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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Colleagues, welcome to meeting number 20 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, October 22, 2020, the committee resumes its study of the vulnerabilities created and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[English]

To ensure an orderly meeting, as usual I encourage all participants to mute their microphones when they're not speaking and to direct their comments through the chair.

When you have 30 seconds left in your questioning or speaking time, I will signal with this piece of paper in a very analog fashion.

Interpretation services are available through the globe icon at the bottom of your screen.

[Translation]

I would like to welcome our witnesses from the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie: Christian Champigny, acting manager for international programs, and Florence Massicotte-Banville, international project officer.

[English]

Also, I would like to welcome Scott Walter, executive director of CODE; Lorraine Swift, executive director of the Change for Children Association, or CFCA; and Chris Eaton, executive director of the World University Service of Canada.

[Translation]

I now give the floor to the representatives of the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie for their five-minute presentation.

[English]

If it's possible to keep your remarks to four minutes, it will be even better for our time for questioning by members, but I will allow all witnesses up to five minutes of opening remarks.

[Translation]

The representatives of the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie have the floor.

Mr. Christian Champigny (Acting Manager for International Programs, Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Education is a fundamental human right and a powerful agent of change essential to the achievement of each of the 17 sustainable development goals. Recognizing this transformative power of education, the international community has set itself the goal of ensuring quality, inclusive and equitable education and promoting life-long learning opportunities for all by 2030. The Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie has made this goal the core of its mission.

It is important to remember that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faced several challenges in the education sector. For example, 258 million children and young people of primary and secondary school age were out of school. Children living in vulnerable or conflict-affected countries were more than twice as likely to be out of school. Girls were one and a half times more likely than boys to be excluded from primary school.

Today, the pandemic is further jeopardizing the achievement of this goal. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the greatest disruption to education in history since its emergence. Ninety-four per cent of the world's pupils and students were impacted by the pandemic through containment measures and school closures. That's 1.6 billion children and young people.

The crisis has highlighted the significant digital divide between countries. Learners, especially female learners, from low- and middle-income countries, and particularly displaced persons and refugees, have had very limited access to the distance learning measures that have been put in place. The closure of schools has led to an increase in unpaid domestic chores and caring activities for many girls, female adolescents and young women, limiting their access to education. The crisis has exposed girls, female adolescents and young women to a variety of protection risks, including depriving them of the structure and sense of trust that schools normally provide.

The negative effects of the pandemic will also worsen as a result of a possible global economic crisis. Here are some examples: the declining economic power of households, which will lead to higher school drop-out rates—it is estimated that some 24 million children, adolescents and young people may drop out or not have access to school this year simply because of the economic impact of the pandemic; school dropouts, which will be accompanied by a marked increase in child labour, sexual exploitation and early marriage; cuts in national education budgets, directly affecting schools and teachers; and a possible significant drop in official development assistance, which could result in a reduction in aid to education of \$2 billion U.S. by 2022.

As part of its international projects, the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie has been able to observe the impacts of the crisis in the field. For example, thanks to funding from Global Affairs Canada, the foundation is currently implementing, in conjunction with the Centre d'étude et de coopération internationale, a project for the education of refugee and displaced girls in Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

More than 60,000 Burundian refugees were confined in the Mahama camp in Rwanda due to the pandemic, while for many, the only opportunities to earn an income were outside the camp. Schools had to close down. Based on our observations, we anticipate that a significant number of girls will not return to their educational path, particularly to support their families economically. We also note a sharp increase in early pregnancies, another important factor limiting the return to school. For many children in this camp, especially many girls and female adolescents, the pandemic will mean a loss or delay in learning, or the cessation of their schooling, and will leave a mark on the future of an entire generation.

In conclusion, the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie wishes to add its voice to those of the hundred or so organizations advocating for the right to education that endorse the white paper produced by the "Save Our Future" campaign, which proposes a series of measures to be carried out in the medium and long term to avoid an educational disaster.

We would like to draw your attention to two key elements of this white paper which, in our view, deserve special consideration.

Firstly, in response to the crisis, there may be a temptation to focus everything on a catch-up logic by concentrating on children newly affected by the educational deficit and on an overuse of technology-assisted learning, thereby diverting attention from the fundamental pre-existing structural problems in learning. However, it is essential that education sector policies and reforms are not only reactive and short-term, but focus on proven interventions and particularly on strengthening the education workforce.

Secondly, it will be important to protect education funding. This means, among other things, advocating for the preservation of education budgets in developing countries and protecting official development assistance for education.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1540)

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

[English]

We will now move to our next set of opening remarks.

Mr. Scott Walter of CODE, please, the floor is yours.

Mr. Scott Walter (Executive Director, CODE): Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My observations are based on the experiences of CODE, the Canadian NGO established 60 years ago to support development through education, and that of our partners and the programming that we jointly support in Africa.

Quality education is empowering, allowing the individual the chance to realize their full potential and contribute to the well-being of their family, their community and to the nation as a whole. This is the basis for a global framework such as Education For All.

Initially, there was consensus that Education For All meant prioritizing universal enrolment in primary school, but it was quickly realized that that only mattered if the students were actually gaining skills and learning. Without quality there's little return on investment. How do we measure that sought-after quality?

In that regard, there's no more foundational indicator than whether or not the child can read and write. It's the canary in the coal mine, the notification of problems to come. A child can't read and so falls further and further behind until they drop out as an illiterate. One learns to read in order to comprehend, and the failure to acquire the skills of literacy impacts the ability to move beyond basic learning and on to higher order thinking skills so needed in today's world, the skills of problem solving and critical thinking.

For those of us working in the sector, it has been clear for a great number of years that far too many students are not learning to read and write. The scenario is so dire across the developing world that the World Bank declared a learning crisis, one that threatens countries' efforts to build human capital and achieve the sustainable development goals.

Make no mistake about it. Human capital, which is basically a measure of productivity, is the most important component of wealth globally. In low-income countries, human capital makes up some 40% of wealth; in high-income countries, it makes up over 70%.

According to UNESCO, if all students in low-income countries left school with elementary reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty, the equivalent of a 12% cut in global poverty. In other words, there's a huge cost to illiteracy and poor-quality education, so we welcome the call by the World Bank to cut by half the global rate of learning poverty, defined as the percentage of 10-year-old children who cannot read.

You may be thinking, wasn't he supposed to talk about the impact of COVID-19? Well, I am, in the sense that the evidence shows that school closures caused by the pandemic exacerbated all the previous existing inequalities, and that those children who are already most at risk of being excluded from a quality education—the poorest, the most marginalized—have been most affected.

Girls are particularly vulnerable. CODE, for example, is very active in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and we know from the Ebola school closures of a couple of years ago that girls were less likely to return once schools reopened. With lockdowns and restrictions, and the economy in freefall, it was the girls who took on greater responsibilities that kept them at home or even forced them into early marriage. We also saw that, with isolation, girls were at increased risk of sexual exploitation, and teenage pregnancy rates doubled.

During COVID and beyond, we feel it's critically important to address the learning crisis by focusing on literacy. CODE believes this can best be accomplished by supporting sustained access to relevant quality reading and learning materials with a corresponding effort to ensure educators have the skills to use those materials effectively.

Access to technology is very limited where we work, and in many cases the solution is low tech. Support the local publishing industries, for example, to produce great learning materials through traditional print, or virtual classrooms with radio reading teachers. Digital learning, access to the Internet, the creation of interactive learning modules are probably best focused on the teachers rather than the students.

The loss of learning is real and severe, and the resulting impact of greater levels of learning poverty will be felt for years, but we're not without tools and we know more can be done to support the foundational skills of literacy. We need to support kids to become readers wherever they are.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now turn to Lorraine Swift from the Change for Children Association.

The floor is yours for five minutes, please.

Ms. Lorraine Swift (Executive Director, Change for Children Association (CFCA)): Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this committee.

This year Change for Children is celebrating its 45th anniversary of support for rights-based development in the global south and an award-winning global education program in Canada. Based in western Canada, we do appreciate being included in this discussion. For me, it is an honour to be invited to testify here as I've worked in international development for the past 25 years.

Given that you've already heard testimony from many others in this field, my presentation will focus on our unique perspective as an Alberta-based NGO working with indigenous populations in the developing world that are already vulnerable, marginalized and hardest hit by the impacts of climate change.

Change for Children enjoys significant support for our work from Albertans and Canadians, including from Global Affairs Canada. Donor support for our climate change mitigation program and for our education and health projects in indigenous communities actually increased in 2020. Our brigade program, while not offered currently, obviously, allows Canadian medical, dental, optometry and teacher professionals to offer much-needed support and services to some of the world's most remote populations. Since 2000, our brigades have taken over 1,000 Canadians into the UNESCO biosphere reserve called Bosawas in Nicaragua, home to the Miskito and Mayangna indigenous peoples. Poverty and food insecurity have increased here because of climate change and because of COVID-19. This area was hit hard by the back-to-back hurricanes Eta and Iota that ravaged Central America last fall.

In some of the world's most remote indigenous communities we see families struggling to survive in the face of their existing vulnerabilities, now exacerbated by the pandemic. We also see that women and girls suffer the most. Persisting gender discrimination means that women and girls living in extreme poverty are the most vulnerable to some of the least visible impacts of COVID-19 and of climate change. We see girls suffering from disrupted education, time poverty and increased risks.

There is a solution. We know that quality education for girls is a public health and a climate change solution. Education empowers girls to take control over their own bodies, enabling them to determine when, and if, to bear children. Fewer children mean healthier populations and lower carbon emissions. Education tackles the underlying inequalities that increase girls' vulnerability to COVID-19 and to climate change.

