitor the evidence on the COVID-19 virus and all vaccines. Federal departments are working with the provinces and territories, health workers, experts and international partners to share the latest evidence and information. As we've seen with recent variants that have emerged around the world, the threat of COVID-19 to the health of Canadians continues to evolve. This type of collaboration is critical, Mr. Chair, to help us understand how the virus is mutating and how that may impact the success of vaccines in preventing infection and transmission of the virus over the long term.

Mr. Chair, I had a call the other day and basically the comment was this: “Your government’s planning is poorly thought out; it’s too quick and it hasn’t been studied enough.” You know, with respect, of course I went back and said, “Look, we’re trying to turn the pages of a book before the ink is dry.” These are unprecedented times and we’re trying to move as quickly as we can in a time when we don’t know what the next day, the next week, the next month or the next variant is going to bring us. We need to continue to collaborate with experts. We need to trust and put our trust in Health Canada. We need to have faith, as a government—and not just as a government but as all political leaders—that we can stand together, work together, continue to collaborate and have each other’s backs to get this country through an unprecedented time. We will do that.

Mr. Chair, I’d also like to take the opportunity to highlight that Canada is not alone in facing the challenges around COVID-19 vaccines. Many countries are implementing similar approaches to their vaccine strategies. I also had a call this week asking, how come that other country is so much further ahead of us? That country was basically the size of Prince Edward Island, and Canada is a large, logistically challenged country. It was like comparing apples to oranges.

Mr. Chair, Canada’s international partners and allies are also impacted when there are disruptions to supply chains. They have adopted a diverse portfolio approach, given the uncertainty around how many safe and effective vaccines would be available, and when. We also know that other countries share Canada’s commitment to supporting mechanisms that will provide equitable access to safe and effective vaccines internationally in order to help bring an end to the acute phase of the pandemic globally. While Canada’s current focus is on securing domestic supply, Canada is also committed to working with Gavi and the COVAX facility. This includes Canada’s commitment of \$220 million to the COVAX advance market commitment to purchase vaccine doses for low- and middle-income countries. This funding is in addition to the up to \$25 million U.S. that Canada previously committed to the COVAX AMC.

● (1445)

I would note that Canada has been asked about how it is managing its potential surplus of vaccines. Although Canada is not currently in a position of surplus, Canada is fully committed to working with its partners to ensure that vaccines do not go to waste. Canada worked closely with international partners, including Gavi, the COVAX facility and vaccine manufacturers, to ensure that all possible options are explored to ensure doses get to people around the world who need them.

With respect to the acquisition side, I want to finish by affirming that Canada is confident that our current strategy has positioned Canada to be able to navigate uncertainties in the world of vaccine development, and the Government of Canada is committed to continue to manage the vaccine strategy in the best interests of the people of Canada, to ensure we have timely access to safe and effective vaccines.

Again, I come at this from a bit of a different perspective. I had the opportunity in a previous life—it seems like 20 years ago—to teach international logistics and to articulate what I learned when I worked for a salmon company and travelled the world with respect

to salmon sales, and how important it is in the logistical chain to have every part covered, from sourcing to procurement, warehousing and distribution, and execution.

Sure, we have challenges, and sure, we’re going to face more challenges, obstacles, roadblocks and adversity, but we face that straight on, and we face it knowing that our government is there. Our government will respond and answer the bell for Canadians.

Look, we’re in government, and I certainly accept the fact that people will be critical. People will say, “Yes, you did this, but why didn’t you do that?” or “Why can’t you do that?” We were elected to govern. We were elected to lead, and we have led. We have stood up for Canadians during this pandemic. When other parties wanted us to stop benefits or not extend the CERB, the wage subsidy or rent relief, we said, “No, we will be there for Canadians.” We will get Canadians through this once-in-a-generation pandemic, and we will come out of this strong—stronger than before, and more united.

Look, we all know that over the past year we’ve lived our lives in the shadow of the virus, unfortunately. What we do, how we act, where we go, all this has been changed. I would like to think it hasn’t been changed forever, but certainly I don’t think there’s a Canadian who doesn’t now reflect more on their lives, their friends and their family, and just wonder and give thanks for what they have and hope for a better future. We’ve all experienced it. We’ve experienced isolation, uncertainty, heartbreak, disappointment, fear and anxiety. We’ve missed seeing our friends, our families and our extended families.

● (1450)

I was a small business operator. Many of our friends have lost businesses. They’ve had trouble making ends meet. They don’t know what tomorrow brings. Sadly, so sadly, many Canadians have lost loved ones to this dreadful pandemic that is COVID-19.

Even as the current wave of this pandemic continues to take a toll on all Canadians, we're seeing safe and effective vaccines being rolled out across the country. The vaccines are coming; they're coming. We had more good news again today. We heard we're going to receive hundreds of thousands of vaccines weekly for the next several weeks. I know personally, and we know as a government, that it's been difficult. We all just want the pandemic to end. We want to go back to the way it was. As vaccinations roll out among those in our communities who are most at risk of infection, all of us need to keep following measures that prevent the spread of this virus and its variants. We say it here every day. We do videos here in this office every day. Wear a mask. Wear the mask up over your nose. Wash your hands. Social-distance and be smart. That's how we will get through this.

Chair, from the beginning of the pandemic, our government has been keeping Canadians safe by acquiring personal protective equipment and other supplies in a competitive worldwide market. As we continue to work non-stop to negotiate access to hundreds of millions of doses of vaccines in an atmosphere that is ever volatile and complex, Canadians across this country have been taking guidance from our public health officials to heart and putting it into action. This spirit of co-operation has been crucial as our first line of defence to keep our neighbours and communities safe.

Chair, let me say that our premier, Premier Blaine Higgs, has done an admirable job managing our province through the pandemic. I tip my hat to his government. I'm very encouraged to see the co-operation and alignment of our premiers with our government regardless of political stripe. It's refreshing and encouraging to see all political leaders across this country at all levels—municipal, provincial, and of course us as federal—all working together. We can see that in the co-operation on this committee this afternoon.

We have a strategy. We're going to make sure we deliver safe and effective vaccines. They will be delivered, distributed and administered as soon as we can acquire them. It's a strategy that we've been putting into action for many, many months. The fact is that getting these vaccines to Canadians in a timely manner means we are competing with the entire world in a very volatile market for a very precious commodity. When I talk to my constituents, of course there are lots of questions and lots of concerns, but generally they are very, very happy with and appreciative of the job we are doing for Canadians.

We've been approaching companies from around the world. As soon as their vaccine candidates begin to show promise.... We knew whom to approach based on the most recent scientific developments. Thanks to the COVID-19 vaccine task force, we had access to advice from leading experts in vaccines and immunology to alert us to the best candidates.

● (1455)

From there, we got commitments and signed flexible agreements with seven vaccine manufacturers, starting, as we all know, with Moderna in July. This government then went on to get access to millions of doses and to put in options in our purchase agreements for millions more. By ensuring access to nearly 400 million doses of potential vaccines secured from seven different manufacturers, our strategy is set to deliver for Canadians.

We're faced with a disease, if you will, a virus, and we don't know exactly what will happen in the future, so we need to cover our bases. We need to secure and source. I'm proud to say that experts across Canada and around the world agree with our approach. By building a diversified portfolio of vaccines, we have positioned Canada to be able to deploy the vaccines as soon as possible, as soon as they are available.

Let me say this, Chair, about dealing with uncertainty. The approach is providing much-needed security to communities across Canada, and all of us as political leaders can assure Canadians.... This isn't the time to stoke fear and uncertainty among Canadians, because Canadians are dealing with a lot right now. The last thing they need is to see political leaders toss rhetoric back and forth. That only elevates Canadians' concerns and fears.

Shipments of Moderna and Pfizer vaccines have been arriving. Our most vulnerable people in long-term care homes and our health care workers are being vaccinated. I can certainly attest to that in my riding of Saint John—Rothesay. This indeed is happening. Our most vulnerable are being vaccinated.

Working together with the provinces and territories, we have received and distributed, as I said earlier, a total of 1.4 million COVID vaccine doses, with Canadians getting their first dose and more being inoculated every day. However, the road continues to be long, and we need to anticipate that things can go wrong. We need to be ready for that. We need to cover our bases and be prepared. That's what good planning, sourcing, warehousing and distribution do.

The road is long. It's a marathon. It's not a sprint. It's a long race. It's not those who are first out of the gate. It's not those who make the biggest splash. It's those who are prepared to win the race, and we're going to win the race. We're going to provide a vaccine to Canadians who want it by September. We said we would. We said we will, and we will.

Countries are clamouring to get the doses they negotiated. We're in a race with every country around the world. Countries want those doses as fast as possible. I understand. I understand the angst and anxiety. I feel it too, but Canadians need to have confidence that we have their backs. They need to have confidence that we have the people in place who can make this happen, because we are in an unpredictable marketplace, and we're in an extremely unpredictable world right now.

