



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Special Joint Committee on the Exercise of Powers Under the Building Canada Act

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 002

Tuesday, April 14, 2026

Co-Chairs: Dean Allison Patti LaBoucane-Benson



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• (1835)

[English]

The Joint Chair (Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC)): Welcome to meeting number two of the Special Joint Committee on the Exercise of Powers Under the Building Canada Act.

Today's meeting will take place in a hybrid format. Before we begin, I would like to ask all in-person participants to read the guidelines written on the updated cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You'll also notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

I would like to remind participants of the following points.

I don't believe there is anyone on Zoom, so we'll just skip that part.

Before speaking, we ask you to wait for one of the joint chairs to recognize you by name. Please make sure that your microphone is on before you start speaking. To those in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. We'll certainly maintain a list and do the best we can to maintain a consolidated speaking order.

I'll remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the joint chairs.

We have a couple of routine motions outstanding. At meeting number one, we debated these two routine motions, and they were adjourned. We're going to resume debate on them.

On the first one, at meeting number one, Senator Varone moved an amendment, which was adopted by the committee. The text of the motion as amended is:

That witnesses be given five minutes for their opening statements; that, whenever possible, witnesses provide the committee with their opening statements 72 hours in advance; that, at the discretion of the joint chairs, committee members be recognized in the following order of questioning:

a. In the context of a three-hour panel:

i. first round: four minutes for each committee member;

ii. second round: four minutes for each Member of Parliament and three minutes for each Senator;

iii. third and subsequent rounds: two minutes for a House of Commons Liberal member, two minutes for a House of Commons Conservative member, two minutes for a House of Commons Bloc Québécois member, and two minutes for one Senator, to be determined by the joint chair from the Senate;

b. In the context of a one-and-a-half hour panel:

i. first round: three minutes for each committee member;

ii. second and subsequent rounds: two minutes for each Member of Parliament and two minutes for two Senators on a rotational basis following the rotation used for questions during Question Period in the Senate; and that the rotation shall carry over to the next round of questioning or panel of witnesses, whether at the same meeting or at a subsequent meeting.

Is everyone clear on that?

If there's no debate, we'll call the question.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Joint Chair (Dean Allison): I'm going to turn the next motion over to my co-chair.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson (Senator, Alberta (Treaty 6), GRO)): Colleagues, the text of the motion that we are debating is as follows:

That when an equality of votes arises, (a) on a debatable motion, the vote shall be deemed not to have occurred and the committee shall resume debate on the question; and (b) on a non-debatable motion, it shall be negatived.

This was moved by MP Stubbs.

Go ahead, Ms. Stubbs.

Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Thank you, Chair, for raising that.

We'll withdraw that motion.

(Motion withdrawn)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): Okay, then we revert to the original text of the motion, which reads:

That the joint chairs shall have the ability to fully participate, including to move motions and to vote on all items before the committee, and any vote resulting in a tie vote shall mean that the item is negatived

Are we ready for the question?

(Motion agreed to)

• (1840)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): Is there any other business, colleagues, that we would like to discuss today?

Go ahead, Ms. Bendayan.

[Translation]

Hon. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to move a motion regarding the committee's mandate and our first guests. I have copies of this motion.

Would you like me to distribute the paper copies so that committee members can take a look at them before I read the motion?

[English]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): That would be fantastic. We will circulate them.

Has everybody reviewed the copy?

Hon. Rachel Bendayan: I think I need to read it into the record.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): I was just going to ask you to do that.

Hon. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you.

I believe colleagues have a copy. For the record, I am tabling this motion:

“That the committee invite the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy, and officials from the Major Projects Office (MPO), to update the committee on the work of the MPO under the Building Canada Act; and

“That the committee review the Governor in Council's and minister's exercise of their powers and performance of their duties and functions under the Building Canada Act, which shall include but are not limited to:

“a) the designation of projects of national interest, as per section 5(1) of the act;

“b) the creation of the Major Projects Office, as per section 20 of the act;

“c) the definition of “national interest”, as per section 4.1(1) of the act, and;

“d) the publication of an independent review, as per section 23.1(1) of the act.”

[Translation]

Lastly, the final paragraph reads as follows:

“That the committee report to each House of Parliament the results of its review at least once every 180 days while Parliament is neither prorogued nor dissolved, pursuant to subsection 24(1) of the act, and that the first report be tabled before summer adjournment.”

Madam Chair, Mr. Chair, we're taking the wording from the act.

● (1845)

[English]

As you can see, colleagues, an effort was made, further to recommendations from various senators, including Senator Quinn, that we specify several references to the act, as we have done. However, these are not exhaustive, as is made clear.

I think this represents faithfully not only the spirit of the law but also our intention and our willingness as a government to bring forward both the minister and Major Projects Office officials so that we can begin the good work of this committee.

Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): Thank you.

On debate, Mr. Dhaliwal.

Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey Newton, Lib.): Madam Chair, even though the intent seems to be pretty clear, the 180 days is a running clock. Is it 180 sitting days, or are the 180 days a continuously running clock?

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): That's a good question.

Ms. Bendayan, is it 180 sitting days or just 180 days?

Hon. Rachel Bendayan: When it's not specified, it's 180 calendar days.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): It's calendar days.

Ms. Stubbs.

Shannon Stubbs: Thank you, Chair.

I would like to thank the Liberals for bringing this motion forward and showing, I think, what is the spirit that at least Conservatives tried to approach the debate on Bill C-5 with to create the MPO. I want to thank them for bringing forward this motion to map out in a general way some of the work until the end of June.

I had a motion that I was going to prepare to bring forward and that is in fact very similar. It mirrors the government's motion, although it is somewhat more detailed in terms of invitations, which would help to contribute to our road map of committee work to the end of summer.