In the Americas, the regions with the lowest levels of education for girls are indigenous. Realizing the rights for indigenous people is essential to recovery. Earlier this month, Elon Musk offered \$100 million for the best carbon capture technology. His tweet was met with the response, "Congratulations to whoever invents forests." Forest preservation is our best defence against climate change and against COVID-19 and against future pandemics. While not the inventors of forests, indigenous peoples are indeed their stewards.

Indigenous people in all countries of the world fall into the most vulnerable health category. They have significantly higher rates of diseases, higher mortality rates and lower life expectancies than their non-indigenous counterparts. Change for Children works with indigenous communities in some of the most remote forest regions of the Americas. We work promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation. We work promoting technology-enabled indigenous language education. We work with indigenous populations marginalized from all services due to their remoteness and because of their ethnicity. There is a high likelihood that they will be marginalized from future access to COVID-19 vaccines as well.

Today we are facing overlapping global health emergencies: COVID-19 and climate change. Both exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Both have the ability to bring health systems and economies to their knees. Both dial back progress on every human development indicator by at least 10 years. To build back better, we must design our COVID-19 recovery plans to facilitate collaboration amongst all actors. Small and medium-sized organizations—SMOs like Change for Children—working for decades with strong connections in some of the world's most remote communities are central and essential to this recovery.

We cannot design effective recovery plans if we have no funding to implement them. We cannot reach the most vulnerable and remote communities without means. Global Affairs Canada has not called for proposals from SMOs since early 2019.

COVID-19 has taught us that we are not safe in Canada until we are all safe globally. We must do more. We continue to need stable and consistent funding from the Government of Canada for SMOs to build back better from COVID-19 and to continue our vital and important work towards achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030.

Thank you.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

For our final set of opening remarks, we will go to Chris Eaton of the World University Service of Canada.

The floor is yours for five minutes, sir.

Mr. Chris Eaton (Executive Director, World University Service of Canada): Thank you.

My organization, WUSC, works to expand education and employment opportunities for marginalized youth, and has a strong presence in Iraq, in Jordan, in the refugee camps and host communities of northern Kenya and northern Uganda, and in South Sudan. In all of these places, we have been working with local institutions to foster better quality education and employment outcomes for girls, young women and refugees. As in Canada, all of these young people have been affected by the pandemic with the closure of schools and a marked decrease in local economic activities and employment opportunities.

In these circumstances, refugee and out-of-school girls are particularly vulnerable to significant learning losses and to the lost social protection that schools often provide. Our current concern is that many of these young people will not return to class as schools

open, and that those who do so will not receive the support they need to catch up and stay in school. This will result in higher dropout rates, lower graduation rates, early marriage and depressed future incomes.

Indeed, we are already seeing a significant decline in the return rates of girls to now-open schools in the Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps in northern Kenya where we work.

Refugees and their host communities have not been passive in this context. Instead, they have been part of the response to the education crisis that COVID has caused and should form an important part of the longer-term solution. For example, we witnessed many instances of refugee and host communities undertaking door-to-door campaigns to identify vulnerable students and organizing peer support learning clubs and ed-tech sharing groups—all initiatives that have prevented some dropouts and learning losses, provided some ongoing social protection and, perhaps most importantly, helped to sustain a sense of hope amongst these vulnerable youth.

These efforts are unfortunately under-recognized, undervalued and under-supported by governments and the international development community. This is incredibly short-sighted, as these kinds of refugee-led initiatives are an essential complement to the other investments in teacher education, smaller classroom sizes and the integration of education technology in remote classrooms and communities, all of which need to happen.

In this context, the government's recently announced “together for learning” campaign, which seeks to mount an international effort to ensure that all refugee and displaced children and youth have access to the education they need and deserve is well-timed. However, to realize this campaign's potential and meet the increased needs of vulnerable youth and children caused by COVID, the government really needs to ensure sufficient and consistent funding, in part by investing in innovative approaches that support refugee-led responses to the education challenges that they face. Now really is the time to invest.

I will conclude my remarks with two recommendations.

First, the government has already committed to allocate no less than 10% of Canada's international assistance budget to education, but to education broadly. Now is the time to further focus these resources to direct a significant percentage of this commitment to the “together for learning” campaign, recognizing that refugee education has not received the level of support that it deserves in Canada's international development efforts.

Second, the government should create a fund directly to support refugee voices, leadership, organizations and responses in the education sector. This could be modelled on the equality fund, which the government helped to create in 2019 to permanently change the model of support to women's rights organizations. Similarly, a fund to permanently change the model of support to refugee-led organizations and responses would address a critical gap in the global refugee support architecture. It could form an important new instrument in Canada's international development tool kit and become a pillar of the "together for learning" campaign.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank our witnesses again for their opening remarks.

We'll now go into our first round of questions. These are six-minute segments.

Leading us off will be Mr. Diotte.

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thanks to all the witnesses especially for all the good work that they do.

I'm going to ask a very general question. We've certainly heard from every witness who's come before this committee about how important it is that children get to school and get educated in person. Of course, we've seen throughout the world a big push, especially by teachers and even teacher's unions, saying, "No, we can't send kids back. It's too dangerous; COVID infections are going to go through the roof, etc."

First of all, I'm wondering if we've seen a trend in underdeveloped countries where there is a push to keep kids out of school because of COVID fears. Second, how can we fight against that so that teachers will feel comfortable going back to the classroom, encouraging their students to come back to get an education, which we all agree is absolutely vital, especially in underdeveloped countries?

I'll just throw that open to each one of you to comment on.

Mr. Scott Walter: I guess I'll jump in.

I think, in part, to say.... In Africa anyway, which is where we work and what I'm familiar with, there hasn't been that same reluctance to send their kids to school or to get them back into school. Now that differs across the board, of course, but there's not much in the way of an alternative. Online learning technology is simply not available. Kids do not have access to the Internet. They don't have access to broadband. They don't have access to the devices that are needed. It's not really like there's an alternative.

Now in some families, they've made a choice already about how many of their children can go to school, because there's a cost even if there are no fees. It does tend to be the boys who are prioritized over the girls, so we definitely need campaigns at the national level from the government and from NGOs to encourage kids to go back to school. For the most part, schools have reopened in Africa. From my knowledge, kids are back in school and are ready to go. Howev-

er, as everybody said, for example, the most marginalized, girls, the most vulnerable, are not returning in the same numbers.

I guess that would be my comment, that there's just no alternative to a face-to-face classroom.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Would others have opinions on that?

Mr. Christian Champigny: I would add to this that school as a physical space has also its advantages, not only for education but also as a sort of not necessarily safe space but a point of reference and a place where, in some instances, kids go to school and have one complete meal a day. In some areas, that is provided, and it's the only full meal that, in some instances, they will have. There's also protection for girls. That is one major advantage of the physical presence at school.

There are certain elements that go beyond the education aspect that advocate for physical presence in school.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Do any others have something to weigh in with?

Mr. Chris Eaton: Yes.

Similarly, we haven't experienced the same reticence of teachers to return to the classroom or of parents in general to send their kids back. We are witnessing a situation in which girls in particular are not returning in the same numbers as boys. We also have a situation in East Africa where schools were closed for a much longer period of time than they were here in Canada, and nothing was happening during that time period.

In some respects, there was a real pent-up demand to get back to school but, on the other hand, I think, tougher choices in families about who to send back because of some of the barriers that the families face or some of the choices that they make. Unfortunately, that disadvantages the people that we're most concerned about: the most vulnerable, refugees themselves, and girls.

• (1600)

Ms. Lorraine Swift: I will just add to this that in so many places—and as we all testified to already existing vulnerabilities that exist for so many kids and also teachers in places where we work—they have no personal protective equipment. There's no way for them to protect themselves against.... They have super-overcrowded classrooms. Really, there are so many other places where we need to invest in order to be able to confront the dangers of COVID. There are just so many things that require our attention as well as COVID recovery funds.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: I'll end it there because I see that we're ticking down the seconds.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That's appreciated, Mr. Diotte. That may allow us to go to a brief second round.

Our next six-minute round goes to Ms. Saks.

Please go ahead.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses for the wonderful, amazing work they do for so many communities across the world, for the time and effort that's put in, and also particularly for their time with us today.

I'd like to start with Mr. Walter in relation to CODE and the transforming girls' education program in Sierra Leone, which the Government of Canada, I understand, is helping to support.

I am struck by the group's finding that, for the girls in Sierra Leone, as the girls reached puberty, enrolment, retention and completion rates declined, and there was an increasing learning gap between girls and boys over time as they transitioned into secondary school.

We've heard there has been a heightened reduction, obviously, in education during this time due to COVID. We keep hearing that same statistic of the gap with girls, but we haven't homed in on why there is that gender gap and what its impact is. I'd really appreciate some insight on that.

Mr. Scott Walter: I'll try to respond to a couple of things.

One, I think, is that in Sierra Leone, for example, which is somewhat unique with its post-conflict scenario, there are much fewer female teachers in the classrooms. The girls don't have those mentors, those role models to look up to. One of the things that the TGEP is doing is paying for scholarships for young women to go to teachers' college to increase the number of women who are in teaching and in the classroom.

Another thing is that girls are starting later than boys. One of the things we know for sure is that if they don't catch up, if they don't advance, they will drop out. That's in part because of the pressure from their families. If they're not achieving, really the families would just as soon quite often have them at home doing domestic work or working in the market. There are also the pressures of early marriage. Girls in Sierra Leone are getting married at 13, 14 or 15 years of age, and that's often an economic reality. In some countries, the ages are, in fact, quite a bit younger where you first start seeing early marriage.