• (1500)

It's a pressurized environment, and there are going to be bumps. As one of my former colleagues used to say when I worked in the hockey business, it's a long and winding road with many twists and turns; we just need to make sure that we stay on that road and don't go into the ditch. We won't go into the ditch. We're going to stay on the road. Sure, we're going to have a few bumps here and there, but we're going to move forward and we're going to deliver for Canadians. We're going to make sure that we're safe and we're going to make sure that we can move past this pandemic. We will move past this pandemic.

Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister and the government have remained vigilant. They have been in contact with the CEOs of these companies nearly every day, and these companies have reassured us that they will meet their commitments for the first quarter of this year.

I was a business guy in a former life. I understand that we said we would do this by this date, by first quarter, by second quarter, third quarter, by September. I'm expecting my government to live up to those commitments, and I know we will. That means that Pfizer will still deliver the four million doses and Moderna the two million doses by the end of March.

Canada is hardly alone in facing obstacles to receiving vaccines, but this is what our strategy was designed for. We cast the net wide. Having a number of agreements in place, building a diverse portfolio and keeping arrangements flexible are helping to bring stability to a chaotic situation. While the numbers may fluctuate in the short term with a curveball here and there, manufacturers will continue to find efficiencies as they produce more and more doses for distribution around the world, and as this government remains committed to sharing accurate information with Canadians, we will share information with Canadians as soon as we get that information. As more doses are produced, the system for manufacturing and distributing vaccines will stabilize.

I just want to say that we know every member, every MP, everybody who is sitting here on this beautiful Friday afternoon—it's minus 16 here in Saint John, believe it or not—wants to see an end to this, all of us. We all agree on that. For sure, we differ on how we get to the end, and we differ on how we want to support Canadians. We want to make sure that we have supports for Canadians and continue with things and support businesses with the wage subsidy and commercial rent relief and CEBA and things like that. We want to make sure we have those, whereas some of our Conservative colleagues didn't want those programs to continue on. We did. We wanted to make sure that we protected businesses and we protected constituents.

I sincerely believe...and, Chair, I think my record over the past five or six years—it's hard to believe I'm a second-term MP—shows that I'm not afraid to speak out. I'm not afraid to speak up. I'm not afraid to call things out as I see them, but I'm also deeply proud of the job we are doing in unprecedented times with unprecedented challenges.

I know we're on the right track, with a strategy for acquiring vaccines that combines diversification, flexibility and aggressive negotiating. When setbacks occur, we are committed to keeping Canadians informed. We're committed to communicating. We will contin-

ue to bear down and redouble efforts to get shipments back on schedule.

• (1505)

As we have heard before, Chair, and as I've said before, the race to end the pandemic is a marathon, not a sprint. Yes, I look at it too and ask why they did this or why they got more doses there this week, but it's a marathon. It's who has prepared for the long haul, not the short gain or the short win. It's who has covered enough bases. It's who has the net cast to make sure that when we have curveballs we can deal with them.

Let me wrap this up, Chair. I'm profoundly proud of our country. I'm profoundly proud of all our political leadership. As I said just a few minutes ago, I give kudos to Progressive Conservative leader and premier Blaine Higgs for his managing of the pandemic for us in our province. I applaud his leadership. Obviously, we don't agree on everything, but these are difficult times. It's not a time to be trying to tear people down or trying to divide. It's time for all of us to come together, work together and stand together.

I have absolutely no doubt, Chair, none whatsoever, that, God willing, sooner rather than later, we will be able to look back with pride and remembrance, with a sincere, profound sense—

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): I have a point of order, Chair.

I've been listening to the member speak for over 30 minutes. The motion is on contracts and I have not heard that word a single time. We have heard about salmon fishing, careers, hockey careers and all kinds of things the member is proud of, but I'm looking to hear about contracts.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

I did hear discussion of this, but I would encourage Mr. Long to remember the topic at hand.

Thank you.

Mr. Wayne Long: Thank you, Chair. I take your point.

Just on a point of clarity, I never was in the salmon fishing business. I was in the aquaculture salmon-growing business. That's an amazing business on both coasts. I have salmon-fished up the Miramichi River and the Restigouche River, but aquaculture is profoundly different. I know that the member would certainly recognize the difference between the two.

To wrap up, I will hearken back to my days with respect to logistics and distribution and how we have sourced vaccines and negotiated contracts with vaccine manufacturers to make sure we have delivered and will continue to deliver for Canadians.

I thank you, Chair, and all the committee members for the work you're doing. I'm just visiting here. Your work is profoundly important. MP Barlow and I also do a lot of very important work on HUMA, which I'm extremely proud to be on, but again, obviously the health committee right now is of utmost importance for all Canadians. I sincerely and genuinely thank you for the work that's being done by every one of you. I think it's profoundly important for our country, and I thank you.

I'll wrap it up, Chair. Thank you for your indulgence. I wish everybody a great continued meeting.

• (1510)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Long.

We will go now to Dr. Powlowski. Please, go ahead.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Thank you very much.

I have to say thank you to Mr. Long, Mr. Lamoureux, Madame Vignola and Mr. Barrett for appearing with us today at the health committee. There's finance committee and there's ethics committee, but I'm sure you'll all agree you've made a big *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* to health committee.

Welcome to all of you.

Let me also say thank you to all the analysts and to the translators, although I'm pretty sure there isn't a place you'd rather be on a Friday afternoon than right here with the health committee. Thank you all.

Let me get to the actual matter at hand and the importance of not doing anything to potentially jeopardize our access to the vaccines. Why is that? We're doing pretty well with respect to vaccines. I know that when the Prime Minister has said that everyone who wants a vaccine will have a vaccine by the end of September, he's basing that solely on contracts from Moderna and Pfizer. There are three other vaccines out there that seem to be effective. Two of them have already gone through the phase three trials. With the other one, Novavax, preliminary results have shown that it's effective. Yes, it has to go through the regulatory approval process and we're not sure how long that's going to take, but from talking to my medical colleagues, it seems likely that most, if not all, of these vaccines are going to be approved. All the data that approval is based on is out there, so we know what that data has shown. The results and the concerns, such as with AstraZeneca, have been much talked about in the medical community, but we think they're going to be approved.

When those other vaccines are approved, we will have millions and millions of doses of those in addition to Pfizer and Moderna, so I think in the quite near future we will have a lot of vaccines. The problem in the spring and early summer is going to be getting those vaccines into arms. That's going to be a provincial responsibility, but I have faith in the provinces and in the medical system. Heck, I might be out there myself, giving some injections. It seems to me that it would be a good use of my time—maybe even better than being here in health committee.

I want to address the things that Mr. Davies brought up, because he brought up some very real questions. He talked about the fact that many of the vaccine manufacturers have used public funds in

developing those vaccines, yet then they have patent rights over those vaccines. It's a very legitimate question that we all ought to be asking right now, and certainly I ask this question: Is it in the collective interest of all the people in the world that the global supply of vaccines be reliant on the free market and the goodwill and business interests—the financial interests—of the pharmaceutical industry to solve the crisis for all of us? Does the free market lead to the optimal outcome in terms of health care, but also in terms of the economy and getting the economy going again?

It is potentially a great failure of global governance that in the end we've left the management of the pandemic to free enterprise and the interests of the pharmaceutical companies. There is probably a better way of doing this. I say it's a failure of global governance, not Canadian governance, because this is a global problem and the only solution has to be a global solution. That'll probably be in terms of a treaty, so that the next time this happens, we're not reliant on market mechanisms and the free market to handle our collective problems.

• (1515)

That's something that's going to be in the future. Right now, we're stuck with the system that currently exists, which is the free enterprise system—the market system. To have that market system work, we're dependent on contracts and contract law. We're dependent on a market where, if the seller has better opportunities with another buyer, perhaps they'll avail themselves of those opportunities. In the system we find ourselves, in the game in which we find ourselves playing, I think it's very prudent to not do anything that could potentially jeopardize our vaccine supply. That is what we're arguing about here.

Sometimes we have to come back to that: What are we arguing about here? It's that we do not want—or do not believe it is in our collective interest—to require the vaccine producers to bring their contracts before us at this committee.

As for the global response, I share Mr. Davies' interest in the possibility of using compulsory licensing. Compulsory licensing is allowed under international trade law and under the WTO TRIPS agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property. Compulsory licensing allows a government, after negotiating with the patent holder, and should they fail to reach agreement with the patent holder, to award a compulsory licence to produce a medication to another enterprise to produce it. This is recognized, as I say, under the WTO, as part of what's known as the TRIPS flexibilities.

This was very much an issue that came to light in the academic literature because of the problem of access to antiretrovirals in Africa during the 2000s. A lot of antiretrovirals were still under patent and, therefore, were at a price range where basically nobody in Africa could afford them. A lot of the African countries and the developing world knew of the TRIPS flexibilities; however, they felt uncertain as to whether a WTO panel really would allow a poor country to use a patent in order to produce medications under the provisions of the TRIPS agreement. In fact, the WTO, in the Doha declaration, stated that, yes, those flexibilities and compulsory licensing could be used for basically what we have here, which is a public health emergency.