I was wondering if there would be openness among the committee members—the members of the government and the Bloc—and any interest for a quick suspension so that we could compare the two motions, which all of us haven't had the opportunity to see yet, and to see if perhaps we can meet on common ground and have an agreement for a road map until June. That could be an efficient way to deal with this part of the prescription for our work.

Sukh Dhaliwal: I agree.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): Colleagues, are you okay with this short suspension to discuss this?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): We will suspend.

● (1845)

(Pause)

● (1930)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): I call the meeting to order.

I will call on Ms. Bendayan.

[Translation]

Hon. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I hope to have the consent of my colleagues to withdraw the motion that I just moved. I would like to move a new motion, which reflects the outcome of our negotiations.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): Is there consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): Please go ahead, Ms. Bendayan.

Hon. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you. It's a pleasure to table a motion, which states:

That the committee invite the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, Internal Trade and One Canadian Economy, and officials from the Major Projects Office (MPO), including the Chief Executive Officer, officials responsible for regulatory affairs and coordination, and officials responsible for Indigenous affairs and consultations, and representatives from the Indigenous Advisory Council, to update the committee on their work under the Building Canada Act.

[*Translation*]

And that the committee review the Governor in Council's and minister's exercise of their powers and performance of their duties and functions under the Building Canada Act, which shall include but are not limited to:

- a) the designation of projects of national interest, as per subsection 5(1) of the act;
- b) the creation of the Major Projects Office, as per section 20 of the act;
- c) the definition of "national interest", as per subsection 4.1(1) of the act, and;
- d) the publication of an independent review, as per subsection 23.1(1) of the act.
- e) the five factors that may be considered by the Governor in Council in deciding whether to make an order as listed in subsection 5(6) of the act.

That the committee report to each House of Parliament the results of its review at least once every 180 days while Parliament is neither prorogued nor dissolved, pursuant to subsection 24(1) of the act, and that the first report be tabled before summer adjournment.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we have taken suggestions from all sides, and I hope this meets the expectations of the members around the table. Obviously, this does not limit in any way the ability of this committee to decide to bring further witnesses or to take the work of the committee in a different direction, but I think this sets out a useful framework for our initial meetings.

Hopefully, we can move expeditiously to a vote.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): Thank you, Ms. Bendayan.

Is there any debate?

Ms. Stubbs.

Shannon Stubbs: Chair, I want to thank the Liberal colleagues and the mover of the motion for being willing to work together with us to get to an agreed upon work plan on behalf of all Canadians before adjournment. I know we all look forward to working together to ensure that we give the oversight to the Major Projects Office and advance these projects, as we've all committed to do and as we did when we all got appointed to this committee.

Thank you for taking our input and for working on a plan for all of us members here.

• (1935)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Patti LaBoucane-Benson): Are there any questions?

(Motion agreed to)

The Joint Chair (Dean Allison): Are there any other motions to bring before the committee?

There's one thing we should consider before we leave. We need to work backwards. Let's assume we have seven meetings left. Let's also assume we can get somebody next week. We're going to ask to hear from some witnesses, and we're probably going to need a couple of weeks to write the report. We're looking at only three to four weeks for witnesses. I would appreciate some conversation during the week with both parties to come up with a list of those witnesses so that our excellent clerks and researchers can try to get them in, because we're on a very short timeline.

We know that when we get to the end of June, we sometimes lose days, but we're early in the week. I don't really anticipate that, but we still need to get the report done so that we can get it back to the House. I want you to consider that, as well, for when we come back next week.

Hon. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to specify, given that we have been quite prescriptive in the motion the committee just passed, that I'm happy to undertake to get in touch with the Major Projects Office on our end to see about availability. Of course, the committee is free to exercise its powers to send invitations out on the basis of this motion, but we will certainly try to get folks' availability as soon as possible.

As you mentioned, next week is coming up quickly, but we will try to get witnesses in front of this committee as soon as possible, understanding that we're not in control of folks' schedules.

The Joint Chair (Dean Allison): I appreciate you reaching out before the invitations go out. That will be very helpful.

Mr. Blois.

Hon. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would simply say, for the benefit of all of us, with our parliamentary schedules, that having the minister come would obviously be essential. I know he'll make himself available, as will the MPO folks.

If next week doesn't look probable, based on the schedule of senior officials at the MPO or the minister getting back within a certain time, on behalf of the group, can we be told if we're going to meet next week? If not, that can clear calendars for other types of activities.

I presume we're going to be sitting at least two weeks from now. There would be an expectation that the officials or the minister can make themselves available.

If it's not looking probable, can we be told by the end of the week or something?

The Joint Chair (Dean Allison): Sure.

I would also suggest that at the very least, we try to come up with a work plan next week. We don't need to stay for three hours. I'm happy to meet all the time. If those meetings are shorter, we can do that. That would be awesome. That's a great thought process.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank my colleagues for their collaboration. Their efforts are appreciated.

I would like to clarify something. It may be the result of the interpretation. However, I believe that I heard you say in French that both parties will work together to come up with the witness list. I think that the word "both" was used. We may want to pay attention for this.

[*English*]

Hon. Claude Carignan (Senator, Quebec (Mille Isles), C): He said "both chambers".

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: Okay.

In terms of next week's schedule, I want to say that this committee has been relatively slow to get off the ground. It was hard to get together at first. I think that it would be more feasible to meet with the people from the Major Projects Office next week. I have no doubt that these people are quite busy. That said, they're quite well paid.

I would like to ask the committee to try to secure the participation of Dawn Farrell and other witnesses, if possible.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Dean Allison): Thank you very much. I meant both sides, not both parties. It's all sides. I see two sides. It's all sides.

Is there any other discussion or any other business?

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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