I think there is also still a gender imbalance in the sense of the quality of the materials. I've spoken about literacy and the importance of getting kids to be reading and writing, because that's the gate that opens up the rest of the learning to them. If they aren't able to read and write, they can't then progress in science, math, history or whatever the other subjects might be.

Often the learning materials, if available, put forward stereotypes of girls, stereotypes that they should really be looking to other, more domestic realities for themselves.

I think that gap is one that's based on a number of things: on the quality of teaching, on the quality of the resources available, on the fact that they're starting late, on the fact that there is often more pressure for them to leave in the first place, and on the fact that there is a lack of role models.

I am probably not doing a great job of expressing them, but these are the main points that are impacting young girls.

• (1605)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you very much.

Do any of the other witnesses want to weigh in on this in relation to other countries and their experiences in education?

Mr. Eaton.

Mr. Chris Eaton: We've seen the gap actually close in a lot of countries in Africa, in a lot of the places in which we work, and particularly close at a primary level. In some respects, in a place like Kenya, girls are actually better off than boys in many of the districts of the country. That gap is starting to close also at a secondary level. Where it's not closing are in those particularly fragile places, like the remote parts of Kenya or Sierra Leone, the remote parts of northern Uganda or South Sudan, or among protracted refugee situations.

I think there is an intuition there about where to focus our energy and resources, because those are the people who are particularly vulnerable.

Girls, in general, are doing better in education across the continent, except in a number of really significant pockets where we need to attend our attention.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you. That leads me into my next question.

In February of this year, Minister Gould announced the launch of "together for learning", which is a three-year campaign to promote quality education and lifelong learning for refugees and vulnerable displaced people, especially children and youth.

With what you've just mentioned, Mr. Eaton, and with that commitment in place, I'd like to know how you see our role playing out over that three-year commitment. You touched on this in your opening statement, and I'd like to unpack it a bit more, since our government has made this commitment to education for vulnerable communities where there is conflict.

The Chair: Mr. Eaton, give a very brief answer, please.

Mr. Chris Eaton: We don't know the details of the campaign yet, because they are still being worked out. We also don't know the financial commitment behind the campaign. The campaign and the focus are well justified, but now we need to make sure they're backed up by the resources necessary to have an impact.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Ms. Saks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses who are taking part in this meeting. Their input is most relevant to the work of this committee.

It is very inspiring to hear you and to see your determination to move forward despite the difficulties.

The portrait that is painted for us, from one testimony to the next, is extremely depressing. Last time, I asked a question about hope. I asked if there was still hope. The dedication and determination you show is what keeps us hopeful. So thank you very much for who you are and what you do.

I would first like to address the representatives of the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie. You have quoted, both in a press release and on your website, this statement by Nelson Mandela:

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

However, as mentioned earlier, between 250 million and 260 million school-age children are not in school. As you are involved in operations both at home and abroad, you know that ensuring that children in a developed country are literate, are interested in reading, grammar, writing and spelling, and perform well in these areas, is already a challenge. Of course, one might think that the situation is even more complex in developing countries.

There was already a problem with the structures that enable learning in developing countries. Yet we were told repeatedly that these difficulties were exacerbated by the pandemic. As we know, students in Canada and Quebec have difficulty maintaining their motivation and level of achievement because of distance learning. For logistical reasons, this is an additional challenge.

This exacerbated situation leads us to believe—I am referring here to a World Bank statistic—that closing schools for three, five or seven months or even longer will eventually result in a loss of income for these children. This crisis will therefore have the effect of increasing poverty in the long term. That's probably why one of the witnesses told us—I think it was again a representative of the Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie—that we are witnessing perhaps the most serious education crisis in history. Added to that is the difficulty in accessing the vaccine in developing countries.

In a simple, orderly, systematic way, what could be done to address this series of multifaceted problems we are currently facing? Where should we start and in what order should we proceed?

• (1610)

Mr. Christian Champigny: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

This question is obviously extremely complex and no one is in a position to answer it with certainty.

You spoke of hope and of the 258 million children who did not already have access to education. I don't know if my colleagues in other organizations will agree with me, but this is a decrease compared to what existed. I think there have been improvements in education, but the problem is much broader, and the current crisis is certainly an economic crisis that will increase the barriers to access to education.

I've worked in this field for many years and I've seen that people generally have a thirst for knowledge and a desire to learn. But there are shortcomings in terms of the quality of education, the structure of education or the economic, sometimes cultural, capacity to access it. This is what needs to be worked on above all.

Where do we start? In other societies or in our societies, I would say that everything has to develop at the same time. When I talked

about the biggest educational disaster, the COVID-19 crisis, I also mentioned the white paper "Save Our Future," which has been endorsed by about 100 organizations. I invite you to consult it, because it talks exactly about the COVID-19 crisis—it is very recent. We can talk about an educational disaster, but education is also a source of hope. Certainly, this is not going to be solved overnight, and we have to try to include as many people as possible in this movement.

We welcome the initiative that Minister Gould presented a few weeks ago on the education of refugees, particularly refugee and displaced girls. This initiative must be supported by funding, of course. We are waiting for news in this regard, as Mr. Eaton mentioned.

It will therefore take shape, but gradually. Indeed, it is a gradual process, but you have to start somewhere, and education is an absolutely crucial starting point.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron and Mr. Champigny.

[English]

The final six-minute round goes to Ms. McPherson.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of our witnesses today. I'm always very impressed with the work that organizations such as yours do. It's nice to see some of my past colleagues on the call this afternoon.

One of the things this committee doesn't often get to do is to hear from a variety of different organizations that are engaged in international development efforts around the world. I'm delighted that we have a number of small and medium-sized organizations represented. I think it's important that those voices get amplified because, of course, it's always a little bit harder for a smaller organization to engage with the federal government in a meaningful manner.

I'm going to direct the first couple of questions to CODE and to Change for Children.

In terms of the role of small and medium organizations in Canada, and the role in terms of our official development assistance, could you talk about how important it is that we are supporting our small and medium organizations? What key roles do SMOs play in the development landscape?

Ms. Swift, could I start with you, please?

• (1615)

Ms. Lorraine Swift: Sure. I'm always great at answering this question of why SMOs should be funded. We are very agile, and we're innovative. We can pivot quickly to respond to the needs of the communities where we have been connected to very specific people in specific places from across the globe, sometimes for 40 to 60 years. There are SMOs across this country that have been around for decades that really gain their support from their local communities.

We mobilize and leverage support from across the country; here in Alberta not so much these days, but there is a lot of wealth here, and we have been able to double the capacity of our Global Affairs Canada funded projects with our matching grants from Albertans and Albertan corporations and foundations.

We also connect Albertans and indeed Canadians from across the country from small towns and indigenous communities with our communities that we work with overseas. Through our brigade programs, we take people who wouldn't necessarily understand the details of international development, and they get to see first-hand the impacts of their support.

We also educate Canadians. We have school outreach programs. We're in the schools. We're making presentations. We're doing that across Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. We basically bring the global community to western Canada, which is something.... If we didn't have NGOs based out here, maybe the involvement in international development would end with writing a cheque and mailing it to Ottawa.

There's a lot to say about how we engage Canadians and how we leverage support from across the country.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you so much.

Mr. Walter, could I turn to you next, please?

Mr. Scott Walter: I would respond that, as a smaller organization, we don't try nor are we able to be all things to all people. As a result, we're very focused. We've been around for a long time, but we're very focused on the question of the quality of education. If there's one thing that's universal, it's that parents want a better life for their children, but they're not stupid. If they don't see their kids gaining or learning at school, they'll pull them out.

What we do is focus on what we think can make the greatest impact. Often big organizations are involved with all manner of community, school and infrastructure programs, but a school is not a school until there's a teacher inside it with good books. That's where we focus.

It happens to be something that Canada knows a lot about. We produce some of the best teachers in the world. We also know a lot about the importance of indigenous publishing to produce a national literature that children can relate to, that speaks to them and that reflects what their reality is in a relevant way. Relevant means being linguistically relevant, relevant quality-wise, and relevant to the length of the curriculum.

That's what we do, and we think we have a special role to do it.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Speaking about relevant curriculum and education, I'm going to turn to Mr. Eaton, if I may.

You spoke a bit about the importance of education for refugees. We know that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by COVID. We know that girls are at most risk, especially when they are refugees, indigenous or living with a disability.

How do we make sure, as we develop the together for learning program, that it meets the needs of those girls and that refugees are at the table as part of the discussions to develop it? What would you as a Canadian organization like to see that program look like?

• (1620)

Mr. Chris Eaton: We have a tremendous network of people here in Canada who have the lived experience of being refugees and who have actually come to Canada because of the educational opportunities offered to them in other parts of the world and here in Canada. This is emphasizing that focus on education. There is thus this tremendous expertise across Canada that we could draw on to inform the design of the campaign itself.

I think that the campaign at its heart has to have something that accentuates values and supports refugee leadership itself, not only in Canada but globally in the places in which we want to do some more educational work.

We have an equality fund that does outstanding work with women's rights organizations. How about having something just like it that supports refugee-led responses, refugee voices, refugee agency in the educational space, in the parts of Africa where all of us work and in other parts of the world as well? I'd like to see something like that at the heart of the campaign.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Colleagues, we're hovering at the 10-minute mark of our scheduled time with witnesses. I would propose to do what we've done a few times before, which is to divide that time evenly, to give every party a chance to ask another question—somewhere in the neighbourhood of two and a half minutes per questioner.