I know that our country in fact has quite a long history of using compulsory licensing. At one time, we were, I believe, the leaders globally in terms of using compulsory licensing to produce medications. I believe that under the Prime Minister's father, Pierre Trudeau, we in fact engaged quite frequently in compulsory licensing. Certainly Canada did not oppose, and in fact stood on the side of, four African nations in their attempts to use compulsory licensing as a way of allowing access to life-saving medications in Africa. In fact, it was under the Jean Chrétien government that we enacted the Jean Chrétien Pledge to Africa act, which allowed Canadian companies to use compulsory licensing to manufacture in Canada drugs for export to developing countries.

In addition, I would point out that early on, under COVID—this summer, in fact—we enacted legislation allowing the Government of Canada to use compulsory licensing with respect to products related to COVID, so Canada has quite a long history of involvement with compulsory licensing. In fact, that is potentially one solution to the problem, but on this question, when it has come up in international quarters in terms of our response to the pandemic, I know the concern has been that compulsory licensing is too slow a process and developing countries wouldn't be able to use compulsory licensing fast enough in order to address the problem.

As a result of that, India and South Africa, as Mr. Davies is aware, went to the WTO a number of months ago looking for a waiver from the WTO, which would basically allow countries that are poor or developing countries to bypass international or intellectual property rights and allow those countries—or companies in those countries—to produce the vaccine. They've gone before WTO asking for the waiver. It's been postponed several times now. Mr. Davies has said that Canada opposes this waiver before WTO.

• (1520)

Don, I don't know if you're listening, but I got this from the department of international trade. I know the media has said and it's been publicized that Canada opposes the waiver. I just got this from international trade because I asked them what I could say on this.

The official response is that Canada does not oppose the TRIPS waiver. It says that Canada has reached out to proponents of the waiver and all WTO members to better understand their concerns. We appreciated the January 15 responses to our questions from co-sponsors of the waiver proposal. We will continue to discuss these responses at TRIPS council, most recently at the February 4 informal meeting, and we look forward to further engagement at the upcoming February 23 meeting. We don't oppose it. TRIPS governs intellectual property matters, but currently vaccine accessibility issues centre on distribution supply chain concerns.

My understanding of the Canadian position is that the free market and, by voluntary licensing, other countries and companies in those countries will hopefully be able to make agreements with vaccine producers in order to ramp up production, which is collectively in all of our interests. Certainly compulsory licensing is allowed under international trade law. I think if you look at our history, Canada has either engaged in compulsory licensing or approved of compulsory licensing in the past. For developing countries, there could be, one, a voluntary licensing agreement with the actual producers, and, two, compulsory licensing. My understanding is that if

this isn't working, Canada does not in fact oppose the waiver or, at least at the moment, hasn't taken the position of opposing the waiver.

I think that's very interesting and I have to say I think Canada has taken a very ethical position and a position that I think is collectively in all of our interests. I certainly agree with Mr. Davies on a couple of points with respect to the global pandemic and having a global approach. One is that, as long as the disease is out there in other countries, it can mutate and come back and haunt us for years to come. Really it is in our best interests to find a global solution.

The second thing is in terms of the economy. I think it was ILO, the International Labour Organization, earlier on in the pandemic that was predicting that 500 million more people globally would be pushed into poverty as a result of the pandemic, and the World Bank estimated that something like 20 million to 40 million people would be pushed into extreme poverty. Various economic think groups have come to the conclusion that it will collectively cost the economies in the developed world billions and billions of dollars if we don't address the pandemic in developing countries, for a couple of reasons.

One is that the supply chains for our companies start in those countries, and another is that, even though developing countries may not spend as much per capita as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom do, markets in those countries are sizable and the pandemic is affecting those markets. For all of those reasons, I fully agree with Mr. Davies that there has to be a global approach to this problem. There has to be a global solution. I salute our government's approach in terms of the international response.

• (1525)

Let me throw in before closing that, with respect to the international response, Canada really has taken a leading role. We've provided \$1.6 billion for the global COVID response, including \$220 million to COVAX for the purchase of vaccines. I think we have done, actually, a fairly admirable job with a problem that doesn't affect just us in Canada. It's a global problem that I think really calls out for global solutions.

Frankly, I don't think there is an international law or adequate mechanisms for dealing with this kind of problem. I would encourage our opposition and the New Democratic Party to consider the possibility of something like a treaty and how we could globally make a response to this that would collectively be in our best interests so that, next time around, we don't have the same kind of problem.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Powlowski.

We'll go now to Ms. Sidhu.

Ms. Sidhu, go ahead, please.

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

I want to thank all of the members who are joining us today to give their perspectives on the matter we are discussing.

Mr. Chair, delivering the vaccine out to Canadians is a massive undertaking. Never in modern times have we seen such an unprecedented level of collaboration and co-operation. This is a team Canada effort. Our collective efforts have allowed us to prepare, build capacity and develop better ways to deliver vaccines. We developed a process so that we could deliver vaccines across the Canadian landscape within days of approved vaccines becoming available.

You heard Dany Fortin at the last committee meeting. We have built and continue to build important relationships with our federal, provincial, territorial and indigenous partners, as well as with industry and a wide range of stakeholders. These relationships allow us to come together in common purpose and to adapt to a complex situation and the rapidly evolving circumstances we are seeing today. Together we have built and tested distribution plans that meet the characteristics of these COVID-19 vaccines. The early-to-market mRNA vaccines demand special cold chain and procurement considerations. This meant our well-established procurement and distribution program would not work. Instead we took a more centralized, federal approach to obtain and distribute this vaccine.

The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine needs an ultra-low temperature, as we all know, commonly known as a ULT cold chain. Ideally, this vaccine is stored and shipped at -70°C. The Moderna COVID-19 vaccine requires a frozen cold chain. This means it needs to be at -20°C, both in storage and during transportation. The capacity for storing these vaccines varied among jurisdictions in some places. ULT freezer capacity was already available in fixed infrastructure, such as in larger hospitals, scientific research facilities or specialized commercial sites. In other areas, an innovative approach that allowed for temporary capacity was needed to respond on a smaller scale.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has been working with the provinces, territories and indigenous partners to build the capacity for the cold chain. They have been obtaining ultra-low temperature and -20°C freezers in addition to hybrid units in various configurations. The freezers are then distributed where needed and the agency ensures that they are properly installed and inspected and are fully operational.

The federal government is also acquiring specialized equipment, containers and dry ice to transport vaccines in smaller quantities. The thermal shippers, in which the vaccines are shipped in their frozen state, can also be used for storage at the destination for up to a month. This allows greater flexibility to maintain the cold chain while reaching remote and isolated communities. This is in addition to providing supplementary equipment to support vaccination. By December 14, 2020, we had 14 locations across Canada ready to receive and administer vaccines. Within a month we were using over 10 times that on a weekly basis.

There are multiple delivery points, referred to as vaccine delivery sites, in each province and territory. The number of these sites being used at any given time fluctuates from week to week. Some sites are used for only one type of vaccine. Others can be used for both. The jurisdictions receiving the vaccine determine which sites are used and how, in order to support their individual vaccine plans.

• (1530)

The largest service providers can deliver vaccines deep into the provinces and territories by designating vaccine delivery sites in remote and isolated communities.

Mr. John Barlow: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Barlow.

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't mind the Liberal members reading the speeches they've been given, but I would really appreciate it if they remained relevant to the topic that we are talking about today, which is the contracts between the pharmaceutical companies and the Government of Canada, and the details of those contracts. It's not about vaccination distribution strategies and storage and those types of things. I would just appreciate it if the members stayed on topic on the issue of my motion.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, on the same point of order, if I may?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Lamoureux, on the same point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have found it interesting.... I've participated in many different types of committee meetings where I have seen individual members afforded the opportunity to be able to express themselves, and just because you don't mention the motion or you don't say something very specific in the motion, does not deem that you are not being relevant.

The member, on two occasions now, has interrupted a speaker while they have been definitely relevant. Ms. Sidhu is talking about the vaccine. The resolution, the motion we're talking about, is about the vaccine. The member is completely out in left field to try to give a false impression that the Ms. Sidhu is not relevant in her remarks. I say that only because Ms. Sidhu is entitled to be able to express herself in the best way she feels she can on behalf of her constituents.

We've now seen twice, through using a point of order as a way to disrupt a line of thinking that I'm very much interested in wanting to hear from her—

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I would suggest that members of the opposition be patient and maybe not so quick to draw a conclusion that a point of order is necessary, and listen to the member who is speaking and get the full perspective of what it is they're saying. I'm sure, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Larry Maguire: Chair, point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: —that you will find that once the member is afforded that opportunity—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Maguire, but we already have a point of order being discussed. Mr. Lamoureux has the floor. We'll deal with additional points of order on this matter as we go forward.

Mr. Lamoureux, please continue.