Let me just mention to our witnesses that there have been a couple of times when interpretation has had difficulty picking up the sound. It was marginal. It wasn't severe enough to interrupt. If you could speak as loudly and clearly into your microphone as possible, that would assist interpretation services greatly.

Mr. Genuis, please take us through the first of these two-and-a-half-minute rounds.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you so much to all of the witnesses.

There is something I would like clarity on, because it's an important point. Ms. Swift, I wrote down that you said "Fewer children mean healthier populations and lower carbon emissions."

Did I get that correctly from you?

Ms. Lorraine Swift: Yes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: At one time, people might have made the argument that fewer children was something that was desirable from a development perspective. That happened in the context of various coercive population controls that tried to push the message on women that they should have smaller families, that they needed to have smaller families.

A lot of emerging data—I'm referring to a paper by Wesley Peterson, "The Role of Population in Economic Growth", which does a sort of historical survey. It notes:

In low-income countries, rapid population growth is likely to be detrimental in the short and medium term because it leads to large numbers of dependent children. In the longer run, there is likely to be a demographic dividend in these countries as these young people become productive adults.

We're seeing in countries that have had higher population growth rates, for example, dramatic economic growth. Such is the case in many countries in Africa, and there are many other countries, such as China, that have had aggressive, coercive population control policies that have been very violent in their implications. The impact of those policies now is an aging population and inevitable impending demographic problems.

Is the case you're making that we should emphasize choice for people, or is it that we should try to push the message that people should not have larger families, even if that's what they wish to have in some of these countries?

Ms. Lorraine Swift: I'm not sure how much time I have to respond to that, but it's well documented that family planning available to women and girls allows them to decide when to have children and how many to have, and basic math around carbon emissions tells us that every person on the planet is contributing to climate change.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can I just clarify, though, madam, that we're talking about two different things. There's the issue of giving people information and choice, and then there's the issue of pushing the message that you should have a smaller family. Those are two conceptually distinct things, right?

Ms. Lorraine Swift: Right.

The Chair: Just really quickly, please. We only have seconds left.

Ms. Lorraine Swift: Women who have information about how to control how many children they have are typically having fewer children, because they don't want to have 12 children. It's not pushing the message to have fewer children, but it is giving women the choice to control their own bodies.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Genuis. We'll have to leave it there.

Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Let me thank the witnesses for the tremendous work they do. We are all so impressed by everything you are able to accomplish.

I'm going to go along the same line of questioning Mr. Genuis just brought up.

We've heard from many other witnesses about wrap-around services and how important education is, in particular health and reproductive health rights education. When young women and girls go to school, I'm sure they get this education about their own bodies, about choice, also about nutrition and being able to get food. We heard from CODE, from Mr. Walter, that marriage is at 13, 14 and 15, taking away the empowerment, the control, that these young women and girls have.

Can you tell us about that? How important is it to have sexual and reproductive health rights education, and how important is that for their empowerment?

• (1625)

Mr. Scott Walter: I'll jump in.

I would say that with education, young women can make informed decisions. That's number one. With literacy, it leads to higher-order thinking skills. Really, what comes with that is problem solving and critical thinking. It's all about being able to make informed decisions once you have that information. But, yes—

Mr. Peter Fonseca: How important are sexual education and reproductive health rights?

Mr. Scott Walter: They are critical. A comprehensive sexual education is critical to the equation you're talking about.

In many of the countries we're working with, they're very conservative, traditional societies, and there's no allowing of that to be in the curriculum. More and more, countries are now opening up to that. They want to have stronger economies, healthier populations and literate peoples, so they're opening up to that kind of curriculum-based program.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Yes, and also nutritional education, and so on.

Does anybody else want to weigh in on how important it is that young girls and women get that type of education, to be able to have control of their lives?

Ms. Lorraine Swift: We definitely support the feminist international assistance policy and the proliferation of information more and more in the schools, in the hands of young women, around their sexual and reproductive health and rights to that sexual and reproductive health.

Certainly, there are a lot of programs now that we can thank the Government of Canada for providing leadership on. Certainly, of course, we need more funding to get those into the hands of the girl students, but that's a definite—

Mr. Peter Fonseca: And young boys—

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

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, both of you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, earlier reference was made to the impact of COVID-19 on learning operations in developing countries.

I would like to know what impact COVID-19 has had on your operations. I am thinking in particular of the Change for Children Association, which had school construction programs in some of the communities in which it operates.

What impact has COVID-19 had on your operations in terms of literacy efforts in developing countries?

[*English*]

Ms. Lorraine Swift: We have an education program, a technology-enabled, indigenous mother-tongue language education program, that also includes sexual and reproductive health and rights education for girls in Guatemala that was closed down completely because of school closures. We have a similar program in Nicaragua where the schools remained open and we were able to continue both our teacher training program and our student learning programs in those schools. It's quite variable in terms of where we're able to continue our work. It's based on the local governments' decisions and on whether or not they have closed schools.

Certainly, we've been responding to COVID. We also have large water projects across Central America. In terms of water and sanitation, we've been able to provide a COVID response effort to the beneficiary populations there. Then, of course, in Canada, we actually expected our revenues to go way down. We predicted a 60% decline in donations because of COVID and also because we're based in Alberta and our economy is in difficult times right now. However, we actually saw our donations increase, so we know that Canadians are supportive of international development investment, and we know that Albertans are supportive of international development investment. We are impressed by our citizens' ability to support that.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Does anyone else have a short answer for me?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Walter: I can just say that we work almost exclusively through local partners, so they have managed to continue to work. We've also had some very interesting programs where we've supported the local publications. They've developed anthologies to put

them into home-schooling kids. They've distributed them and then partnered with local radio stations to have radio reading hours that will reach students wherever they are.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Thank you very much, witnesses.

To finish off our round this afternoon, Ms. McPherson, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was quite compelled by the questions of Mr. Bergeron, but also I'd like to comment on how Mr. Walter talked about the cascading impact of education loss and what that looks like.

I would love just a very quick comment from all our witnesses on what it would mean if we were able to have long-term—not just three years, but long-term—predictable funding through the Government of Canada, and how that would impact your ability to do good work and recover from the impacts of COVID-19 on your programming.

Again, I'll start with Ms. Swift, if I could.

Ms. Lorraine Swift: Absolutely.

We are running kind of from project to project with gaps between projects. We aren't able right now to commit long term to our partner organizations in the south, to the communities where we work or to the participants in our programs. We have been very lucky that our funding continues from one funder to the next and that we're able to sort of continue programs. However, it would be much more advantageous for us and we could leverage more support from Albertans and Canadians across the country if we were able to say, "We have this long-term funding from the Government of Canada. Will you also support this initiative?" We could do much more, and of course, we will have to do much more because the effects of COVID and climate change are profound.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Eaton, could I ask you the same question, please?

Mr. Chris Eaton: We could work with our local partners and make long-term investments in quality education for the communities that we're concerned about. We're unable to do that fully at the moment, but longer-term, predictable funding would allow us to do so and would be of great benefit to the people we're particularly concerned about.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Do I still have time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds, Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Wonderful.

Mr. Walter or Mr. Champigny, either of you, perhaps you have some comments on that.

Mr. Scott Walter: I'll just say very quickly that education is a long-term goal, and there's no silver bullet in education. More than in almost any other sector, you need predictability and you need long-term funding. You invest in a child at age six, and by the time the child is 16, you start to see the return on that investment.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. McPherson.

Colleagues, that takes us to the end of our time with our witnesses this afternoon.

As usual, I'd like to thank all of them on our collective behalf for their expertise, their testimony and, most importantly, their service. It was great to spend time with you. We would have appreciated more time, but time is limited. There's always an opportunity for you, if you haven't had a chance to express all your thoughts or recommendations, to address us in writing subsequent to this meeting. Thank you again. We'll allow you a few minutes to disembark.

We have some business to attend to, colleagues. We're still in public session.

We're continuing our discussion on the motion introduced by Mr. Harris and Ms. McPherson. We most recently in our discussion on this had an amendment on the floor that was introduced by Ms. Sahota, if I'm correct.

I'd like to hand her the floor to continue to speak to that amendment. Then we will take a speakers list as usual, through the "raise hand" feature, please.

Madam Clerk, let's do the same thing we did last time with respect to members who are present in the committee room.

Ms. Sahota, please go ahead.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you for giving me the floor, Chair.

I should probably start with a refresher for everybody, because I believe the last time we spoke to my amendment was last Thursday, a week ago.

I'm sorry, Ms. McPherson, that we weren't able to get to it on Tuesday. Anyway, I'm really glad that we got our interim report done, finally. That's good news, at least.

My amendment is to Mr. Harris's motion.

• (1635)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry, I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, please, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I would just encourage us to be careful about matters that were or were not concluded in camera being discussed, given that we are in public.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Right. Thank you, Mr. Genuis. I'm glad I didn't go into detail with this. Thanks for the heads-up. I will try my

best to be more careful. I don't want to let the cat out of the bag about the report.

Going back to the amendment to Mr. Harris's motion, the amendment that I proposed was basically a rewording of the first sentence so that the motion would read, "That the committee recognizes that, due to global circumstances, the government has faced delays in the supply of vaccines for Canadians through national manufacturing and international procurement". The rest of it goes on as is and then I have removed the final sentence of the motion.

If everyone has the motion in front of them, hopefully they have the amendment as well. The last sentence, which is removed, is, "Finally, that the committee report this motion to the House."

Maybe I'll start with "Finally, that the committee report this motion to the House". The reason I proposed these changes to Mr. Harris's motion is that I'm really opposed to our reporting every comment or feedback we get to the House in this way without having done some thorough study or investigation of it. The committee's work is to actually do some work on a matter and then report that to the House, as we have been doing in the study that we currently have before us. It's not to make a statement and then just send it to the House.

A lot of work needs to be done on this issue. I said last time that I appreciate the NDP's sentiments on this, but what I don't appreciate is our just blocking up House time, without doing the work that this committee should be doing. That is essentially what we're seeing. In many committees, we're seeing motions just being sent to the House so that they can be concurred in and so that we can spend four hours of House time and delay a lot of important legislation.

I want to make sure that all the members in this committee are basically aware of what the consequences of continuing to go down this road could be. The consequences we're currently going through right now are that Bill C-14 has not been given the due time it needs to move forward. Bill C-14 is the fall economic statement. It is important for Canadians. It's important in the context of this pandemic.

Just as the sentiment of this motion about vaccines going to poor or middle-income countries...I absolutely agree that this pandemic should be first and foremost on our minds as a government, and it is. Our delaying support to Canadians and delaying legislation in the House, however, is not what is going to help Canadians or developing countries.

Another piece of legislation that's in the House, which I think is important for the safety of Canadians, is Bill C-19, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act. That piece of legislation, I think, has not had any time in the House—

Ms. Heather McPherson: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm sorry to interrupt the member, but we have very limited time, and I don't know that listing all of the bills that have to come forward to the House is actually how we want to move forward on this. We have not had sufficient time to talk about the actual meat of this motion yet, despite the fact that I tabled it some time ago, so unless the member is going to actually talk about this motion, not, in fact, all of the bills coming forward in the House.... I would prefer that we stick to this motion.

• (1640)

The Chair: Ms. McPherson, I believe she was addressing consequences of the motion, so I will allow this thought to be expressed. I think it is part of the consequences of what would happen if we go down this path.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Dr. Fry. Is it on the same point of order?

Hon. Hedy Fry: No, I would like to suggest that the freedom of a member of this committee to discuss and debate an issue of importance to this committee should not be curtailed by another member. The tradition of committees is that we discuss until we are happy, as we did with our report until we were happy with the report, until we all believed that we could feel safe in putting that out because our names are on it.

Ms. Heather McPherson: As long as we were talking about the report.

Hon. Hedy Fry: She is speaking about the report, Mr. Chair, so I do think that that was not a point of order, as you so rightly pointed out. I wanted to raise my voice to support you, as the chair, in deciding that this is not a valid point of order.

Thank you.

The Chair: I believe Ms. McPherson was getting to the question of relevance. Your point was a broader one, which is the privilege of the member to speak unrestrained at committee, and that point is also important. I thank you both for your points of order.

I'll pass the floor back to Ms. Sahota, unless there are additional comments on this point of order.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): I would add to that point of order that I would hope the chair would caution all members to make sure that points of order are points of order. Yes, you can call on relevance, but you can't call on whether or not there are motivations behind the member's speech. That is up to the member. That's a long-standing tradition.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

Are there any other points on this point of order? Okay.

Ms. Sahota, we will give the floor back to you.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I appreciate the comments that all my colleagues have made. I do take some exception to Ms. McPherson trying to get me back on track. I think I'm completely on track. I think it's important that I'm speaking to my amendment. My amendment is to remove the last sentence. Part of my amendment is to remove the last sentence of the NDP motion, and I think it is important, if we do get to a vote

on my amendment or essentially the motion unamended or amended, that we need to understand what the impacts are.

I want to make it very clear so that we all have a good understanding before we vote on these things. Also, I even want to, perhaps through the discussion that we're going to have on this, fully understand where the NDP or other parties that wish to support the original amendment were going with this and what the intention really is. Is the intention for us to better understand the Covax initiative? Is it to better understand how Canada can play a better role in providing vaccines not only to Canadians but also in supporting other countries? Is that essentially what we're trying to achieve or are we trying to achieve something else?

I would argue that at the end of the day, that last sentence is really there to try to achieve something else. That's happening not just in this committee. It's happening in many committees. We're seeing many things being done so that all of the House time is blocked up with opposition motions and concurrence motions. We're even seeing—we just saw here on Tuesday.... Actually, I won't mention that part, but we are seeing in other committees as well attempts to bring whatever issue it is, reports and such, to the House as quickly as possible so that they can be concurred in, so that there can be debate on those issues in the House. I want us to fully understand what's at stake here.

I know, to Ms. McPherson and to her party, that Bill C-15 is incredibly important. Bill C-15 is an act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. UNDRIP is something that one of her esteemed colleagues from the NDP has worked very hard on to make sure that the government would move on this piece of legislation so that we could recognize those rights within our own country. It's very important to me, but seeing how things are evolving, I really hope that we get this work done in this Parliament.

If we continue to send all the work that we're supposed to do in committees to the House, then we're not going to get anywhere with legislation at all. Why are we trying to get rid of work that we should rightfully be doing in this committee as members? We should be doing our job. We should be bringing, perhaps, the minister in to try to figure out how this program of Covax was put together, what it was intended for. We could be bringing in other witnesses if those proposals are on the table. But all I'm seeing in this original motion is an attempt to make some value judgements and to send this to the House so it can block up legislation. That's what I'm seeing.

That's why I'm trying to get to a point where maybe we can come up with a solution that would better serve the sentiments behind—or at least what I hope are the true sentiments behind—this motion, the original motion, to make sure that we're doing our role as a leader.

Some of the language I haven't even attempted to amend, really, because I was trying to do the least possible amount of amendment to the original motion so that I wouldn't offend the original motion's intent. There's definitely language beyond that, with which I'm not happy, but I let it go. I'm trying to do the bare minimum so that we can still move on and do some important work and look into the whole Covax initiative.

That's why I haven't removed the fact that Covax was an initiative that was intended to provide vaccines to high-risk individuals in low- and middle-income countries.

• (1645)

With regard to the intent of Covax's program and the initiative, I think there's a failure to completely understand what the intent of that program is. It is to provide equitable access. That doesn't say it's to deny any developed country access to Covax. It is to ensure that all countries that are investing in and supplementing this program could also benefit from this program. It is an equal opportunity program. I'm really proud that Canada is a leader in the investments that it's made into Covax.

Another issue which I think is important is.... God forbid, I don't want this to happen, and I don't think most members that sit on my other committee really would like this to happen, but when I was interrupted before, I was about to say that we have Bill C-19 also in the House. That is election legislation. It is something that the elections commissioner has asked us to pass so that they can prepare if there were to be an election in this pandemic. The government doesn't control that necessarily. Things can happen. Oftentimes, you know, I'm getting to the point that—

Ms. Heather McPherson: I have a point of order again, Mr. Chair.

Do you still deem this relevant?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] House, making sure—

The Chair: One second, Ms. Sahota.

Ms. McPherson, what is your point of order?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Is this relevant? Do you find that this is relevant to this motion?

The Chair: I believe it is, yes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Okay.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, go ahead, please.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I haven't been a member of another minority parliament, but what I have been told by others who have been members of minority parliaments is that things can occur, especially when we get to a point where there is a lot of disagreement, where legislation is essentially no longer able to move through the House and you have a log jam basically. No work is getting done. Canadians have sent us here to do work, to pass important legislation, for committees to work.

Oftentimes we hear this ideal notion that minority parliaments are wonderful because there is so much co-operation and consensus building. I'm hoping that we can build some consensus at this committee today and work together to make sure that the House has time to do the important work that is needed for Canadians. If we don't go down that path of working together and we have that log jam, it is possible we could end up having an election. It's possible that we could end up getting to a place where no one is willing to work together. I would hate to see that happen, but I would really hate to see that happen before Bill C-19 passes.

Without having election legislation passed, and without it getting past second reading, getting to its committee so that the committee can do important work on that legislation and bring forward amendments and then send it back to the House to go through the third reading stage, we won't be able to give the elections commissioner the important powers that are needed to make sure that an election would be run in the safest way possible for Canadians.

I feel it is our responsibility to make sure that we are doing the right thing for Canadians at the end of the day. That is very important.

We have in the House as well Bill C-12, an act respecting transparency and accountability in Canada's efforts to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050. I think that's a very important piece of legislation as well, and I'm hoping that the NDP and the Green Party are going to be very supportive of that legislation, and who knows, maybe the Conservatives will be as well. You just never know.

I'm eager to see all of that work get done in the House so I can see for myself what ends up happening, but right now what's happening is nothing, absolutely nothing. That is why I come back to why it's important for us to revisit this motion and to understand the repercussions it would have in the House if we were to pass it as is. I think that would be a complete failure of this committee to do its work.

That was some of the language I wanted changed in the original motion. I don't think that the government's work in procuring vaccines for Canadians can be described as it is. I sincerely believe—and I know Canadians do too, and I know at the very least that my colleagues will back me on this—that we are currently seeing vaccines come into our country, and we're going to continue to see vaccines flow into Canada even more quickly than what might be doable by the provinces to roll them out, but I'm very optimistic. I think Canadians are too. I'm starting to hear a lot of relief on that end from my constituents. I know they are very concerned. Their number one concern is getting vaccines to our seniors, to immunocompromised people, to those who work at the front line.