• (1535)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: The essence of what I'm saying, Mr. Chair, is that when you're in a standing committee or you're inside the chamber, it is not the individual member of Parliament's responsibility solely to interrupt a speech because, in their mind, they happen to think that the person is not necessarily being relevant.

That's why we have chairs. That's why we have the Speaker. I wouldn't want members of this committee to try to give a false impression that someone is not in keeping with the motion. I've listened to what Ms. Sidhu was saying, and I can tell you that every word she has said, in my opinion, is completely relevant. To try to give the impression that she is waiving away from the motion is just irresponsible, and it interrupts her train of thought.

I am hoping that by my providing an interjection at this point in time members of the opposition will be more respectful in listening before they start interrupting when there are no grounds for that interruption. As you can see, Mr. Chairperson, I get a little agitated because I find her comments to be completely relevant. If she were irrelevant, then maybe I wouldn't be quite as upset about the interruption.

I would suggest to you that she is completely in order and that the point of order is what's out of order.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux.

We have another intervention on the same point of order.

Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you for that.

The point of order here, which Mr. Barlow raised, is quite relevant. We've been here for three hours now and we haven't heard anything about contracts, and that's what his motion is about, so maybe the last speaker should read the motion and get on the topic. I know that vaccines are relevant to the whole situation we're talking about, but right now, we're talking about the government hiding things in the contracts and not making them public. I think that's the relevant issue here, which Mr. Barlow was trying to note, and I agree with him on that.

Relevancy, Mr. Chair, will be in your view as chair of the meeting, and not in the view of the government's deputy House leader at those times. While I respect his right to have an intervention here as well, I think it would be beneficial for all of us if we were talking about the substance of the motion that was made.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Maguire.

Those are excellent points, everyone. I certainly remind all members to try to keep their remarks relevant to the motion.

Ms. Sidhu, you were interrupted. Please carry on.

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

I know my speech is relevant to COVID and the motion too. I've made the points I'm reading, so other members know they are very relevant points I'm making, and I urge everyone to listen.

The logistics services providers can deliver vaccines deep into the provinces and territories by designating vaccine delivery sites in remote and isolated communities, which is very important to all members' isolated communities, especially indigenous communities.

In areas that would otherwise be difficult to access, there is considerable flexibility and capacity in the distribution network to handle both surge and deliberate scale-ups.

Provincial and territorial governments are responsible for deciding how and where COVID-19 vaccines are being deployed within their jurisdictions. However, there is extensive collaboration to ensure that all Canadians who wish to be immunized can be, no matter where they live. That is very important, Mr. Chair.

The logistics of moving vaccines into large cities are very different from those needed to reach Canadians living in remote, rural and isolated communities. To address the varying needs, different options will be used, from mass immunization clinics in major urban settings to small mobile immunizations teams that can be flown into remote locations.

In early December, to prepare for the imminent arrival of Pfizer vaccines, we conducted a dry run to confirm our ordering, shipping and receiving processes. A few weeks later, we repeated the same process for the Moderna vaccine. These dry runs were followed up by the validation of the distribution processes prior to an initial live shipment.

Mr. Chair, you heard me question General Dany Fortin on that last time, because it is important to my constituents. More than 100 participants from federal, provincial and territorial governments, indigenous and industry partners and key stakeholders participated in the validation efforts. Everyone involved in the distribution process had an opportunity to visualize their role, to confirm responsibilities and critical hand-offs, and to build confidence in the overall conduct and execution of the complex multiplex plan. These collective efforts assured us that our distribution networks were in place for the arrival of the much-anticipated COVID-19 vaccines.

Our understanding of these new vaccines continues to evolve and manufacturers continue to update their product monographs and instructions. We are prepared and able to adapt to these changes and can modify how and where we distribute and administer vaccines to Canadians. Updated manufacturer guidelines and procedures that allow vaccines to be transported in a thawed state also allows shipments in smaller quantities. This is a key consideration for some remote communities.

As we roll into spring and summer, we anticipate a steep increase in vaccine availability. Distribution will also become easier when vaccines are approved that can be transported outside of ultra-low temperatures and frozen cold chains.

We also have the capacity to adapt and rapidly deploy vaccines if an unexpected supply becomes available on short notice.

Allocation forecasts continue to fluctuate on a regular basis. This is to be expected as we work with the manufacturers to accelerate the availability of approved vaccines.

It is also expected that natural disruptions will occur during the vaccine production process. We will update our federal, provincial, territorial and indigenous partners and the public regularly on allocation forecasts as they evolve.

The provinces and territories have been building and executing their plans for distributing vaccines within their jurisdictions. They have been ensuring that the necessary equipment, training and safety monitoring systems are in place to support a rollout. In parallel efforts, they have been confirming the practical readiness of designated immunization clinics, which are preparing for the largest scale ramp-up. That is still to come.

• (1540)

The federal government is supporting these efforts and working tirelessly to ensure that we can deliver through any eventuality as COVID-19 vaccines become more available to Canadians. We'll continue to work collaboratively, to share lessons and best practices, and to test and adjust as we move forward.

The safe and efficient rollout of Canada's COVID-19 immunization campaign is our primary focus, and rest assured that security is a key consideration in the planning and execution of the vaccine rollout. We continue to work with our partners in federal departments, with law enforcement at all levels and with designated logistics service providers to ensure the safe delivery of Canada's COVID-19 vaccine supply.

Our collective efforts over the past weeks and months, the early rehearsals of our distribution and logistics systems and the launch of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have all served to set the condition for a rapid scale-up as vaccines become more rapidly available in the months ahead. With more agility and flexibility, we are able to transport vaccines to more sites and in smaller amounts. This, complemented by our inherent flexibility to deliver to an increased number of vaccine delivery sites and our continually expanding capacity to support multiple cold chains, is good news for Canadians and for Canada's COVID-19 immunization strategy.

Mr. Chair, if this entire process sounds complex, it is. We have to do everything to prevent disruption. I am worried that the motion we are discussing today puts all of that at severe risk.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sidhu.

We'll go now to Mr. Lamoureux.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson.

It's been a while since I've appeared at the health committee. I have a number of thoughts that I would like to share with committee members. I very much appreciated both Ms. Sidhu's and Mr. Long's comments.

It has been an interesting process, if I can start it off in that fashion. I did have a chance—I say this to my Conservative friends in particular—to read through the motion several times, and I must

say that I am a little disappointed. I'm not surprised, but I am disappointed.

I'm disappointed in the sense that there is so much potential for what the Standing Committee on Health could actually be doing, and I genuinely believe that. In a minority situation, we recognize that our standing committees could play a very important role. In normal times—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: We have Madame Vignola on a point of order.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Now I really don't want to disrespect my esteemed colleague Mr. Lamoureux or interrupt his momentum, but I would like to point out that, although I have selected the French channel to hear the interpretation, I can hear my colleague's voice just as clearly as that of the interpreter. I may have a super-brain, but it can become complicated to follow two voices speaking at the same time.

Is it possible to check this, please?

The Chair: I am sorry, Madam Vignola. We will look into this.

[*English*]

Mr. Clerk, could you see what you can do?

The Clerk: A technician will call the member.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Madam Vignola, we will continue. If the problem persists, please interrupt us again.

[*English*]

Mr. Lamoureux, if you wouldn't mind, please carry on. You might need to back up a little bit so, hopefully, Madam Vignola can hear what you are saying.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I'll lower my mike, Mr. Chair, in the hopes that might help resolve the issue. I don't think the proximity from me to the screen really matters, but hopefully the mike will help.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Lamoureux.

I just want to mention that if the problem persists, Madam Vignola, we will pause briefly to see if we can get it resolved. Do keep us informed, please.

Sorry, Mr. Lamoureux.

[*Translation*]

You can carry on.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. It's very much appreciated.

As I was trying to express, I am not surprised by the motion. I'm really not surprised at all. I am disappointed. It's something to be said in terms of where the priorities of the Conservative Party really are. It's encouraging that the health critic is actually online listening to this, because I do believe that she, along with the leader, is most likely giving the guidance here. I think it's very important that we recognize that the opposition party really has a responsibility too. We need to recognize that. I think they are letting Canadians down by the types of actions I have witnessed in both the House and committees.

I don't say that lightly, Mr. Chairperson. As I've said before inside the House, I've been in opposition for over 20 years. I love the happy face, I must say. The statement's inaccurate, but I do like the happy face. I have been a parliamentarian for about 30 years, with over 20 of those years in opposition. I understand what it is you need to be able to do in opposition to be able to maybe generate the type of attention you so desire in order to be able to communicate a message and so forth. Believe it or not, I've had the opportunity to participate in many different types of filibusters over the years. I wouldn't necessarily say that this is one I would classify as a filibuster.

I raise that because I'm trying to give some advice to my Conservative friends. That is, recognize the situation we are in and maybe start putting party politics second to the coronavirus and the pandemic that we are trying to overcome collectively. When this all came into being this time last year, when everything was starting to turn upside down, Canadians understood that we all needed to start working together. These contracts that we're talking about, these contracts that are within this particular motion, are part of the teamwork that we saw months ago. This isn't something that came from nowhere. This is something that's been in place for a long time now.