When we come back to Covax, in terms of the amount of vaccine that Canada would be receiving through Covax, I believe it would be somewhere in the area of 1.9 million doses by the end of June. The majority of doses that we are currently receiving are through Moderna. We are receiving doses through AstraZeneca. We're receiving Pfizer doses, of course. Pfizer is the largest number that we're receiving.

• (1650)

I know there might be some delays in the Covax shipments to developed countries, but I was happy to hear that—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I am sorry to interrupt my colleague, but I see that almost all our Liberal colleagues have raised their hands.

Are we systematically filibustering to prevent this motion from being adopted by the end of the hour?

Ms. Sahota has already been speaking for 25 minutes and she doesn't seem to have finished. I have asked for the floor, but I get the impression that they do not intend to let us speak on the subject.

So, if they're trying to prevent the motion from passing by the end of the day, we could just adjourn the meeting and go home.

I find what I am witnessing at the moment extremely deplorable. It seems to me that government members are systematically filibustering to prevent the adoption of this motion, amended or not. Yet, having spoken with Ms. McPherson and with the minister, I came here in a spirit of compromise, and I find that few of my colleagues are acting in the same spirit. At least not many on the government side.

I'm a bit exasperated by what's going on right now. Let me point that out to you, Mr. Chair.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron, but I am not convinced that this is a point of order—

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: One second, please. Let me briefly address Monsieur Bergeron's point, Dr. Fry, and then we'll go to you.

It's my understanding that Ms. Sahota was very directly addressing the consequences of this motion and her perception of the vaccine distribution. I don't see that there's any issue with relevance.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Oh, come on.

The Chair: Monsieur Bergeron, you are actually in line to speak after Ms. McPherson and Dr. Fry, so you have your place in line and you will be able to share your reflections.

I don't believe procedurally, Madam Clerk, that this is a point of order, but maybe you could clarify for the committee.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: One second, Dr. Fry. Just let me address Monsieur Bergeron's point. Then I'll go right to you.

Madam Clerk, is there a point of order that can be raised on filibuster? I'm not aware, but you may have clarification.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): No, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, I understand Mr. Bergeron's concern in wondering if there's a hidden agenda here or whatever. The point is—and according to rules of committee—a member is speaking,

and when that member is finished, I would like to support her motion.

That is part of what we do with a motion. When a motion is moved for an amendment, one supports it or one disagrees with it. My hand is up because I want to support her amendment with regard to removing that last sentence, and I would like to have the privilege as a committee member to speak to my support for that amendment and to all the reasons why I think it is important. My hand is still up, Mr. Chair, to speak when my time comes.

I understand Mr. Bergeron's concern, but I think that one can always read a hidden agenda into everything if one chooses to. As far as I'm concerned, I do not have a hidden agenda. I want my privilege to be able to support the member's amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Fry.

I think we're getting into points of debate that are being raised under points of order.

Just for the members' benefit for the moment, the speakers list following Ms. Sahota consists of Ms. McPherson, Dr. Fry, Monsieur Bergeron and Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order on the agenda. Could you clarify how much time this committee could have to go past 5:30 if it's the wish of the committee to do so?

Could you also clarify this point? On our agenda, we're supposed to be considering the draft report on the Uighur issue. Is there an intention to proceed to that at some point, or will we not get to that if the lengthy speeches continue?

Could you clarify those points on the agenda?

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, thank you for the point of order.

It is at the will of the committee what they choose next. The Uighur report is an item on the agenda, not with a defined time frame, but it is an item that is on the agenda. I'm advised that tonight we will not have the ability to extend past 5:30. Unless I stand corrected on that, that's the most recent advice I've received.

We will go back to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

It's interesting that I heard my colleague Mr. Genuis, who I have a lot of respect for, laugh at my perception of the vaccine rollout. I guess maybe it was mentioned, but it's just interesting.... I've spent many hours listening to Mr. Genuis debate at length and oftentimes just read out of textbooks, which I have found barely—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have never done that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It has been extremely hard to link to the—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I've always filibustered extemporaneously.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I have seen you read out of textbooks.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Find the clip.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Genuis, come on. Let's move on.

The Chair: Let's stay with the speakers list, colleagues, please.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'll send that clip to you, for sure.

I did think that he always found a way to link it back to the issue at hand, and at this point, I would say that I have not strayed from the issue at hand at all.

My intention, really, right now is to find that consensus for my amendment so that we can move forward. I know the draft report consideration, as Mr. Genuis has mentioned, is very important as well. If you would like to table this amendment for now, that's okay with me. If there's consensus at the committee to table this issue right now and move on to the draft report, that's fine. I think that's important work that this committee could be doing.

When it comes to this motion, I want to retain my right to be able to speak to my amendment until I feel I can garner some support on my position. I'll go back, unless I hear from committee members otherwise.

You're free to talk amongst yourselves, if you like, to see if you can build some consensus. That is fine. I'm willing to amend my amendment or maybe have a subamendment if somebody thinks that might be appropriate, but I just don't think that the original motion as it stands in its original form is appropriate.

I'll continue to explain why.

• (1700)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, again, Mr. Chair, I'd like to seek unanimous consent to first allow Ms. McPherson to—

The Chair: Hold on, Mr. Genuis. I'm not sure that you can introduce a motion on a point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Well, it's for unanimous consent. If people aren't interested in hearing it, that's their business. I'm trying to create a procedure by which we can at least get the Uighur report done.

If people want to give me an opportunity to move for unanimous consent to do that—

The Chair: Okay. Let's hear it, briefly, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

What I would propose, if there's unanimous consent for this, is that Ms. McPherson be allowed to deliver some brief remarks on this issue. Then we will adjourn debate on this issue. Adjourning debate doesn't mean going to a vote on the issue; it means it can be brought back at a future point. Then we would adjourn debate on this issue and that would still leave us, hopefully, with 20 or so minutes to address the Uighur report so that we could at least get something done.

That's my proposal for unanimous consent.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Point of order.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Let's stay in sequence here.

There's a point of order.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Point of order.

The Chair: There's a point of order on Mr. Genuis's point of order, raised by Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, there are procedures in place—they're written in a book that we were all given when we first became MPs—on how committees and standing committees must proceed with the work that they have to do. We cannot suddenly decide that we don't want to follow those procedures and create our own new procedures. Doing that is out of order, as far as I'm concerned, Mr. Chair.

The order, at the moment, is that a member has duly, according to her privilege, introduced an amendment to a motion on the floor. We will debate it because that is what the rules say. She will debate her own points of order, and those of us who support her or do not support her, have an opportunity to speak to or against her amendment. The order on the floor right now is the debating of an amendment to a motion introduced by Ms. McPherson.

Until the debate on that amendment is finished, there should be nothing else moving that procedure off, because anything else would be against the order of the committee's rules at the moment.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Dr. Fry, thank you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The committee can, by unanimous consent, do anything it wants to.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, wait one second please. Let's stay in sequence here.

I take it, Dr. Fry, that through your point of order, you've expressed a view that there is no unanimous consent on Mr. Genuis's proposal.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Fair enough.

Hon. Hedy Fry: That's it exactly, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We will pass the floor back to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I kind of had a point of order there, too. I want some clarification on the points of order that just took place. I know you can't move a motion on a point of order, but what was tricky there was that Mr. Genuis was not just trying to get consensus on moving to the draft report and tabling this issue for now and maybe coming back to it later, but he was also trying to take my position on the floor away from me and give it to Ms. McPherson. I don't think I'm willing to cede the floor right now.

Could I get clarification on that as well? That's where I was confused.

The Chair: Procedurally, we may need some advice here.

Ms. Sahota, I think what you're raising implicitly is a point of privilege. Maybe we can pass it to the clerk to help us sift through that and see how to best answer it. In any event, I believe we do not, at this point, have unanimous consent, which means the floor would revert to you.

Madam Clerk, could you advise?

• (1705)

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, I would suggest that when you gave the floor to Mr. Genuis after he indicated that he was seeking unanimous consent, he did at that point legitimately have the floor. However, he does not have unanimous consent to move that motion or for it to be agreed to.

At this point, I would consider any debate on this collapsed. The floor would be returned to Ms. Sahota.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Clerk.

Just for future reference, is it permissible, then, to raise a point of unanimous consent, if that's the right term, on a point of order—or raise a question of unanimous consent on a point of order rather than a motion? Can a member solicit the unanimous consent of the committee at any time through a point of order?

The Clerk: No, Mr. Chair. Points of order are really reserved for when a member thinks the rules of the committee are being breached. They would have to indicate which rule is being breached to make it a proper point of order.

The Chair: That's helpful to all members, I believe, Madam Clerk.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, just for clarification, my understanding of the committee rules is that a committee can do anything it wants by unanimous consent. It's a moot point anyway, because there's no unanimous consent.

Hon. Hedy Fry: No.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This happens all the time in the House. We constantly have members of the House rising on points of order to seek unanimous consent on points of procedure or substantive matters. Is it the point that this can happen in the House but it can't happen in committee?

Hon. Hedy Fry: That's not what you're seeking. That's not what you're seeking.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, if I may—

The Chair: Please.

The Clerk: —the committee can proceed to some things on unanimous consent, but it is a freedom with limitations. You cannot overturn the Standing Orders, for example, and you cannot overturn higher procedural authorities.

In this particular case, once you had moved your point of order and gotten the attention of the chair, and the chair gave you the floor legitimately, then you could seek unanimous consent. In the House, unanimous consent is really used to move along procedure, such as unanimous consent being sought for concurrence in committee reports of PROC, or for membership changes, for example. Those are the real reasons unanimous consent is generally used. In committee it can be used the same way. In this case, I would suggest that it was, but it did not pass.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: That's helpful, Madam Clerk. Thank you very much.