There were ample opportunities for opposition, if they were genuinely interested in the issue itself. If they were genuinely interested in the contracts, the Conservative critic for the Conservative Party would have been talking about this back in July, back in August. In fact, even then agreements were already in the making. If the Conservative Party really wanted to contribute to this whole question of who's going to be getting the contracts, what kinds of contracts they should be, and what about the Canadian content aspect, or if the Conservatives had any sort of legitimacy in terms of interest back then, I would suggest to you that they would have been able to contribute so much more to the debate that we're having today.

Mr. Chairperson, for the first time in 30 years, we sat during the summertime. The opposition had thousands of questions they could have asked. If we were to ask the analysts how many of those questions they asked about the vaccine, people might be surprised, from the health committee. I cannot recall one. The health critic is on the monitor right now. Did she ask one question in regard to the vaccine from May to the end of July, when all these negotiations were taking place and when her so-called concern about the vaccines that she espouses today...?

• (1550)

You know, hindsight is wonderful—20/20, absolutely. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to base all your decisions on hindsight? But then there is the real world, Mr. Chairperson.

I can tell you, because I was on the floor of the House and listening to opposition members ask questions, that I don't recall questions about the vaccines in June or July—none at all. I didn't hear opposition members saying, "Well, you know what, we want to contribute to that discussion and that dialogue with these companies, and at the end of the day when you're sitting down negotiating, we believe that no matter what those companies say, we want to make sure that these become public documents automatically, so you sign an agreement and it has to become public."

I don't recall any discussions or dialogue of that nature, and I follow this issue fairly closely. I pay a lot of attention to what is taking place in the House. I can recall the Conservative health critic reacting to things after the fact, after she had been provided information, and it's very easy to be critical well after the decisions are made. As the opposition, yes, you can do that.

I can tell you, Mr. Chairperson, that this is where I will say that I am disappointed, but not surprised. What is the expectation of this motion? If this motion were to pass, what is the expectation? I believe that it puts Canadians in a potential difficult position. We don't know—I don't know and the health care critic and the Conservative Party do not know—all the details of those contracts and the confidentiality matters that are important. Could we in fact lose out by doing what it is that the official opposition wants and just say "here are the tabled documents"? Could we be opening ourselves up to all sorts of other problems as a direct result?

I don't know, Mr. Chairperson. What I do know is that when you enter into an agreement, there is a certain expectation. We entered into these agreements, and I am very proud of the way in which we achieved those agreements. We didn't say that it was going to be a political decision, that it was going to be the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health or the Minister of Procurement who was going to sit down and make that decision without ensuring that we had listened to what the experts were actually saying. There was a committee that was established—the vaccine committee. They were charged with the responsibility of ensuring that Canada was moving in a direction that would achieve optimum results in protecting Canadians from coast to coast to coast with a well-thought-out plan to deal with vaccinations.

Those health care experts, the people with science as a background and the bureaucrats who came together in order to ensure that Canadians' interests would be well served, did a phenomenal job—and, I would suggest to you, second to no other country in the world—in making sure that Canadians were going to be protected when it came to the issue of vaccines.

Of course, there are areas that I would have loved to see. To state the obvious, yes, let's produce vaccines here in Canada—wonderful. Sure, I'd love to produce vaccines here in Canada, but it doesn't happen by snapping your fingers. It's a lot more complicated than that. Even I understand that. The vaccination committee understood that too. That's why, if you take a look around the world, you're talking about hundreds of companies that all believe they have the answer and can produce the vaccine. Some of those companies are here in Canada. Who do we invest our tax dollars with to try to encourage and see that development?

• (1555)

Again, these are contracts in many ways, in different forms, entered into with Canadian companies—millions of dollars of federal tax dollars collected by Canadians to ensure that we move forward at the same time with some of that Canadian product, using the science that we have here in Canada, the homegrown stuff. Do you know what? We will have the capability, in good part because of the people of Canada who have the background to make it happen. The government, through the vaccination committee, was very successful at identifying the handful that they believed in...and asked the Government of Canada to get behind and support. We did just that.

Later this year, Mr. Chair, I think we could actually realize some of the benefits. We've had some tangible commitments. None have actually been approved by Health Canada yet, but there are tangible commitments to the development and progress on Canadian vaccinations being put together and manufactured or processed here in Canada. I think it is only a question of time. The committee understood that the best way for Canada to be able to protect its citizens and residents was that we needed to be able to enter into agreements, even if it meant we had to go outside our borders. We as a government, with the help of the vaccination committee and the many endless hours of consultations that took place, came up with a number of agreements.

There are those who now say, well, yes, the agreements are nice, but what about in Canada? We need to understand the history. Why doesn't Canada have the capability for manufacturing? This isn't something that happened overnight. Since the mid-eighties our capability to manufacture vaccines to the degree needed for this pandemic started to diminish. I received an interesting paper. It stated that in 2007 AstraZeneca closed its Canadian manufacturing operations and consolidated this activity into its Swedish-based manufacturing facilities. In 2010 Johnson & Johnson closed its research centre in Montreal. In 2011 Teva closed one of its Canadian manufacturing operations in Montreal. These actions were all taken when Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister of Canada. It was all part of something that's been taking place for decades. Canada's ability to produce vaccines just isn't there. We recognize that. This government has been investing millions in trying to build up that capacity into the future.

We hear about variants. We hear about how this is a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, and even greater than that in terms of its occurrence, but we never know. The Prime Minister has said that we want to build back better where we can. One of the ways in which we can build back better is to look internally in terms of the vacci-

nations. Let's take a look. There will be opportunities for us to look at the contracts at some point in time in the future, I suspect.

• (1600)

Let's take a look and see how we can support that industry as a whole and allow it to grow. This government, in the last five years, has demonstrated that it is not hesitant to move and to take progressive measures in order to support and grow industries in our country. We have seen that, all of us, first-hand, by this Prime Minister and this government over the last number of years, so it should be no surprise to anyone that we now have from companies potential vaccines that will in fact be manufactured here in Canada. In fact, for my own premier, Brian Pallister, take a look at Newswatch. He has acquired a commitment for vaccines. Ottawa hasn't prevented provinces from being able to acquire. If they feel that they too want to be able to acquire vaccines, they can do that.

Premier Brian Pallister has actually acquired a commitment from a vaccine company that's hoping to be able to provide vaccines later this year. It might not be until October or November. It may be earlier—hopefully earlier. I'd like to see it more so as an insurance policy. The reason I say it's an insurance policy is that it's not until later in the year.

Because of the hard work of our vaccination committee, what we're able to see is those seven solid agreements. Contrary to the misleading information that the Conservative Party tries to give Canadians, we have seven agreements, which have put Canada, on a per capita basis, better off than any other country in the world—bar none.

If you take a look at those seven contracts, we have two of those vaccines, two of those agreements, that are actually in play today, because the vaccines were also approved by Health Canada. If the government's targets and plans continue in the positive way they have and we continue to realize the benefits of that hard work that was done months ago, you will find that we will get six million vaccines before the end of March, even though you wouldn't think that by the behaviour of the official opposition and the misinformation they want to pump out day in and day out, but that is the reality.

By the time we get to the end of June, we're talking 20 million doses, and then, over the summer period, every Canadian who wants to be vaccinated will have the opportunity to be vaccinated in a safe environment and for free because of the efforts of governments, whether provincial, federal, municipal, indigenous leaders or so many other stakeholders. Those who are administering our vaccines, those who are the backbone of our health care system—our nurses, doctors, pharmacists, all these people—are playing a critical role, but Ottawa and this Prime Minister did their jobs. Those agreements are there, they're real and they are delivering.

Conservatives stand in question period after question period and ask, “How many vaccines are we getting this week?” “Ha, ha, ha,” they say, “we’ve got the government not getting very many vaccines.” The bottom line is that we made a commitment to six million by the end of March, and let’s see what the Conservatives say at the end of March once we’ve achieved that target, that goal, when we’ve hit the six million. They will find out very clearly that at the end of the day we fulfilled a commitment that was based on agreements, and there is still potential for more.

● (1605)

Mr. Powlowski talked about the agreements that were signed off on. We still have other agreements that are out there that will enable us to get more vaccines if and when they are approved by Health Canada. To me, that’s what’s important.

We all get emails. I get a lot of emails. I don’t want to go through all of the emails I have with you, but in terms of time, if we’re still going at this in a few hours, I might resort to going through some of those emails. I can say that my constituents are very concerned and they appreciate our being straightforward with them, which I am. There are some things that are beyond our control. When Pfizer said that it needed to retool so that it could expand its production, do you think we were going to say, “No, you can’t do it”? Is that what the opposition is trying to suggest?

We had a commitment that by the end of the first quarter we would get x number of vaccine doses, and our concern was whether or not they would be able to maintain that commitment. We got their word that they would. In fact, most recently I have been told that they might even exceed it by some.

My concern, because this is what I am telling my constituents, is that Canada will have six million doses before the end of March. That is what the government has stated. Those are the agreements that were signed off on. Those are the ones that have been approved by Health Canada. Hopefully there will be more. There are ample opportunities to see our numbers go higher than what they are today. Until we get that Health Canada stamp of approval, I think we have to continue to go with the numbers we know we can guarantee.

When Brian Pallister, yesterday or maybe the day before came out and said that the Province of Manitoba had secured some vaccines, I said, “That’s great”. There is nothing wrong with that. I think it’s a good thing. Why not? There is always going to be a world demand for these vaccines, which will be ongoing past September or October. If all the Manitobans have had the opportunity to be vaccinated and we have a surplus, then they can explore other possible options in terms of what to do with the vaccines.

At the end of the day, that is also, in a way, like an insurance policy. I won’t criticize the premier for that.

If you try to distort what it is that Ottawa is doing, or give a false impression, or try to give a false expectation that, for example, the vaccinations that are in the works here in Canada are going to be out in the first quarter, we know that’s not going to happen. We want to make sure that we are not giving information that would build up a false expectation. That’s where I believe our Minister of Health, Minister of Procurement and our Prime Minister have done

a fantastic job, because they have stuck to the facts. They have respected the importance of listening to what health care professionals have to say, and have taken into consideration science when it comes to dealing with every aspect of the coronavirus, including the vaccinations.

● (1610)

There is a lot of information out there. When you think in terms of those contracts, you will find that there is information out there dealing with numbers, which is the most important aspect of the contracts. That is what we can base our planning on. If we know we’re going to get x amount by such-and-such quarter, that allows us, that enables us, to make the decisions that are so very important.

We have web designers—I’m not sure what best to call them—who are absolutely incredible people. The Internet provides so much in terms of service. I hate to think of how we would have dealt with the coronavirus in every way had we not had the Internet. In that sense, it has been quite a blessing to all of us. I say that because Canadians who are interested in not necessarily following the debate but having a good understanding of all aspects of the coronavirus can go to the website. There is so much information on the website.

Here in this motion they talk about how they want to see the contracts. Go to the website. Yes, you’re not going to get the details that would make the Conservative critic happy. After all, she is looking under every little rock for whatever she can try to find so that she can somehow make the government look bad. It doesn’t really matter. That’s been her personal agenda for months and months and months. I don’t recall her back in May and June saying, let’s sit down collaboratively and work with companies to see what we can come up with in contracts, and then, by the way, as I mentioned earlier, let’s make sure those contracts are public. Of course that didn’t happen.

Let’s take a look at what you can expect if you look at the website. Every Canadian can do that. That includes members of the Conservative Party. The nice thing about committees nowadays is that it’s kind of like having two screens. I can see the committee members on this side and then I have the coronavirus website on the left side of my screen.

The page I have here states, “Procuring vaccines for COVID-19”. It is an extensive document. It would take a long time to go through the whole thing. I will highlight certain aspects of it. Where it says, “Vaccine agreements with suppliers”, these are the agreements the motion is specifically asking about.

When you read the motion, it’s asking for the law clerk to take some actions. I will read a portion of it:

That the Chair of the committee write to the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel inquiring on whether or not the contracts for Canada’s seven vaccine agreements with suppliers have been provided to his office as part of the motion adopted on October 26, 2020 by the House of Commons.

To be honest, I haven’t taken a look at the details of the motion that was there from October 26, 2020, so I don’t really know exactly what that motion is, but it’s referencing these seven vaccine agreements. For the vaccine agreements and the suppliers, you can go to the website. You can get the list of those suppliers. That’s why I say it’s about the numbers.

To me what Canadians are concerned about, right now, today, is how soon they can get the vaccines. We understand the importance of it, but we're not going to forsake the health and well-being of Canadians. It has to be done in a safe way. Health Canada is recognized around the world for their expertise and the fine work they do. They are outstanding. I think if there was something every member of this committee could likely agree to, it would be on that particular point: We have some of the best, if not the best, health care experts worldwide.

• (1615)

We see that—and I don't say this lightly—because we see that in our approval process, in which two of those seven have actually been approved. If you go to the website, you'll see a list of all seven of them. You see “Moderna” and the actual number of doses at 44 million. We can anticipate that according to that agreement Canada will get 44 million doses. Now, I suspect that you might be able to find out in more detail—this very committee might even have talked about it—when those doses will be coming in terms of some approximate dates. For example, in the first quarter, we might get two million doses. Please don't quote me on the hard number, Mr. Chair, but we know that we're going to get x number of doses from Moderna in the first quarter.

We know that we're going to get 44 million, and that is something I think is fairly significant. Think about it. What's the population of Canada? It's maybe just over 37 million. I know it's in and around that 37 million. There are 44 million doses.

Pfizer gets a great deal of attention worldwide, and it's yet another company that we have an agreement with. Like Moderna, we actually have Health Canada approval of that vaccine. Because we have that vaccine approved, and also the Moderna, I can guarantee to my constituents that Canada will have six million doses of vaccine. I am perfectly comfortable in saying that by the end of March we will have six million doses.

If you take a look at how many there are in total, we could get up to 76 million doses. You don't have to believe me. All you have to do is look at the website. If the committee is really curious about it, check out the website and you will see that, yes, there is a commitment for up to 76 million doses. That's well over 110 million between Moderna and Pfizer.

I suspect that if you were to ask Canadians as a whole in terms of their confidence in those two vaccines, you would find that there is overwhelming support for both of those companies and confidence in those vaccines. Why? Because at the end of the day, there was proper research and it went through a process that speaks of confidence, public confidence. Health Canada was not pushed. It made sure that it did the things it needed to do in order to make sure that it was safe for Canadians.

In fact, my understanding is that we received doses back in December. Some countries didn't receive those vaccine doses until the new year. We started to receive some in December, but I want to try to avoid playing away from those stats. What about December, January, February, March...? The numbers fluctuate, as we all know, and that's why I will go back to those agreements and those contracts. We know that there is a solid commitment from Moderna and Pfizer for over 100 million doses, with Canada having a popu-

lation base of 37 million people. Even if the balance is not covered or doesn't get approved, we know that Canadians' safety and well-being are being taken care of, because by the end of June, everyone who wants to be vaccinated will in fact be vaccinated.

• (1620)

I might have said June, but it's by the end of September, Mr. Chair, that every Canadian who wants to be vaccinated will in fact be vaccinated. That's good news that's in the not-too-distant future. I talked about just the two vaccines that are approved. There are many different stages prior to getting approved with Health Canada.

I made reference to Brian Pallister, the Premier of Manitoba. He has an agreement. I don't know if it's 100% ironclad yet. I believe it's a tentative agreement so don't quote me on it. This comes right from a CBC report that says that “Manitoba has made a deal to buy two million doses of a Canadian-made COVID-19 vaccine on the condition it gets approved for use in Canada and is delivered by the end of the year.”

This is a company that's Calgary-based but I think they're actually taking into consideration a component that would be done here in the province of Manitoba. I say, good for the premier. We have a great insurance policy. That's not going to happen until the end of the year in all likelihood. I would be pleasantly surprised if it happened in the first six months. I don't think it will, but if it does, that's fantastic. Let's let Health Canada continue to do its work.

Here's a company that has great potential. Hopefully we will realize and we will see those vaccines. I'm a proud Canadian and I'd like to see that made in Canada. It's not alone. As I said, we've invested literally millions into Canadian companies all over the place to ensure that we can bring up our capabilities to be able to produce the stuff into the future, which is so very important, Mr. Speaker—or, rather, Mr. Chair.

I apologize for calling you Mr. Speaker all the time. I'm used to it in the chamber, and I'm not as used to the committee room. I will get better as we proceed. You have my apologies, Mr. Chair.

• (1625)

The Chair: Pardon me, Mr. Lamoureux. I take no offence to that, by the way.

I just want to advise the committee that we have a hard stop at 4:30 eastern time. After 4:30 we have no interpreters, no clerk, no analysts and no room.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, you have just stated that you intend to either suspend or attempt to adjourn this committee meeting based on resources. I realize that we are undertaking this meeting from a virtual perspective, but I believe that democracy has to proceed regardless. It is actually incumbent upon the House of Commons to ensure that we have resources for situations like this.

It is clear that the Liberals are filibustering this motion. I don't believe that they should be given a convenient window to stop the debate on this motion using the excuse of "resources". The House of Commons—whoever it is, the Speaker's office, your office or whatever—should be attempting to find resources rather than shutting down the committee because of a "lack of resources". My privilege as a parliamentarian is being violated by your decision to attempt to shut down the committee with regard to this.

I submit this as a formal point of privilege and I do not accept your attempt to shut down this committee due to "resources".

Find them.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Mr. Lamoureux is next.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you.

On the same point of order dealing with the member's matter of privilege, I'm wondering if the member is suggesting that if we cannot provide French interpretation then we should continue on, because I would strongly advise against that. If we cannot provide French interpretation, I don't think it would be appropriate to continue.