The floor reverts to Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. Now to remember where I left off...

That was helpful, though. Every time you learn a little bit more about procedure, it updates and refreshes your memory or your knowledge.

I think I was at the point I wanted to make about the initial reason for the WHO having initiated and coordinated—

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Chair, I would like to raise a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I was trying to do that, but my microphone was up on my head.

I just want it on the record that I do not think it is appropriate to use a point of order to make what was a de facto motion. I don't want it to become—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You're on a point of order now.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: —the standard of this committee.

I'm not making a motion. I'm wanting to make it very clear—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You're making an editorial comment.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Will you just let somebody speak, Mr. Genuis, when they're speaking?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's not a point of order.

The Chair: Colleagues, let's please maintain order.

Mr. Oliphant has the floor.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: It is a point of order. I am not going to challenge the chair on this. However, I want to make it very clear, at least in the record of the committee, that I am saying that it is not appropriate for the chair to be giving the floor to someone in the midst of someone's speech and who then uses it to make a de facto motion and request unanimous consent.

I do believe the clerk was right by saying that once he had the floor, he could actually make a motion, and he asked then if there was unanimous consent to do it. However, the problem was prior to that, when the floor was yielded to him when it wasn't truly a point of order. I just want to make sure we don't go down that road, because we would then be outside the Standing Orders. You can only make a motion when you duly have the floor, which we have decided by convention on this committee is by the order on the speakers list kept jointly by the chair and the clerk.

I really think that was a very difficult moment, and I think it needs to be noted in our minutes.

• (1710)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant, thank you. That confirms the advice of the clerk.

Is there another point of order?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order on that.

Mr. Chair, Mr. Oliphant's comments do not confirm the advice of the clerk, because what the clerk said was that it is a reasonable practice within the existing framework of the Standing Orders for unanimous consent motions to be proposed which are designed to facilitate or expedite the work of the committee, and that is what I was seeking to do. I was trying to propose, by unanimous consent, a procedure that would allow us to actually get through the work we need to get done. There were members on the government side who rejected that unanimous consent motion.

That's fine. That's their right, but it is very common, including during filibuster scenarios, as happened at PROC during a filibuster scenario, where unanimous consent was sought to do things procedurally to move things along or to create certain accommodations. For instance, in the middle of a speech, you can say "unanimous consent to suspend" or "unanimous consent to allow someone else to intervene".

The use of unanimous consent for procedural abridgement is very common and is necessary for a well-functioning committee. If one person doesn't like it, they can always simply say no to that point of unanimous consent, but it is normal and proper, and I'm trying to propose a path forward. If members don't like that path forward, if they don't want to move on from this debate to create time for something else to be done, that's fine. They can say no to unanimous consent, but this is a normal procedure, and that has been confirmed by the clerk's advice.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, thank you for that.

I just want to circle back one more time to the clerk, because the way I understood it was that the desire or the solicitation of unanimous consent is not properly sought on a point of order, which is really just to clarify a breach of the Standing Orders with reference to a particular standing order that the member, in her or his perception, believes has been broken.

Madam Clerk, how do members seek, and at what point can they seek, the unanimous consent of the committee for procedural or other reasons?

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On a point of order, you may not move a motion, including a motion for unanimous consent.

In this particular case, Mr. Genuis moved his point of order, and then you did indicate that you were going to give him the floor. At that point, he had the floor legitimately. Usually, in the normal course of things, members will gain the floor legitimately through their turn on the speaking list or if the chair gives them the floor.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. That is helpful.

Ms. Sahota, we'll go back to you.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you. I appreciate that.

I'd like to reflect a little on that as well. I'm thinking back to perhaps something I said may have instigated some of this, and that was for us to work together to come up with a solution, a compro-

mise, and perhaps Mr. Genuis was trying to jump the gun a little to try to get to that consensus. So I give him the benefit of the doubt that maybe he wasn't trying to do something tricky, but I do feel he was giving up my position on the floor maybe to get to a better place. He can definitely raise his hand if he hasn't done so, and Ms. McPherson is next as well, so they will definitely have their time to propose different compromises that perhaps would be feasible to move this committee in a positive direction and get us working on something that will help Canadians and people around the world.

Turning to the purpose of Covax, I think the original motion fails to understand the real purpose behind this initiative. Covax was a global vaccine-sharing initiative that a whole bunch of countries joined. The goal of this initiative was to accelerate the development and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccines. This was to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world.

It was not at the expense of the investing countries to not be able to get any vaccines out of this initiative or out of the vaccines that are manufactured. Nowhere did it say that wealthy countries are to invest without receiving anything in return. It was quite the opposite. The whole purpose of this initiative was so that the countries that invested were also to receive some benefit out of this program. By doing so, my belief is it encourages more countries to enter into this program, which helps supplement vaccines for the developing world and to other countries as well.

I think at some point I mentioned we just heard an announcement that Ghana received 600,000 vaccines through Covax just the other day. There might be some delays there as well, but many countries are seeing delays when it comes to vaccines. We've seen delays for various reasons that are outside our control because of the ramping up of manufacturing, the changes to lines and all of that. But, it is still good news that we are starting to see these vaccines roll out from Covax. I think in large part it's good that Canada has played a large role in that being possible today.

Our initial investment in September—and there has been more since then—was for \$440 million. Half of this investment was going to secure doses for Canadians and the other half was going toward helping other countries. Right there you know that is the agreement Canada had entered into. As I said at the beginning, I understand the sentiments and the emotions that may take us away from what we think this program was all about and what it actually was all about.

I also want to mention, as I have mentioned before, I'm sure many of my colleagues might be aware that other countries such as Singapore, New Zealand and many others on that growing list have also secured vaccines through this program, just like Canada.

We've also heard the minister. There have been a lot of questions in the House already on this issue. The ministers are there at question period to answer questions on these issues.

• (1715)

However, I understand that my colleagues may want to get more in-depth answers on this issue so that we can understand this program better. I am of the mindset that it would be a great idea. I think it would be great to have the minister come and explain this program to us a little bit better.

The minister has been explaining in the media, and Minister Gould has been explaining in question period. I know that some of the opposition members in this committee as well have posed questions on various platforms, and question period is always there. It's a part of our House proceedings and our House time to raise these important issues.

Otherwise, I think it's important for us to recognize that the committee should be doing that work, and it should not be taking over legislative time to debate this issue.

I want to talk a bit about the terms and conditions that Gavi had outlined for participants in Covax. The terms and conditions themselves stated: "These 'Terms and Conditions' set out the basis on which [self-financing economies] will participate in the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility" and that "all economies are invited to participate, and all participating economies will benefit by securing access to vaccine supply made available through the Facility."

This is actually in the terms and conditions of the agreement that was signed by the government. It goes on to state:

Economies of all financial means can participate with the degree of support for the AMC Group Participants determined by the resources raised by the COVAX AMC.

...The world will need to work together to overcome the pandemic, and the Facility will work best with as many economies as possible committing to this collaborative global effort. Everyone contributes so that everyone can benefit. This principle will be realised through clear political and financial commitments.

When we see that this is a part of the terms and conditions laid out at the onset, then I would argue that the motion we're trying to pass at this committee is really false. It's a false notion. It's a false narrative and it's a very partisan narrative that is trying to be spun against the best interests of, I would argue, Canadians, and against the best interests of people around the world as well.

This is a really big issue right now. Vaccines for Canadians and for people around the world are a big issue, and Canada has stepped forward to make sure that Canadians are served well, but not just Canadians, that those around the world will also benefit. That's very important for us to make sure that we remember and that we don't continue to raise this false narrative and worry people that somehow Canada is gobbling up all the vaccines out of this program. That's absolutely false.

It's absolutely false, and, like I said, the vaccines that Canada has secured through this program are not even going to be received by Canadians, by Canada, until the end of June. This issue right now I think is something that we should explore in our committee by bringing the minister in and by having other witnesses in order to see perhaps what the actual impacts and effects are.

● (1720)

I would gather, as vaccine manufacturing is ramping up—and we're seeing it right before our eyes right now, and we're going to see it in the weeks to come as well—that since Canada has secured so many doses of vaccines and we will have our population, all of those who desire to be vaccinated, vaccinated by the end of September, all of the vaccines that are going to be in surplus will surely be going back to countries that need them the most.

Not only what we've contributed into Covax, to make sure we're accelerating and increasing the capacity that they have in this initiative, but also the other vaccines we've secured outside of Covax are going to be going towards aid. That's really important. Canada is going to be giving back and already has been paying it forward in a really big way.

I think that should be recognized, and I don't think Canadians should be tricked into believing this false narrative that somehow Canada is not stepping up, that it's not fulfilling its international role and duty. I just don't think that is fair.

Minister Gould has also been very clear on this. In answer to the questions that were asked to her at committee, she did say that Covax was intentionally set up to have wealthy countries contribute both to procuring vaccines and to growing purchasing power, so they could subsidize vaccines for low-income countries while working for equitable access.

She said that Canada is the second-largest contributor to the Covax AMC, and we're proud of that. It's historic that we've been able to create and to collaborate with other countries and to be a part of such a fantastic initiative that is going to help so many people around the world. I think we should be proud that we've helped set up this historic global mechanism.