Can she provide some clarification as to whether she is recommending that we continue despite not being able to provide interpretation?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No, Mr. Chair, on that point of privilege what I am saying is that it is a failure of the chair and the House of Commons to obtain resources for interpretation during this meeting.

To underscore, again, the Liberals—including the government House leader Mr. Lamoureux—are filibustering this motion. He has not talked about the contracts. It's very clear that the Liberals don't want this motion to pass. The opposition parties are clear that we do. House resources should be here to ensure that debate can happen, that includes in both official languages, so my privilege is being violated. The privilege of every member here is being violated.

Of course we want proceedings to happen per the Standing Orders with regard to interpretation, but we're a year into this pandemic. The House of Commons has been proceeding virtually for some time, and I do not accept that my privilege should be violated because they or you or whoever it is can't find interpretation. This should be something that is accommodated for. I don't believe that Liberal members of Parliament and the government should be able to abrogate democracy with the excuse that they can't find resources. If the government and the House of Commons can't find resources for a Zoom meeting and interpretation, how are they going to deliver vaccines for Canadians? Come on.

Mr. Chair, I need to finish this.

The privilege that I, as a parliamentarian, have is directly tied to my ability to pass motions or debate motions like this on behalf of my constituents. The excuse that somehow we don't have resources is the definition of a breach of privilege. This debate must continue, so you need to find resources, Chair. You need to find interpreters.

The clerk should have seen, and you should have known—in fact, I'm sure you've been privy to discussions with the centre and with other people—that this is a filibuster, so this needs to finish. I assert that my parliamentary privilege will be being breached if you decide to suspend or attempt to adjourn this meeting due to "lack of House resources". I think most Canadians would agree. We are a year into this. The government has prorogued Parliament. It has done everything possible to stop opposition members from getting answers from it.

The Liberals can filibuster this all they want, but I don't think that it is fair. It is a breach of my privilege to allow them to have a break on their filibuster because of "lack of resources". Find interpreters. Find House resources. Do it. This is democracy. Get it done. This is my privilege.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

I am going to just say that the House resources are a matter of House administration to allocate, and the current situation is a matter of agreement between all the House whips and leaders. It's really not up to the chair, and it's not up to the government how to allocate House resources.

If you wish to raise—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: On my point of privilege—

The Chair: I am speaking. Do not interrupt, please.

If you wish to raise a point of privilege, the committee cannot deal with points of privilege. You will have to take it up with the House.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: On a point of order, Chair, actually, the committee has to deal with this point of privilege. It has to deal with it in order to go to the House. If I go to the Speaker to raise this point of privilege, he will say, "Go back to the committee", so I urge you to learn your procedure.

I am raising a point of privilege and I urge you to rule on it.

The Chair: The chair cannot rule on a point of privilege.

The committee can move a motion of privilege, and if the committee passes it, that motion can be passed to the House and the House can deal with it. You can also raise your point of privilege directly in the House at the next opportunity.

Be that as it may, we are over time. We have no resources. We do not have access to this room. We're already minutes over.

The interpreters—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: On a point of order, Chair, on procedure, according to the Standing Orders and procedure, you actually have to decide whether or not you consider this a matter of privilege. You have to. I have raised this, so that is a ruling you need to make today before you attempt to shut down this meeting.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, as much as the member Ms. Rempel Garner likes to, she doesn't get to dictate the rules of the committee and try to misrepresent your responsibilities.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Did I miss the election of the chair? Was Mr. Lamoureux elected chair during that exchange, Chair?

The Chair: Please step down.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: You know, Mr. Barrett, as—

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, the member was addressing the chair, and Mr. Lamoureux was not recognized. Is it a free-for-all?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I believe I was recognized.

Mr. Larry Maguire: No, he wasn't.

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux had the floor at the outset before he was interrupted.

Mr. Michael Barrett: You've been asked to rule on Ms. Rempel Garner's point.

The Chair: It is my understanding that if the member feels it's a point of privilege she can take it up with the House.

I don't think it's a point of privilege at this point for me to deal with, but I certainly invite her to—

• (1635)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Do not interrupt me.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: I will deal with your point of order in due course.

It is my view that this is not an infringement on the member's privilege and we—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I challenge the chair on his ruling that this is not a matter of privilege.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel, I will get to your point of order in due course.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I challenge the chair on your ruling—

Mr. Larry Maguire: The chair has been challenged.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I challenge the chair on your ruling that this is not a matter of privilege.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel, I hear your challenge, but you don't have the floor to make the challenge at this point.

I just wish to make it clear that this is a matter of House administration. For resources, they make arrangements for staff, for rooms, and they have done so with the agreement of the House whips and of the leaders.

To your point of order, if you wish to appeal my ruling, then it is—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I do.

On my point of order, Chair, if you open up your green book, on page 1060.... If you open up your—

The Chair: You've appealed my decision, so let's deal with that firstly.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You asked for my point of order, so let's start with that.

The Chair: All right.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: On a point of order, if you open up your green book—and I encourage you to do that right now—to page 1060, you actually do have the power to do what I'm talking about. You actually have the power and are required to say whether or not you consider it a matter of privilege. Since you have done that, I challenge your ruling. I argue that it is a matter of privilege and I request that the chair's ruling not stand.

The Chair: Shall the decision of the chair be sustained?

Mr. Clerk, I would ask you to take the vote.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Chair, just for clarification, I'm not 100% clear what we're voting on. What is your ruling, that is or is not a point of privilege?

The Chair: I have informed the committee that we are out of resources and we have to quit, which means that we have to adjourn or suspend. Ms. Rempel has raised that as a matter of privilege: that it's a violation of her privilege to not continue with this debate at this time.

I have ruled that it's really not up to us on the committee. It's not up to me as the chair and it's not up to the staff. It is a matter of the House administration that allocates resources and determines what resources are available in conjunction with conversations with the whips and House leaders. I have ruled that, in my view, Ms. Rempel's matter is not a matter of personal privilege, and she has challenged that ruling.

If you vote yes, you support the chair's decision that, in this case, it's not a point of privilege. It's for the committee to deal with. It still leaves it open for Ms. Rempel to raise it in the House as a question of privilege. If you vote no, then you would agree with Ms. Rempel's contention that this is a violation of her privilege as it stands.

Is everybody clear on that?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Chair, just to that, a few moments ago, I heard you say specifically that it's not up to the government to find resources, so that's the concern—

The Chair: We're getting into debate here. We have a motion to appeal the ruling of the chair. Let us deal with that.

Mr. Clerk, if you would, please take the vote on that.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 4)

The Chair: Thank you. The decision of the chair is sustained.

Now we have really no choice. We are nine minutes past—

• (1640)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I have point of order, Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: No more points of order. We have no more time.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: A point of order....

The Chair: This is unfair—

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Interpretation is exactly what I would have liked to have. I heard absolutely nothing and, because of that, I couldn't even vote. It's insulting, it's maddening. Technology is all well and good, but I didn't have interpretation. My channel is open, the interpretation channel is open, everything is still there. This is the second time this happens. I've had more than enough.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: On a point of order—

The Chair: Madame Vignola, will you tell us what your vote was: yes or no?

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Your microphone is turned off.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I'm well connected, but I don't have sound. I hear absolutely nothing.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Clerk, would you include Ms. Vignola's vote in the tally you just acquired?

The Clerk: I could, but I don't know how she wanted to vote.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Lamoureux.

The Clerk: We're having technical difficulties here, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: For me, it is complete silence. I didn't hear a thing.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Vignola has voted no. If you could include her vote in the tally—

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I can't understand what Ms. Vignola said, because I'm not getting any interpretation of what she said.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Mr. Davies, I can see your lips moving, but I'm not getting any interpretation.

[*English*]

The Clerk: We are having technical difficulties with interpretation.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Now I can hear someone.

The Clerk: We have difficulties with interpretation. Please wait a moment, we will check this.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I can no longer hear anything.

I can now hear the interpreter.

The Clerk: Can you hear me, Mrs. Vignola?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, if you will, I would like to continue on my point of order.

The Chair: Yes. Be very quick. We do have to wrap up.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes.

Mr. Chair, you do have the opportunity to suspend the committee if in fact you feel that we're not able to provide the full services that are necessary in order to have a properly functional committee. It would appear, just by observing the last two minutes, that we really do not have the ability at this stage. If more notice had been given from the Conservatives of their desire to sit past this time, we might have been able to be better prepared. I don't think the House administration should be blamed.

I do believe it's critical that we have French translation services. If we do not have it, I would highly recommend that you suspend the committee.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: On this point of order, Chair...?

The Chair: Excuse me. We're getting too far down the rabbit hole here.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You acknowledged the Liberal male speaking on a point of order. I would like to be acknowledged on the same point of order.

The Chair: Can we just get things straightened away on this vote?

Mr. Clerk, would you incorporate Ms. Vignola's vote in the tally?

[*Translation*]

The Clerk: Mrs. Vignola, are you voting for or against the motion?

Mrs. Julie Vignola: I will abstain from voting. It will be better than to speak my mind.

[*English*]

The Chair: That means there's no change to the tally. The chair's decision is sustained.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: A point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel Garner, please go ahead quickly.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Chair, you cannot just adjourn a meeting. A meeting can only end by implied or explicit consent. A chair's decision or lack of resources is not a reason to end a meeting.

In this type of situation, Madame Vignola is absolutely right. We should have translation, but a Liberal filibuster...? I'm sorry, democracy doesn't just run along the Liberal government's timeline. Of course the opposition is going to put forward motions to compel the government to give information. Of course we're going to do that. There should be resources for Parliament to continue. If there aren't resources to do this, then this isn't working and we can't continue this way. This is a violation of privilege.

Madame Vignola just had to abstain on a vote because she couldn't get interpretation. That is a failure on behalf of the House of Commons. As a member of Parliament, I don't have to give anybody notice of the extension of a debate or a point of order. This is an absolute breach of privilege.

I'm just reminding you that even though the government deputy House leader might be trying to suggest that something happened, a committee ends only by consent—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Not true.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: —and not by a lack of resources. A lack of resources is not approved—

• (1645)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: You're wrong, Michelle.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Chair, I'm being heckled by the House leader at this point.

I think this is a huge problem. This is something that has not been addressed and needs to be addressed. It is not my fault as a parliamentarian that the Liberals decided to filibuster a motion that could have been dealt with five hours ago. They could have voted yes or no, but they wanted to filibuster it to get to this point; they wanted to filibuster it to the point where there were no translators so that Madame Vignola couldn't hear and couldn't vote.

That is an abrogation of democracy, and it is a breach of my privilege. It should be brought up in the House, and shame on you for not agreeing to it.

We're stuck in the middle of the pandemic. We're being asked to deal with these resources and then you're not providing them. This is the definition of a breach of privilege. This absolutely should be raised in the House, between translation or whatever.... It shouldn't be, "Oh well, I just have to bring in Kevin Lamoureux to talk the clock so that Rempel's motion can't get through."

That is an abrogation of democracy, and I cannot believe this is happening right now.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Chair, may I speak to the point of order?

The Chair: Sure.

Mr. Don Davies: I'm really conflicted on this. Having considered Ms. Rempel Garner's point, in theory I think she's right. If there's a filibuster going on, then the filibuster continues until there are no speakers to be put up. I'm troubled by the fact that during the vote and during the debate leading up to the vote we did not have translation, which in my opinion abrogates the vote.

Ms. Vignola has the right to—you just said it yourself earlier—contemporaneous translation. I don't even know at what point she didn't have translation during this. We were conducting a vote without having official simultaneous interpretation, and Ms. Vignola indicated that.

I'm troubled by this because we are operating in a strange time right now, which is that from the very beginning.... The reason I voted the way I did was that it has been my understanding from the beginning of this meeting that we would be out of technical support at 4:30 eastern. But when I think about it, Ms. Rempel Garner is correct that if there are still people who are willing to speak at this point and there's no motion to adjourn that has passed by a majority, the meeting continues.

I'm troubled by the vote, because I don't think it was validly taken, and I'd like to hear from the clerk, if I could, as to when it is appropriate to end the meeting in the case where we have gone over time, we have speakers who are still wishing to speak and there is no motion to adjourn on the table. Is it a valid reason to stop the meeting because the current translators are going to leave or the technical support isn't there? I'm sorry. I regret my vote, because I think Ms. Rempel Garner's position is correct.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Once again, it's a matter of House administration to allocate staff and resources. It's agreed to by the House leaders. It has been agreed to by the whips. It's not up to me. Ms. Rempel Garner can certainly raise this in the chamber as a point of privilege—absolutely.

You're right that the chair cannot just arbitrarily adjourn the meeting. If there seems to be a consensus, the chair can do so. Otherwise, there needs to be a motion of adjournment. Failing that, the chair will have to suspend, and that is in fact what I must do, because we're already 20 minutes past the time when all the interpreters and staff are supposed to leave—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: A point of order, Chair.

The Chair: —and it's not fair to them.

The meeting is now suspended.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: A point of order, Chair.

The Chair: The meeting is suspended.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: A point of order, Chair.

The Chair: The meeting is suspended.

[*The meeting was suspended at 4:50 p.m., Friday, February 12*]

[*The meeting resumed at 1:12 p.m., Friday, February 19*]

• (18110)

The Chair: The meeting is now resumed.

Welcome back, everyone. We are resuming meeting number 18, which commenced last week on February 12.

Before we get going, I wish to emphasize that everyone has the right to participate fully in this proceeding in the official language of their choice. If at any time there is an interruption or problem with the translation services, I urge affected members to advise the chair or clerk without delay. We will do our best to correct the situation.

The motion currently on the floor was moved by Mr. Barlow. According to my information, it currently reads, as amended, as follows:

That the Chair of the committee write to the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel inquiring on whether or not the contracts for Canada's seven vaccine agreements with suppliers have been provided to his office as part of the motion adopted on October 26, 2020 by the House of Commons.

Should the law clerk have copies of any of these documents, that the committee instruct the law clerk to prioritize the translation of these documents and that these documents be published as soon as possible in accordance with the parameters set out in the House motion.

If the law clerk does not have such documents, that the committee request from the government the contracts for Canada's seven vaccine agreements with suppliers be tabled with the committee in both official languages, that the documents be vetted in accordance with the parameters set out in the House motion, and that the members of the Standing Committee on Health review these documents in camera.

The clerk has advised me that the speakers list at the time of suspension was as follows: Mr. Lamoureux has the floor, followed by Mr. Kelloway, Mr. Davies and Mr. Fisher. I would ask these members, if they still wish to speak, to use the "raise hand" function on the participants pane and they will be recognized in the debate in the order I have just noted.

Members will note, however, that in order to adhere as closely as possible to the motion passed earlier, meeting number 19, giving effect to that motion, is tentatively scheduled shortly following this one. That meeting cannot take place, of course, until the current meeting concludes.

It is my hope that after a number of days of reflection, members will be able at this time to proceed straight away to the vote on Mr. Barlow's motion, as amended. If it appears that the current meeting will continue at length, however, I must reschedule meeting number 19 for Monday.

If anyone wishes to speak to the current motion as amended, please use the "raise hand" function on the participants pane to signify this. If there are any, they will be recognized following anyone on the current list who still wishes to speak in the debate.

• (18115)

The Clerk: The bells are ringing, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. I'll finish my statement.

If you're on the list and your hand is raised but you do not wish to speak in the debate at this time, please lower your hand from the participants pane. If there is no one who wishes to speak in the debate, we will be able to proceed to the vote.

Thank you.

After that marvellous speech, I have been advised that the bells are ringing. We require unanimous consent to continue. Do we have unanimous consent to continue?

Is it the wish to carry on with this meeting at this time?

I'm not seeing any response here, so I'm going to ask the clerk to conduct a vote.

The Clerk: Is it for the bells or on the motion?

The Chair: Right now we have to decide whether we're going to continue through the bells or whether we're going to proceed to the House for the vote.

If there is anyone who dissents from carrying on with the meeting at this time, they should speak up or vote "no" as we conduct the roll call vote.

Please, Mr. Clerk, go ahead.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: I have a point of order. We are now voting on the motion as amended from the last session, am I right?

The Chair: No, we are not. We are voting on whether to continue this meeting or go to vote in the House. If anyone says no, then we're done, and then we can... Anyway, is that clear, that that's what we are voting on? Okay.

Mr. Clerk, please carry on.

The Clerk: Mr. Kelloway?

Mr. Kelloway: I vote no.

The Chair: Okay, that's sufficient. We will suspend the meeting at this time to go vote. We will see you all back here after the vote in the House.

Thank you, all.

• (1318)

(Pause)

• (1435)

The Chair: We once again resume meeting 18.

I won't go through my whole remarks again, but I would emphasize that it is my hope that after a number of days of reflection, the members will be able at this time to proceed straight away to the vote on Mr. Barlow's motion as amended.

If anyone wishes to speak to the current motion as amended, please use the "raise hand" function on the participants pane to signify this. If there are any, they will be recognized following anyone on the current list, as aforementioned, who still wishes to speak in the debate. If your hand is raised and you do not wish to speak or debate at this time, please lower it from the participants pane. If there is no one who wishes to speak in the debate, we will be able to proceed to the vote.

I'm seeing no hands raised. Therefore, I will ask the clerk to conduct the vote on Mr. Barlow's motion as amended.

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk, and thank you to the committee. It appears that our business in this meeting is done, unless there is any further business someone wishes to raise.

The Clerk: I'm going to send a new link—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I was just going to ask if the clerk would be sending a new link.

The Clerk: Disconnect and I will send a new link for the new meeting, to avoid any confusion. That's why I waited. You need to disconnect.

The Chair: Thank you, everybody.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>