Moving on from those points, if I don't have everyone convinced that this is an interesting issue and that we should look at it in the House—I mean in committee—sorry—and not in the House. Absolutely, that is not what my intention is. I don't think we're going to achieve anything in the House on this issue, because all that's going to happen in the House is that members are going to get up and give speeches on this issue, and then what? Conservative members will give their speeches. They'll have their allotted time, and we'll have three hours on the issue, let's say, and then we'll have a vote. The vote will be to—what, to make a statement, to make a declaration of some sort? I think what we can do on this committee goes far beyond that.

I just don't think that vaccines and the health of Canadians and the health of people around the world should be politicized in this way. I can definitely say, and I'm sure that many members sitting around this virtual committee table today can attest to the fact, that at the beginning of this pandemic, and I would say also well into this pandemic, what Canadians have been most proud of has been our parties working together for the benefit of Canadians.

I've heard many times from my constituents that they like to see cross-party collaboration. They like to see us working together. They like to see the different levels of government working together.

Absolutely, Peter, that's exactly what they like to see. They like to see us hand in hand, working hard for Canadians.

This reeks a little bit of scoring political points and partisanship. That's what this looks like to me. That's my personal opinion. I do think there is a reason that the last sentence was added, and I don't think it was added for any genuine purpose. I think it was added for the reason I just stated. It's to gain some political points, unnecessary ones, really, because what we could be doing is talking about....

• (1725)

I think in committees is where we do the most collaborative work. I always tell young people that, when I am mentoring them, and they talk to me and come to seek advice as to whether they should get into politics. They think it's such an ugly place. They talk about the ugliness they see in question period. I tell them a lot of work goes on behind the scenes, that there's a lot of camaraderie and a lot of friendships develop, that there's a lot of co-operation, even across parties and a lot of that work happens at committees.

People are not as tuned in to committees. There might be some people watching us today since we're public. I'd like to thank all the people who are watching the foreign affairs committee today. However, I'm also not naive. I don't think there are that many people who have the time to tune in to committee work, but a lot of people do see the little clips in question period. They start thinking that this is what it's all about, the fighting and the one-sided questions, and answers, for that matter.

I don't think so. I think there are so many places they don't get to see and get an in-depth look at because they're busy working. They're busy trying to make ends meet. We know they're extremely busy in this pandemic. If they are having to isolate and stay home, they're worried. They have something else on their minds, not figuring out if the House of Commons will have a three-hour debate on Covax or if we can work together in this committee. Can we come up with a compromise where we can maybe see how programs like this, more initiatives could be created on how we can improve the House of Canadians and those around the world?

I'm really enjoying the current study we're doing; however, it's extremely heavy. To Ms. McPherson's credit, it takes somebody with a really big heart to do the work she's done in aid and development. It also leaves an emotional impact. I have a lot of respect for all my colleagues for the hard work they do.

In conclusion, I want to get to a point where we can start doing something really interesting in this committee—

• (1730)

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, let me interrupt you there.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: In the interests of many people anticipating the subcommittee's report on the Uighur genocide, I believe if you seek it, you may find unanimous consent for the following motion: That the committee adopt the report of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights titled "Human Rights Situation of the Uighurs" and that the chair report this report to the House.

The Chair: Mr. Chong, that is a motion that should not be brought on a point of order. I see heads shaking. I take that to mean there is not unanimous consent at the moment.

In any event, I was going to interrupt Ms. Sahota to let the committee know we're at 5:30 p.m. This is a hard constraint tonight because of other committee work taking place. With your consent we will adjourn this discussion—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'd like to challenge the chair's ruling with respect to Mr. Chong's motion.

The Chair: I've been challenged on the ruling that Mr. Chong's motion should not have been brought on a point of order.

Madam Clerk, first of all, we have the 5:30 p.m. time issue. We may have a minute to deal with this or we may not. I'm in your hands on this. In any event, I don't believe we should simply override the fact that we have a hard time constraint at 5:30 p.m. with respect to other committees having to do their work.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's why I put in the challenge.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, I move that this meeting be now adjourned.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I challenged the chair. We have to take a vote on the challenge to the chair.

The Chair: Okay. Let's get advice to unravel this.

Madam Clerk.

Hon. Hedy Fry: No, that this committee be now adjourned is a priority motion. I'm sorry.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's a dilatory motion.

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair, but—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Ms. Fry did not have the floor when she moved that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Neither did you. Neither did Mr. Chong.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, a challenge to the decision of the chair is also a dilatory motion that we would need to decide right away, but I just need to clarify. Was it your decision that Mr. Chong did not have the floor correctly to seek unanimous consent?

The Chair: That is correct. That's why I was challenged by Mr. Genuis.

The Clerk: Mr. Genuis is challenging the decision of the chair.

The question is whether the decision of the chair should be sustained.

(Ruling of the chair overturned: nays 6; yeas 5 [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: That means then, effectively, Madam Clerk, that Mr. Chong gets to seek the unanimous consent of the committee.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: That's right.

I move, Mr. Chair, that the committee adopt the report of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights titled "Human Rights Situation of the Uighurs", and that the chair report this report to the House of Commons.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, is there a point of order on Mr. Chong's motion?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No. I am confused about this and I need to understand it better.

Earlier we heard from the clerk that codified procedures are superior and stand above any other unanimous consent motions or anything we would call for. After me—if I was even seen to have ceded the floor—it would have been Ms. McPherson's turn next.

Mr. Chong raised a point of order and then continued to bring a motion on that point of order. The chair ruled according to what *Procedure and Practice* states. How can that be challenged, when it's not really a discretionary ruling? The chair did not make that ruling based on his own discretion. He made it because he had to make it. There was no other ruling he could have made.

• (1735)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On the same point of order, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Hedy Fry: A point of order.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, perhaps you could just explain. Is that a ruling that could have properly been challenged?

Hon. Hedy Fry: You did not cede the floor to him.

The Clerk: In committee, Mr. Chair, members are free to challenge the decision of the chair. In this case, your decision, your ruling, was that Mr. Chong did not properly have the floor. The decision was challenged. The majority of the committee members determined that Mr. Chong did properly have the floor.

The Chair: That means he now properly has the floor, unless there's a point of order on his—

Hon. Hedy Fry: I have a point of order.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: But he had the floor properly. That's why I was interested in the way in which the question was posed originally on the challenge. The question that was posed was whether he properly had the floor, and I don't think that was the question. Yes, he properly had the floor on a point of order, but a point of order does not provide you the opportunity to move this type of motion. Yes, he had the floor, but not the ability to move a motion such as this.

Shouldn't that be the question?

Hon. Hedy Fry: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I think the clerk, in the original instance in which Mr. Genuis asked for a point of order and then, after the chair ceded the floor to him, used that to move a motion to get unanimous consent, had made a very clear ruling on that. He had been given the floor in order to speak to whatever his motion was.

Then we had Mr. Chong, when there was a debate on the floor, when there was a motion to end the meeting, coming up with his own.... Having asked for a point of order, he did not speak to a point of order. He moved a motion instead.

To my understanding, the chair said he did not allow Mr. Chong to have the floor to speak to that motion. That was what we were ruling on. If we're going to play politics with clear rulings that have been made by the clerk and that are in the actual rule book, the

Standing Orders, on standing committees, then what is the point of even looking at rules? Let's just have a free-for-all.

It seems to me that if we want to work together as a committee, which Ms. Sahota has spoken about repeatedly—she thinks we should all work together—how do we ever get to work together when there is such disrespect shown for the rules and for the chair? When someone is speaking, a person does not wait their turn. They just jump in and decide they're going to utilize a bona fide rule, which is a point of order, not to speak to a point of order—

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: What about disrespect for your colleagues?

Hon. Hedy Fry: —and to speak over someone when they're speaking. This happens a lot in this committee. No one waits their turn. They just talk whenever they feel like it.

Mr. Chair, I am just suggesting that I think if we accept that the chair was wrong in his ruling, then we are actually throwing away the rule book on standing committees.

The Chair: Dr. Fry, I appreciate the point. Let me see if we can unravel this.

My ruling had been overturned to give Mr. Chong the floor. He has the floor. He was trying to seek unanimous consent. He can't move a motion, but he can seek unanimous consent on a ruling that has overturned mine.

If I detect, as I do seem to detect, that there is no unanimous consent to accept this motion, in light of the fact that we're well past 5:30 p.m. and now cutting into the time of two other committees, I suggest that we adjourn and continue this discussion at the next possible opportunity. I think there are lots of views on both procedure and substance—most importantly, on the substance of Ms. McPherson's motion—that still need to be unpacked.

I take all the points that have been made by all members from all sides with respect to privilege and the importance of parliamentary dialogue. We're simply at the point now where I'm—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, Mr. Chong, as a result of the vote of the committee, has a right to seek unanimous consent for the motion.

The Chair: Yes.

• (1740)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: At that point any member can say no to his request for unanimous consent, and at that point the meeting can adjourn. All of that needs to take only 30 seconds. I have much to say about the procedural issues raised here, but I will save that for another time, perhaps for private conversation.

Please allow Mr. Chong to move his motion according to the wish of the committee—

The Chair: Well, he can't move a motion, Mr. Genuis, but he can seek—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Right. Let him seek unanimous consent for the motion.

The Chair: From the shaking of heads, I have gained the perception that—

Hon. Hedy Fry: I do not give consent. There is no unanimous consent.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Fry.

With the consent of the committee, I believe this is a point where we should adjourn tonight's discussion and resume it at the very next opportunity.

I thank all members for their views. The vibrancy of the discussion reflects the importance of both the procedural and the substantive issues. I wish you a safe and good evening. We will see you at the next opportunity.

The meeting is adjourned.

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